

March 15

Scriptures: Read Exodus: 30

Key Verse: “Aaron shall burn on it sweet incense every morning (and ‘at twilight,’ verse 8) when he tends the lamps...”. (Exodus 30:7)

Overview

The altar of incense was very important. It was covered with pure gold and situated in the Holy Place directly in front of the ark but before the veil. It is called an altar, although no blood sacrifices are offered upon it. God considers prayer and praise a sacrifice (Psalm 141:2; 107:22; Heb. 13:15); something necessary in our relationship with Him. At the same time the priest tended the lamps, he was to tend the incense. The lamp represents the word of God, and the incense represents prayer. From this we learn that prayer, praise and reading God’s word should go together. God desires the constant praise and worship of His creation. In tending the incense, the priest faced the mercy seat and directed the aroma toward it, although it could not be seen because of the veil. In like manner, we cannot physically see the throne of God, yet with faith we direct our prayers to the Lord. In the Bible, the prayers of the saints are compared to “golden bowls full of incense: (Rev. 5:8) which are then, through our mediator, the Lord Jesus, offered up to the throne of God (Rev.8:3), that they may be acceptable. In this manner, God hears and answers our prayers according to His will.

The sweet aroma would constantly flow into the Holy of Holies and encompass the mercy seat. Likewise, Christ our advocate, always appears in the presence of God for us. The offering of Himself on the cross was “for a sweet-smelling aroma” (Ephesians 5:2) which continues to appease God’s wrath against us which we as sinners deserve, but instead, commends us for righteousness. Jesus Christ (symbolized by the incense) through the believer (the gold censer which housed the incense) “diffuses the fragrance of His knowledge in every place. For we are to God the fragrance of Christ” (2 Cor. 2:14-16). The perfect proportion and ingredients combined to make the incense was a divine invention. It was not to be copied, for there could be no counterfeit; just as there is only one divinely given Christ, who is “most holy to the Lord” (30:10).

There is a link between the altar of incense and the bronze altar. The fire for burning the incense was taken from the bronze altar. The same fire, which God initially gave, burnt the offering and also brought a sweet aroma to Him. This holy fire was to be guarded so it would not die out. Once a year the blood from the bronze altar was to be applied to the horns of the incense altar as rite of purification, for it came in contact with sinful people and, so required cleansing and renewed sanctification by the blood. We must keep ourselves pure, cleansed by the blood of Jesus, and never let the fire of the Lord be extinguished from our lives so that we are able to pray and worship Him in the right way. Before the high priest would make atonement in the Holy of Holies once a year, by sprinkling the mercy seat with the blood from the sacrifice, he was first to enter with the incense that the ark might be enveloped in its cloudy smoke (Lev. 16:13, 14). This may represent Christ’s intervention and intercession which precedes our forgiveness by God and acceptance to Him.

The ransom money, the price of a life, (30:11-16) was the same for all the Israelites, regardless of their economic position. In other offerings, they gave according to their means, but this was not a free-will offering; it was obligatory, for all benefited from the tabernacle and its services, especially the grace God granted on the day of atonement. Since all were sinners and have the same need for Christ, this ransom for their soul had to be the same. Several Jewish expositors believe this was a yearly tribute to be paid to the tabernacle (and later to the temple in Jerusalem) which Moses began, upon the instruction of God, when the first census was taken.

In the New Testament Jesus was required to make this payment called the “temple tax”. Although He had good reason to be excluded, He paid it so none would be offended (Matt.17:24-27). As well as providing for the on-going expenses of the tabernacle and the priesthood, the ransom money reminded them that their life came from God. Refusal to pay it could result in God’s wrath and judgment through plagues (30:12).

The laver, or washing basin, held a large quantity of water to be used only by the priests. Those involved in service to God must be pure. It was not only part of the priest’s consecration ceremony, but was a daily cleansing. Each new day we need to purify our hearts to draw near to God (James 4:8). This practice was to help them understand the reverence for God and His holiness.

The holy oil and incense were to be made by skilled people and intended for sacred use only, not for any common purposes. The sacred things of God are not to be mocked or taken lightly, nor is any counterfeit to be made. Once again, a reverence for God’s holiness and ordinances is stressed.

Prayer

O God, we offer up the sacrifice of prayer and praise. May we daily direct this aroma toward Your Throne. We reverence Your Holiness and we carefully approach Your Throne having been washed through the reading of your Holy Word.