

April 8, 2018 - Ex. 30:1-38 - Altar of Incense, Redemption Money, Brass Laver, Anointing Oil & Incense

Torah Reading: Exodus 30:1-38 - Altar of Incense, Redemption Money, Brass Laver, Anointing Oil & Incense

Psalm 64

Haftarah: Malachi 1:11 – 2:7

This section covers the Altar of Incense, the Redemption Money, the Brass Laver, and the ingredients for the Anointing Oil and the Incense.

The Incense Altar 30:1-10 (also called “the golden altar” (See Exodus 40:5)

Why was this not discussed when the other furniture of the Holy Place were described? There first had to be an anointed priest to perform the offerings. Only then could anyone approach God for worship, which is what the incense represents.

The altar of incense is not approached until we have been to the altar of sacrifice.

Incense = *keṭōreth* - ‘sweet smoke’

The altar of incense was to be of acacia wood, overlaid with gold, a cubit (1½ ft.) broad and long, and 2 cubits (3 ft.) high; at its upper corners were to be four horns (cf. **Exodus 27:2**); a rim or moulding of gold was to run round it, probably near its top; and close under this moulding, on two of the opposite sides, there were to be two gold rings to receive the poles for carrying it. It was to stand in the Holy place, directly in front of the mercy-seat but on the other side of the veil.

The altar of incense was as close as you could come to the Ark of the Covenant without being in the Holy of Holies.

Exodus 30:8 - "...a **perpetual** incense before the LORD throughout your generations."

- **1 Thessalonians 5:16-18** - "Rejoice evermore; pray without ceasing. In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you."

Like all of the furniture in the Tabernacle and the whole structure itself, the incense altar is "speaking" the gospel. The liturgy around it reflects a spiritual reality in eternity.

The Incense, touched by the coals of the Brazen altar and thus sanctified, rises up to God and represents the praise, thanksgiving, prayer and petitions of Israel. The incense had a sweet smell and was therefore understood to be accepted by God - but only if it originated from the Incense Altar that had been lit by coals from the Brazen Altar on which the blood of sacrifice had touched.

One of the roles of the priest was as intercessor between Israel and God, as a picture of Christ our High Priest:

- **Hebrews 7:25** - "Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them."

"The King Messiah hears and receives the prayers of his people; and, as Mediator, presents them to his Father perfumed with much incense; for he is a Priest as well as a King." - *Gill's Exposition* on **Psalm 20:9** - "Save, LORD: let the king hear us when we call."

Incense could also be directed *away* from God, and all ancient civilizations employed the burning of incense:

Hosea 11:1 (NET) - "When Israel was a young man, I loved him like a son, and I summoned my son out of Egypt. But the more I summoned them, the farther they departed from me. They sacrificed to the Baal idols and burned incense to images."

Prayers, Worship, Thoughts

- **Psalm 141:2** - "May my prayer be counted as incense before You; The lifting up of my hands as the evening offering."

For believers now, the incense represents our prayers and worship, all of which originates in our thoughts. The Scriptures often use "the lips" to represent our whole thought process.

- **Isaiah 6:5-7** - "Then said I, Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts. Then flew one of the seraphim unto me, having a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with the tongs from off the altar: And he laid it upon my mouth, and said, Lo, this hath touched thy lips; and thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged."

If our mind is not renewed and transformed (by being "kindled" and purified with coals touched by Christ's blood) then our "incense" is turned toward self, and thus to idolatry.

When Aaron's sons Nadab and Abihu kindled their own censers rather than using coals from the Brazen Altar, "there went out fire from the LORD, and devoured them." (**Leviticus 10:1-7**)

Incense in the Book of Revelation

The Incense Altar figures prominently in the Book of Revelation, depicting the prayers of the martyred saints for vindication being answered by God:

Each one had a harp, and they held the golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints.

- **Revelation 5:6-8** - "Then I saw a Lamb who appeared to have been slain, standing in

the center of the throne, encircled by the four living creatures and the elders. The lamb had seven horns and seven eyes, which represent the sevenfold Spirit of God sent out into all the earth. And He came and took the scroll from the right hand of the One seated on the throne. When He had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb. Each one had a harp, and they held the golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints."

