

KNOWING JESUS THROUGH THE STUDY OF THE TABERNACLE

Part 8 – The Golden Altar/ Altar of Incense

We need to learn the sacrifices & priestly systems in the Old Testament, in order to understand the ministry of Jesus.

Two altars were used in the service of the tabernacle: the brazen altar or altar of burnt offering, which stood in the courtyard at the gate; the golden altar or altar of incense, which stood in the Holy Place immediately in front of the veil. Their functions were distinct, yet they were intimately connected because the activities of the latter were based upon those of the former. The incense altar owed its standing to the blood of atonement (Ex 30:10), and, because it was an altar, it was connected with a sacrifice which had already been offered. No animal sacrifice was ever placed upon it, but the fire which had consumed the sacrifice on the brazen altar was the same fire which was brought to the golden altar to cause the sweet perfume of the incense to ascend to Jehovah.

Names used – Golden Altar, Golden Altar of Incense, Altar of Incense

The altar of incense was called “most holy to the Lord” (Exodus 30: 10).

The Altar of incense is an important symbol in the Bible.

Instruction/ blueprint given: Exodus 30: 1-10

“You shall make an altar on which to burn incense; you shall make it of acacia wood. 2 A cubit shall be its length, and a cubit its breadth. It shall be square, and two cubits shall be its height. Its horns shall be of one piece with it. 3 You shall overlay it with pure gold, its top and around its sides and its horns. And you shall make a molding of gold around it. 4 And you shall make two golden rings for it. Under its molding on two opposite sides of it you shall make them, and they shall be holders for poles with which to carry it. 5 You shall make the poles of acacia wood and overlay them with gold. 6 And you shall put it in front of the veil that is above the ark of the testimony, in front of the mercy seat that is above the testimony, where I will meet with you. 7 And Aaron shall burn fragrant incense on it. Every morning when he dresses the lamps he shall burn it, 8 and when Aaron sets up the lamps at twilight, he shall burn it, a regular incense offering before the Lord throughout your generations. 9 You shall not offer unauthorized incense on it, or a burnt offering, or a grain offering, and you shall not pour a drink offering on it. 10 Aaron shall make atonement on its horns once a year. With the blood of the sin offering of atonement he shall make atonement for it once in the year throughout your generations. It is most holy to the Lord.”

34 The Lord said to Moses, "Take sweet spices, stacte, and onycha, and galbanum, sweet spices with pure frankincense (of each shall there be an equal part), 35 and make an incense blended as by the perfumer, seasoned with salt, pure and holy. 36 You shall beat some of it very small, and put part of it before the testimony in the tent of meeting where I shall meet with you. It shall be most holy for you. 37 And the incense that you shall make according to its composition, you shall not make for yourselves. It shall be for you holy to the Lord. 38 Whoever makes any like it to use as perfume shall be cut off from his people."

Execution of the plan: Exodus 37:25-29

25 He made the altar of incense of acacia wood. Its length was a cubit, and its breadth was a cubit. It was square, and two cubits was its height. Its horns were of one piece with it. 26 He overlaid it with pure gold, its top and around its sides and its horns. And he made a molding of gold around it, 27 and made two rings of gold on it under its molding, on two opposite sides of it, as holders for the poles with which to carry it. 28 And he made the poles of acacia wood and overlaid them with gold.

29 He made the holy anointing oil also, and the pure fragrant incense, blended as by the perfumer.

38:1-7 He made the altar of burnt offering of acacia wood. Five cubits[a] was its length, and five cubits its breadth. It was square, and three cubits was its height. 2 He made horns for it on its four corners. Its horns were of one piece with it, and he overlaid it with bronze. 3 And he made all the utensils of the altar, the pots, the shovels, the basins, the forks, and the fire pans. He made all its utensils of bronze. 4 And he made for the altar a grating, a network of bronze, under its ledge, extending halfway down. 5 He cast four rings on the four corners of the bronze grating as holders for the poles. 6 He made the poles of acacia wood and overlaid them with bronze. 7 And he put the poles through the rings on the sides of the altar to carry it with them. He made it hollow, with boards.

