

Exodus 30:1-10–The Altar of Incense in the Holy Place

TSK, HebrewLexicon, Poythress, Schultz, Gaebelein, Sailhamer, Edersheim, Gray, JFB, Trapp, Delitzsch, Henry, Geneva, Clarke, PasN, Barnes, Calvin, Brothers and Sisters in Jesus Christ:

You saw the beauty of the Table of Showbread. **The bread pictured the Lord Jesus who supplies the needs of your soul.**

You saw the radiance of the Father of Lights from the menorah, **the glorious Lampstand, shining its light on the Table of Showbread so you could find it.** But there was more wonder in the Tabernacle.

Today you will have your senses and souls excited with the Altar of Incense, the 3rd table in the Holy Place.

Our headings are:

The Symbols of the Altar of Incense

The Service of the Altar of Incense

Our goals are: **That, with the help of the Holy Spirit, you will be able to continue to praise your Heavenly Father and petition him for all your needs, earned for you by Jesus Christ.**

The Symbols of the Altar of Incense

1 "You shall make an altar to burn incense on; you shall make it of acacia wood.

1. The Altar of Incense, was made of acacia wood, the wood that was light, strong, and did not rot.

The wood pointed to the humanity and eternity of Christ.

2 "A cubit shall be its length and a cubit its width — **it shall be square** — and two cubits shall be its height. **Its horns shall be of one piece with it.**

2. The Altar of Incense was a square and quite a small table- about 18 inches square, and 36 inches high.

It was not necessary to have a large altar like the one outside of the tabernacle where all the bloody sacrifices were made.

With the blood sacrificing done, this altar was for worship and prayer. (There is no prayer without sacrifice.)

The squareness of the table showed how everyone from all 4 corners of the earth had equal access to God. 1Timothy 2:1.

The height showed that the table was reachable for the man.

3. The Altar of Incense had horns that were made as part of the table.

Why horns? Horns on an altar was a place for people running from danger. They would hold on to it for protection and refuge.

So all men from the 4 corners of the earth had a place of refuge.

But why did the horns have to be joined to the table? The horns were sprinkled with the blood of the clean outside sacrifices. So the blood of the horn was the basis of the prayers made at that altar. So the two things were integrally joined!

3 "And you shall **overlay its top, its sides all around, and its horns with pure gold**; and you shall make for it a molding of gold all around.

4. The Altar of Incense was overlaid with gold and it also had a crown around the top.

The gold pointed to the Divinity of Christ.

The crown was a reminder of Christ's regal nature -the King of kings.

4 "Two **gold rings** you shall make for it, under the molding on both its sides. You shall place them on its two sides, and they will be **holders for the poles** with which to bear it. 5 "You shall make the **poles of acacia wood, and overlay them with gold.**

5. On the sides of the Altar of Incense there were 4 gold rings attached so it could be carried with poles.

These poles were made of acacia wood and overlaid with gold.

Anything associated with Christ had to be pure – absolutely everything!

6 "And you shall put it before the veil that is **before the ark of the Testimony**, before the mercy seat that is over the Testimony, where I will meet with you.

6. The Altar of Incense was placed in the Holy Place just in front of the Holiest Place.

This was the last thing the High Priest would have seen before entering the Holiest Place.

The light shone on the bread, which nourished the eater, and he went to the altar of incense for salvation and strength.

7. Lessons:

a. Signs, symbols, and ceremonies are for instruction about the Lord Jesus throughout the Bible. Don't ignore those parts of the Bible even though the meaning may not be apparent. Ask others. Research. You will find more reasons to pray Christ. (Hebrews 8:5. These things were all for spiritual lessons.)

b. Worship God exactly as he says. No other way would or could please him.

The Service of the Altar of Incense

7 "Aaron shall burn on it sweet incense every morning; when he tends the lamps, he shall burn incense on it. 8 "And when Aaron lights the lamps at twilight, he shall burn incense on it, a perpetual incense before the LORD throughout your generations.

1. Aaron and the priests who followed him, had to burn sweet incense on this altar every morning and evening, after the bloody sacrifices were made outside on the bronze altar.

The priests made sure the lamps were well cared for, and they trimmed the wicks, to make sure the incense was going up to God continually.

Those who were not priests were not allowed to touch this altar or offer incense there.

King Uzziah did this and God struck him with leprosy. It is true likely meant well, but good intentions do not always lead to good actions.

