

Exodus 30:1

The Altar of Incense

“You shall make an altar to burn incense on; you shall make it of acacia wood.”

The book of Exodus not only tells the story of the building of the Tabernacle and its furnishing, it also serves as a wonderfully detailed illustration of the New Testament work of salvation. The altar serves as a portrait of the cross, which provides atonement for sin and access to God. Each of the remaining articles illustrate some aspect of our walk with God.

The incense altar was situated inside the first room of the tabernacle, and serves as a portrait of the beauty of prayer. Morning and evening the priest would bring incense to burn upon this altar, and the fragrance would rise up to the heavens. In the same way, when we take the time to lift our praise, petition and intercession to the Lord it rises up and fills the throne room of heaven like a sweet aroma.

Every adult in Israel, no matter how rich or poor, was required to bring a half shekel of silver as an offering for the sanctuary. By some estimates, the Tabernacle would have cost in excess of fifty million dollars. This was an impossible sum for any one man, but everyone could afford half of a shekel. This offering serves as a picture of the need for and value of faith. Our simple offering of trust in Christ is all that is required for us to receive the benefit of salvation. Just outside the door of the Tabernacle sat the bronze laver. It was a big bowl used by the priests to ceremonially wash themselves whenever they approached the tent. This cleansing is a picture of the importance of the Word of God. Jesus spoke of the Word as a cleansing agent in the life of the believer. Each time we open the Bible it is like taking a shower, and the dirt of living in a fallen world is washed away.

Finally, the priests were anointed with a fragrant oil. This oil symbolizes the work of the Holy Spirit that makes ministry possible. Before Jesus began His public ministry He was baptized with the Holy Spirit, and before the ministry of the church began the believers were also baptized with the Spirit. We see in Scripture that the work of the Lord is energized by the work of the Spirit on individuals. It is also worth noting, they were not to alter the fragrance. A false incense would not serve as a proper anointing oil. In the same way, we must be careful not to confuse hype and emotion with a work of the Spirit of God.

As we continue through Exodus, we will see more and more of these beautiful portraits of our relationship with the Lord. Keep in mind, Jesus said the entirety of the Bible testifies of Him. Pastor Jim