

# TLCBiblical.com Video Lessons

## 223 - The Altar Of Incense

### 1. Introduction

As we've discussed objects that possessed a symbolic nature that were part of the Law of Moses their figurative representation has been easily identifiable. As we examine the objects inside the Tabernacle we come to one that isn't as prominent as some of the others but on closer inspection we see that it has a highly sacred nature and importance. In this lesson we'll discuss **The Altar Of Incense** and explore its significance in worship to God.

### 2. A silent but powerful presence

When we think of the altar of incense one event usually comes to mind - the sin of Nadab and Abihu - the sons of Aaron. We'll talk about that in a few minutes but we want to focus on the object at the center of that story. The Altar of Incense is one of the items that gets neglected in most studies. One reason might be that figurative elements are more obscure and harder to connect to it. Another reason might be the apparent simplicity of the altar and how it was to be used. They put coals in it and burned incense on it. End of story. Or is it?

Today there are religious bodies that burn incense as part of their worship. This is interesting since there are no examples in the New Testament of incense being used, commands to use or make incense, or any record of the early church following such a practice. The history behind the practice is interesting but we'll save that for another series and lesson. The first thing I can point out is that this was limited to the Law of Moses and restricted in practice and usage. While we may find it difficult to understand this object and what it meant there's ample evidence in the scriptures for us to uncover that will enhance our knowledge of this practice.

In this lesson we'll discuss

- a. God's command to make the Altar of Incense, its materials and dimensions
- b. The incense itself and how it was to be made
- c. Usage and limitations for the incense and altar
- d. Burning incense as a sign of departure from God
- e. Figurative representations involving the incense and its holiness, and
- f. What we can learn from this today

Let's take a look at each of these

### 3. God's command to make the Altar of Incense, its materials and dimensions

God commanded Moses, "***And thou shalt make an altar to burn incense upon: of shittim wood shalt thou make it. A cubit shall be the length thereof, and a cubit the breadth***

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*thereof; foursquare shall it be: and two cubits shall be the height thereof: the horns thereof shall be of the same. And thou shalt overlay it with pure gold, the top thereof, and the sides thereof round about, and the horns thereof; and thou shalt make unto it a crown of gold round about. And two golden rings shalt thou make to it under the crown of it, by the two corners thereof, upon the two sides of it shalt thou make it; and they shall be for places for the staves to bear it withal. And thou shalt make the staves of shittim wood, and overlay them with gold. And thou shalt put it before the vail that is by the ark of the testimony, before the mercy seat that is over the testimony, where I will meet with thee.” (Ex 30.1-6).*

In this description we see consistency in the objects made and placed in the Tabernacle. The Table of Shewbread and Altar of Incense were made of “*shittim*” or acacia wood as was the Ark of the Covenant. It was to be overlaid with gold on the top and sides. At the corners were “*horns*” that were also to be overlaid with gold and a “*crown*” around the top. Two gold rings were placed on each side these were to hold two staves of acacia wood overlaid with gold used to carry the altar when moving it.

The altar was to be perfectly square with its length and width measuring one cubit. This would make the altar about a foot and half in both dimensions using eighteen inches as an estimate for the length of a cubit. The height of the altar was to be two cubits or approximately three feet. In the description there are no instructions for a table to set this on or any mention of a base or stand when the altar is finished.

We have a description of how the altar was constructed. Speaking of Bezaleel, we read, “*And he made the incense altar of shittim wood: the length of it was a cubit, and the breadth of it a cubit; it was foursquare; and two cubits was the height of it; the horns thereof were of the same. And he overlaid it with pure gold, both the top of it, and the sides thereof round about, and the horns of it: also he made unto it a crown of gold round about. And he made two rings of gold for it under the crown thereof, by the two corners of it, upon the two sides thereof, to be places for the staves to bear it withal. And he made the staves of shittim wood, and overlaid them with gold.” (Ex 37.1, 25-28).* Once more there isn’t anything said about a table or stand for the altar to sit on.

