

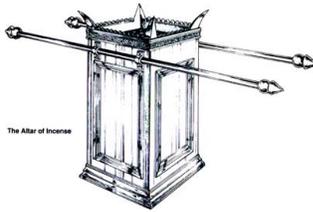
## The Altar of Incense Exodus 30:1-10

It's important to remember that the tabernacle is a copy of a heavenly temple.

Hebrews 8:5 - *They serve a copy and shadow of the heavenly things. For when Moses was about to erect the tent, he was instructed by God, saying, "See that you make everything according to the pattern that was shown you on the mountain."*

Once again, Christ is the absolute and final fulfilment of this copy. He is the 'real thing.' He is the substance or light that gives the shadow. He is the 'heavenly thing' to which all earthly things point in the tabernacle.

### First: It's Construction

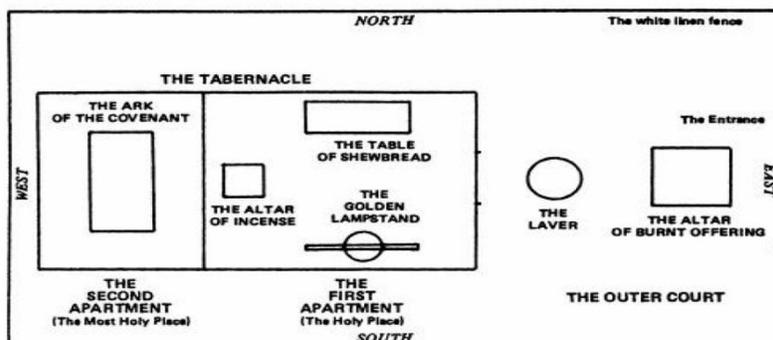


Unlike the menorah, which was comprised of one single piece of gold weighing one talent or about 75 pounds, the altar was constructed out of

- a) acacia wood
- b) overlaid with gold
- c) 1.5 feet long
- d) 1.5 feet high
- e) 3 feet tall
- d) gold rings
- e) gold poles (for transport)

In the majority of pictures of the tabernacle, it stood in front of the veil that separated the holy of holies from the holy place. It was the piece of furniture farthest from the entrance to the holy place and closest to the holy of holies....in front of the mercy seat.

### A drawing of the Tabernacle



But...

Hebrews 9:3-4 - *Behind the second curtain* was a second section called the *Most Holy Place*, <sup>4</sup> having the golden altar of incense and the ark of the covenant

### **Second: It's Purpose**

- a) Aaron was instructed to burn incense on the altar each morning and at twilight, every day, as a regular offering to the Lord (Exodus 30:7-8).
- b) God gave the recipe for making the incense and stipulated that no other incense ever be burned on the altar (verses 34-38).
- c) The fire used to burn the incense was always taken from the altar of burnt offering outside the sanctuary (Leviticus 16:12).
- d) Never was the altar of incense to be used for a burnt offering, a grain offering, or a drink offering (Exodus 30:9). "HB/no unauthorized incense"
- e) 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. The altar of incense was called "most holy to the Lord" (verse 10).

The altar of incense is associated with prayer –

Luke 1:8-11 – *Now while he was serving as priest before God when his division was on duty,<sup>9</sup> according to the custom of the priesthood, he was chosen by lot to enter the temple of the Lord and burn incense. <sup>10</sup> And the whole multitude of the people were praying outside at the hour of incense. <sup>11</sup> And there appeared to him an angel of the Lord standing on the right side of the altar of incense.*

And also, with protection -

Leviticus 16:12-13 - *And he shall take a censer full of coals of fire from the altar before the LORD, and two handfuls of sweet incense beaten small, and he shall bring it inside the veil <sup>13</sup> and put the incense on the fire before the LORD, that the cloud of the incense may cover the mercy seat that is over the testimony, so that he does not die.*

On the Day of Atonement, the high priest was to take some of the incense into the holy of holies, the cloud of smoke rising from the censer intended to cover the ark of the covenant.

