

7 -- THE ALTAR OF INCENSE

(Heavenly Communication)

The altar of incense was placed at the far end of the holy place, immediately in front of the veil which partitioned off the most holy place. Like the table of showbread, the altar of incense was made of acacia wood overlaid with pure gold. It was one cubit long and one cubit wide. The height was two cubits, or about three feet. Like the brazen altar, it was foursquare and it had four horns, one on each corner. The two poles with which it was carried, were also made of wood overlaid with gold, and the four rings, that held the poles were of pure gold (Exodus 30:1-10). Nothing but the sacred fire and the prescribed incense was ever placed upon it (Exodus 30:9,10). In offering of incense the priest was brought more directly into the presence of God than in any other act of his daily work.

1. Who was to offer the incense on the altar?

Exodus 30:7, 8 Aaron shall burn on it sweet incense every morning; when he tends the lamps, he shall burn incense on it. And when Aaron lights the lamps at twilight, he shall burn incense on it, a perpetual incense before the LORD throughout your generations.

Note: Each day the activities of the sanctuary began with a service of consecration which was carried out by the priests. These services were known as the “daily,” which included all the activities in the court yard and in the holy place of the tabernacle. These services began and ended with the morning and evening burnt offering (a lamb each time), and the offering of sweet incense upon the golden altar.

2. What did the multitude do at the hour of incense in the morning and evening service?

Luke 1:9, 10 ... according to the custom of the priesthood, his lot fell to burn incense when he went into the temple of the Lord. And the whole multitude of the people was praying outside at the hour of incense.

Note: Israel understood that the morning and evening burnt offerings were a call to consecration. At this time Israel would turn to the Sanctuary and pray while the priest acted the role as mediator, or intercessor, between God and this people.

3. What did the incense symbolize?

Psalms 141:2 Let my prayer be set before You as incense. ...

4. Who does Paul say the priest represents?

Hebrews 7:24, 25 But He [Jesus], because He continues forever, has an unchangeable priesthood. Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He ever lives to make intercession for them.

1 Timothy 2:5 For there is One God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus.

Note: The altar of incense is a call to God's people to start the day and end each day with prayer. Here Jesus brings our prayers to the Father pleading His blood for each one. Thus, the altar of incense is a call to prayer.

Our Call to Prayer

5. What is God's invitation to us?

Hebrews 4:14-16 Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

1 Peter 5:7 ... casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you.

Note: The altar of incense is the 3rd component in the sanctification process, or Christian growth. As the oil of the lampstand represented the Holy Spirit, and the bread at the table of showbread represented the Word of God, so the incense represents prayer which is essential to our "growing up" in Jesus.

6. Upon what conditions are we promised needed blessings?

Matthew 7:7, 8 Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened.

James 4:2 ... Yet you do not have because you do not ask.

Note: Prayer is not the overcoming of God's unwillingness to help us, but rather it is taking hold of God's willingness to do so. "Prayer is the opening of the heart to God as to a friend." (*Gospel Workers*, p. 92)

7. What has God promised to do with my needs?

Philippians 4:19 And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.

Note: All that the child of God needs is theirs for the asking. What we cannot do in our own strength can be accomplished when our efforts are united with divine power. Those who ask will not be disappointed. But even after we ask we must remember to say, "Not my will, but Your will be done." Finite beings that we are, we do not always know what is best for us, but Jesus can be trusted to answer our requests the way we would want them answered if we knew the end from the beginning. In short He knows what is best for us.

Conditions to Answered Prayer

8. How must one ask in order to receive?

James 1:6, 7 But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; ...

Hebrews 11:6 But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.

Note: When we come to God with our needs we must believe that He cares for us, and has our best interest in mind. However, disbelieving His love and power jeopardizes our request.

9. Under what conditions does the Lord hear prayer?

1 John 3:22 And whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do those things that are pleasing in His sight.

Psalms 66:18 If I regard iniquity in my heart, The Lord will not hear. (See Isaiah 59:1, 2; James 4:3)

Note: Rebellion, contention, and discord quench the spirit of prayer. (1 Peter 3:1-7)
Many grieve the Spirit and wound Jesus by giving in to impatience, unkind words, disobedience, strife, and an unforgiving attitude.

10. When praying, what must we do in order to be forgiven?

Mark 11:25 And whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him, that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses.

Note: If Jesus is so ready and willing to forgive us our sins, how can we be unwilling to forgive another? (See Matthew 18:23-35)

Time, Place, and Content of Prayer

11. What example did Jesus give of how to start each day?

Mark 1:35 Now in the morning, having risen a long while before daylight, He went out and departed to a solitary place; and there He prayed.

12. What did Jesus say concerning secret prayer?

Matthew 6:6 But you, when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly.