On the day the Tabernacle was setup the Altar of Incense was placed in the area decreed by God. “*And thou shalt set the altar of gold for the incense before the ark of the testimony, and put the hanging of the door to the tabernacle.” (Ex 40.5).* This follows installation of the Ark of the Covenant, Table of Shewbread and Lampstand which were on the sides of the Vail toward the North and South. The Altar of Incense was to be placed in a position that appears to be in line with the Ark of the Covenant, between the Table of Shewbread and Lampstand. It appears that it may have been freestanding although it was only three feet high. Now let’s take a look at how the incense was made and used.

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**4. The incense itself and how it was to be made**

We have a summary of Bezaleel making the incense as he fabricated items for the Tabernacle. ***“And he made the holy anointing oil, and the pure incense of sweet spices, according to the work of the apothecary.” (Ex 37.29).*** We find a list of specific spices to be used in the incense as God gave Moses instructions for making it.

***“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: And thou shalt make it a perfume, a confection after the art of the apothecary, tempered together, pure and holy: 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.” (Ex 30.34-36).*** The incense is also referred to as a “perfume” due to the fragrant aroma. God stated ***“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. Whosoever shall make like unto that, to smell thereto, shall even be cut off from his people.” (Ex 30.37-38).*** This statement emphasizes the sacred nature of the incense and provides a powerful prohibition against copying it.

The spices listed in a number of translations shows some variation in the rendering. The King James Version, American Standard Version, English Standard Version and New King James Version renders these as:

- a. stacte
- b. onycha
- c. galbanum
- d. frankincense

The New International Version renders these as

- a. gum resin
- b. onycha
- c. galbanum
- d. frankincense

KJV, ASV, NKJV, ESV	NIV
Stacte	Gum-resin
Galbanum	Galbanum
Onycha	Onycha

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Frankincense	Frankincense
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The first of these spices in the list isn't easily identifiable but may refer to one of a few resins that could be gathered from a bush or tree without cutting the plant. Some believe this refers to the Labdanum or rock rose. Others believe this may refer to a type of cinnamon while others believe it to be a reference to myrrh. In any case this would have been a sweet aromatic element.

Galbanum is believed to be a resin that originated in Persia. It is described as a thick resin that has a strong pungent odor. Galbanum appears to have been used in making perfumes, fragrances and incense and is described as best when mixed with other fragrances. It is also described as being a binding agent that would provide body for a mixture.

Onycha is an element used in the incense that has a number of interpretations as to what it was. Some refer to an ingredient from the inside of the shell of a mollusk residing in the Red Sea while others believe this refers to the gum resin of certain fir trees. Others interpret this as a substance derived from either a wildflower or root. My personal opinion is that this was a plant based substance since shellfish are defined under the Law as unclean animals (**Lev 11.9-12**).

Frankincense is perhaps the most well known of these ingredients. It derives from an aromatic resin from trees in the Middle East, India and Persia and was known for its fragrance and medicinal qualities. Frankincense remains a staple in the manufacture of incense today and is readily available as an essential oil as well.

The spices were combined in equal for the incense. The instructions stated that this was to be "**tempered together**" which implies a thorough blending. Most modern translations render this statement as being mixed with salt which may have been used as a preservative. Some have expressed the opinion that salt may have helped diffuse the cloud of smoke created by the incense. If we take a look at various sacrifices we find that salt accompanies them and is therefore holy. Speaking of meat or grain offerings God told Moses, "...**with all thine offerings thou shalt offer salt.**" (**Lev 2.13**). Inclusion of salt in the incense would also provide a common element linking certain offerings with each other and God's declaration that they're holy.