General specifications:

Location: The Golden lampstand was positioned on the south side of the Tabernacle within the Holy Place. It was placed opposite of the table of shewbread. Only the sons of Aaron, the priestly family, were permitted to enter this sacred place and behold the splendor of the gold as it was illuminated by the light of the golden lampstand.

1. Location: Place the altar of Incense just outside the inner curtain that shields the Ark of the covenant. (Exo 30:6)
2. Dimensions: 1 cubit long x 1 cubit wide x 2 cubits high.

(foursquare, Table of Shew bread was 1.5 cubits high)

3. Its materials – acacia wood overlaid with pure gold
4. Its parts – 4 horns, 4 rings in total (2 on opposite sides) for 2 staves/poles (to bear it)
5. A gold moulding / crown around the entire altar (just like Table of shewbread)
6. Its use – to burn incense upon.
7. Instruction when the camp moves: ***Numbers 4:11-12 And over the golden altar they shall spread a cloth of blue and cover it with a covering of goatskin and shall put in its poles. 12 And they shall take all the vessels of the service that are used in the sanctuary and put them in a cloth of blue and cover them with a covering of goatskin and put them on the carrying frame.***

V.15 The Kohathites will come and carry these things to the next destination. But they must not touch the sacred objects, or they will die. 18 “Do not let the Kohathite clans be destroyed from among the Levites! The Kohathites must never enter the sanctuary to look at the sacred objects for even a moment, or they will die.” (Staves were in place to carry without touching the sacred objects)

Specific Instructions:

1. Altar of acacia wood & overlay with gold (symbol of humanity & divinity)
2. Horns at the corners carved from same piece of wood as the altar itself, similar to Altar of burnt sacrifice in the courtyard.
3. Location : ***Exo 30: 6 just outside the inner curtain that shields the ark of the covenant, in front of the Ark’s cover—the place of atonement—that covers the tablets inscribed with the terms of the covenant. I will meet with you there.***
Leviticus 16 : 1 After the death of Aaron’s two sons, who died after they entered the Lord’s presence and burned the wrong kind of fire before him. 2 The Lord said to Moses, “Warn your brother, Aaron, not to enter the Most Holy Place behind the inner curtain whenever he chooses; if he does, he will die. For the Ark’s cover—the place of atonement—is there, and I myself am present in the cloud above the atonement cover.

Lev 4: 7 The priest will then put some of the blood on the horns of the altar for fragrant incense that stands in the Lord’s presence inside the Tabernacle

Golden altar is placed just a curtain away from the thick presence / shekinah glory is present.

The altar of incense was called “most holy to the Lord” (verse 10).

Now there is no more veil of separation. We have free access to the throne of grace through Jesus.

4. Regarding burning of incense:

Exo 30:7 "Every morning when Aaron maintains the lamps, he must burn fragrant incense on the altar. 8 And each evening when he lights the lamps, he must again burn incense in the Lord's presence. This must be done from generation to generation.

Burn the fragrant incense every morning & evening: Any time Aaron comes to maintain the lamps.

Coal comes from the brazen altar. The fire used to burn the incense was always taken from the altar of burnt offering in the courtyard, outside the Tabernacle (***Leviticus 16:12***).

Never was the altar of incense to be used for a burnt offering, a grain offering, or a drink offering (Exodus 30:9). Once a year, on the Day of Atonement, the high priest was to put blood on the horns of the altar of incense to cleanse it.

Ingredients of the incense: (Exodus 30: 34- 38)

34 The Lord said to Moses, "Take sweet spices, stacte, and onycha, and galbanum, sweet spices with pure frankincense (of each shall there be an equal part or in other version, blend each spice separately) , 35 and make an incense (Qetoret) blended as by the perfumer, seasoned with salt, pure and holy. 36 You shall beat some of it very small, and put part of it before the testimony in the tent of meeting where I shall meet with you. It shall be most holy for you. 37 And the incense that you shall make according to its composition, you shall not make for yourselves. It shall be for you holy to the Lord. 38 Whoever makes any like it to use as perfume shall be cut off from his people."

The burning of the holy incense in the Bible, the Tabernacle altar of incense known as Ketoret or Qetoret was central to all of the ceremonies conducted in the Temple as a key component required under the Law of Moses. When Moses received instruction to build the tabernacle he was told to include an altar on which his brother Aaron was to burn incense every morning and every evening throughout all of Israel's generations. Each morning when the menorah was cleaned and each evening when the lamp was lit,

a priest burned the Qetoret (Holy Incense) on the Golden Altar in the center of the sanctuary (Exodus 30:8).

