

The Tabernacle

The Golden Altar - Part 1 - Introduction

Introduction

It is my thoughts that it is impossible to gain an understanding of the golden altar of incense without considering other matters connected with it. Because of the deep truths it symbolizes, we know we shall never grasp its fulness while in this body, and definitely not even in eternity, for since it symbolizes the work of our Lord the Lord Himself said, "No man knoweth the Son, but the Father" (Matt. 11:27). In other words, there are profound truths regarding the person and work of our Lord that only God can comprehend. Nevertheless, for us to enter a little into the slightest depths of its truths there needs to be a consideration of :

- a) The construction and purpose of the golden altar.
- b) The relevance of the golden altar to the Brazen altar.
- c) The incense that was placed upon it and its significance.
- d) The work and clothing of the High Priest relative to it.

The incense Altar and that associated with it is a multi-picture shadow of the Lord, but each part contributing to the glory of His person, work and petitioning. That is, the coals which were put on it indicated one truth, the incense another, the altar itself another, and the work of the priest another. What was the altar and its symbolism?

There are two pointers which lead us to an understanding of its purpose:

- a) It was to burn incense (Ex. 30:1, 7). This is very important due to fact that it is the only piece of furniture in the tabernacle in which there is given the reason for it before any details of its construction. In fact the expression, "To burn incense", is repeated three times (Ex. 30:1, 7-8).
- b) Another reason for its purpose is its connection with the Mercy Seat since it is recorded, "Where I will meet with thee" (Ex. 30:36). It is therefore evident that the foremost consideration is not the materials, while they are very important, but rather the twofold purpose for the altar. This then leads to several questions:
 - i) What was the incense to be burnt on the altar? (Ex. 30:34-38)
 - ii) What was the duration of the incense ascending? (Ex. 30:8)
 - iii) Where did the coals come from? (Lev. 16:12)
 - iv) What were the prohibitions from being burnt? (Ex. 30:9)
 - v) What were the prohibitions for it being used for personal delight? (Ex. 30:37-38)
 - vi) What was the Golden altar associated with? Intercession and prayer (Psa.141:2; Num. 16:16-18; Mal. 1:11; Rev. 5:8), On the day of atonement (Lev. 16:1-34).
- c) This Altar foreshadows the Lord who prays for us. He is our Intercessor, being associated with the meeting place (the Ark and Mercy Seat) between God and man (Ex. 30:6). This indicates the Lord as our Mediator.
- d) It is also noticeable that in its given order it is not given with the other pieces of furniture (Ex. 25:1-27:21). It is introduced after the institution of the priesthood (Ex. 28:1-29:46). This would indicate it had something to do with the priest.

The golden altar was a piece of furniture in the ancient Tabernacle. Without knowing anything about it, an individual can, and by its very name "Golden altar", understand it was connected with an offering. That which was offered on it was not an animal but incense, which coupled with coals from the brazen altar, pointed forward to the fragrance of the life of Christ rising before God. Because the incense was rising all through the day and throughout the night, it indicated the consistency of the fragrance of Christ before God. When the coals were added to the sweet incense, it resulted in a more abundant fragrance.

The incense which God prescribed was the only incense to be put on the altar and indeed, God specifies "no strange incense, no burnt-sacrifice, no meat-offering, and no drink-offering was to be put on it" (Ex. 30:9). However, man in his natural state, rejects the idea of being told what to do or not to do, consequently when Nadab and Abihu defied God, acting presumptuously, fire came from God and killed them (Lev. 10:1-2; Num. 16:35).

The construction of wood and gold indicated the glory of the man "Jesus". I say "glory" because of two truths:

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- a) In the Scriptures it is only false gods which is spoken of as being made with gold. The God of heaven is never in the Scriptures typified as gold. It is my understanding that God gives His interpretation of “gold” by use of the cherubim. In speaking about the cherubim of the mercy seat, in the Old Testament God specifically states they were gold (Ex. 25:18; 37:7), but in Hebrews the Holy Spirit of God describes them as “cherubims of glory” (Heb. 9:5).
- b) It has been stated that gold indicates deity and pure gold indicates essential deity. I cannot see this in the scriptures, for either deity is deity or it is not. There are not two levels of deity.

Its Descriptive Names

This piece of furniture is spoken of in six ways, being described as:

- a) The altar of incense (Ex. 30:27)
- b) The incense altar (Ex. 35:15)
- c) The altar of gold (Ex. 40:5)
- d) The golden altar (Ex. 39:38)
- e) Altar to burn incense (Ex. 30:1)
- f) Altar of sweet incense (Lev. 4:7)
- g) In Solomon's temple, it would appear that there was a new altar made for it is recorded, “And the whole house he overlaid with gold, until he had finished all the house: also the whole altar that was by the oracle he overlaid with gold” (1 Kgs. 6:22).

A Micro Comment On It As a Symbol

The incense altar and that associated with it is a multi-picture shadow of the Lord, but each part contributing to the glory of His person, work and petitioning. That is, the coals which were put on it indicated one truth; the incense another; the altar itself another; and the work of the priest another.

Its Shape

When God specifies four of anything it is always subdivided into either a three and a one, or a two and a two. For instance, in the meal offering there were four ingredients, fine flour, oil, salt, and frankincense. A careful reading will show that the priest took a handful of the fine flour, oil and salt, which was put on the altar, all the rest of the three ingredients were for himself. The fourth ingredient, “frankincense”, was all put on the altar, none of it was for the priest (Lev 2:2). In the Brazen altar it had four sides, three are specified one is not. With that in mind, it is interesting that in the golden altar one side is specified and three unspecified. The only side of the golden altar mentioned is the “right” side (Lk. 1:11).

**May God grant us good understanding as He, by His Holy Spirit, deigns to guide us into all truth.
John 16:13**

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