

"The Better Sanctuary"

Part 5

Hebrews 9:1-12

Introduction: Tonight as we come back to our study in Hebrews I need to remind you that we are in chapter 9 but we have stepped away due to the focus in this chapter. It is in this chapter that the writer is focused upon showing the Hebrew believers that that Jesus now ministers in a better sanctuary. Let us keep in mind that many of these Hebrew believers desired to return to Judaism and let us also remember that at the time of this writing the Temple was still standing. Another point to keep in mind is the sacrificial system was still functioning within the Temple.

So because of the persecution the Hebrew believers were experiencing they were now torn between Christianity and Judaism. Many of them had a divided allegiance and this divided allegiance was hindering their spiritual walk and growth. So the writer of Hebrews has written to these believers to show them that Jesus Christ is BETTER than anything of the Old Covenant. He has written to also show them that all the rituals and the ceremonies of the Old Covenant were pictures of Jesus Christ. Therefore, the point he was making was, it made no sense to return to the rituals and the ceremonies when they were just shadows and types of Jesus Christ and now He was here and so why not follow Him and be committed fully to Him?

In the section which we are in the writer is focused upon showing his readers that all the articles of furniture in the Tabernacle were also shadows of Jesus Christ. So we have taken time to slow down and to look at the articles of furniture to see the spiritual pictures within each article of furniture within the Tabernacle.

Now so far we have looked at 4 articles of furniture.

1. The Brazen Altar.
2. The Brazen Laver.
3. The Golden Lampstand.
4. The Table of Shewbread.

Tonight in our study we have come to the 5th article of furniture.

I. The Furnishings of the Earthly Sanctuary

Part 5

5. The Altar of Incense.

Let us first of all look at the instructions given to Moses concerning this altar.

Exodus 30:1-10

And thou shalt make an altar to burn incense upon: of shittim wood shalt thou make it.

² *A cubit shall be the length thereof, and a cubit the breadth thereof; foursquare shall it be: and two cubits shall be the height thereof: the horns thereof shall be of the same.*

³ *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.*

⁴ *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.*

⁵ *And thou shalt make the staves of shittim wood, and overlay them with gold.*

⁶ ***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.***

⁷ *And Aaron shall burn thereon sweet incense **every morning**: when he dresseth the lamps, he shall burn incense upon it.*

⁸ *And when Aaron lighteth the lamps **at even, he shall burn incense upon it**, a perpetual incense before the LORD throughout your generations.*

⁹ *Ye shall offer no strange incense thereon, nor burnt sacrifice, nor meat offering; neither shall ye pour drink offering thereon.*

¹⁰ *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.*

These are the instructions which God gave to Moses for the altar and there is much here for us to consider as we look at this Altar of Incense.

A. The Picture of Jesus Christ

It is very interesting that before we are given the specifications of the alter we are told of its purpose.

Exodus 30:1

And thou shalt make an altar to burn incense upon: of shittim wood shalt thou make it.

Our attention is taken directly to the altar and the fact that it was to be used to burn incense upon. The Altar is a picture of Jesus Christ and the incense is a picture of His intercession and praise on our behalf.

The altar was to be constructed from acacia/shittim and then overlaid with gold. This is a picture of the humanity and the Deity of our Lord joined together in One Person. The Apostle John states it in a beautiful way.

John 1:1, 14

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

¹⁴ And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.

The Eternal God became a man so that He could come into this sin filled world and provide a way of salvation for all sinners.

The altar was located directly in front of the vail which separated the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies. This is a picture of the present ministry of our Lord as He is BEFORE the Father interceding on our behalf. Let us remember that this earthly tabernacle was built after the pattern of the True Sanctuary which exists in heaven. Therefore, that which took place on earth in the sanctuary is a picture of what takes place in heaven. The priests would come to the Brazen Altar and offer the sacrifice of the animal. They would then come to the Laver and wash before entering into the Holy Place. As they entered into the Holy Place they would take a coal from the Brazen Altar and they would place it upon the Altar of Incense and then that would sprinkle the incense upon the coal and this would ignite the incense and fill the Holy Place with a beautiful fragrance.

Jesus Christ willingly went to the cross to make the Perfect Sacrifice on our behalf to pay the full penalty for our sins. He then went into the presence of our Heavenly Father and it is there that He intercedes for us. His intercession is like the incense ignited in the Holy Place for is it a beautiful fragrance in the presence of the Father. Now because of this ministry of our Lord there is much encouragement for you and I as believers. Let me show you some verses.

Revelation 12:10

¹⁰ *And I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of his Christ: for the accuser of our brethren is cast down, which accused them before our God day and night.*

This verse points to the day when Satan will be forever cast down but the point I want you to see is that he accuses us before the God on a daily basis. When we fail he is quick to bring our failures into the presence of God. But we have an Intercessor.

Hebrews 7:22-25

²² *By so much was Jesus made a surety of a better testament.*

²³ *And they truly were many priests, because they were not suffered to continue by reason of death:*

²⁴ *But this man, because he continueth ever, hath an unchangeable priesthood.*

²⁵ *Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them.*

Jesus is before the Father to claim His blood and His sacrifice as the payment for EVERY ONE of our sins. For this reason we can claim the very words of the Apostle Paul.