Using tongs or a golden censer, the priests removed hot coals from the altar of sacrifice and placed them upon the altar of incense twice daily, after which the incense would be sprinkled upon.

A special offering of incense was made on the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16:12-13), in which the Cohen Gadol (High Priest) entered the Holy Place, carrying in his right hand the pan for the incense, filled with live coals, and in his left hand the spoon-like kaf, containing the incense. After placing both of these utensils on the floor, the High Priest took the incense from the kaf with the hollow of his hand and heaped it upon the pan containing the coals (Leviticus 16:12).

Stacte/ Balsam (healing balm)

onycha

galbanum

pure frankincense

Considered Holy (Kodesh) – no replica, to be set aside, kept separate, power to sanctify what it touches, elevate everything around it.

Stacte – is a gum from exudes from certain trees in liquid drops that harden and are known as ‘tears’. The stacte shrub grows in abundance in lower hills of Israel.

Onycha – type of resin from the tree with a nail like shine. Highly aromatic & fragrant with medicinal properties.

Galbanum- Comes from a plant found growing from Syria to Iran. Same family as fennel- sharp biting smell

Frankincense – a gum resin from a tree that grows in the Himalayas & in Arabian peninsula. Hebrew word ‘Levonah’ means white light or pure.

These ingredients were highly aromatic with medicinal properties and this whole compound was then to be mixed with salt.

How does this apply to us? ***Ephesians 5:1,2 Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. 2 And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.***

We are not called to spread bad smell or unpleasant odor but to spread the fragrance/ aroma of Christ by walking in love, the same love with which Christ loved us. Let us be imitators of God, his living epistles so the name of God is glorified through us. As we go about our daily responsibilities, others are often "reading our lives." While they are observing us, they can actually be learning of the truth and love of our Lord Jesus, as He is working in and through our lives.

5. No unauthorised entry/ unholy incense: ***Do not offer any unholy incense on this altar, or any burnt offerings, grain offerings, or liquid offerings.(Exo 30:9)***

2 Chronicles 26: 16-21 But when he had become powerful, he also became proud, which led to his downfall. He sinned against the Lord his God by entering the sanctuary of the Lord's Temple and personally burning incense on the incense altar. 17 Azariah the high priest went in after him with eighty other priests of the Lord, all brave men. 18 They confronted King Uzziah and said, "It is not for you, Uzziah, to burn incense to the Lord. That is the work of the priests alone, the descendants of Aaron who are set apart for this work. Get out of the sanctuary, for you have sinned. The Lord God will not honor you for this!"

19 Uzziah, who was holding an incense burner, became furious. But as he was standing there raging at the priests before the incense altar in the Lord's Temple, leprosy suddenly broke out on his forehead. 21 So King Uzziah had leprosy until the day he died. He lived in isolation in a separate house, for he was excluded from the Temple of the Lord.

6. What happens at the altar of Incense?

- Burning of incense morning & evening
- The blood of all sin offering put on the horns of the altar (Lev 4:7,18)
- Atonement made for, by the High Priest once every year. (Exo 30:10, Lev 16)

- a. Burning of Incense morning & evening

- b. The blood of all sin offering put on the horns of the altar (Lev 4:7,18)

When a sin offering was required because of a failure on the part of the high priest (bringing guilt on entire community) or the entire Israelite community sins by violating one of the Lord's commands , the ritual begins by first laying hands on the animal's head, then the blood of the offering was first sprinkled seven times before the inner

curtain of the tabernacle (not on mercy seat) and then smeared on the horns of the incense altar and poured out the rest at the base of altar of burnt sacrifices (Lev. 4:7,18).

Individual sin offering was different – lay hands on the animal, blood put on the horns of altar for burnt offering. Pour the rest of the blood at the base of the altar.

He that laid his hand on the head of the animal thereby owned that he deserved to die himself, and that it was God's great mercy that he would please to accept the offering of this animal to die for him.