First, the persecuted saints cry out to God:

- **Revelation 6:9** - "And when the Lamb opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the testimony they had upheld. 10And they cried out in a loud voice, 'How long, O Lord, holy and true, until You judge those who live on the earth and avenge our blood?'"

Later in **Revelation 8:4** - "Then another angel, who had a golden censer, came and stood at the altar. He was given much incense to offer, along with the prayers of all the saints, on the golden altar before the throne. And the smoke of the incense, which came with the prayers of the saints, ascended up before God out of the angel's hand."

The prayers of the persecuted saints will be answered, and retribution exacted at the proper time:

- **Revelation 8:5** - "And the angel took the censer, and filled it with fire of the altar, and cast it into the earth: and there were voices, and thunder, and lightning, and an earthquake."

The sprinkling of the ashes earthward is the symbol of the answer descending from heaven. Recall the similar action of Moses before Pharaoh, when he took ashes of the furnace and sprinkled it towards heaven, but it descended towards earth, as a symbol of the plague about to fall upon the land (**Exodus 9:8-10**).

As in the parallel vision in Ezekiel (**Ezekiel 10:2**), when the man clothed with linen is bidden to "go in between the wheels, even under the cherub, and fill his hand with coals of fire from between the cherubim, and scatter them over the doomed city;" so here the ashes fall — the judgments are at hand. - *Ellicott's Commentary*

Where was the Altar of Incense?

Exodus 30:6 - "And you shall put it before the veil that is by the ark of the testimony, before the mercy seat that is over the testimony, where I will meet with you."

- **Hebrews 9:4** - "And after the second veil, the tabernacle which is called the Holiest of all; Which had the golden censer, and the ark of the covenant overlaid round about with gold, wherein was the golden pot that had manna, and Aaron's rod that budded, and the tables of the covenant"

So, was the Altar of Incense in the Holy of Holies as in Exodus, or in the Holy Place on the other side of the Veil as it seems to be in Hebrews?

This may refer to the liturgical practice on the Day of Atonement. The "censor" = Heb. "*maḥtah*" - was used in conveying incense to the altar. An exception to this was in the ritual for the Day of Atonement. The high priest filled the censer - a golden one on that day according to Josephus - with coals from the altar and, placing upon them a handful of incense, caused the smoke to cover the mercy-seat of the Ark in the Holy of Holies (**Leviticus 16:12, 13**). Mishnah Tamid v. 5 indicates that those in the Temple were complicated in construction and of costly material (see also Yoma 43b).

Also on Yom Kippur, the Incense Altar was sprinkled and cleansed by the high priest with the same blood which he had carried into the Most Holy Place (**Exodus 30:10; Leviticus 16:18**).

Alternately, it could simply mean that the Altar of Incense itself was related closely to the Holy of Holies because of this Yom Kippur ritual, and therefore could be said to "belong" to it, even though it stood outside the Veil.

At any rate,

"the incense, which was carried in with those coals, typified the intercession of Christ in heaven, which is pure and holy, sweet, fragrant, and perpetual; and the priest having his hands full of it, expresses the fulness of Christ's intercession for all his elect, and for all things for them, and his fulness of merit to plead, which makes his intercession efficacious and prevalent; and hence, through his much incense, the prayers of his people become odorous and acceptable: and the incense being put upon the burning coals in the censer, shows that Christ's intercession proceeds upon the foot of his blood and sacrifice, his sufferings and death; and hence it becomes grateful, and has its influence; the smoke of it covers the mercy seat, or throne of grace, and makes that accessible; and as the priest, who offers it, never dies, so none of those for whom he intercedes." - *Gills Exposition*

Half-Shekel of Redemption (Exodus 30:11-16)

Exodus 30:12 - "When thou takest the sum of the children of Israel after their number, then shall they give every man a ransom for his soul unto the LORD, when thou numberest them; that there be no plague among them, when thou numberest them."

A half-shekel for everyone "to make an atonement for your souls." (**Exodus 30:16**)

Why? To show they are a redeemed people, but *individually*. There was not a lump sum required by every tribe or clan, or even every family. *Individuals* were each to bring the half-shekel of silver.

