

Tabernacle Studies: The Golden Altar pt2

by Sydney Maxwell

The primary passage on this subject is Exodus 30:1-10, 34-38

Having looked at the features and function of the Golden Altar, (February T&T) we will conclude our meditation by considering the fragrance associated with this vital piece of tabernacle furniture.

The Fragrance of the Altar

This was the result of the incense being placed on the fire. The typical significance is explained in the following Scriptures: “Let my prayer be set forth before Thee as incense; and the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice” (Ps 141:2); “... having everyone of them harps and golden vials full of odours (incense) which are the prayers of saints” (Rev 5:8); “Wherefore He is able to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him, seeing He ever liveth to make intercession for them” (Heb 7:25); “In the midst of the church will I sing praise unto Thee” (Heb 2:12); “By Him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually” (Heb 13:15). The fragrant incense consisted of three sweet spices and frankincense. The names of the spices given in Exodus 30:34-38 are found only in this one passage in the entire Bible. The origin of the spices is very interesting:

a) **Stacte** – the sap of the Acacia tree which oozed through the bark in the spring in blood-red drops. After congealing, it was ground into powder. The Greek word used in Luke 22:44 for drops is “*THROMBOS*” which means to thicken, a lump or a dot of blood. In this spice the spiritual anguish of the Lord Jesus is brought before us.

b) **Onycha** – the ground-up crusts of a shellfish, native to the Red Sea. One meaning given for onycha is “to peel off by percussion of sound.” This would refer to the pounding of the waves which resulted in the breaking of the amber-like outer crusts of the onycha. Here we have the physical sufferings and death of the Lord Jesus brought before us.

c) **Galbanum** – this was the sap of the shrub called “ferula.” The bark of the tree was cut, and the sap which flowed out as a result was caught in

basins. After hardening, it was ground into perfume. One characteristic of the tree was the manner in which the sap still ran even after the wound was healed. Christ's wounds received on the Cross continue even today to send forth blessings to mankind. Here we have His resurrection and glorification brought before us.

These were combined with frankincense in equal parts to form the incense which is called "sweet" (v 7), "pure" (v 35), and "most holy" (v 36). And this is the incense which was placed upon the golden altar every morning and again every evening in fulfillment of the words of Exodus 30:7, 8, 36. Here the fire which had consumed the sacrifice on the brazen altar was now used to release the sweet savor to Jehovah. The figure is very clear: the blood put on the horns of the altar presents the full value of the work of Christ viewed in God's presence (Heb 9:11-12, 24-26). The value of that blood in all its freshness and fragrance is ever before the Throne as our Great High Priest appears there. The presence and power of Christ in the glory for us are the results of His finished work on the Cross.