13. With what should our prayer be mingled?

Philippians 4:6 Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; ...

Note: Prayer does not change God, but it does change us and, our relation to Him. It places us in a frame of mind where God can consistently and safely grant our requests.

14. How often should we pray?

Ephesians 6:18 ... praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, ...

Note: This doesn't mean we should be always on our knees, but that we should live in an attitude of prayer.

15. What are some examples of things to pray for?

- (1) The **forgiveness** of sin (*2 Chronicles 7:14; 1 John 5:16; Matthew 5:44*)
- (2) The **Holy Spirit** (*John 14:16; Luke 11:13*)
- (3) **Deliverance in the hour of temptation and danger** (*Matthew 6:13; John 17:11; Proverbs 3:26; Psalm 91*)
- (4) **Wisdom and understanding** (*James 1:5; 1 Kings 3:9; Daniel 2:17-19*)
- (5) The **healing** of the sick (*James 5:14, 15; 2 Kings 20*)
- (6) The **prosperity of the ministers** of God (*Ephesians 6:18, 19; 2 Thessalonians 3:1*)
- (7) Those who **suffer** for the truth's sake (*Hebrews 13:3; Acts 12:5*)
- (8) **Rulers** (*Ezra 6:10; Acts 23:5*)
- (9) Our **enemies** (*Matthew 5:44*)
- (10) Temporal prosperity, that the **work of God be not hindered** (*James 5:17, 18; Zechariah 10:1*)
- (11) The **Lord to vindicate His cause** (*1 Kings 18:30-39*)
- (12) **Laborers** (*Luke 10:2*)
- (13) The **coming of Jesus** (*Matthew 6:10; Revelation 22:20*)
- (14) Needs (*Philippians 4:19*)

16. If an answer does not come at the time and in the manner expected, what should be our attitude?

Psalms 37:7 Rest in the LORD, and wait patiently for Him; ...

17. What if I don't pray just right or worse, I don't know what to pray for? *Romans 8:26*

Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.

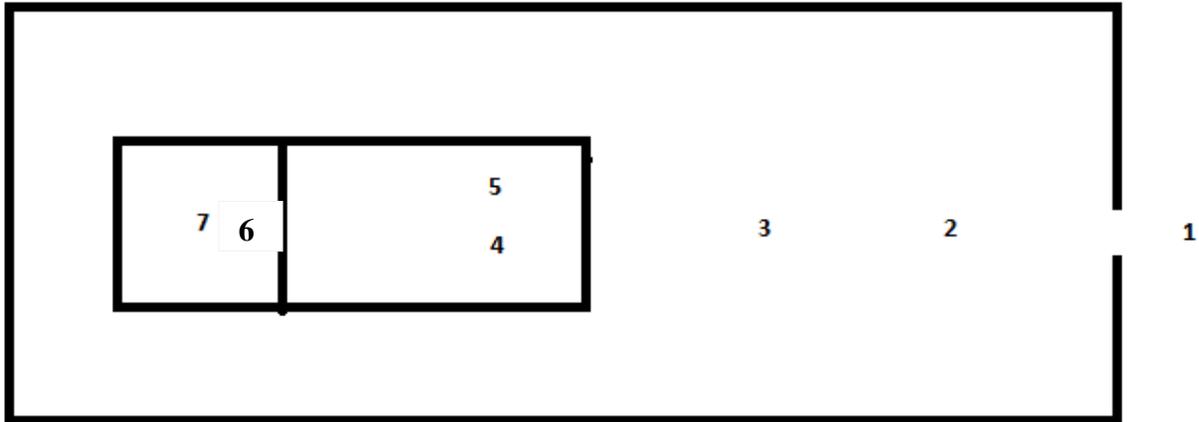
Note: What a joy to know that our prayers are delivered to the throne intelligently through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Your Response

Is it your desire to erect an altar (figuratively speaking) in your home for God's honor and glory by starting and ending each day in prayer?

Answer _____

THE SANCTUARY
A MODEL FOR PRAYER
(Additional Study)



KEY

1. Enter with praise – Psalm 100; Luke 10:21
2. Confession – 1 John 1: 8, 9; Romans 10:9; 2 Timothy 2:19
3. Recommit my life to God – Psalm 51:10
4. Baptism of the Holy Spirit – Luke 11:13; Galatians 5:22-25
5. Strength for the day – John 6:32-33; Romans 13:12-14; Put on the whole armor of God – Ephesians 6: 10-18
6. Intercession – Philippians 1:3, 4; Romans 1:9, 10
7. Experience intimate communion – Psalm 16:8, 11. Enter into the heavenly sanctuary with Christ. Hebrews 10:19, 20 (In the context of Matthew 27:51a, Hebrews 9:8-14, Hebrews 10:11-22.