The blood of his sacrifice is put upon the altar of his incense and sprinkled before the Lord.

c. Atonement made for, by the High Priest once every year. (Exo 30:10, Lev 16)

However, even these regular sin offerings were not sufficient to deal with the accumulated pollution caused by the people's sin; in order to prevent the land from becoming unfit for divine habitation, the high priest had to enter the Holy of Holies once a year on the Day of Atonement. He carried with him a portable incense burner that would provide a protective cloud of smoke, under which he could safely take the blood of purification offerings and apply it to the mercy seat on top of the ark of the covenant (Lev. 16:12–13).

For the sins of Aaron the High priest (to purify himself & his family – right with the Lord)
-> present young bull (for sin offering) & ram (for burnt offering) at the entrance
-> present 2 male goats from the community (on behalf of atonement for people)-> cast sacred lots to determine which goat will be reserved as an offering to the Lord and which will carry the sins of the people and be released as a scapegoat out into the wilderness.

➔ After slaughtering bull -> fill incense burner with burning coals from altar of incense along with 2 handfuls of fragrant powdered incense, carry them and burn it inside the Holy of Holies so that a cloud of incense will rise over the mercy seat covering ark of the covenant. Why? So that it would provide a protective cloud of smoke, under which he could safely take the blood of purification offerings and apply it to the mercy seat on top of the ark of the covenant. ***Psalm 2:11 commands, "Serve the LORD with fear and rejoice with trembling. (Don't lose the awe of the presence of God. It should be there not only when I worship but in every area of my life. In my ministry, serving, preparing a message, teaching Sunday school, youth or young adult ministry)***

Gen 28:17 He was afraid and said, "How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven."

- ➔ Take blood of the bull, dip his finger in it and sprinkle seven times in front of the mercy seat. (2nd entrance) No one else is allowed to enter during these entrances, until the High priest comes out.
- ➔ slaughter first goat (on behalf of people) -> same process (3rd entrance)
- ➔ To purify the Altar of incense, takes some of the blood and the goat – puts it on the horns of the Golden altar of Incense -> Sprinkles blood seven times over the altar
- ➔ The scapegoat – lay both hands on the goats' head & confess the sins of the people – transfer the sins of the people to goat's head – sent to a desolate land.

Significance of Golden altar of incense:

1. Incense : Scripture often likens incense to the prayers of God's people .

May my prayer be set before you like incense; may the lifting up of my hands be like the evening sacrifice. Psalm 141:2

And when he had taken it, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb. Each one had a harp and they were holding golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of God's people. Revelation 5:8

Another angel came and stood at the altar, holding a golden censer; and much incense was given to him, so that he might add it to the prayers of all the saints on the golden altar which was before the throne. Rev 8:3

And the smoke of the incense, which came with the prayers of the saints, ascended up before God out of the angel's hand. Rev 8:4

Fine spices were mixed together and left to smolder on the altar day and night (Ex. 30:7–8, 34–38), the ascending smoke symbolizing that what was offered there went up to God, much as our prayers go up to Him.

The altar of incense reminded Israel to pray. Yet they were not inherently sweet smelling savour to the Lord, for atonement had to be made for the altar once a year (v. 10). Today, the perfect sacrifice of Jesus alone ensures that God hears our prayers (Prov. 15:29, 2 Cor. 5:21). Through Jesus, our prayers are a sweet-smelling aroma to the Lord. Not because of how much we prayed, what fancy flowery words we used, not because of our righteousness but because of Jesus, because He intercedes for us.

When should prayer be offered? In the Tabernacle, incense was to be burned day & night. We are asked to Pray without ceasing. Prayer is a constant communication with God. Communication is relationship. Imagine a friend who approaches you or talks to you only when he/she has a need? Prayer is just a simple conversation with God. Simply communicate. **LET IT BECOME LIKE OUR NEED FOR BREATHING** . We can go without food for many days but not without air. **WATCH AND PRAY LEST YOU ENTER INTO TEMPTATION.**

Enemy accuses day & night – Rev 12:10 Then I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, “Now the salvation, and the power, and the kingdom of our God and the authority of His Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren has been thrown down, he who accuses them before our God day and night.

Our Prayer should counter the powers of the enemy.

