

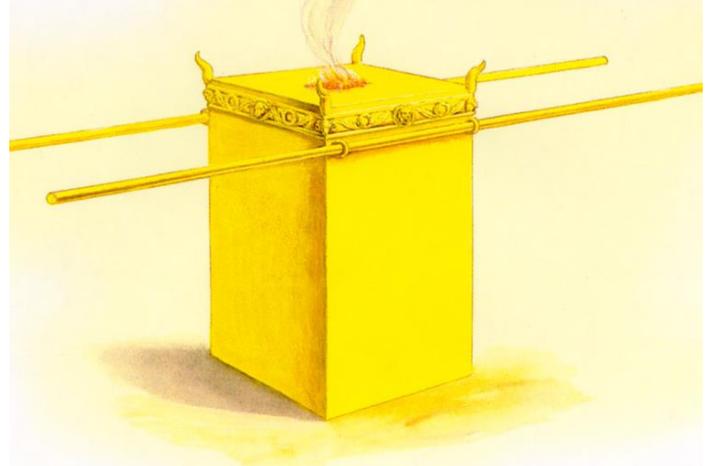
The Altar of Incense

Scripture	Main Theme	Description/Notes
Exodus 30.1-10	The Golden Altar (Incense)	

The Construction

The Altar of Incense was a cubit long (1.5 feet), a cubit wide (1.5 feet) and two cubits high (3 feet). The top of this altar stood higher than any other in the Tabernacle. It was constructed of shittim wood overlaid with gold. It had four horns and a crown around the surface. There were two golden rings through which were placed staves to carry the instrument (vv. 4-5).

The altar was positioned before the vail and opposite the mercy seat. That is, it stood in the Holy Place between the Golden Lampstand and the Table of Shewbread.



The Use

No blood sacrifice was ever to be offered on this altar (v.9). Blood was only ever placed upon the horns of the altar once a year on the Day of Atonement (v.10). Aaron entered the Holy Place twice a day (morning and evening) to tend to the Lampstand and burn incense on the Golden Altar (vv.7-8). Other priests were also allowed the privilege of burning incense upon the Altar (Deuteronomy 33.10).

The Significance

Why is the Altar of Incense not mentioned in Exodus 25 and 26? These items speak of God in Christ coming out to His people displaying His grace. The two vessels mentioned here in Exodus 30 speak of the provisions God has made for us to approach Him.

The atmosphere of the Holy Place was constantly permeated with the fragrance of the incense. The Altar of Incense is a picture of the risen, ascended Lord Jesus in heaven as our interceding Great High Priest (Romans 8.34, Hebrews 7.25, 9.24). Hebrews speaks of the Lord Jesus saving us completely ('to the uttermost') because "he ever liveth to make intercession for them". This is not salvation from the penalty of sin only, but an on-going continuing salvation from the power of sin until we reach heaven. How much we have been preserved we may never know until we reach glory, but Christ is praying for us (John 17.9, 11, 15, 17, Luke 22.32) and He has intercessory power with God (represented by the horns, cf. Habakkuk 3.4).

Prayer

First, what took place on this altar represents the prayers of the saints (Psalm 141.2, Revelation 8.3). To all the prayers of the saints, the Lord Jesus adds His incense speaking of the sweetness of His Person and work. He makes our prayers acceptable in heaven (1 Peter 2.5). The Holy Place was continually filled with this incense signifying the continual enjoyment by God of the prayers of His saints. Such is the value in heaven of the prayers of the saints that the Lord Jesus as Great High Priest is constantly occupied with them.

Second, the altar had a continual fire and incense, but there were regular times in the day when it was specifically attended to. So, we are to "pray without ceasing" (1 Thessalonians 5.17; *adialeiptos* – used of an incessant cough!), but also take regular occasions to devote special attention to prayer. Christ always intercedes for us, and we are responsible to pray for others too (cf. 1 Samuel 12.23).