### **5. Usage and limitations for the incense and altar**

The Altar of Incense was holy as were the other objects in the Tabernacle. On the day the Tabernacle was setup the altar was to be put in the Holy Place. God told Moses, "**And thou shalt set the altar of gold for the incense before the ark of the testimony, and put the hanging of the door to the tabernacle.**" (**Ex 40.5**). The altar was also to be sanctified as were the other objects

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in the Tabernacle. God states, “***And thou shalt take the anointing oil, and anoint the tabernacle, and all that is therein, and shalt hallow it, and all the vessels thereof: and it shall be holy.***” (Ex 40.9). The Altar of Incense appears to have been placed in line with the Ark of the Covenant and positioned between the Table of Shewbread and the Lampstand.

God provided instructions on how the Altar of Incense was to be used. “***And Aaron shall burn thereon sweet incense every morning: when he dresseth the lamps, he shall burn incense upon it. And when Aaron lighteth the lamps at even, he shall burn incense upon it, a perpetual incense before the Lord throughout your generations.***” (Ex 30.7-8). From this we can see that the incense and the altar were significant, weren't to be neglected and was a perpetual practice that was to be respected.

There were also restrictions and prohibitions regarding how the incense and altar were to be used. God told Moses, “***Ye shall offer no strange incense thereon, nor burnt sacrifice, nor meat offering; neither shall ye pour drink offering thereon.***” (Ex 30.9). The Altar of Incense was reserved for the single purpose of burning the holy incense. As we'll see in a few minutes there were some notable violations of the altar and the incense that brought about some very negative consequences.

The holy nature of the altar is also seen in the instructions for the day of atonement. God states, “***And Aaron shall make an atonement upon the horns of it once in a year with the blood of the sin offering of atonements: once in the year shall he make atonement upon it throughout your generations: it is most holy unto the Lord.***” (Ex 30.10). This makes the Altar of Incense significant as it is to be hallowed with the blood of atonement every year. This is the blood that was to be taken into the Most Holy Place and offered before the Mercy Seat. This forms a link with the sacrifices, Altar of Burnt Offering, blood of Atonement and the Mercy Seat as we can see in the tasks that were to be performed on the day of atonement.

On the day of atonement Aaron was to make an offering for his own sins before presenting the blood before the Mercy Seat. God states, “***And he shall take a censer full of burning coals of fire from off the altar before the Lord, and his hands full of sweet incense beaten small, and bring it within the vail: And he shall put the incense upon the fire before the Lord, that the cloud of the incense may cover the mercy seat that is upon the testimony, that he die not...***” (Lev 16.12-13). Burning the incense before the Lord on this day connects it with the future forgiveness of sin and God's concealment of mercy reserved for the time when the Messiah would be revealed.

The day of atonement also helps us understand other conditions under which the incense was used. The Altar of Incense was the primary place where the incense was burned but we see that provisions were made for it to be used in other applications as instructed by God. As we read from the procedures for the day of atonement, censers were made to accommodate this. To

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burn incense in the presence of God there would be a need for portability. In that sense the censer was an extension of the Altar of Incense and would be recognized by God when used correctly. The use of the censer also brings up some questions about how the incense was burned.

In order to burn incense there was a need for coals. There are no instructions for placing wood on the Altar of Incense but the text implies that coals were present. There's a question then of where the coals for the altar, and the censers came from. The Altar of Burnt offering was used constantly and would have a ready supply of coals that could be used on the Altar of Incense or placed in a censer. In procedures such as those for the day of atonement, the priest would have offered a sacrifice in order to bring the blood into the Tabernacle. The coals would be available from the Altar of Burnt Offering and in a practical sense this would be efficient and guarantee a supply of coals for the Altar of Incense and any censers to be used.

