

Lesson 7: The Golden Altar of Incense

Read: Exodus 30:1-10, 34-38

The golden altar of incense, which is not to be confused with the brazen altar, sat in front of the curtain that separated the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies. This altar was smaller than the brazen altar. It was a square with each side measuring 1.5 feet and was 3 feet high. It was made of acacia wood and overlaid with pure gold. Four horns protruded from the four corners of the altar.

Discussion:

1. What were some of the rules concerning the incense on the golden altar?
 - *The priests were to burn incense on the golden altar every morning and evening, the same time that the daily burnt offerings were made.*
 - *The incense was to be left burning continually throughout the day and night as a pleasing aroma to the Lord.*
 - *They were not to burn strange incense, burnt offerings, meal offerings and drink offerings on the altar.*
 - *The incense was to be made of an equal part of four precious spices (stacte, onycha, galbanum and frankincense) and was considered holy. The Israelites were not to use the same formula outside the tabernacle to make perfume for their own consumption; otherwise, they were to be cut off from their people.*
 - *The high priest was to make atonement on the horns of the altar once a year on the Day of Atonement (more on this will be covered later).*
2. Read Leviticus 10:1-3 about a violation of one of the rules concerning the incense. What was the consequence of that violation and what does this say about God's nature?

Nadab and Abihu offered "strange incense" or "unauthorized fire" (incense not found in God's commandments) on the golden altar, which He had specifically prohibited. Fire came out and consumed them, and they died. This was a solemn warning that God is holy and not to be trifled with. Any irreverence or disobedience is not acceptable in God's sight, for God cannot tolerate sin. This incident, along with the rest of the tabernacle, was one in many ways that God used to teach the Israelites (and the rest of the world) about His pure and holy nature.

3. Read Psalm 141:2 and Revelation 8:3-4. What does incense represent in the Bible?

The incense was a symbol of the prayers and intercession of the people going up to God. The altar is a picture of prayers wafting up to heaven like incense. It is a sweet fragrance to Him.

4. Read Isaiah 56:7. What does the incense say about what God wanted His dwelling place to be?

God wanted His dwelling to be a house of prayer for the nations, a place where people could approach Him and pray to Him.

5. Read Romans 8:34. How is the golden altar a representation of Christ?

The golden altar is a representation of Christ as our intercessor before God the Father. During His days on earth, Jesus prayed for the believers. He was like the high priest of the tabernacle, who bore the names of each of the Israelite tribes on his breastplate before God. Just before He was betrayed and sentenced to death, Jesus interceded for His disciples and all believers, asking God to guard them from evil and sanctify them by His Word, and that they may see God's glory and be a witness to the world (John 17:1-26). Today, Jesus still is our high priest at the Father's side, interceding for God's people.

6. Read John 14:13-14. How can we, as believers, take part in the burning of incense at the golden altar?

Since we have been forgiven of our sins through the blood of Christ, we also come boldly in prayer in Jesus' name. When we pray in Jesus' name, we are praying based on the work He has done and not on our own merit. We can intercede for others in Christ's name.

7. Read Leviticus 4:7. When animal sacrifices were made, the horns of the golden altar were sprinkled with blood to cleanse it from the sins of the Israelites. As you may recall, horns represent power in the Bible. How does this relate to what we have been studying about the golden altar?

The horns on the golden altar signify the power of Christ's blood to forgive sins in prayer (James 5:15-16). We need to come to the Lord in prayer and confess our sins, asking for His forgiveness. Confessing our sins and asking for forgiveness should be an indispensable component of our prayers, as outlined by Jesus Himself in the Lord's Prayer (Luke 11:4). He is faithful to forgive (1 John 1:9). He is also our advocate, interceding for us (1 John 2:1-2).