

The Altar of Incense

Ex 30:1-10; 34-38

The sun was rising over the horizon as the priest entered the holy place to trim the lampstand and offer sweet incense on the golden altar. He never minimized his high holy privilege of serving in the Tabernacle. He alone was the mediator who offered intercessory prayer before a holy God on behalf of the nation of Israel.

The priest took a censer full of burning coals from the brazen altar in one hand and specially prepared sweet incense in the other hand and ignited the incense by sprinkling it over the burning coals (Lev. 16: 12–13). A thick cloud of smoke curled upward filling the Tabernacle, symbolic of Israel's prayers to God. The priest, enveloped by the sweet fragrance of the cloudy incense, must have been lifted to inexpressible heights of blessing as he communed with God in this sanctified place.

Remember that you cannot access the altar of Incense without accessing the Bronze altar first which is the cross.

The Placement of the Altar

Placing the altar before the veil (Ex. 30: 6) was of great significance. The golden altar stood next to the veil in the center of the holy place, which separated it from the holy of holies where God manifested His presence.

God told Moses to place the Alter just outside the inner curtain. It was to be opposite the Ark of the Covenant. This is a great blessing of intercessory prayer: Intercessory prayer:

- Is close to the veil
- Is close to the very throne of God
- Is close to the glory of God
- Is close to the place where God's eternal mercy and grace reside
- Is close to the door of answered prayer
- Is close to the most intimate fellowship and communion with God imaginable

Therefore, the closest the priests could come to God in daily worship was when they ministered at the altar of incense. The same principle holds true for Christians. The closest we can come to God is through prayer (Jas. 4: 8).

There is a significant difference between the way we come to God and the way the Aaronic priests came to Him. Today, there is no veil separating us from the throne of God, as there was in the Tabernacle. The veil was rent at the crucifixion of the Lord, giving us direct access to the throne of God through the veil of Christ's flesh and by way of His shed blood (**Heb. 10: 19–20**).

The golden altar of incense stands before the throne of God (Rev. 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” as an everlasting testimony to the prayers of believers as they ascend into His presence.

The Preparation of the Incense

The incense was made from three specific sweet perfumes (Ex. 30: 34)

The Priests’ Preparation for Intercessory Prayer

Before the priests could offer the incense of prayer, three requirements had to be met. **First**, the priests had to minister at the brazen altar, shedding the blood of an animal for their sins. Before we are able to come before a holy God in prayer, we must be cleansed by the shed blood of Jesus Christ, which is done by appropriating His sacrificial death on the cross on our behalf.

Second, the priests had to wash all defilement from their hands and feet (Ex. 30: 18– 20) before they could enter the holy place to offer the ministry of prayer.

We must confess our sins and come before God with clean hearts before He will hear our prayers. Unconfessed sin in the lives of believers

hampers God from listening and responding to their prayers (1 Jn. 1: 6–10). As believer-priests, we are to be set apart into holiness.

Third, the priests had to be in the holy place to offer the incense of prayer. Cleansed by blood and water, they stepped into the sanctuary to fellowship with God. The writer of Hebrews summed it up well when he said, “**Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water**” (Heb. 10: 22). It is only when we are in a proper relationship with God that we can have the full assurance that He will answer our prayers.



Jesus Christ the son of the living God, stands before God as the great Intercessor for us.

- **Jesus Christ Intercedes for sinners**

Therefore I will divide Him a portion with the great, And He shall divide the spoil with the strong, Because He poured out His soul unto death, And He was numbered with the transgressors, And He bore the sin of many, And made intercession for the transgressors.

Isa 53:12

- **Jesus Christ intercedes for weak believers**

But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail; and when you have returned to Me, strengthen your brethren Luke 22:12

- **Jesus Christ Intercedes for his enemies**

Then Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do LUKE 23: 34

- **Jesus Christ Intercedes for the church**

And for their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they also may be sanctified by the truth. John 17:9

- **Jesus Christ Intercedes for God to accept us God to accept us**

Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us Romans 8:34

- **Jesus Christ Intercedes for our salvation**

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. Heb 7:25

- **Jesus Christ Intercedes for the Holy Spirit to abide in us**

And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever John 14:16

The Priests' Participation in Intercessory Prayer

Aaron was to offer incense on the golden altar at regular times each day (Ex. 30: 7– 8). When the priests offered the morning and evening sacrifices on the brazen altar, they also entered the holy place to trim the golden lampstand and burn incense on the altar. In New Testament times, the disciples kept morning and evening hours of prayer in the Temple and in their homes (Acts 3: 1; 10: 9, 30), indicating that God desires believers to set aside specific times for prayer throughout the day.