Daniel’s prayer – man who prayed 3 times a day. He saw a vision where the powers of the enemy where it attacked the heavenly army. ***11 It even challenged the Commander of heaven’s army by canceling the daily sacrifices offered to him and by destroying his Temple. (Dan 8)*** . Enemy’s plan to stop the daily sacrifices/ incense.

Daniel went on praying and confessing his sin & sins of the people, pleading with the Lord for Jerusalem. ***As I was praying, Gabriel, whom I had seen in the earlier vision, came swiftly to me at the time of the evening sacrifice. 22 He explained to me, “Daniel, I have come here to give you insight and understanding. 23 The moment you began praying, a command was given. Dan 9:21- 23***
Then he said, “Don’t be afraid, Daniel. Since the first day you began to pray for understanding and to humble yourself before your God, your request has been heard in heaven. I have come in answer to your prayer. 13 But for twenty-one days the spirit prince of the kingdom of Persia blocked my way. Then Michael, one of the archangels, came to help me, and I left him there with the spirit prince of the kingdom of Persia.

How does he know about evening sacrifice. As a young man in Jerusalem, Daniel often saw the smoke rising from the temple at the time of the evening sacrifice.

Enemy tried to stop the sacrifices/ incense offered at the temple, now stopping the incense arising from Daniel's little house. A man who turned his face to God for help- nothing else mattered. He was in mourning for 3 weeks, no rich food, no meat, no wine.

Lord is releasing angels to fight on our behalf. We feel our prayers are not being answered. Know that our prayer is heard. The answer might take some time. Angels are fighting the powers of darkness on our behalf.

When Prayer or the incense goes up , answers , blessings, His presence comes down !

Incense burned with fire : Work of the Holy Spirit in our prayer . ***Ephesians 6:18 Pray in the Spirit at all times and on every occasion. Stay alert and be persistent in your prayers for all believers everywhere.***

1 Cor 14:15 Well then, what shall I do? I will pray in the spirit, and I will also pray in words I understand. I will sing in the spirit, and I will also sing in words I understand.

Persevering in prayer is like the fragrance of incense continually offered on altar of incense.

2. **Our High Priest, Jesus Christ, makes intercession in prayer for us continually.** Every piece of furniture in the Tabernacle represents the person and work of Jesus. The Altar of incense represents the continual intercession Jesus makes for us before the Father.

Hebrews 7:23-28 The Old Testament priests / former priests existed in great numbers because they were prevented by death from continuing one after another, but Jesus on the other hand, because He continues forever, Because He lives forever, holds His priesthood permanently. 25 Therefore he is able, once and forever, to save those who come to God through him. He lives forever to intercede with God on their behalf.

26 He is the kind of high priest we need because he is holy and blameless, unstained by sin. He has been set apart from sinners and has been given the highest place of honor in heaven. 27 Unlike those other high priests, he does not need to offer sacrifices every day. They did this for their own sins first and then for the sins of the people. But Jesus did this once for all when he offered himself as the

sacrifice for the people's sins. 28 The law appointed high priests who were limited by human weakness. But after the law was given, God appointed his Son with an oath, and his Son has been made the perfect High Priest forever.

Rom 8:34 Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us.

1 John 2:1 But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate who pleads our case before the Father. He is Jesus Christ, the one who is truly righteous. 2 He himself is the sacrifice that atones for our sins—and not only our sins but the sins of all the world.

Heb 4:15 For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

19 And so, dear brothers and sisters, we can boldly enter heaven's Most Holy Place because of the blood of Jesus. 20 By his death, Jesus opened a new and life-giving way through the curtain into the Most Holy Place. 21 And since we have a great High Priest who rules over God's house, 22 let us go right into the presence of God with sincere hearts fully trusting him. For our guilty consciences have been sprinkled with Christ's blood to make us clean, and our bodies have been washed with pure water.

What a privilege we have through the ministry of Christ! We are blessed.

P.S : God is not pleased with people burning incense to other gods. We read in Book of Jeremiah that the land was defiled and destroyed as a result of this. This is the very thing that provokes God to anger. ***Jeremiah 44: 3,4 because of the evil they have done. They provoked me to anger by burning incense and by worshiping other gods that neither they nor you nor your fathers ever knew. Again and again I sent my servants the prophets, who said, `Do not do this detestable thing that I hate!'***

