

The Altar of Incense

Exodus 30:1-10

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

Today we come back to our study of the tabernacle and back to the interior of the holy place.

We have already seen all of the furniture except for this last piece to be put in the tabernacle. We have seen the ark of the covenant, the table of showbread, the golden lampstand. Outside the tabernacle proper we saw the brazen altar.

Today we come to the altar of incense or as it is also called the golden altar. Unlike the altar in the court of the tabernacle this altar was not for sacrifices or the burning of anything other than incense.

It was about 18 inches square and stood about 36 inches high. It was made of the same wood as everything else in the tabernacle and like everything in the tabernacle it was to be gold and not bronze.

Its function was quite simple. Twice a day, at dawn and at dusk the priest would bring a coal from off the brazen altar where the sacrifices were burnt and place it on the golden altar. He then would take a specially prepared incense and put in on the glowing coal. This would produce a fragrant smoke that would fill the tabernacle.

The only other time the golden altar was put into use was on the day of atonement when the horns of the altar were to be covered in the blood of the sacrifice.

Now Baptists are not too much for burning of incense and candles. We leave that in the Old Testament where it belongs. We do not have a censor. We leave that to others

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You see that as with everything else we have studied, this is a symbol of something and what it is a symbol of needs the attention not the picture. If I continually spent time with a picture of my

wife instead of desiring to spend time with her, we can see the trouble with that.

- I. Incense and the burning of incense in the Bible is a picture or prayer.
 - A. Psalm 141:2 (NKJV) 2 Let my prayer be set before You as incense, The lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice.
 - B. Revelation 5:8 (NKJV) 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.
 - C. Revelation 8:3-4 (NKJV) 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.
- II. The importance of prayer
 - A. Some people doubt that prayer makes a difference.
 1. To them I would say that I am sure that the prayers of Jesus make a difference.
 2. Remember that James said that the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man avail very much.
 - B. But let us look at a Mosaic example.
 1. Numbers 16:41 On the next day all the congregation of the children of Israel murmured against Moses and Aaron, saying, "You have killed the people of the LORD." 42 Now it happened, when the congregation had gathered against Moses and Aaron, that they turned toward the tabernacle of meeting; and suddenly the cloud covered it, and the glory of the LORD appeared. 43 Then Moses and Aaron came before the tabernacle of meeting. 44 And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 45 "Get away from among this congregation, that I may consume them in a moment." And they fell on their faces. 46 So Moses said to Aaron, "Take a censer and put fire in it from the altar, put incense on it, and take it quickly to the congregation and make atonement for them; for wrath has gone out from the LORD. The plague has begun." 47 Then Aaron took it as Moses commanded, and ran into the midst of the assembly; and already the plague had begun among the people. So he put in the incense and made atonement for the people. 48 And he stood between the dead and the living; so the plague was stopped. 49 Now those who died in the plague were fourteen thousand seven hundred, besides those who died in the Korah incident. 50 So Aaron returned to Moses at the door of the tabernacle of meeting, for the plague had stopped.

- III. As we have seen all these things in the tabernacle are a part of the picture of Jesus Christ.
- A. Since the altar pictures prayer we should notice how it pictures the prayers of Jesus.
1. We know that Jesus spent a great deal of time in prayer sometimes praying all night long.
 - a. Luke 6:12 Now it came to pass in those days that He went out to the mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God.
 2. Or at least He would rise a great while before day and go to a solitary place to pray.
 - a. Mark 1:35 Now in the morning, having risen a long while before daylight, He went out and departed to a solitary place; and there He prayed.
- B. At the altar was to be tended every morning and every evening so Jesus prayers are continually offered on our behalf.
1. Hebrews 7:25 (NKJV) 25 Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them.
 2. 1 John 2:1-2 (NKJV) 1 My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. 2 And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world.
 3. So Christ is ever before God, in all the merits of His person and value of His work, on His people's behalf. One third of our lives is spent in sleep; but He never slumbers: "He *ever* liveth to make intercession for us," and because of this He is "able to save unto the uttermost (to the end of their wilderness journey) them that come unto God by Him" (Hebrews 7:25). Thus the golden-altar is a pledge of our eternal security. A.W. Pink
- C. Jesus connects the meaning of both altars, the bronze and the golden.
1. "And thou shalt make unto it a crown of gold round about." There was no crown to the brazen altar, for that sets forth Jesus in His humiliation, suffering, and death; the only crown He wore on earth was a crown of thorns. But there is a Golden Crown to the altar of incense, because it represents Him who, though once made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, is now "crowned with glory and honour." Types of the Tabernacle.

The precious incense of our Lord's priestly intercession maintains us (through our wilderness journey) in the place of fullest acceptance as a sweet savor unto God. A.W. Pink