Many wonder when is the best time to pray, in the morning or evening. Although the Lord does not stipulate a set time for Christians to pray, the biblical pattern is that we should pray both morning and evening. We should offer morning prayers of praise and petition, **inviting to Lord to give us direction** as we begin the day.

The Bible is full of examples of those who rose early in the morning for prayer: Samuel's parents (1 Sam. 1: 19); Hezekiah (2 Chr. 29: 20); Job (Job 1: 5); David (Ps. 57: 8); and Jesus (Mk. 1: 35). In the evening we should reflect on the day, thanking and praising God for answered prayer and the direction He gave us. David found great solace and strength when he meditated in prayer in the quietness of the night

watches (Ps. 63: 5– 6). At times the Lord spent whole nights in prayer (Lk. 6: 12).

The incense burned perpetually before the Lord throughout the years (Ex. 30: 8), picturing believers offering up prayers continually to God. Paul instructed us to “**Pray without ceasing**” (1 Th. 5: 17), meaning that we are to be in a continual attitude of prayer throughout the day. This was illustrated by the Lord (Heb. 7: 25) and the Holy Spirit (Rom. 8: 26– 27), who continuously intercede for us before the throne of God the Father.

The prepared incense was burned with fire by the priests: “**And he shall put the incense upon the fire before the LORD**” (Lev. 16: 13). The same fire that consumed the sacrifice on the brazen altar was used to consume the incense. This, too, is a picture of Christ. Because He experienced the fires of suffering and sacrifice to secure our salvation, He is able to appear in heaven as our advocate, making it possible for us to have direct access to God through prayer (Heb. 9: 24; 1 Jn. 2: 1– 2). Calvary gives validity to our prayers.

Two solemn warnings

Were given concerning the type of incense and fire that could be used on the golden altar. **First**, no strange incense could be used on the altar

(Ex. 30: 9), nor could anyone make the incense for his own personal use (Ex. 30: 37). Anyone who did so was “cut off from his people” [Praying to the saints \(put to death\)](#) [Ex. 30: 38]. This is a figure of prayer offered contrary to God’s will. Our prayer life is to conform to the pattern set by God in His Word. We are not to offer prayer through “vain repetitions” (Mt. 6: 7) but after the model presented by the Lord when His disciples asked Him to teach them to pray (Lk. 11: 1– 4). Our prayers should always be offered in the divine will of God (1 Jn. 5: 14– 15) ([Read](#))*by the authority of Jesus’ name (Jn. 14: 13).

Our prayers are hindered when we are out of fellowship with God, harbor an unforgiving spirit against a brother in Christ (Mt. 6: 15), or pray selfishly out of the will of God (Jas. 4: 3).

Second, no fire other than that from the brazen altar could be used on the golden altar. When Nadab and Abihu offered strange fire, they immediately died by the hand of the Lord (Lev. 10: 1– 2) [Read](#).

These men were true priests with true incense, but they used fire that had not been prescribed by God (Lev. 6: 12– 13; 16: 12). They willfully disobeyed God’s expressed command concerning worship at the golden altar.

Some may question the harsh judgment from God on these two priests, but it is a grim reminder of the fact that rebellion against the expressed will of God can bring His judgment even on believers. It also illustrates that we should not worship and serve God according to the flesh but according to His revealed will in the Scriptures. Man-made religion.

The horns of the altar of incense were not just for decoration but served a specific purpose in relationship to the blood sacrifice.

First , on the day of atonement (the tenth day of the seventh month), the high priest took some of the blood that was used to sprinkle the mercy seat and put it on the horns of the altar of incense to “**make an atonement upon the horns of it**” (Ex. 30: 10). The purpose of this act was to “**cleanse it, and hallow it from the uncleanness of the children of Israel**” (Lev. 16: 18– 19).

Second, the altar served as a place of expiation, apology for the sins of the priests and the congregation (Lev. 4: 7– 8, 18). The sin offering was a compulsory offering covering sins committed unintentionally, in contrast to those committed intentionally out of rebellion to God’s commandments.

It typifies Christ, who was made sin for us. Paul wrote, “For he hath made him, who knew no sin, to be sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him” (2 Cor. 5: 21).