Romans 8:31-34

³¹ *What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us?*

³² *He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?*

³³ *Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth.*

³⁴ *Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us.*

This then gives to us the most glorious assurance which is recorded in Romans 5.

Romans 5:8-10

⁸ *But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.*

⁹ *Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him.*

¹⁰ *For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life.*

It is our LIVING Savior Who keeps us eternally secure. So the Altar of Incense is a shadow of the present ministry of our Lord. There is also another picture.

B. A Picture of the Prayer Life of the Believer

1. The Placement

The location of the altar is again very significant in this picture. The altar was set before the veil and was as close as the priest could come to God. This is a picture of how the believer, when he or she is in prayer, is the closest to God.

Hebrews 4:16

¹⁶ *Let us therefore come boldly **unto the throne** of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.*

When we come to God in prayer we are stepping right into the presence of God.

2. The Appointed Times

Exodus 30:7-8

⁷ *And Aaron shall burn thereon sweet incense **every morning**: when he dresseth the lamps, he shall burn incense upon it.*

⁸ *And when Aaron lighteth the lamps **at even, he shall burn incense upon it, a perpetual incense before the LORD throughout your generations.***

Here we see that the priest was to burn incense both in the morning and in the evening. I believe this is a wonderful picture of how our days should be started in prayer and they should be ended in prayer. There are many examples in God's Word of those who started their days early with prayer. Then there is David who loved to pray in the night watches.

Psalms 63:5-6

⁵ *My soul shall be satisfied as with marrow and fatness; and my mouth shall praise thee with joyful lips:*

⁶ *When I remember thee upon my bed, and meditate on thee in the night watches.*

It is also interesting to notice that the incense burned "perpetually" (without ceasing) from year to year. This is a picture of how we are to constantly have an attitude of prayer. Notice what Paul said in 1 Thessalonians.

1 Thessalonians 5:17

¹⁷ *Pray without ceasing.*

Just as there were regular times for the priests to burn the incense so we also should have regular times when we get alone with the Lord. At the same time we should have a constant attitude of prayer meaning our prayer life is not limited to those "certain times" but we go to Him whenever there is a reason.

3. The Importance

We need to see what God said to Moses concerning the altar.

Exodus 30:10

¹⁰ *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.***

At the end of this verse God told Moses this altar was the MOST HOLY UNTO THE LORD. There was only one article of furniture that was more sacred than the altar and that was the Ark of the Covenant which was in the Holy of Holies. This altar was next of importance. This then raises a question, "Why was this altar so important and sacred to God?" The answer is, "This shows the importance which God places upon the believer's prayer life."

The sad truth is that many believers are too busy or just do not take the time to pray. Let me show you some statements made about prayer:

"It is because of the hasty and superficial conversation with God that the sense of sin is so weak and that no motives have power to help you to hate and flee from sin as you should." ~ A.W. Tozer

"Prayer is the acid test of devotion." ~ Samuel Chadwick

Prayer takes discipline and determination. It is a labor to spend time in prayer but we must remember it is a great privilege given to us through the finished work of Jesus Christ. Let me show you a few verses that speak of the power of prayer.

James 5:16-18

¹⁶ *Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. **The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.***

¹⁷ *Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain: and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months.*

¹⁸ *And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit.*

There are many other Bible verses on prayer but from these we get the idea that prayer is very powerful. When God's people pray the wheels of heaven begin to turn.

4. The Connection.

Now there was a distinct connection between the Brazen Altar and the Altar of Incense. The Altar of Incense did not have its own fire but instead there was to be taken hot coals from the Brazen Altar which was to be used to burn the incense.

Leviticus 16:11-13

¹¹ *And Aaron shall bring the bullock of the sin offering, which is for himself, and shall make an atonement for himself, and for his house, and shall kill the bullock of the sin offering which is for himself:*

¹² *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 veil:*

¹³ *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:*

This was a picture of how there is only ONE WAY into the presence of God and it is through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Let me show you something which happened in the book of Leviticus.

Leviticus 10:1-2

*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.*

² *And there went out fire from the LORD, and devoured them, and they died before the LORD.*

Nadab and Abihu put coals from a STRANGE FIRE into their censers and used the STRANGE FIRE to burn the incense and for that reason God struck them dead. They did not take the coals from the Brazen Altar but instead they took them from a fire which they had made on their own. This is a picture of the end result of those who attempt to enter in a relationship with God without coming through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. It is a picture of those who refuse to come to Jesus Christ and instead they believe they can come to God by their own works or create their own way to God. When they die they will forever perish.

Conclusion:

There were 2 warnings given with the altar.

1. **No strange incense.**

Exodus 30:9

⁹ Ye shall offer no strange incense thereon, nor burnt sacrifice, nor meat offering; neither shall ye pour drink offering thereon.

The incense was symbolic of our prayers so "strange incense" would be prayers offered outside the will of God.

2. **Keep the altars separate.**

Sacrifices were never to be offered upon this altar. This is a picture of how believers are to move on from the basic doctrines into a deeper relationship with Jesus Christ.