

## Study #7 The Golden Altar

### Introduction

The Golden Altar of Incense was situated on the west wall of the Holy Place right next to the veil separating the Holy of Holies from the Holy Place.

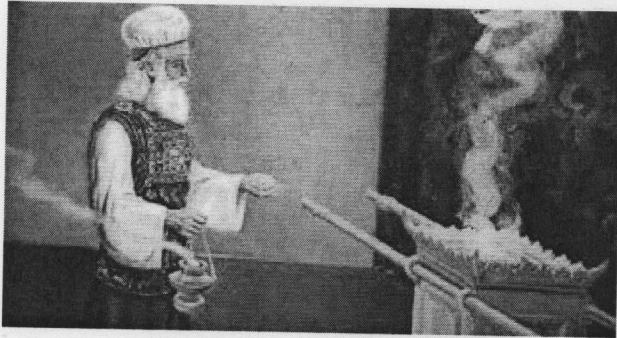


Fig 7.1 Priest ministering at the Golden Altar of Incense

Remember, the Holy Place is the place of fellowship with God Himself. This is the most important element in the Christian life since God is not so much concerned with what I do as to what I am, for doing comes from being and it is only from our fellowship with God that become what we ought to be - a process known as progressive sanctification.

God gave Moses specific instructions regarding the construction of the Golden Altar of Incense in Exodus 30.1: *"Thou shalt make an altar to burn incense upon: of shittim (acacia) wood shalt thou make it."* In Exodus 30.6-9 He gave the following further instructions: *"and thou shalt 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 thee. And Aaron shall burn thereon sweet incense every morning: when he dresseth the lamps, he shall burn incense upon it, a perpetual incense before the Lord throughout your generations. Ye shall offer no strange incense thereon, nor burnt sacrifice, nor meat offering; neither shall ye pour drink offering thereon."*

Although the altar was made of acacia wood, it was overlaid with pure gold (Exod 30.3) – this combination of materials the same as the other furniture in the Holy Place which of course points to Christ in both his humanity (the acacia wood) and His deity (the gold overlay).

It is important to note that the altar was so placed as to be the closest piece of furniture to the Holy of Holies, the place where God dwelt. Then, as now, the closest you can get to God is in the place of prayer.

## **The Altar and Intercession**

An offering of incense was to be on the coals of fire of the golden altar continually. This is a typology of the intercessory prayer ministry of Jesus expressed in Hebrews 7.25 and 9.24, I John 2.1 and Romans 8.34 which is cited as being a continual ministry in Heaven. Whereas the brazen altar represents the Christ who dies for us, the golden altar represents the Christ who prays and intercedes for us in Heaven. Thus the altar of incense is symbolic of the living, resurrected, ascended Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. This progression from the brazen altar to the golden altar of incense pictures the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ (I Cor 15.3-4).

The Lord Jesus Christ saves us from much more than the condemnation of sin – indeed He saves us from all that contaminates in the daily life. This is why the writer to the Hebrews could say “He saves to the uttermost those that come unto God by Him, seeing He ever liveth to make intercession for them” (Heb 7.25).

## **The Altar and Our Prayer Life**

The golden altar had a continual offering of incense that was burning, symbolic of prayer without ceasing (I Thess 5.17), but there were times throughout the day when it was to be specifically attended upon. Paul’s instruction to the Thessalonians was to pray without ceasing, the Greek word used that is translated “without ceasing” is the same word used to describe a person with a chronic, continual cough. Just as the coughing was not one long drawn out event, so the command to pray without ceasing does not mean that we are to pray one long drawn out prayer. Instead it means that we are to be praying incessantly and to live in an attitude of prayer and reliance on God. But just as the altar needed to be attended upon so we also need to have special times set aside for intercessory prayer.

It is of course self-evident that we cannot intercede for others in the same manner that Christ intercedes for us, yet we have the responsibility to do so. Indeed, Samuel considered it to be a sin to fail to pray for the needs of others (I Sam 12.23). Paul also saw the responsibility to pray for others and set forth the principle in Colossians 1.9 and I Timothy 2.1-4. There are two stunning examples of intercessory prayer and God’s response in the Old Testament. Moses prayed for the people and God spared them (Exodus 32.10-14) and Abraham interceded for the city asking God that if 50 people could be found that were righteous would He withhold His hand from destroying the city and God agreed that He would (Gen 18.23-33). Unfortunately, history shows that not even ten could be found and ultimately God destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah.

The importance of intercessory prayer is seen in the dramatic incident when Israel was locked in battle with the Amalekites (Exod 17.8-16). While Joshua led the Israelites in battle, Moses stood upon the mountain and interceded for him. Israel won the victory as Moses prevailed in prayer. It is always appropriate to avail yourself of the opportunity to engage with fellow believers in intercessory prayer.