Although its possible that the text simply omits instructions for using wood to create coals on the Altar of Incense this seems unlikely, in my opinion, but is a possibility. It appears more reasonable to think that the coals, or fire, came from the Altar of Burnt Offering. Some might object to that idea since the Altar of Incense wasn't to be used for meat, burnt or drink offerings as we read a few minutes ago. However, live coals from the Altar of Burnt Offering would have consumed the sacrifices or blood, purifying them, and so wouldn't contaminate the Altar of Incense. In the absence of instructions for using wood on the Altar of Incense, coals from the Altar of Burnt Offering would make sense. Instructions for preparing censers for use may also have included taking coals from either the Altar of Burnt Offering, or, could have been taken from what was already in use on the Altar of Incense. If the coals came from the Altar of Burnt offering this would provide another figurative link to the sacrifices and wouldn't violate God's instructions.

As we read of the procedures the priest would follow on the day of atonement we usually have an image of the priest carrying the censer into the Most Holy Place with smoke from the incense rising from it. Reading carefully it appears that the priest would offer the appropriate sacrifices, collect the blood of atonement, place coals from the Altar of Burnt Offering in the censer then enter the Holy Place with the blood and censer full of coals. Inside the Tabernacle the priest would apply the blood of atonement to the horns of the Altar of Incense, collect the prescribed amount of incense in his hands and proceed to the Most Holy Place. Once there he would put the incense on the coals burning in the censer so the smoke would cover the Mercy Seat then present the blood of atonement as instructed. Once this was done, God would manifest his presence and set the sins of the people aside for the year.

We can see the Altar of Incense had the same significance as the other objects in the Tabernacle. The incense itself was also holy and the people weren't to make anything like it for their personal use. The incense was part of the offering on the day of atonement and was significant in its presence and usage. There were strict restrictions concerning the use of the



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incense as we can see in events where this wasn't respected.

### **7 Burning incense as a sign of departure from God**

Only the priests were to burn the incense on the Altar or present it before God on the day of atonement. As we examine the scriptures we find examples of violations of that brought about disastrous consequences. In the following episodes misuse of the incense represents:

- a. A failure on the part of the priests to sanctify God by following his directives
- b. Rejection of limitations set by God and
- c. A sign of apostasy as the children of Israel fell away from God

The first incident took place during the twelve days of dedication when the Tabernacle was setup. The priests, including Aaron and his sons, were to sanctify themselves as they were consecrated for their office by Moses. Following their consecration they were to remain in the Tabernacle for seven days and perform their duties. One of the most well known incidents involving the Altar of Incense and the priests occurs during this seven day period.

***“And Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, took either of them his censer, and put fire therein, and put incense thereon, and offered strange fire before the Lord, which he commanded them not. And there went out fire from the Lord, and devoured them, and they died before the Lord.” (Lev 10.1-2).*** Questions remain concerning this event but the bottom line is that Nadab and Abihu failed to follow the instructions God gave them. Some have argued that the two weren't priests at the time and this is why God burned them. We can confirm that Nadab and Abihu had been consecrated as priests as Moses provides a summary in the book of Numbers.

***“And these are the names of the sons of Aaron; Nadab the firstborn, and Abihu, Eleazar, and Ithamar. These are the names of the sons of Aaron, the priests which were anointed, whom he consecrated to minister in the priest's office. And Nadab and Abihu died before the Lord, when they offered strange fire before the Lord, in the wilderness of Sinai...” (Num 3.2-4).*** This passage clearly indicates the two had been anointed and consecrated as priests. From the description in Leviticus and Numbers we can also conclude that it was during the first seven days after they had been consecrated when God killed them for their sin. So, what was it that they did?

The passages state they offered strange ***“fire”***. This could mean that they didn't collect coals from the Altar of Burnt Offering as they should have, or, they might have substituted something else for the holy incense that was to be offered. Whatever they changed doesn't matter. The end result is the same. They failed to obey God and polluted the Holy Place. Their actions, if left unpunished, would have opened the door for others to violate God's directives as

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well. Serving in the Tabernacle was a privilege and an honor. The Levites and priests represented what faithful service to the Lord was to look like and they were to represent God before the people. Their failure, which took place in the presence of God in the Tabernacle, defiled the holy things and therefore they forfeited their own lives. It demonstrates that no command of God is open to our interpretation and the Lord doesn't allow deviations from what he's commanded.

