

## Exodus 60 – Altar of Prayers of the Holy Ones

Exodus (Names) – Changing the World  
Dr. Leon L. Sanders    Exodus 30:1-10, 34-38

### Tabernacle – Altar of Incense

Tabernacle - Outside



Tabernacle - Inside



Holy Place

Holy  
of Holies

### Altar of Incense

- Altar was made of wood overlaid with beaten gold, including the poles
- Resembled the Bronze Altar of sacrifice
- Tended by priests at AM and PM sacrifices



## Fire from Bronze Altar

- The coals for this altar came from the Bronze Altar
  - The priest would carry glowing coals to this altar
  - The priest would place the incense on Altar of Incense
  - The incense would billow clouds of scented smoke
  - The incense would cross the veil into the Holy Place
  - Incense would rise before the Seat of Examination; i.e., throne of God in Heaven

## Special Incense

- Though the exact recipe was not given in Scriptures, one of the main ingredients mentioned is frankincense
- This incense was reserved only for the Altar of Incense
- Anyone else using this incense for any reason was cut off from God and the nation (theocracy) as it detracted from the metaphor that we will discuss shortly

## Altar of Incense Only

- This altar was only for the special incense
  - This was not a sacrificial altar and any other offerings on it were forbidden; not a place of judgment
- This was not an altar of judgment (gold) but an altar of fellowship with God based on the sacrificial offering on the bronze altar (morning and evening sacrifices) (Christ - stauros)

## Involved in Annual Sin Offering

- High Priest put blood on the horns of this altar every year before going into the Holiest Place to make atonement for the unintentional sins of the nation
- This was not to cleanse the altar but to denote that the incense offering was possible through the sacrifice for sin of the coming Messiah depicted by the Bronze Altar

## Enigmatic Problem

- The Old Testament places the Altar of Incense in the Holy Place - Attended daily by the priests
- Hebrews *appears* to place the Altar inside the Holiest Place which only the High Priest could enter annually  
(He 9:1-2)
- Many call this a contradiction, which destroys the integrity of Scripture, but there is an explanation

## Perhaps only the Greek is Correct

High Priest is before the Altar of Incense

He is holding a *ensor* to take incense into Holiest Place as commanded

Greek (θυμιαστήριον, thymiastērion) can mean either a *ensor* or an altar



## Context of the OT and NT

- Old Testament
  - Actual placement of the Altar and duties of priests
  - Places it physically in the Holy Place
- New Testament - Hebrews
  - Context is duties of the High Priest
  - Altar isn't carried into the Holiest Place but a censor is carried by the High Priest during his annual sin offering (Le 16:12-13 LXX)

## θυμιαστήριον

- The key to understanding is how this word was used by the original authors to determine if the translation is correct (Translations are *not* inspired)
- This *same* word is translated as censor or firepan in the LXX or as altar depending on the context (Le 16:12)
- Specifically, it is translated as censor (ESV) with the duties of the High Priest during the annual sin offering

## No Contradiction

- This supposed contradiction is not a contradiction but a display of ignorance of
  - Original Hebrew and Greek languages
  - Practices of the High Priest vs the Priests
  - Contextual continuity of the passages
- Early translators were trapped in assumptions that could only lead to *apparent* contradictions

## Why Altar of Incense Described Here?

- Moses placed description of this altar here as pinnacle of the relationship He had with His people (Ex 30:1-2, 13 1:5-10)
- Bible tells us that the incense represents the prayers of His people (Holy Ones or Saints) saved by His blood
- Bible clearly says that His House (Tabernacle/Temple) is a "house of prayer" for all who come in faith (saved) (Is 56:7-8)
- Prayers of the righteous rise continually to God (Ps 5:6 (KJV), 1Ps 1:12)

## Incense Represents all Prayers

- Ezekiel sees vision of Sanhedrin with incense censors representing their prayers to Gnostic idols (Ez 8:5-11)
- Leadership transferred these representations of prayers to Christ, giving them to Gnostic idols, demeaning Christ's holiness even to degrading practice of killing their children (Ez 16:16-28)
  - God says those children were His, not theirs (Is 52:7)
  - God says this is why He drove them into exile

## God Hates Polluted Offerings

- God tells Israel, and priests, that it would be better to not have offerings than to offer polluted offerings (Am 1:11)
  - Their incense did not represent prayers to Him
  - He shall make His name great among the Gentiles
  - Presages coming Diaspora for rejecting Christ
- Yet, He will call them back to Him in His time (Zc 12:10-13:2, Rv 11:7, 25-32)

## Scripture Explains the Incense

- The ritual of offering incense and prayers to God is clearly explained in Revelation (Re 5:6-8, 8:1-5)
  - Incense, prayers of holy ones, offered to God when Christ takes the scroll preparing for His Kingdom
  - Incense, prayers of saints, precede trumpet judgments
    - Offered on gold altar *before* God's throne, Altar of Incense
    - Word for censor (λιβανωτός) only used in Revelation (Re 8:3, 5) [In LXX this word translated as frankincense, (Ex 30:34; SS 4:13)]

## Summary of Incense Metaphor

- Incense Metaphor Explained
  - Tabernacle: Incense clouds represented prayers to God
  - Fragrance represented the goodness of God in prayer
    - Prayer to God based on sacrifice of Christ (Sweet Savor) (Le 1:9)
    - Work of Holy Spirit in believer resulting in prayers (Ro 8:26-27)
  - Idolatry: Incense represented prayers that rejected God
    - Their own lips condemned them as sinners (Le 8:12)

## Only Our Prayers Ascend to God

- The placement of the Altar of Incense and the ritual of the High Priest entering the Holiest Place annually demonstrate that only our prayers ascend to God while we are in this life, for those who are new creations
- All deeds arising from ourselves, including our deeds and good intentions, remain behind until we stand before Him; only our prayers demonstrate our faith

## Christ's Main Activity

- Christ spent more time in prayer than any other deeds
  - He prayed long hours into the night (Lk 6:12-00)
  - He prayed before major decisions and troubles (Mt 26:36-40)
  - He prayed for His own (6-17)
  - He taught His own how to pray (Mt 6:9-13)
- We, like His disciples, spend little time in prayer (Mt 26:40, 43, 45)

## Prayer Reduced to Rituals

- Unfortunately, much that passes for prayer is nothing more than empty rituals to satisfy the flesh rather than communicate to God seeking answers (Mt 6:5-8)
  - Public prayers usually for the approval of others
  - Rote prayers, written prayers, are empty words to God
- Much that passes for prayer cannot please God as they are sacrifices to Satan, not God; making us like Israel

## Lack of Prayer Equals Powerlessness

- Prayers lacking the empowerment of God's indwelling Spirit are sacrifices to Satan, hindering faith in God
- Prayers are the pathway provided by God building faith through trials because in prayer to Him He, in turn, teaches us out of His Word about His Word building His Word in us
- Want Faith? Pray from your weakness for His strength!