Third, when the priest entered in twice daily to offer incense, they were at the closest point to the presence of God within the Holy of Holies as it was possible to be. Constant communion with our God in prayer brings us closer to Him (Acts 6.4, Ephesians 1.16, 1 Thessalonians 5.17).

Fragrance

Third, it was not possible to hide the fact that the priest had been in the Sanctuary. There was a fragrance about him which was gained nowhere else. This pure fragrance could only be used in the Sanctuary (Exodus 30.37). What a challenge this is! The mark of the Sanctuary is on those who have entered in! It is also noticeably absent from those who have spent no time in the Sanctuary.

Atonement

Finally, on the Day of Atonement the High Priest went out from the Holy of Holies and put the blood of the bullock (slain for Aaron and his sons) and goat (slain for the people) upon the horns of the altar (Leviticus 16.18-19). Atonement needed to be made for the Tabernacle as it was defiled by the very presence of man within it. The blood was necessary to ensure that the purity of the Sanctuary was maintained. In like manner, the heavenly Sanctuary itself also requires purification in the light of the presence of men (Hebrews 9.23). Praise God there is no danger of those who are Christian priests entering there and defiling it; the blood of Christ has been shed; all has been dealt with at the cross.

The Incense

Scripture	Main Theme	Description/Notes
Exodus 30.34-38	The Incense	

34 And the LORD said unto Moses, Take unto thee sweet spices, stacte, and onycha, and galbanum; these sweet spices with pure frankincense: of each shall there be a like weight:

35 And thou shalt make it a perfume, a confection after the art of the apothecary, tempered together, pure and holy:

36 And thou shalt beat some of it very small, and put of it before the testimony in the tabernacle of the congregation, where I will meet with thee: it shall be unto you most holy.

37 And as for the perfume which thou shalt make, ye shall not make to yourselves according to the composition thereof: it shall be unto thee holy for the LORD.

38 Whosoever shall make like unto that, to smell thereto, shall even be cut off from his people.

A sweet-smelling perfume was therefore made to be burned upon the Golden Altar. The incense was composed of four "sweet spices" in equal proportions blended together. These spices speak of the fragrance of the Lord Jesus.

Spice	Significance	
<i>Stacte</i>	From a Hebrew word meaning 'to drop', 'to ooze' or 'distil'. The same word is used for 'rain' (Judges 5.4, Job 36.27) and also describes speech as flowing forth (Job 29.22, Song of Solomon 4.11). The thought seems to be that of the expression of the thoughts silently in tears and audibly in refreshing speech.	Luke 4.22 Luke 19.41 John 11.35 Isaiah 53.3
<i>Onycha</i>	From a Greek word meaning a 'lid', 'claw' or 'nail'. Also comes from a word meaning 'lion'. Christ is the Lion of the Tribe of Judah which is a symbol of His kingly character. The lion symbolises strength, courage and judgment.	Revelation 5.5
<i>Galbanum</i>	From a root word meaning 'fatness', 'best' and 'finest'. Christ was utterly devoted to, and gave His best to God. Typifies the inward energy of Christ in offering Himself to God. Used to cool fever and produces a calming influence.	John 4.34 Mark 1.29-31, 4.35-41, 5.1-13
<i>Frankincense</i>	When placed on the altar, the frankincense in the mixture caused a thick, white cloud speaking of the glory of Christ. The root meaning of the word is 'to be white' which speaks of His purity. It was a spice of great value.	Leviticus 16.12-13

Note.

1. The ingredients were of equal weight, giving perfect balance.
2. The ingredients were to be blended together. They character of Christ complemented each other in harmony.
3. The ingredients must be beaten small. The fragrance more precious and fragrant in virtue of His sufferings.

Hutch:

Stacte – dilute down – humility (Philippians) – John
One who came down
Onycha – 'lion' Matthew – dignity (Ephesians)
Galbanum – 'fat' – energy (Corinthians) – Mark
Frankincense – 'whiteness' – purity (1 Peter) - Luke