

The Tabernacle in the Wilderness

by

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CHAPTER SEVEN

The Golden Altar of Incense

KEEP YOUR BIBLE OPEN, PLEASE, TO EXODUS 30:1-10, that passage recording the commands GOD gave to Moses for the construction of the Golden Altar.

Today we study the third and last item of furniture in the Holy Place.

We have seen how the other two pieces of furniture in the Holy Place pointed to CHRIST and to the position the believer occupies by virtue of his relationship to CHRIST. We saw how the Table of Shewbread pointed to CHRIST the Bread of Life, and we saw how the Golden Candlestick typified CHRIST, the Light of the World. But we also saw that the Table of Shewbread showed how individual believers are to live in harmony and fellowship with each other as they have fellowship with CHRIST and the Father; likewise, the Golden Candlestick taught that believers are to be lights in the world as they are joined to CHRIST. [63]

As we read concerning the Golden Altar of Incense in Exodus 30, we ask ourselves, "In what way does this object of furniture point to CHRIST and the relationship that believers bear to Him?"

In dealing with the typical teaching of the Tabernacle (as with all typical teaching), we must be very careful not to allow our foolish imaginations to run riot. The interpretation we give to these various parts of the Tabernacle must be based upon GOD's Word - not upon our own ideas.

In the last analysis, GOD's Word itself is its own best commentary, and so let us turn to it now to find the meaning of the Golden Altar of Incense.

THE BIBLICAL MEANING OF THE GOLDEN ALTAR

In Revelation 8:3, 4 we read: "**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." Here we find incense connected with prayer.

Now let us also turn to Luke 1:9,10, where we find another reference to the fact that prayer accompanied the offering up of incense: "**According to the custom of the priest's office, his lot was to burn incense when he [i.e., Zacharias] went into the temple of the Lord. And the whole multitude of the people were praying without at the time of incense.**" [64]

Therefore, it is safe to say that the Golden Altar of Incense points to CHRIST's intercessory prayers and the prayers which believers are able to pray by virtue of their relationship to Him.

First of all, then, let us consider how this Golden Altar typifies the intercessory work of CHRIST, and then how it points to the prayers of the saints.

CHRIST'S INTERCESSORY WORK FOR US

In the Tabernacle in the Wilderness there were two altars, the Brazen Altar and this Golden Altar of Incense.

On the Brazen Altar a sacrifice was constantly being offered up, whereas GOD made it explicit to Moses that no offering or sacrifice was to be placed on the Golden Altar. The reason for this is quite apparent, for we have already seen that while the Brazen Altar typified the atoning death and finished work of CHRIST upon the Cross, the Golden Altar pointed to CHRIST's work of intercessory prayer.

The first Altar pointed to CHRIST's suffering and death - to the atoning work which He did while still upon this earth. It was made of brass; it had no crown, and it thus bespeaks the suffering and humiliation of our precious Lord. But the second Altar, the Altar of Incense, was made of gold, and its top was a crown of gold extending outward from each corner in the form of a horn, and thus it points to CHRIST's glory and exaltation - to His work of intercession which He is now doing as our ascended Lord Who is far above all principalities and powers. [65]

Hebrews 1:3 says concerning CHRIST that " . . . **when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high.**"

CHRIST's first work was to purge our sins, and this was foreshadowed by the Brazen Altar. But now CHRIST is engaged in His second work for us. Hebrews 7:25 says that, " . . . **he ever liveth to make intercession for us.**"

And this work was foreshadowed by the Golden Altar.

What a wonderful thing it is to know that our Lord is constantly interceding for us!

Whatever our needs may be, known or unknown to us, CHRIST prays to the Father that we may have them supplied. He ever liveth to make intercession for us! He that keepeth Israel never slumbers or sleeps!

But wait a minute, friend of mine. You can never benefit from CHRIST's work, typified by the Golden Altar, until you accept what He has done for you at the Brazen Altar. You can never have the confidence that CHRIST intercedes on your behalf, until you have accepted His atoning death for your sins.

Remember, to get to the Golden Altar you must first pass by the Brazen Altar where the sacrificial lamb was slain and offered up.

So likewise, to know CHRIST's constant watch-care over your life, you must first humbly kneel at the foot of the Cross, confess your sins, and trust in CHRIST and the finished work of paying the penalty for your sins which He accomplished for you there. [66]

CHRIST'S INTERCESSORY WORK IN US

The fact that CHRIST lives to make intercession for us constantly does not mean, however, that we should not engage in prayer ourselves. Rather, the Word commands that we should "**pray without ceasing**" (I Thessalonians 5:17), that we should pray " . . . **always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints**" (Ephesians 6:18).

