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The Altar of Incense in the Sanctuary: Christ, Our Advocate with the Father 30:1-10, 22-38 and 37:25-29

The Altar of Incense in the Sanctuary DIG: What does incense, as used here, symbolize (Psalm 141:2; Revelation 5:8, 8:3-5)? Where is it placed? When does it burn? Who attends it? What meaning does the incense have when God is present to meet His faithful children (30:6 and 36)? What meaning does it have the rest of the time when no people are present?

REFLECT: Do you think you “smell” like a believer? How can you tell? What reaction from others would you expect if you did? How can you become a fragrant aroma to God (Second Corinthians 2:14-16)? The rabbis characterize incense in terms of prayer, holiness, purity, compassion and hope. What characterizes your prayer?

There were seven pieces of furniture in the Tabernacle, and the altar of incense would be fifth that the priest would come to. As he entered the Holy Place, it would be directly in front of the inner veil that covered the entrance to the Most Holy Place. The golden lampstand would be on his left and the table of bread of the Presence would be on his right. Unlike the larger bronze altar in the courtyard, the altar in the Holy Place was for the burning of incense, symbolic of the prayer and praise that ascends to God as a fragrant offering from His grateful people.⁵⁸⁹



The description began with its size. **ADONAI** said to **make an altar of acacia wood for burning incense. It was to be square, a cubit, or one and a half feet long and a cubit wide, and two cubits, or three feet high, with horns on each corner. The top, all the sides and the horns were to be overlaid with pure gold, with a gold molding around it. Two gold rings were to be made to hold the poles used to carry it. The poles were to be made of acacia wood and overlaid with gold. The altar was to be placed in front of the inner veil in the Holy Place (30:1-6; 37:25-28).** It may have been placed there because on the Day of Atonement some of the blood of the **sin** offering was sprinkled on **the altar of incense** seven times (**Leviticus 16:19**), just as it was on the Ark and Mercy Seat.⁵⁹⁰

And so, those two altars were linked together by the command of **ADONAI**. Without the bronze **altar** with its fire, there could have been no worship at the golden **altar** of incense. The coals from the bronze **altar** were taken inside the Sanctuary and placed upon the **altar of incense**. It was upon those coals that sweet **incense** was burned. In our study of the bronze **altar** in the courtyard, we saw that **bronze** spoke of judgment of **sin**. The death of the sacrifice on that **altar** foreshadowed the vicarious sufferings of Jesus, **the Lamb of God**. Without the fire from the bronze **altar**, there could be no burning of sweet **incense**. Without the death of **Jesus**, there could be no **Intercessor** for us at the throne of grace to hear our prayers (**Romans 8:34**).⁵⁹¹

Even though Moses said that **the altar** was to be placed **in front of the** inner veil in the Holy Place (**30:6; 37:28**), the writer to the **Hebrews** seems to disagree about its placement there. He refers to the Most Holy Place as having a **golden altar of incense (Hebrews 9:4)**. At first glance, this seems to suggest that there is a contradiction between **Exodus** and **Hebrews**. However, while **the altar of incense** stood in the Holy Place in front of the inner veil, its ritual use on the Day of Atonement was connected with the Most Holy Place. The high priest would take **coals** from **the altar of incense** to be burned within the Most Holy Place (**Leviticus 16:12-13**). The writer to the **Hebrews** was referring to the censer, or the shovel, on which the high-priest poured **the coals**, when he entered the Most Holy Place on the Day of Atonement.⁵⁹²



Then **ADONAI** gave special instructions on the making of **the fragrant incense** that was to be burned on **the altar**. Only **incense**, and only a special kind of **incense**, was to be placed there. Four **spices, gum resin, onycha, galbanum, and pure frankincense, all in equal amounts**, were made into a **fragrant blend of incense**. Salt was to be added to the mixture, because it made white smoke when burned and added to the fragrance.⁵⁹³ **Ground into powder**, these **spices** were **to be** placed upon **the altar** that was **in front of** the inner veil. Because of its **sacred** nature, this special **incense** was not to be used anywhere except **the altar of incense** or the priest would die **(30:34-38)**.

Throughout the day and throughout the night the smoke of the sweet incense went up before **ADONAI** filling **the Sanctuary** with its fragrance. Twice a day **Aaron** and his sons burned **incense on the altar**. *This was considered to be one of the five key duties of the priesthood.* **Aaron** was commanded to **burn the fragrant incense on the altar every morning when he** replaced the oil and wicks in **the lamps** of the golden lampstand. And he did the same thing **at twilight so incense** would **burn** continually **before ADONAI (30:7-8)**. The continual burning of **incense** is an example of the need for persistent prayer (**Psalm 16:8, 55:17; Luke 18:1-8; First Thessalonians 5:17-18**).

The priests were **not to offer any other incense on that altar, or any burnt offering or grain offering**. Neither were they to **pour a drink offering on it**. If they burned any other **incense** than the formula they were given, they would be killed **(30:9)**. Later, **Nadab and Abihu**, Aaron's two sons, disobeyed this command and **offered unauthorized incense before God**. **So fire came out from the presence of ADONAI and consumed them, and they died (Leviticus 10:1-2)**.

