

the altar that they make. To what does this law apply? It would seem to be given at the beginning of their religious history to meet a certain situation, in opposition to the type of those altars which the Canaanites and Egyptians had. There was to be a difference.

We do not fully know what made it so vital for them to have these regulations about the type of altar they were to make, whenever they were to make altars. When were they to do it? Well, there was a period of a few months before the tabernacle was built. When the tabernacle was finished, were all the sacrifices on the brazen altar? Or were there other altars on which the sacrifices for this great number of people were to be performed? With the people wandering through the wilderness, they would naturally be at the central headquarters where Moses and Aaron were supervising. The question of where you are to build altars is not something that the people needed to worry about at the time. It could have been conceivable that God would tell the people that every head of a family was to build an altar for his family and to sacrifice on it. In such a case you would expect a certain regulation of the type of sacrifice they were to give. We find nothing of the kind in JE at all! In the law here in JE, “an altar of stone was to be built,” and if they make an altar of stone it is to be of undressed stone, not of stone that is chiseled down. The way the regulation was given it seems to be given not for each individual, but what is to be expected of the nation as a whole. Now, of course, even in later times the nation would be torn with wars, the people would be scattered, so there were particular reasons why it was necessary to guard the building of altars in particular places. It might then be a matter of providing that people in such circumstances would recall what kind of an altar was described. So it might be valuable for them or not, we cannot say, but we can guess as to what purpose might be involved. But you notice it does not say that all the different tribes are to go out in the wilderness a slight distance from the main encampment and build their own altars. There is no suggestion of any such thing. It is establishing the type of altar which may be built. In the midst of this statement as to the type of altar which was to be built, it says “in every place where I record my name I will bless thee.” To say that this statement proves that it was the meaning of this law that people could build an altar anywhere they wanted we are certainly reading