

# The Sacrifice of PRAYER

05-30-2021

## INTRODUCTION

Have you ever been studying the Bible, or studying for a lesson you're giving, or heard a sermon and thought, "I never knew that. How could I have been a Christian for most of my life (some of you) and never knew that?"

Well, that's what happened to me this week about the ALTAR OF INCENSE in the Old Testament tabernacle.

As I am wrapping up this whole focus on what does it mean for Christians to offer up spiritual sacrifices to God acceptable to God through Jesus Christ, I decided to just go back and doublecheck that I hadn't missed anything. And I stumbled upon this. But before I dive into all that, let me pray. [pray]

So, what is the altar of incense?

The altar of incense was one of the articles that God commanded Moses to build to be a part of the regular worship of God in the tabernacle. Now there were several furnishings in the tabernacle.

## The Tabernacle Furnishings

### The Ark of the Covenant

The Ark of the Covenant was basically a gold-plated box made out of acacia wood with two cherubim hammered out of pure gold "hovering" over the center of the box. Between the cherubim was understood as the geographic location of the manifest presence of Yahweh.

### The Bronze Altar

This massive bronze-plated altar is where all of the various blood, grain, and wine offerings would take place.

### The Bronze Basin

This small basin stood between the Bronze Altar and the Holy Place. The priests were instructed to wash their hands whenever entering the Holy Place or when about to offer up a sacrifice.

### The Lampstand

There was the lampstand which was constantly lit day and night, representing God's Presence with His people, almost like a miniature pillar of fire which was a supernatural manifestation of God's Presence among His people. There was the pillar of smoke by day and the pillar of fire by night which served as a constant reminder of God's abiding Presence. This of course is a picture of God's faithful presence in our lives now by the ministry and Person of the Holy Spirit.

### The Table of Shewbread

This demonstrated as a constant reminder to the people that God would provide for their daily needs. Give us this day our daily bread. The manna which came during the Israelites time in the wilderness came daily. Ultimately, it points back to our need for our souls to "feed" on the Lord daily. Jesus said, "I am the Bread of Life".

### The Veil

This was a very thick and beautiful woven veil that blocked easy passage into the Most Holy Place where the Ark of the Covenant dwelled. Once a year, the high priest would enter on the Day of Atonement.

### The Altar of Incense

This was a relatively small piece of furniture which stood directly before the Most Holy Place. It was one cubit wide (or about 20"), one cubit in in depth, and two cubits tall (or about 40"). On it the high priest would burn incense in the morning, and then again at twilight when he was tending to the Lampstand.

There was a special formula for the incense that could only be used in the tabernacle. In fact, to use this formula anywhere else that person would be cut off from his people.

And once a year on the Day of Atonement, there was blood sprinkled on the horns of the altar.

Now, this had a practical purpose on some levels. It was common in those days with the constant smell of animals to burn incense in the presence of a King so that there was a pleasant aroma constantly in that place. Israel was serving God as the Great King over all the universe, so this would have made sense to them. There was a sense that the smell, or fragrant aroma, of the burning incense was covering up the stench of the smells of that agrarian society.

But figuratively, the altar of incense and the fragrant aroma going up came to represent something else—that is, the prayers of God's people.

While the bronze bath, the table of Shewbread, the Lampstand, the Ark of the Covenant all represented various ministries or provisions that the Lord was providing for His people, the table of incense represented the ministry of His people to Yahweh. It was a continual, daily offering of prayer before God—these prayers were a mixture of different things—different kinds of prayer perhaps—coming up before God, a fragrant aroma covering up the stench of the world in its sinful desires and actions.

David in Psalm 141:2, said this:

*May my prayer be set before you like incense;  
may the lifting up of my hands be like the evening sacrifice.*

And so, whether David was the first one to make this figurative connection, or he was simply following the line of thinking that was already established, he clearly connects the idea that his prayers were being lifted up before the LORD in the same way as when the priest offered up incense at twilight.

### **The Layout of the Tabernacle**

One can see powerful lessons on salvation in the very layout of the Tabernacle itself.

### ***So now, what is the significance of the Altar of Incense for the believer?***

God, through the prophet Isaiah in Isaiah 56:7 said, "...My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations."

There is something about the ministry of prayer specifically that is a ministry to God. In other words, we don't just pray when we need something. We pray because it is our priestly duty to pray.

Again, we have been called out of darkness, into His wonderful light, we have been set apart, we have been cleansed, we have been given mind-blowing access to God, for specific purposes. And one of the purposes is to pray. To worship. And to intercede. Prayers of worship. And prayers of intercession.

### **Prayer is a Ministry to God**

We tend to think of prayer as somewhat "us-centered". That is, we need certain things down here and what a wonderful thing to know that God is for us. That we have a heavenly Father who is in heaven who is willing to answer our prayers.

And that is all true. BUT... prayer is not ultimately about us. It is primarily and ultimately for God and His Glory and His Kingdom. Watch the pattern given to us in the Lord's Prayer (Luke 11:1-3):

### *Father*

- It starts with recognizing our SONSHIP.

### *Hallowed be Your Name*

- After recognizing our sonship, we begin with WORSHIP.

### *Your Kingdom come, Your will be done on earth as it is heaven*

- Then it moves to Kingdom-centered INTERCESSION.
- We pray because things are not right in the world. And God wants to make things right. He wants His Kingdom to come and His will to be done on the earth as it is in heaven.
- Prayer is simply agreeing with that. And saying, Yes. May it be so.
- Even if our prayers are not being answered. We are honoring Him by praying according to His will.

### *Give us this day our daily bread*

- It then moves to personal REQUESTS.

### *Forgive us our sins for we also forgive everyone who sins against us. And lead us not into temptation.*

- It concludes with prayers of CONFESSION and recognizing our need for total DEPENDENCE.

## **A Recipe for Prayer**

Paul said in Ephesians 6:18 that we should pray continually "...with all kinds of prayers and requests". What are some of the various kinds of prayers we may lift up?

- Worship and Praise (Psalm 9:1-4)
- Thanksgiving (Psalm 107:1)
- Confession (1 John 1:9)
- Intercession (Ephesians 6:18b)
- Prayers for Wisdom (James 1:5)
- Prayers for Healing (James 5:13-16)
- Prayers for Boldness to Witness (Acts)
- Petitions and Supplications (Matthew 6:11)
- Continual Prayer (Ephesians 6:18b; 1 Thessalonians 5:17)
- Persevering Prayer (Luke 18:1-8)
- Faith-filled Prayer (Hebrews 11:1, 6; James 1:6-8)
- Pray in the Spirit (Ephesians 6:18a)
- In Jesus' Name (John 14:13-14; 1 John 5:14-15)

## **CONCLUSION**

**"How Long O Lord"** (Psalm 13; Revelation 5:8; 8:3-6)

**DON'T FORGET!!!—Monthly Prayer Gathering is THIS Thursday evening, 7pm**