

# The Tabernacle – The Altar of Incense

## Slide #2

- **Questions:** What is prayer? Why do we pray? How do we pray?
  - How do we know God is hearing our prayers?
  - Does God hear every prayer that is prayed?
- Read 2 Timothy 3:15 AMP
  - "the sacred Writings" – at this point, only the Old Testament
  - "able to instruct & give you understanding" – on how to BE saved and STAY saved
  - the Tabernacle is part of those "sacred Writings" – it gives us understanding
- **To Stay Saved, We Need:**
  - **Lampstand** – cannot see anything in the room without light (to see = to understand)
  - **Table of Showbread** – daily Bible reading; Bible study; preaching of the Word
  - **Altar of Incense**
  - Notice: this room does **NOT** have the altar of sacrifice
    - refutes the "cannot live free from sin" doctrine (praying every night for forgiveness)
    - Revelation 2:5 – if you sin, you must "repent, and do the first works"
    - "first works" – works you did at the beginning (confession, godly sorrow, forsaking)

## Slide #3 – The Altar of Incense

- **Design of the Altar:**
  - overlaid with gold (compare to the brass-covered altar of sacrifice)
  - four horns (horns = power)
    - brazen altar = power in the blood to save from sin
    - golden altar = power in prayer
    - "four" – Revelation 7:1 talks about the "four corners of the earth"
    - you can pray anywhere; no limitations on your location when it comes to prayer
- **Location of the Altar:**
  - in front of the veil (veil separated the 2 rooms of the Tabernacle)
  - right before the presence of God (inner room)
  - between the lampstand & table of showbread
- **Purpose of the Altar:**
  - designed for burning incense (not for sacrifices for sin)
  - incense represents prayer
    - Psalm 141:2 "Let my prayer be set forth before thee as incense."
- **Time of the Offering:**
  - Exodus 30:7-8 "And Aaron shall burn thereon sweet incense every morning ... a perpetual incense ... and at even"
    - best time to pray = at the beginning & at the end of your day
    - "perpetual" = continual
    - Luke 18:1 "men ought always to pray" (be in a prayerful attitude)

## Slide #4 – Smell of Incense

- **Memorable Smells:**
  - fresh bread baking
  - dead skunk on the road

- campfire smoke
- pleasant smells attract & draw us in
- unpleasant odors cause us to hold our nose or move away
- in the Tabernacle, incense was offered morning and evening
  - years later, when it was burned in the Temple, it was said to have been smelled 12 miles away in Jericho
- Exodus 37:29 "And he made the holy anointing oil, and the pure incense of sweet spices, according to the work of the apothecary"
  - "work of the apothecary" = the incense had distinct ingredients
    - likewise, prayer has some distinct ingredients
  - God had a special recipe – like the bread, this could only be used in the Tabernacle

### Slide #5 – The Ingredients

- Exodus 30:34 "And the LORD said unto Moses, Take unto thee sweet spices, stacte, and onycha, and galbanum; these sweet spices with pure frankincense."
- **"sweet spices"** – prayer should not be a chore, something boring
- **"stacte"** = means "drops"
  - a costly kind of myrrh
    - myrrh represents suffering
  - drops are believed to have resembled tear drops
  - effective prayers often include some tears
  - Rabbis identified it as the "balm of Gilead"
    - Jesus, our "balm of Gilead," understands our tears
    - this might represent humbleness, brokenness in our prayers
- **"onycha"** = part of the flap on mollusks that closes the shell when the mollusks goes inside
  - this "lid" seals in the mollusk during dry periods
  - prayer closet – just between you and God
    - unplug from the world, your phone, etc. and listen to God's directions
  - Psalm 141:3 "Set a watch, O LORD, before my mouth; keep the door of my lips."
    - How? Through prayer (verse 2).
    - more time spent in your "prayer closet" will help you keep the door of your mouth
  - these mollusks were harvested out of the deep parts of the ocean
    - God wants access to the deepest parts of our hearts; tell Him how you really feel

### Slide #6 – More Ingredients

- **Galbanum** = a gum resin from a large plant
  - bitter smell (turpentine-like scent)
  - this offensive odor brought out the best smell of the other spices
    - galbanum was used to repel noxious insects & poisonous reptiles, including snakes
  - sometimes there are bitter, unpleasant things in our lives
    - 1 Samuel 1:10 "And she was in bitterness of soul, and prayed unto the LORD, and wept sore."
    - how can something "bitter" be part of the "sweet spices"?
    - God wants us to bring Him all the hurt, trials, and bitterness in our lives
    - He will work ALL things together for our good (Romans 8:28)