Some time later another violation occurs as some rose to challenge the authority of Moses and Aaron and ultimately God. In the wilderness, Korah, Dathan, Abiram and a number of their followers challenged Moses and Aaron. As they gathered and demonstrated their defiance Moses issued instructions to resolve the challenge. ***“And he spake unto Korah and unto all his company, saying, Even to morrow the Lord will shew who are his, and who is holy; and will cause him to come near unto him: even him whom he hath chosen will he cause to come near unto him. This do; Take you censers, Korah, and all his company; And put fire therein, and put incense in them before the Lord to morrow: and it shall be that the man whom the Lord doth choose, he shall be holy..”*** (Num 16.5-7).

The challenge was to the leadership of Moses and priesthood of Aaron. A symbol of their role was in the fact that only the priests were able to burn incense to the Lord. Coupled with that is the fact that the incense was a specific blend that wasn't to be used by anyone else and its logical to conclude that no one else was to have it. In this episode however those who challenged Moses and Aaron were to burn incense also and the Lord would indicate who was acceptable to him. As they gathered with their censers and burning incense, God acted.

***“And they took every man his censor, and put fire in them, and laid incense thereon, and stood in the door of the tabernacle of the congregation with Moses and Aaron. And Korah gathered all the congregation against them unto the door of the tabernacle of the congregation: and the glory of the Lord appeared unto all the congregation. And the Lord spake unto Moses and unto Aaron, saying, Separate yourselves from among this congregation, that I may consume them in a moment.”*** (Num 16.18-21). God then commanded Moses and the people to separate themselves from the rebels. Moses stated that a sign would be given to prove that God had sent him by doing something that hadn't been done (Num 16.30).

***“And it came to pass, as he had made an end of speaking all these words, that the ground clave asunder that was under them: And the earth opened her mouth, and swallowed them up, and their houses, and all the men that appertained unto Korah, and all their goods. They, and all that appertained to them, went down alive into the pit, and the earth closed upon them: and they perished from among the congregation. And all Israel that were round about them fled at the cry of them: for they said, Lest the earth swallow us up also. And there came out a fire from the Lord, and consumed the two hundred and fifty men that offered incense.”*** (Num 16.31-35). While incense appears to be a minor element the fact is that only those authorized by God were to burn it. The rebels were identified as those who took it upon



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themselves to offer incense and for their error were killed.

The next incident involves Uzziah the king of Judah. Uzziah began his reign following God and rebuilding much of the country that had been torn down. With the help of God he was able to defeat the Philistines and secure the borders of the country.

***“But when he was strong, his heart was lifted up to his destruction: for he transgressed against the Lord his God, and went into the temple of the Lord to burn incense upon the altar of incense. And Azariah the priest went in after him, and with him fourscore priests of the Lord, that were valiant men: And they withstood Uzziah the king, and said unto him, It appertaineth not unto thee, Uzziah, to burn incense unto the Lord, but to the priests the sons of Aaron, that are consecrated to burn incense: go out of the sanctuary; for thou hast trespassed; neither shall it be for thine honour from the Lord God. Then Uzziah was wroth, and had a censer in his hand to burn incense: and while he was wroth with the priests, the leprosy even rose up in his forehead before the priests in the house of the Lord, from beside the incense altar. And Azariah the chief priest, and all the priests, looked upon him, and, behold, he was leprous in his forehead, and they thrust him out from thence; yea, himself hasted also to go out, because the Lord had smitten him. And Uzziah the king was a leper unto the day of his death, and dwelt in a several house, being a leper; for he was cut off from the house of the Lord...” (2 Chron 26.16-21).*** In spite of Uzziah’s service and faithfulness to God he allowed his pride to lead him astray and perform something he believed he should be able to do. He ignored the pleading of the priests and attempts to stop him from burning incense and when he refused to listen the Lord struck him with leprosy.