While CHRIST is constantly praying for us while seated at the right hand of the Father, we should be continually engaged in prayer here upon earth.

But you say, "Brother Fuller, how can I pray without ceasing? How can I go on praying especially when the affairs of life close in upon me?"

My answer is that of course you cannot do this by yourself. But GOD has provided a way in which the incense of our prayers may constantly ascend to the throne of grace.

In Romans 8:26, 27 we read:

"Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit himself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. And he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God." [67]

This passage I have just read means that all who are born again have the Spirit of GOD abiding in them and interceding for them.

The HOLY SPIRIT is constantly interceding for us even when our attention is focused upon other things.

At such times, we can sense His work by the groanings, by the inarticulate yearnings which are in our soul, and by the sense of CHRIST's presence which He constantly vouchsafes to us. Then, when we are finished with the affairs of the day, He may gently call us to the secret place of prayer, and there open our hearts to pray to the Father in the name of CHRIST.

All true prayer must be initiated and inspired by the HOLY SPIRIT, or else we will simply be praying as the Pharisee in the temple who prayed with himself.

Thus, it is our solemn responsibility as Christians so to walk in the Spirit, so to refrain from grieving or quenching the Spirit, that He will constantly have full sway in our hearts to carry on His work of intercession.

But, friend of mine, let me repeat - You can never know what it is to have fellowship with GOD and CHRIST, you can never know the joys of answered prayer until you come first to the Brazen Altar (i.e., the Cross), the only place where you can find the forgiveness of sins and be born again.

Then you must always wash at the Laver of the Word of GOD so that the incense of Spirit-inspired prayer may constantly ascend to GOD the Father in the name of CHRIST. [68]

Now, let me point out some of the details of this Golden Altar which help to teach us the way we can be godly men and women whose fervent prayers avail much.

First of all, incense of the Golden Altar was caused to rise by being set afire by a coal from the Brazen Altar.

Since the Brazen Altar typifies the Cross of CHRIST, we learn from this that true prayer can come only from a heart which is inspired by a genuine love for the Cross of CHRIST.

What does this mean?

Paul said in Galatians 6:14: " . . . **God forbid that I should glory save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ**"

Only when our chief delight, our chief glory, is in the Cross of CHRIST - only when we seek the glory and presence of GOD Himself rather than the praise of men, when like Paul we count all things but loss that we might know CHRIST - only then can our prayers be motivated by that love which will make them rise as incense to the throne of GOD.

If your heart is filled with self-love, the love of money, pleasures, and gain, if your heart is filled with the cares of this world, you are not glorying in the Cross, and therefore there is no coal from off the Brazen Altar to cause the incense to ascend.

Therefore, cleanse your hands, ye sinners, and purify your hearts, ye doubleminded, so that you might become righteous in heart and pray effectual, fervent prayers that avail much. [69]

Again note that according to Exodus 30:7, 8, the incense was burned both in the morning and at evening, and at the very same time the wicks of the Golden Candlestick were trimmed.

How beautiful!

Just as the wicks in the Golden Candlestick burned brightest when the incense on the Golden Altar was set afire, so also our witness for CHRIST before a lost and dying world shines brightest when our hearts are aflame with Spirit-inspired prayer.

A striking example of this truth is to be found in the call of Isaiah.

In Isaiah 6:1-3 we read how Isaiah caught a vision of the glory of CHRIST (see John 12:41).

Then, he confessed and repented of his self-love and sin, and the result was that a live coal was taken from the altar and his sin was forgiven.

When the Lord said, "**Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?**" Isaiah answered, "**Here am I; send me.**"

Then GOD sent Isaiah forth to prophesy to Israel. For fifty years he shone as a light in the world, and today, though dead, he yet speaketh.

Why? He prayed a prayer inspired by a love for the Cross of CHRIST, and in so doing, GOD trimmed his wick so that he became a burning and shining light for GOD and CHRIST in his generation.

Friend of mine, do you know the reality of CHRIST, of sins forgiven? Do you have the certain hope of eternal life? Kneel there by your radio today as this broadcast goes out to the nations of earth. Accept CHRIST as your personal Saviour - settle it today. [70]

And you, fellow believer, is your heart right with GOD so that you can pray in the Spirit and be a shining witness for CHRIST?

Let GOD cleanse your life as He cleansed Isaiah's.

Count all things but loss that you might know the excellency of the knowledge of CHRIST.

Learn to pray the effectual, fervent prayer of the righteous man so that you may be a lighthouse in this sin-darkened world. [71]

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