

The Tabernacle

The Golden Altar - Part 3 - Symbolism of The Altar

What The Golden Altar Was a Symbolized

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 his life arising before God. Because the incense was arising before God non stop, it indicated the consistency of the fragrance of His life 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 offering 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.

The Golden Altar Shadowed the Lord and His High Priestly Ministry

- 1) One of the magnificent truths connected with the “brazen altar“ is the base structure was wood indicating the Lord as a man. Wonderful to consider that the Man who suffered for our sins is still a man and is the only man with a human body in Heaven. By His entrance into Heaven, the spirit world, He has not only prepared the way for us (Jn. 14:2-3), but also became the only Forerunner in the scriptures (Heb. 6:20). Having gone into Heaven He is now able to function as our High Priest. Since there were priests on earth, the Lord could not function as such, He could only function as a High Priest after His ascension (Heb. 8:4).
- 2) The glory of the man “Jesus”
 - a) The Lord Jesus is unique in every way and consequently has a series of glories which are incomparable with all others. It is irrelevant whether it is a consideration of His person, power, pre-eminence, or positions. He is supreme. It matters not what officiating position man has, Christ is superior as Judge, High Priest, Deliverer, Sanctifier, Advocate and Saviour, none can equal Him.
- 2) Fundamentally, the golden altar was an instrument by which there was a constant fragrance arising to God. When the coals were added to the sweet incense it resulted in a more abundant fragrance. This was its only purpose, no strange incense, no burnt offering, no drink offering was to be put on it (Ex. 30:9). For the results of those who defied God and did so, fire came out from God (Lev. 10:1-2; Num. 16:35).
- 3) The combination of wood and gold indicated the glory of the man “Jesus”. I say “glory” because of two truths:
 - a) 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.
 - b) In the scriptures it is only false gods which are 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 cherubims 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).
- 4) The Lord is the only individual who has ever, is, or will ever live who is:
 - a) Perfectly impeccable in every aspect of His life (2 Cor. 5:21; 1 Pet. 2:22; 1 Jn. 3:5).
 - b) The only way of acceptance with God and admittance to God (Jn. 14:6).
 - c) The only One who is the theme of redemption in heaven (Rev. 5:3-14; 15:3).
 - d) The only One who fully revealed God and the Father (Jn. 1:18; 14:9).

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- e) The only One whose name has power with God (Jn. 14:13-14; 15:16).
- f) Is God, pre-determined and anointed Heir of all things, and to whom all will Head up (Heb. 1:2-3; Eph. 1:22; Col. 2:10; 1 Pet. 2:7).
- g) He is not only a High Priest but also a King (Heb. 7:1).
- h) He is the only one who knew what His work for God would be after his resurrection (Jn. 15:26; 16:7). He knew every aspect of life He experienced on earth was either a preparation for His high priestly work, for by them He was perfected (Heb. 2:10; 5:9). When our Lord was here, every release of an individual from the power of Satan (Mk. 5:9-15); His own defeat of the temptation of Satan (Matt. 4:1-11; Jn. 14:30); His breaking the power of Satan in resurrection foretold in prophetic picture (Matt. 12:40) and parable (Matt. 12:29); and in reality (Heb 2:14) were shadows and assurances of His future ultimate complete defeat of Satan (Rev. 20:10). Well, did Issac Watts write:

Join all the glorious names
Of wisdom, love, and power,
That mortals ever knew
That angels ever bore:
All are too poor to speak his worth,
Too poor to set my Saviour forth.

Great Prophet of My God,
My tongue would bless thy Name:
By Thee the joyful news
Of our salvation came,
The joyful news of sins forgiven,
Of Hell subdued and peace with heaven.

Jesus, my great High Priest,
Offered His blood and died;
My guilty conscience seeks
No sacrifice beside:
His powerful blood did once atone
And now it pleads before the throne.

The Going of The High Priest Into The Holy Place

The instructions for the Priest to go into the Holy Place were very clear, except we are not told how he was to bring all in, how he carried the censer with the burning coals, or how with his hands full he put the incense on the coals. Without any extra biblical data one would assume that there was some sort of a “cart” which would be pulled by his arm and on it the basin of blood and the censer.

- a) He could not go in without blood (Heb. 9:7).
- b) He had to have the burning coals of the altar in the censer (Lev. 16:12).
- c) He had to have his hands full of sweet incense (Lev. 16:12).

Standing in the Holy Place, a man alone with God, the High Priest put the incense on the coals and a cloud of incense arose before the Lord (Lev. 16:13). Then with his finger he sprinkled the blood upon the east side of the mercy seat and before it, seven times (Lev. 16:14).

From the burning incense there arose a cloud, thus it seems there were two clouds in that Holy Place. The cloud of the divine presence and the one from the incense.

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The Contrasts and Similarities Between The Two Altars

In the Tabernacle there were two pieces of furniture called “altar”, the “The Brazen Altar” and the “The Golden Altar”. By their structure and purpose they carried two different significances. The following is some of the contrasts and similarities between them:

Their Similarities

Brazen Altar	References	Golden Altar	References
Burn	Ex. 29:13	Burn	Ex. 30:1
The fire never to go out	Lev. 6:13	It was to be a perpetual incense	Ex. 30:8
Four horns	Ex. 27:2	Four horns	Ex. 37:25
Four Square	Ex. 27:1	Four Square	Ex. 30:2

Their Contrasts

Brazen Altar	References	Golden Altar	References
In the court	Ex. 40:29	In the holy Place	Ex. 40:26
Animals offered	Lev. chs. 1-6	Incense offered	Ex. 30:1

Significances

Brazen Altar	Golden Altar
Substitution	Intercession
Finished work of Christ	Unfinished work of Christ
Christ on the Cross	Christ in heaven
Christ as Saviour	Christ as Priest
My justification	My Sanctification
A past work	A present work
3 hours of darkness	Entire life of Christ

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Observe

While various pieces of the furniture of the Tabernacle were constructed of the same materials, yet by their usage they carry different lessons. For instance, the table, the altar of incense and the ark were all made of wood and gold but they carry different truths.

- a) The wood always shadows the humanity of Christ and the gold His glory.
- b) The ark indicates the man who was both God and man in that the gold was inside and outside the ark and it was the only piece of furniture like that. It indicated the man on this earth (it was not lifted up with legs as the table was) who always fulfilled the will of God. The three items in the ark were the law, which was a witness to the people's weakness and proneness to sin; Aaron's rod that budded was a witness to the people's rebellion against the exclusiveness to those the Lord chose as priests; and the manna was a witness to the people's satisfaction. Such was the perfections of the Lord that He never in all His earthly sojourn ever in any way rebelled against the will and ways of God. The table with the bread and the crown of gold was the place where the priests ate in fellowship with each other and the Lord. It foreshadowed the exalted Christ, the Bread of God, on whom we in fellowship with God can feast. Its highest antitype today is the Lord's Supper. It is ideally saints in fellowship with each other and the Father, can feast (muse and meditate) on the Lord.

Practical Consideration

When the High Priest carried the incense in His hands and then placed it on the burning coals, would there be left on his hands the fragrance of the incense? When we hold in our hands the holy emblems signifying the body and blood of the Lord, ought our hands have the aroma of the Lord upon all that we do?

When we approach God in thanksgiving, worship, supplication, confession, is there the sense of reverential awe and fear that there would have been with the ancient priest, or can the holy become common?

**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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