Later in the history of the kingdom of Israel, the burning of incense is a sign of rebellion against God and rejection of his Law. Isaiah writes about this in his prophecy. ***“I have spread out my hands all the day unto a rebellious people, which walketh in a way that was not good, after their own thoughts; A people that provoketh me to anger continually to my face; that sacrificeth in gardens, and burneth incense upon altars of brick...” (Isa 65.2-3).*** Burning incense was to be done only by the priests and only on the Altar of Incense in the Holy Place. As we saw in the case of Nadab, Abihu, Korah, Dathan, Abiram and Uzziah, burning incense inappropriately or by the wrong person was a violation of God’s law. From the passage in Isaiah we see that it represents rejection of God and is a symptom of other sins against the Lord. Incense in the ancient world was associated with the worship of idols and in Israel and Judah indicated a shift toward idolatry and away from the Lord.

We might not think of the incense and the procedures for using it to be important but as we can see in these events, it was commanded by God, restricted in use and limited in who was authorized to burn it. It was to be burned in the Holy Place daily and presented before the Lord once a year on the day of atonement. The problem is that humans don’t realize that while we might not see the significance of something, the command of the Lord makes it significant or in

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this case holy. This fact also leads us to looking at links and figures that we can associate with the incense and the altar made to burn it.

#### 8 Figurative representations involving the incense and its holiness

In regard to the incense, figurative representations and connections are less obvious and more elusive than with other things. Some might think that there aren't any connections that can be explored but as we look at the scriptures we find some links that stand out. These are more indirect than others have been which makes them harder to understand but as we compare references we'll see that these are worth spending time to explore.

First we can think about the nature of the incense, the altar and what it produced. The Altar of Incense was designed and commanded by God. It was made of acacia wood overlaid with gold and put in the Holy Place along with the Table of Shewbread and Lampstand. God's directive to create and sanctify it makes it significant. We also see that it was anointed with the Holy Anointing Oil the day the Tabernacle was setup. The anointing oil has a direct figurative link with Christ. As I explained in an earlier lesson, Christ is a title meaning the anointed one. Another link with Christ is that the Altar of Incense was anointed with the blood of atonement once a year, representing God's provision for forgiveness through the Messiah.

The incense was burned daily and was taken into the Most Holy Place on the day of atonement where its smoke covered the Mercy Seat. No one but the priest was authorized to burn the incense and its manufacture was prohibited by anyone else because it was holy. As we saw earlier, violations of these limitations brought about catastrophic results when God intervened imposing negative consequences for these infractions.

We also saw how the censers, objects that were made and sanctified for use in the Tabernacle and the altar (**Num 4.14**) were an extension of the Altar of Incense. As we focus on these things we have to direct our attention to the product of the incense as it was burned. The smoke. There are references in the scriptures that provide a figure of what this may represent.

David writes, "*Lord, I cry unto thee: make haste unto me; give ear unto my voice, when I cry unto thee. Let my prayer be set forth before thee as incense; and the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice.*" (**Psm 141.1-2**). In this passage we see a comparison to prayers rising before God as incense would have. Smoke from the incense would have risen in the Most Holy Place before the Mercy Seat. Its intangible nature perhaps represented the substance of God's desire to save mankind which was hidden in types, foreshadows and prophecy. Christ came into the world to complete the work of the Father, an action that existed as an intangible idea in the words of the prophets. Just as the smoke rose before God in the Most Holy Place so do the prayers of the faithful as they strive to do the will of the father.

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A similar image is seen in the book of Revelation as John records the visions that were directed to the seven churches of Asia. ***“And I saw the seven angels which stood before God; and to them were given seven trumpets. And another angel came and stood at the altar, having a golden censer; and there was given unto him much incense, that he should offer it with the prayers of all saints upon the golden altar which was 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. 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 thunderings, and lightnings, and an earthquake.”*** (Rev 8.1-5).

