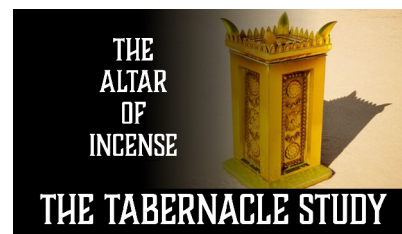


Church of God

Sunday School



THE TABERNACLE #8 – THE ALTAR OF INCENSE

DAILY READINGS:

- ❑ **Monday:** The Altar of Incense was in front of the Veil (Exodus 30:1-10).
- ❑ **Tuesday:** Prayer is to be as the "perpetual incense" (Exodus 30:8; Luke 18:1; 1 Thessalonians 5:17).
- ❑ **Wednesday:** The Altar's four horns teach there is power in prayer (Psalm 89:17; 18:2; Luke 1:69).
- ❑ **Thursday:** God sees our "tears"; He will heal the brokenhearted (Psalm 56:8; Jeremiah 8:21; Psalm 147:3).
- ❑ **Friday:** Effective prayer requires withdrawing from things that distract (Matthew 6:6; 14:23; Mark 1:35).
- ❑ **Saturday:** God will work "bitter" trials for your good (1 Samuel 1:10, 20; Psalm 34:17; Romans 8:28).

MEMORY VERSE: *"Let my prayer be set forth before thee as incense; and the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice."*
—Psalm 141:2

Why Recipes Matter

Have you ever tried baking something without following the recipe exactly? Maybe you were missing an ingredient and skipped it or replaced it with something else. The result probably did not turn out the way you hoped. Would it have been better with the correct ingredients? Recipes help to make sure the food tastes and looks the same every time. This lesson teaches about a recipe God gave. How important do you think it was to follow His recipe?

In the Tabernacle, there was a specific recipe for the incense the priests placed on the Altar of Incense. (The incense represents prayer being offered to God; Psalm 141:2.) If God was particular about the prayers of incense in the Old Testament, is He concerned about our prayers today? Could there be a "recipe" we need to follow for our prayers to be effective? Does God hear prayers with the wrong ingredients?

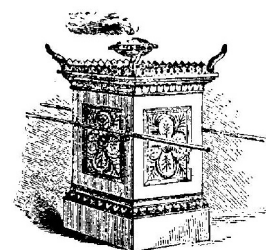
The Importance of Continual Prayer

The Outer Court of the Tabernacle teaches how *to be* saved. The first room and furniture of the Tabernacle Proper teach how *to stay* saved. The Altar of Incense was in the back of the first room with the Golden Candlestick and the Altar of Showbread on each side of the room. Its placement shows that prayer must be at the center of our lives. We need to "pray without ceasing" (1 Thessalonians 5:17). Just as the incense was "perpetual" (continual), our day should begin and end with prayer. An attitude of prayer throughout the day will help guide every life decision we must make.

The Altar of Incense stood right in front of the Veil. The Veil separated the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies (where God's presence dwelled). In the same way, prayer brings us into God's throne room (Hebrews 4:16). There we can talk to Almighty God. The Altar's design included four horns (representing power). This teaches that there is great power in prayer! Unlike the brass-covered Altar of Sacrifice, the Altar of Incense was covered with pure gold, symbolizing holiness. No sin can be in God's church or in God's presence. Sin will hinder our prayers.

The Smell of Incense

Some smells are unforgettable—pleasant and unpleasant. The stench of a dead skunk is nothing like the smell of baked bread. Certain smells draw you in, while others chase you



away. Incense was burned in the Tabernacle every morning and evening. Centuries later, when the sweet incense was offered in the Temple at Jerusalem, historians recorded it could be smelled from miles away. Even after the priest changed into his regular clothes, his family could still smell the incense on him. It was clear he had been before God at the Altar of Incense.

In the same way, Peter and John were recognized as men who had "been with Jesus" (Acts 4:13) through their words and actions. Can your friends and family tell you have spent time in God's presence? Do your prayers affect your attitude and how you treat others? Consider the impact of the incense of your prayers following you all day long, drawing others to God because of your example.

Ingredients of the Incense

The incense contained special ingredients. It was "the work of the apothecary" (Exodus 37:29). God gave a special recipe, and the exact process was a guarded secret. Like the bread, the incense could only be used in the Tabernacle. Each ingredient teaches what God considers essential for effective prayer. All are necessary; none can be omitted.

STACTE (*stack-tee*): this costly form of myrrh looked like teardrops. Psalm 56:8 says our "tears" are put "into thy bottle." Myrrh (which represents suffering and healing) is called the "Balm of Gilead" (a healing ointment). Jeremiah wept because there was no hope, "no balm in Gilead ... no physician there" (Jeremiah 8:22). But Christ (the Great Physician) came to heal the brokenhearted (Psalm 147:3). He understands our tears. *Stacte* represents brokenness, humility, and healing. God hears our humble, tear-filled prayers.