This silver originally was not *earned* by them. It was part of the spoil given over to them by the Egyptians when God freed them from slavery and brought them out of Egypt, so it represented God's grace.

Silver is the picture of redemption by Christ's blood.

This command is carried out later when the Tabernacle was being constructed:

Exodus 38:26-27 - "A bekah for every man, that is, half a shekel, after the shekel of the sanctuary, for every one that went to be numbered, from twenty years old and upward, for six hundred thousand and three thousand and five hundred and fifty men. And of the hundred talents of silver were cast the sockets of the sanctuary, and the sockets of the vail; an hundred sockets of the hundred talents, a talent for a socket. And of the thousand seven hundred seventy and five shekels he made hooks for the pillars, and overlaid their chapters, and filleted them."

The Tabernacle's foundation is the silver from this half-shekel collection - the Tabernacle is literally supported by Christ's blood, his redemptive sacrifice. His blood redemption is separating us from the world, the earth.

This collection was to be made whenever the people were numbered. A numbering usually occurred when Israel was going out to war, so the reminder that each individual was living on borrowed time, redeemed with a price, was important.

Later, David numbered the people without taking this redemption money collection, and that's why a plague killed 70,000. (**2 Samuel 24; 1 Chronicles 21**)

Bottom line: We must individually be covered in his blood, purchased by his sacrifice, and present before God the redemption of Christ **INSTEAD OF OURSELVES** in order to approach Him with acceptance.

- **1 Corinthians 6:19-20** - "Ye are not your own: for ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's."

- **1 Peter 1:18-19** - "For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life you inherited from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or spot."

By the time of Christ it had become a yearly "tax." In the Mishnah there is a whole treatise called "Shekalim", in which an account is given of the time and manner of collecting this ransom money, and for what uses, and who were obliged to pay it, etc.

The Laver of Brass

Exodus 30:20 - "When they go into the tabernacle of the congregation, they shall wash with water, that they die not; or when they come near to the altar to minister, to burn offering made by fire unto the LORD:"

Washing as spiritual type:

- **Psalm 51:2,7** - "Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin..."

- **Jeremiah 4:14** - "O Jerusalem, wash your heart from wickedness, that you may be saved. "

- **1 Corinthians 6:11** - "But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God."

- **John 13:8** - "Never shall You wash my feet!" Peter told Him. Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no part with Me."

- **John 13:10** - "Jesus said to him, He that is washed needs not save to wash his feet, ..."

- **1 Timothy 2:8** - "I will therefore that men pray every where, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting."

- **Ephesians 5:25-26** - "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her to sanctify her, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word"

The Anointing Oil

Exodus 30:22-29 - "And thou shalt anoint the tabernacle of the congregation therewith, and the ark of the testimony, And the table and all his vessels, and the candlestick and his vessels, and the altar of incense, And the altar of burnt offering with all his vessels, and the laver and his foot. And thou shalt sanctify them, that they may be most holy: whatsoever toucheth them shall be holy."

Exodus 30:32 - "Upon man's flesh shall it not be poured, neither shall ye make any other like it, after the composition of it: it is holy, and it shall be holy unto you."

"man" = the natural man in his worldly pursuits. When someone was anointed, in effect that person died to his own concerns and was fully given over to the demands of his office, whether high priest or possibly the king. The same happens when the Spirit of God comes upon a believer - we are part of a royal priesthood.
(See "myrrh" below)

The Incense

Ingredients and preparation - The incense burned upon the golden altar was prepared of sweet spices. When it was used, it was to be beaten very small (**Exodus 30:36**); thus it pleased the Lord to bruise the Redeemer, when he offered himself for a sacrifice of a sweet-smelling savor.

Gold, frankincense and myrrh were gifts to the child Jesus at his birth (**Matthew 2:11**).

Myrrh was an ingredient in the Anointing Oil and also used to prepare the dead for burial.

Frankincense was an ingredient used to create the incense burned on the Golden Incense Altar.

Both reflected Christ's sacrifice and its effects - mediation in bringing our prayers before God and his atoning death on the cross, as well as his position as High Priest.