This image is interesting as we explore the context of the passage. We know that the book of Revelation is expressed in signs, or symbols; non-literal statements meant to convey Christ's message. In this reference we see a golden censer with ***“much incense”*** whose smoke rose with the prayers of the saints. The book was written to a group of congregations in a region where persecution was increasing. Some had already died as a result and one of the messages in the book was that God would judge the persecuting power and reward it for its evil. Here we see incense rising before God, just as the incense rose in the Most Holy Place and with it are the prayers of the saints who struggle to remain faithful in spite of extreme hardship. Its interesting that the scene changes, the censer that contained incense is then filled with coals from the altar which is cast into the Earth representing a judgment directly from the presence of God.

A final passage we'll take a look at complements these images. Malachi writes, ***“For from the rising of the sun even unto the going down of the same my name shall be great among the Gentiles; and in every place incense shall be offered unto my name, and a pure offering: for my name shall be great among the heathen, saith the Lord of hosts.”*** (Mal 1.11).

Malachi wrote about four hundred years before Christ came into the world. The Jews had returned from Babylonian exile but over time they had drifted into indifference and neglected the Law. Idolatry was no longer an issue but they failed in other areas. Malachi writes to let them know that the time is coming when the Gentiles would also be able to seek the Lord offering up prayers and praise to his name. This is seen in the statement that ***“in every place incense shall be offered unto my name”*** referring to worship, devotion and faithful obedience as the Gentiles turned to the Lord.

In this reference we have an image of prayer rising before the Lord just as we had with the Most Holy Place and in Revelation as the smoke of the incense rose with the prayers of the saints. In each of the references the smoke of the incense, an intangible quality, is coupled with the intangible reality of faith, prayer and praise toward God. Just as the incense was restricted and could only be offered by the priests, so Christians are those whose prayers ascend before God as the Lord is praised and thanked for redemption through his son.

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**9. What we can learn from this today**

There are some important lessons we can learn from the Altar of Incense, the holy incense itself and how it was used including limitations that surrounded it.

- a. First, Moses was reminded that all things shown to him in the mount had to be made according to God's pattern (**Ex 25.40, Heb 8.5**)
- b. The Altar of Incense was anointed with the holy anointing oil which figuratively connected it with Christ who was God's anointed.
- c. the Altar of Incense was anointed with the blood of atonement once a year which also signifies a connection with the blood of Christ and redemption
- d. The Altar of Incense, the incense itself and the fuel used to burn the incense were to be done exactly as God commanded. Violations of this were met with severe consequences as we saw in the episode with Nadab and Abihu and others
- e. Smoke from the incense is paired with the image of the prayers of the saints and may also denote the aspect of prophecy to be fulfilled as God prepared the world for the Messiah.

The Altar of Incense and incense demonstrates that God stated specific instructions and doesn't allow deviation from them. Today we have instructions in the New Testament that are clearly stated concerning how we're to become a child of God, worship and conduct ourselves. As seen in events involving the incense, God hasn't given humans the ability to change his directives or conditions.

A final note on the burning of incense. In modern worship there are a number of bodies that refer to themselves as Christian but their doctrines and practices deviate from the pattern we find in the New Testament. Burning incense passed with the waning of the Law of Moses and there are no instructions or examples in the New Testament supporting such a practice. The Law of Moses was fulfilled and taken out of the way. Incense, like blood sacrifices, was no longer commanded nor would they be effective. Today the incense that rises before God are the prayers of the saints as we praise and commune with him following the pattern for worship we've been given. Deviation from that pattern, as under the Law, will result in catastrophic negative consequences as it did then.

**10. Next**

Water has a place in the scriptures and is used by God physically and figuratively. In the next lesson we'll discuss **The Laver** and the presence of water before God at the Tabernacle.