The symbol of the horns. The horns are symbolic of God’s power and strength. God’s power and strength are available to help us in times of desperate need, times of:

- Pain and anguish
- Loneliness and emptiness
- Accident and disease
- Temptation and sin
- Bankruptcy and loss
- Hunger and poverty
- Suffering and death
- Broken trust and desertion

The sin offering had three purposes:

1. It acted as a substitute for the sins of individuals;
2. its blood was efficacious in atoning for sin; and
3. the application of the blood expiated sin (freed individuals from the punishment of sin).

The golden altar also represented the place of intercession before the Lord; therefore, when blood from the sin offering was sprinkled on the

horns of the altar, it symbolized a prayer for the pardon of sin before God. The blood, when applied to the altar, gave the incense of prayer its value. So it is with Christ's blood, which gives value to our prayers before God (**Heb. 9: 14; 12: 24**) and opens the way for us to come before the throne of grace to find mercy and grace in the time of need (**Heb. 4: 16**).

The Golden Lampstand

Exodus 25:31-40; 37:17; 39:37)

Having been cleansed by washing at the brazen laver, the priest reverently made his way a few feet toward the Tabernacle entrance. His heart pounded with anticipation as he carefully drew back the heavy curtain of the Tabernacle and entered to minister in the holy place. A hush fell over him as he contemplated the privilege and responsibility of representing his people before a holy God. In a spirit of humility, he worshiped and communed with the true and living God.

The Tabernacle was a rectangular building divided into two sections. The holy place was 30 feet long and 15 feet wide, and the holy of holies was 15 feet square. The holy place and the holy of holies were divided by a huge, heavy veil made of blue, purple, scarlet, and fine-twined linen, richly embroidered with figures of cherubim (**Ex. 26: 31– 33**).

Three pieces of furniture graced the holy place. **The golden lampstand** stood on the left side (south); **the table of showbread** stood on the right side (north); and **the altar of incense** stood in front of the veiled entrance to the holy of holies, which contained (the ark of the covenant). The furnishings were made from the exact specifications that God gave to Moses on Mount Sinai (**Ex. 25:40**)

Light from the huge golden lampstand filled every corner of the holy place with a warm, shimmering brilliance, providing illumination for the priest as he ministered.

The lampstand was made of one talent of pure gold (**Ex. 25: 39**), which weighed 90 pounds. With gold retailing at approximately \$350 an ounce, the cost to reproduce it today would be tremendous.

The lampstand had a center stem with three branches on each side, making it a seven-pronged lampstand. Each stem had three groups of almond blossom cups, knobs, and flowers— except the middle stem, which had four (**Ex. 25: 31– 40**). It was not made from a mold but was hammered out of a single talent of gold (**Ex. 37: 17, 24**). The artisan who crafted it was given great ability by God to be able to sculpt such a beautiful piece. It was part of the priests' ministry to care for the lampstand.

Its lamps were kept continuously burning (**Ex. 27: 20– 21**) by filling them daily with pure olive oil. The priests trimmed each lamp every evening and morning (**Ex. 30: 7– 8**).

The Lampstand and Christ

The lampstand was filled with rich symbolic teaching for Christians. The gold in the lampstand typified the deity of Christ, the divine Son of God, who stepped across the galaxies of the universe and became a man. He was pure in His humanity, having neither spot nor blemish (**1 Pet. 1: 19**), but it was His deity that sustained His humanity.

The lampstand, as we have already seen, was not molded or pieced together but was hammered out of a solid talent of gold (**Ex. 25: 31**), symbolizing the Lord, who endured the harsh, hot sting of a biting whip before His crucifixion (**Mt. 27: 26, 30**). Isaiah wrote concerning His suffering, “**we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted . . . and with his stripes we are healed**” (**Isa. 53: 4– 5**). Contemplate the stripes of the Lord, and your love for Him will be renewed and deepened.

The dimensions of the lampstand are not given, but its size, weight, and beauty portray Christ in His fathomless greatness. He is the creator of all things, and by Him all things are held together (**Col. 1: 16– 17**). He is

limitless in His value, for in Him are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge to be found (**Col. 2: 3**). Paul summed up the greatness of Christ when he wrote, “**For in him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily**” (**Col. 2: 9**). Joy should fill our souls as we realize that we are complete in Him (Col. 2: 10), the one who provides a wealth of wisdom and knowledge for our Christian walk.