The cloud created a barrier between the high priest and God, much like God hid Moses in the cleft of the rock so that his glory did not 'burn' Moses to death

Exodus 33:18-23 - *Moses said, "Please show me your glory." <sup>19</sup> And he said, "I will make all my goodness pass before you and will proclaim before you my name 'The LORD.' And I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy.<sup>20</sup> But," he said, "you cannot see my face, for man shall not see me and live."<sup>21</sup> And the LORD said, "Behold, there is a place by me where you shall stand on the rock, <sup>22</sup> and while my glory passes by I will put you in a cleft of the rock, and I will cover you with my hand until I have passed by. <sup>23</sup> Then I will take away my hand, and you shall see my back, but my face shall not be seen."*

John 1:1 & 14 - *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God... And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son<sup>d</sup> from the Father, full of grace and truth.*

"What a Beautiful Name" Song Story - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b6snOj0oZDU>

The Old Testament doesn't say much else about the altar of incense, but the New Testament does shed light on its purpose and function

### **Third: It's New Testament Understanding**

When John was taken up into heaven in the Revelation, he observed the Lamb being worshipped in the use of golden bowls of incense, which, according to John, are the prayers of the saints

Revelation 5:8-10 - *And when he had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each holding a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints.<sup>9</sup> And they sang a new song, saying, "Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation,<sup>10</sup> and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth."*

Revelation 8:3-4 - *And another angel came and stood at the altar with a golden censer, and he was given much incense to offer with the prayers of all the saints on the golden altar before the throne,<sup>4</sup> and the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, rose before God from the hand of the angel.<sup>5</sup> Then the angel took the censer and filled it with fire from the altar and threw it on the earth, and there were peals of thunder, rumblings,<sup>[a]</sup> flashes of lightning, and an earthquake.*

What are these prayers of the saints?

Matthew 6:7-10 - *And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words.<sup>8</sup> Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.<sup>9</sup> Pray then like this: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.<sup>10</sup> Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.*

Side Note: *The Open Secret and The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* by Lesslie Newbigin.

It appears the altar of incense was a reminder for the high priest to intercede for Israel. It stood for intercessory prayer.

#### **Fourth: The Prayers of the High Priest**

We often forget the intercessory prayer ministry of Jesus as our high priest. These prayers appear in John 17. What does Jesus pray for us?

11 – *Keep them in your name*

11 – *That they may be one*

13 – *That they may have my joy fulfilled in themselves*

15 – *Do not take them out of the world*

15 – *Keep them from the evil one*

17 – *Sanctify them in the truth*

20 – *That they also may be in us*

22 – *That they may be one even as we are one*

23 – *That they may become perfectly one*

24 – *May be with me where I am*

24 – *To see my glory that you have given me*

26 – *That the love with which you have loved me may be in them*

27 – *And I in them*

This high priestly intercession is not the only time Jesus prayed for us. Nor did his intercessory prayers finish when he completed his ministry on earth.

Hebrews 7:25 - *...he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them.*

#### **Fifth: Our Application**

Let's remember our responsibility as intercessors

1 Peter 2:9 - *But you are....a royal priesthood, a holy nation....*

One of our functions as priests, just as that of Israel's priests or the high priest, is interceding for people.

Ephesians 6:18 - *praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end, keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints*

1 Timothy 2:1-6 - *First of all, then, I urge that supplications [needs], prayers, intercessions [converse for a cause], and thanksgivings be made for all people, <sup>2</sup> for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way. <sup>3</sup> This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, <sup>4</sup> who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. <sup>5</sup> For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, <sup>6</sup> who gave himself as a ransom for all, which is the testimony given at the proper time.*

Here is a list of prayers God prescribes

- a) Thanksgiving – 1 Timothy 2:1
- b) Intercession – 1 Timothy 2:1
- c) Praise and adoration – Psalm 148:1-14
- d) Utter dependence – Matthew 6:11
- e) Forgiveness – Matthew 6:12 & 1 John 1:9
- f) Protection from evil – Matthew 6:13
- g) Seeking wisdom – James 1:5
- h) Petitions and supplications – 1 Timothy 2:1; Philippians 4:6
- i) Seeking peace – Philippians 4:6-7
- j) Salvation – Romans 10:9-10

New incense was added to the altar each morning and evening (Ex 30:7-8), we are to “pray without ceasing” (1 Thess 5:17)

### **Conclusion:**

When we think about the altar of incense, we should think about prayer –

- a) The high priest's prayers for Israel
- b) Christ's prayers for us
- c) Our prayers for others

However we pray, and whatever we pray for, let this be our prayer –

Psalm 141:2 - *Let my prayer be counted as incense before you,*

### **One more word about Jesus**

Colossians 1:15-20 & 24-27 - *He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. <sup>16</sup> For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. <sup>17</sup> And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. <sup>18</sup> And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. <sup>19</sup> For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, <sup>20</sup> and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.... Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is*

*lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church,<sup>25</sup> of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God that was given to me for you, to make the word of God fully known,<sup>26</sup> the mystery hidden for ages and generations but now revealed to his saints.<sup>27</sup> To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.*

“What A Beautiful Name” Song - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nQWFzMvCfLE>