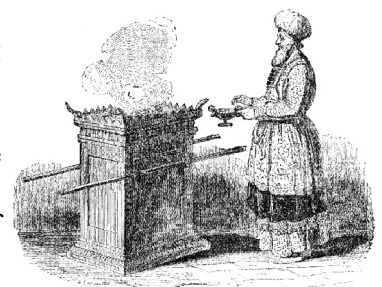
ONYCHA (*on-e-ka*): a shellfish pulls into its shell in times of danger or during dry spells. The flap that seals the mollusk inside is called the *onycha*. Effective prayer requires pulling away from distractions. "Unplug" from whatever hinders you. Jesus said, "When thou prayest, enter into thy closet" (Matthew 6:6). A prayer closet is not necessarily a closet in your house, but a quiet place where you spend time alone with God.

GALBANUM (*gal-ba-num*): the bitter smell from this plant was used to repel harmful insects and poisonous reptiles. Yet, the bitter galbanum brought out the best smells of the other spices when they were mixed together. It represents the hard trials of life. We might unexpectedly lose a loved one, experience abusive situations, or suffer financial problems. We are tempted to let bitter feelings develop, but God wants us to bring those hard circumstances to Him. When Hannah "was in bitterness of soul" (1 Samuel 1:10), she did the right thing. She "prayed unto the LORD," and God answered her prayer. Romans 8:28 promises, "ALL things [including the bitter trials] work together for good to them that love God."

PURE FRANKINCENSE: this tree was bruised three times and then a spike was driven into it to collect the white frankincense. This points to Christ's suffering on the Cross. (He was "wounded" and "bruised"; Isaiah 53:5.) Only the priests could offer incense on the Altar. Because of Jesus' sacrifice, we can now pray directly to the Father ourselves. When placed on the coals of the Altar, frankincense did not immediately produce a fragrance. It took some time. Often, God seems not to hear our prayers. Daniel felt the same way. God promised Daniel, "Your words [prayers] were heard ... I have come in response to [because of] your words" (Daniel 10:12 *Amplified Bible*).

Prayers That Are Heard

The high priest placed incense on the Altar of Incense (Leviticus 16:12) along with coals from the Altar of Sacrifice. Through Jesus (our High Priest), our prayers are heard by our Heavenly Father. This is why we pray "in Jesus' name" (John 16:24). The incense recipe reveals the ingredients needed for effective prayer. Without it, the light in our life will go out (Golden Candlestick) and Bible reading will become dull (Table of Showbread). God is waiting to hear from you. Bring Him your prayers of love, thankfulness, as well as your tears and struggles. He is listening!



Bible Quiz



1. Following a recipe helps to make sure the food _____ and _____ the same every time.
2. What does the Altar of Incense being in the center of the first room teach us? _____
3. What do the four horns of the Altar represent? _____

4. Christ (the Great Physician) came to heal the _____ (Psalm 147:3).

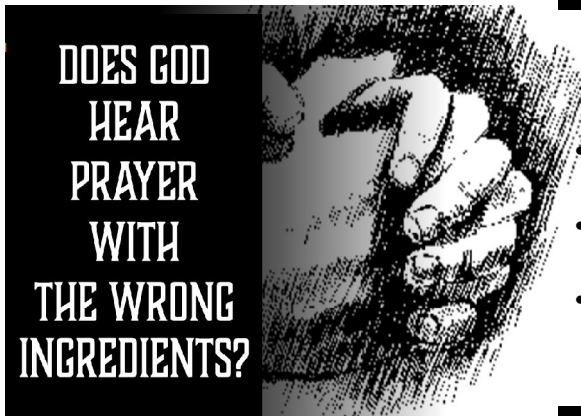
5. What is a "prayer closet"? _____

6. What does Romans 8:28 promise about "ALL things" (including the hard, bitter trials)? _____

7. How does the collection of frankincense point to Christ's suffering on the Cross? _____

8. What did God promise Daniel when it seemed his prayers were not being heard? _____

9. What two things did the high priest place on the Altar of Incense? _____



WRONG INGREDIENTS

- **SIN:** "Now we know that God heareth not sinners" (John 9:31).
- **MISTREATING PEOPLE:** "That your prayers be not hindered" (1 Peter 3:7).
- **ASKING FOR THINGS OUT OF GOD'S WILL:** "Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss" (James 4:3).

Recipe

Incense



Stacte



Onycha



Frankincense



Galbanum

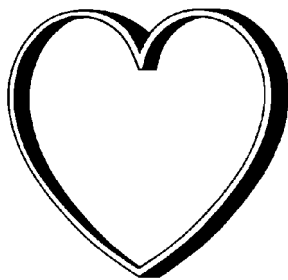
DRAW A LINE FROM THE INCENSE INGREDIENTS TO THE MATCHING INGREDIENTS NEEDED FOR PRAYER

Recipe

Prayer



Prayer Closet



A Holy Life



Take Bitterness & Hurt Feelings to God



Humbleness & Tears

"In the Old Testament, the New is hidden; in the New Testament, the Old lies open."