According to **30:9**, no offerings were to be made on **the altar of incense**, whether they were animal or grain. The next verse provides the only exception. **Once a year**, on the Day of Atonement, **Aaron** was to make **atonement** for the **sins** of the nation by smearing **blood** on the **horns of the altar of incense**. **This annual atonement** had to **be made with the blood of a sin offering**. It was **most holy to ADONAI (30:10)**.⁵⁹⁴

Haftarah T'tzaveh: Yechezk'el (Ezeki'el) 43:10-27

(See my commentary on Deuteronomy, to see link click [Af](#) - Parashah)

Ezeki'el describes **God's** return to **the Messianic Temple** (see the commentary on [Jeremiah Gs - God Shows a Vision of the Millennial Temple](#)) during the thousand year reign of **Messiah**. Parallel consecration of **the Bronze Altar** in the parashah (see the commentary on [Exodus Gg - Take Seven Days to Ordain Aaron and His Sons](#)), with **Ezeki'el**, who requires that **a sin offering** be offered **each day, for seven days, to cleanse the bronze altar**. Then **the Bronze Altar** in the Millennial Temple will be anointed, and sanctified as most holy (**Ezeki'el 43:26-27**). **Isra'el** will not pollute this Sanctuary as **she** polluted the former Sanctuary (**Ezeki'el 44:6-10**). The sacrificial system in the Dispensation of the Messianic Kingdom will serve the same purpose as communion in the Dispensation of Grace. It will be the, **do this in remembrance of Me**, for Jewish believers.

B'rit Chadashah suggested reading for Parashah T'tzaveh: Philippians 4:10-20

Motives for **doing good and sharing with others (Hebrews 13:16)** should not be entangled with desires for the respect or acceptance of others, but solely to please **ADONAI**. Believers must not seek respect or inclusion on any terms except **God's**. **Yeshua's** sacrifice, taking place **outside the camp** is perceived by the world as **disgraceful (Hebrews 13:11-13)**. If **Yeshua** couldn't avoid such disgrace when **sacrificing** to please **God**, how should we expect anything different? **The rabbis point to fulfillment of the covenant sacrifices, "In the time to come, all sacrifices will be annulled except for the sacrifice of thanksgiving" (Lev. R. 97)**. These special sacrifices are called *todah* (*thank offerings*). We see this in **Jeremiah 33:11** where we read: **The sounds of joy and gladness and the voices of bridegroom and bride, the voices of those who sing, "Give thanks to ADONAI-Tzva'ot, for ADONAI is good, for His grace continues forever," as they bring offerings of thanksgiving into the house of ADONAI.**

Scripture clearly shows that **incense** is a symbol of prayer. The Psalmist said: **May my prayer be set before you like incense; may the lifting up of my hands be like the evening sacrifice (Psalm 141:2).** The Apostle John said: **And when the Lamb had taken it, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before Him. Each one had a harp and they were holding golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints (Revelation 5:8).**

You will notice that this **altar** was in the Holy Place. Only the priests could worship there. Even King Uzziah was inflicted with leprosy when he tried to worship there (**Second Chronicles 26:16-21**). Only priests can pray today, and every true believer in **Christ** is a priest. There is a great deal of sentimental rubbish being spread around today that a person can lead any sort of **sinful** life he pleases, reject **Jesus** and then, in time of trouble, he can get on his knees and expect an answer. Motion pictures have shown scenes like this, and some sentimental pastors or rabbis talk about such things happening, but **God** says **He** will not answer prayers like this. Let me be very clear. **The altar of incense** is where priests go. The *only* prayer a **sinner** can pray is, “**God**, be merciful to me, a **sinner**.” **God** will hear and answer that prayer when it is offered to **Him**.⁵⁹⁵

Sacred **oil of dedication** was also to be blended from various fragrant ingredients. Its formula was as unique as the product was holy. It was made **of** about 12.5 pounds **of liquid myrrh**, 6.25 pounds **of fragrant cinnamon**, 6.25 pounds **of fragrant cane**, 12.5 pounds **of cassia** (from the **fragrant** bark of a tree), **and** about four quarts **of olive oil**. When mixed, they made **a fragrant blend (30:22-25)**.⁵⁹⁶

It was to be used to dedicate **the Tabernacle** and its furnishings as well as the members of the priesthood for ministry. **The priests** were to **use** the **oil** to dedicate **the Tabernacle, the ark of the Covenant, the table of the bread of the Presence and all its articles, the lampstand and its accessories, the altar of incense, the bronze altar and all its utensils, and the bronze basin with its stand**. The dedicating set them apart for **the Lord's work, and whatever touched them would be most holy**. But things were not only to be dedicated, people were also to be dedicated. Dedicate **Aaron and his sons so they may serve Me as priests (30:26-30)**.

The death penalty associated with **the incense** also applied to the **oil** of dedication. No unauthorized use was to be made of it. **ADONAI** said it was **His sacred** dedicating **oil for the generations to come**. The **priests** were **not to put it on** their **bodies**, nor were they to **make any oil with the same formula**. It was **sacred**, and they were to **consider it sacred**. Whoever made **perfume like it** or whoever puts it on anyone other than a

priest would **be cut off from his people**, a Jewish expression for being executed (30:31-33). The significance of this was **Christ** being dedicated, or set apart, by **the Holy Spirit** for **His** ministry (Isaiah 61:1; Acts 10:38).

Just as the golden **altar** was the last object to be reached as the priest traveled from the gate in the courtyard to the inner veil that hid the mercy seat from view; likewise, worship is the highest state to be reached on earth and the object for which all other things in this life are merely preparations. **God** seeks worshipers. This was the desire that led **Jesus** to go through Samaria to meet a **sinner** (John 4:1-26), to turn her heart from her **sins** by filling it with the satisfying portion of grace, that she might meet **Him** and give that praise and worship that only a forgiven **sinner** can give (John 4:39-42). And this is what led **Jesus** to leave the heaven of light and peace and come down to the cross of suffering and shame. **He** still seeks worshipers today. **He** seeks those who, having tasted the love of **God** as no angel can possibly taste, might from a heart overflowing with love for **Him**, pour out **the fragrant incense** of praise.⁵⁹⁷