- **Pure Frankincense** – a white, milky resin (substance)
  - the tree was bruised three times to release the resin
    - then, a spike was driven into the frankincense tree to collect this substance
  - as frankincense burns, it creates a clear, white smoke
  - a picture of Christ's Crucifixion (bruised, pierced) that enables us to live a holy life
    - Song: "He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities"
  - for our prayers to be heard, we need to be living a holy life
  - frankincense on hot coals did not produce a fragrance immediately; it took some time
    - often our prayers seem like they are not being heard; we must wait on the Lord
- **"Incense"** (Exodus 30:1)
  - the word "incense" in the Hebrew comes from the Aramaic word = "to bond with"
  - all these work together (bond); not one of them can be left out

### Slide #7 – Does God Hear Prayer With the Wrong Ingredients?

- Amos 5:21 "I hate, I despise your feast days, and I will not smell in your solemn assemblies."
  - their hearts were not right with God; they were just going through the motions
- John 9:31 "Now we know that God heareth not sinners: but if any man be a worshipper of God, and doeth his will, him he heareth."
- Psalm 66:18 "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me"
  - what did God do with Adam & Eve after they sinned? No longer in fellowship
  - what did God do to His Son when Jesus bore the sins of the world? Turned His back
- Not everything that is called a "prayer" is truly a prayer
- There are conditions for God to hear you
  - You cannot pray OVER top of your sins
  - Isaiah 1:15-17 If "your hands are full of blood" (sin stained), "when ye make prayers, I will not hear."
    - What is the answer?
    - "Wash you, make you clean" (How?)
    - "put away the evil of your doings ... cease to do evil ... learn to do well"
    - only salvation can do that
- 1 Peter 3:7 mistreating people can hinder your prayers
- James 4:3 asking for things out of God's will ("amiss") hinders your prayers

### Slide #8 – A Censer Full of Burning Coals

- Lev. 16:12 "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."
  - **"he"** = the high priest
    - Jesus is our High Priest
    - Rom. 8:34 Jesus is "at the right hand of God interceding [with the Father] for us."
    - through Christ, we can reach God through prayer
  - the spices were in the high priest's hand (in his control)
    - John 16:24 – we are to ask in Jesus' name (end of our prayers)
  - incense needs heat to create a sweet-smelling fragrance (also called smoke)
    - there is little to no fragrance in a candle; it must have heat applied
    - our prayers must be kindled, have some heat

- "kindled" = serious, thankful, reverent, fervent prayers
- "it is the stretched out string that gives out musical notes; the slack one is dumb."
- "burning coals" – these came from the altar of sacrifice
  - God started that fire; the priests were to keep it going
  - once God saves us, it is our responsibility to keep our spiritual coals glowing

### **Slide #9 – Strange Fire**

- Exodus, Chapter 24 – Nadab & Abihu were part of the group who ascended the mountain and "they saw the God of Israel" (verse 10)
  - AMP "saw ... a convincing manifestation of His presence"
  - Only a few select individuals were allowed to approach the mountain.
  - Leviticus 10:1-6 (story)
  - Did they become "comfortable" with the presence of God, with Tabernacle worship?
  - A great danger in being a "Church of God" kid is familiarity
  - Leviticus 10:2 "And there went out fire from the LORD, and devoured them, and they died before the LORD."
- What might be "spiritual strange fire"?
  - "strange" = profane (treating holy things as everyday, common)
  - praying overtop of disobedience – sin
  - pride (Pharisee: "I thank Thee that I am not like this publican)
  - lack of seriousness & reverence (in our prayers, in our worship)

### **Slide #10 – Closing**

- This altar shows us where prayer should be in our lives
  - between the lampstand & the table (Word) – in the center of the room
  - the light in our life will go out & the Word (Bible reading/study) will become dull (moldy bread) unless both are sustained (kept alive) with real prayer
- Prayer coming from love and thankfulness for Christ's sacrifice (coals of the altar) combined with ingredients of the sweet incense will be heard
- James 5:16 "The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much"
- Can people tell you have been praying?
  - After the priest served his assigned duty at the golden altar, he would exchange his linen garments for his regular garments before departing for home. His family could smell the incense he had burned during his service work.
  - Those who had the privilege of serving at the altar of incense could be quickly identified.
  - By your words and actions, can people tell you have spent time in God's presence?