This incense was a picture of the prayers the priests raised to God on behalf of the people. Yes, it is true Christ is the Mediator who daily makes intercessions for his people. That's what the Bible says. **But the activities pictured on the Altar of Incense picture activities on earth...on the outside of the Holiest Place (which pictures heaven).** So this pictured **the Holy Spirit helping the priests to pray.** Christ is in heaven, but his Holy Spirit was there to help-help his people pray for salvation and sustenance.

9 "You shall not offer strange incense on it, or a burnt offering, or a grain offering; nor shall you pour a drink offering on it.

2. Only the specific incense required by God was allowed to be burned on the Altar of Incense.

God was **precise about the sacrifices on the outside altar** that would permit the priest to come to the Altar of Incense, and he was **just as precise about what the priests could burn to the Altar of Incense.**

No one could come to God without the proper bloody sacrifice.

10 "And Aaron shall **make atonement upon its horns once a year with the blood of the sin offering** of atonement; **once a year he shall make atonement upon it** throughout your generations. It is most holy to the LORD."

3. The priests had to make atonement once per year by putting blood on the horns of the Altar of Incense.

The blood showed that the horns there were clean and man could come there for refuge.

4. Lessons – 5 of them, 2 general and 3 specific:

a. No one is to take on a duty not delegated to him by God! Example: Leadership in the church is restricted to qualified men, so no unqualified man or any woman is permitted to

take that job on himself. This is why a woman can't be a husband. A same-sex union is an abomination to God. Order is essential.

b. The ever-present sweet-smelling incense and the fragrance, which would have filled the Holy Place, would have reminded the priests of their presence in a place of wonder and beauty. There were no awful smells that were common to Israelite life. It was sweet communion with God.

c. That ever-present sweet-smelling incense that rose up to heaven reminded the priests that God delighted in their prayers. (The curtain that separated the Holy Place from the Holiest place reminded the Jews of the sky.)

Revelation 5: 8 Now when He had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, **each having a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints.**

Look at another example. Just as smoke went up, so the prayers of the saints.

Revelation 8:3 Then another angel, having a **golden censer**, came and stood at the altar. He **was given much incense, that he should offer it with the prayers of all the saints** upon the golden altar which was before the throne. 4 And the **smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, ascended before God from the angel's hand.**

d. That every-present sweet-smelling incense reminds you God wants your prayers continually. (Pray without ceasing.) And when God hears those prayers- prayers for forgiveness, prayers of adoration, prayers of thanksgiving, and prayers of intercessions, he answers them.

Psalm 141:2 **Let my prayer be set before You as incense,** The lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice.

Luke 1:8 So it was, that while he was serving as priest before God in the order of his division, 9 according to the custom of the priesthood, **his lot fell to burn incense when he went into the temple of the Lord.** 10 And the whole multitude of the people was **praying outside at the hour of incense.**

e. The ever-present, sweet-smelling incense that rose up to heaven pictures the prayers of the Holy Spirit for you and through you. Yes, **Jesus prayed for his children on earth,** sometimes all through the night, and Jesus continues to pray for his children every single day (Hebrews 7:25), but **Jesus uses his Holy Spirit to pray for his people.**

He knows the prayers of his people are always tainted with sin and they need help from the Holy Spirit. He purifies your prayers. His help is essential! He even prays for you.

Romans 8:23 Not only that, but we also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even **we ourselves groan within ourselves**, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body. 26 Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. **For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession** for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.

Ephesians 6:18 praying always **with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit**, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints —

Conclusion:

The Altar of Incense was in the Holy Place, in front of the Holiest Place. Incense was continually burned – day and night - before the Lord there. The sweet-smelling incense was a picture of the prayer of the saints (who are now priests) for salvation and sustenance, assisted by the Holy Spirit.

Brothers and Sisters in Jesus Christ:

1. Do you pray as you ought to before the Lord? Do you make supplications, confess your sins, praise God, and return thanks to him as you ought to? Your prayers are as incense before God. (Psalm 141)

2. Do you depend on the Holy Spirit and ask him to help you to pray well? You can't pray without his help! You will absolutely ask foolishly without him! Let him clean up your prayers.

3. Do you tell your neighbors of the sacrifice of Jesus (outside the city) that forms the basis of prayer? Do you know there is no prayer without sacrifice...the right sacrifice...the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross?

Finally: If you are not a Christian, your prayers cannot pierce the sky and go up to God. The only way God can hear your prayers is if you accept you are a sinner, if you believe Jesus died on the cross for your sins, and if you plead Christ's work before the Father in heaven. And what wonderful fellowship you can have with the Father if you fix the muck of sin on your life!