The lampstand’s purpose was to provide light. It was a beautiful type of Christ, who is the true light of the world. Jesus said, “**I am the light of the world; he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life**” (**Jn. 8: 12**). The “**light of life**” that Jesus spoke of can be obtained only through faith in His atoning work on the cross. But Jesus made it very clear that the world in general would not come to Him as the “**light of life**”: “**And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil**” (**Jn. 3: 19**).

The light in the holy place was symbolic of Christ’s holiness. John wrote, “**God is light, and in him is no darkness at all**” (1 Jn. 1: 5). The glory of our Lord will also illuminate the New Jerusalem in eternity: “**And the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it; for the glory of God did light it, and the Lamb is the lamp of it**” (**Rev. 21: 23**).

Christians will enjoy the great privilege of walking in the glory of Christ's light throughout all eternity (**Rev. 21: 24**).

The Lampstand and the Christian

The golden lampstand typified Christ, who lights up the walk and fellowship of believers. The holy place had no windows to allow light to shine into the Tabernacle. The light in the holy place was hidden from the world; only the priests had the privilege of ministering and enjoying the light of the lampstand. So it is with Christians.

As believer-priests, we are able to enter into the light of fellowship and communion with God. John, who knew intimate fellowship with the Lord, wrote, “**But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another**” (**1 Jn. 1: 7**).

Today, Christians are the only reflectors of Christ's light to a lost and dying world. Too often the light of believers shines dimly because it is hidden under a bushel (**Mt. 5: 15**).

Believers' lamps are to beam brightly, as a lighted city standing on a hill (**Mt. 5: 14**) whose glow can be seen for miles around (**Mt. 5: 16**). Christ, who is the pure gold, produces true faith in believers. Christians go through the hammering experience of suffering to try their faith so that it will come forth as gold tried in the fire. This type of faith is “**much**

more precious than of gold that perisheth” (1 Pet. 1: 7). The golden lampstand was a type of the church. In Revelation chapters 2 and 3, the church is portrayed as a golden lampstand. Christ is the light of each lampstand and is to shine brightly through each of these local assemblies into the dark world of sin. Jesus warned the Ephesian church, who had lost its first love for Him, “repent, and do the first works, or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy lampstand out of its place” (Rev. 2: 5). Sad to say, the light of all seven churches mentioned in Revelation 2 and 3 was removed, and today those churches do not exist. This situation should sound a solemn warning to the church of the 20th century to take heed, lest it suffer the same fate.

The lampstand and the Comforter ****

The oil in the lampstand was a beautiful type of the ministry of the Holy Spirit. At the top of each branch were cups into which pure olive oil was poured. The oil produced the glowing light that filled the Tabernacle. The seven stems, olive oil, and flame are types of the Spirit’s ministry, which was clearly taught by John: “And out of the throne proceeded lightnings and thunderclaps, and voices; and there were seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, which are the seven spirits of God” (Rev. 4: 5). The “seven spirits of God” symbolize the perfection and fullness of

the Spirit's ministry. The Holy Spirit is the person of the Godhead who administers the plans, purposes, and programs of God on earth.

First, the Holy Spirit played a major role in the Lord's life and ministry. He was conceived (**Mt. 1: 18– 20**), baptized (**Mt. 3: 16**), anointed (**Jn. 3: 34; Heb. 1: 9**), empowered for service (**Lk. 4: 14, 18**), and resurrected (**Rom. 8: 11**) by the Holy Spirit. In His opening words to the church at Sardis, the Lord said, **“And unto the angel of the church in Sardis write: These things saith he that hath the seven spirits of God, and the seven stars”** (**Rev. 3: 1**).

The **“seven spirits of God”** is a reference to the Holy Spirit in His sevenfold ministry, which Christ possesses. Isaiah taught that the Holy Spirit will be manifested in a sevenfold ministry through Christ during the Kingdom age: **“And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots; And the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord”** (**Isa. 11: 1– 2**).

It is interesting to parallel the sevenfold ministry of the Holy Spirit with the seven branches of the lampstand. In this context, the Holy Spirit is referred to as the **“Spirit of the Lord”** resting on Christ, who could be

compared to the center shaft of the lampstand. Branching out of the stem were three branches on each side, corresponding to the ministry of the Holy Spirit of the Lord: the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and fear of the Lord.