

# THE TABERNACLE

Day Four:

The Altar of Incense

Nadab and Abihu  
Offer Strange Fire

Leviticus 10:1-7

Introduction:

1. When one entered into the Holy Place, to the right stood the Table of Shewbread and to the left stood the Candlestick.
2. Straight ahead – before the veil that separated the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place – stood the Altar of Incense.
3. An altar was something on which an offering could be made by burning it with fire.
4. The Altar of Sacrifice was for offering animals as a burnt offering to God.
5. The Altar of Incense was for burning incense inside the Tabernacle.

## I. The Altar of Incense

- A. When one entered into the Holy Place, to the front stood the altar of incense – made of acacia wood covered with gold.
- B. The instructions for it are given in Exodus 30:1-10.
  1. It was to be 1½ feet long, 1½ feet wide, and 3½ feet tall.
  2. It was to have a border (or, crown) of gold around the top with a horn at each corner.
- C. It stood just before the veil that separated the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place.
- D. Incense was to be offered upon it by the High Priest every morning and evening.
- E. God specified the fire and incense that was to be used (Exodus 30:34-38).
- F. This symbolized the prayers of the faithful that ascend as smoke before the mercy seat of God (cf. Rev. 5:8; 8:3-4).

## II. The Symbolism of the Altar of Incense

- A. The burning of incense and the smoke created from it was a symbol of prayer.
- B. As the incense burned it gave off a sweet smell.
- C. The smoke drifted up from the altar and filled the room with a pleasant odor.
- D. The smoke also drifted behind the veil into the Most Holy Place where the Ark of the Covenant and the Mercy Seat were located.
- E. This was a physical way of demonstrating how prayer works.
- F. When a person prays, it is pleasing to God – just like the sweet odor of the incense (Psalm 141:2; Proverbs 15:8; Revelation 5:8).
- G. When a person prays, their prayer ascends up to the very throne of God – just like smoke from the altar (Revelation 8:3-4; Hebrews 4:16).
- H. A good example of this symbolism is the story of Zacharias in Luke 1:5-13.
  1. As a priest, he was serving in the Holy Place.
  2. He was burning incense at the Altar of incense when an angel appeared.
  3. The angel announced that his wife, Elisabeth, would have a son – John the Baptist.
  4. However, in verse 13, the angel said, “Thy prayer is heard.”
  5. Thus, the burning of incense symbolized the praying of Zacharias.

### III. Nadab and Abihu Offer Strange Fire

- A. A story that features the Altar of Incense is found in Leviticus 10:1-7.
- B. It teaches a very important lesson about obeying God's Word and worshipping Him as He commands.
- C. Nadab and Abihu were sons of Aaron, Moses' brother.
  - 1. Aaron was the first High Priest.
  - 2. His sons, including Nadab and Abihu, were the first Priests.
  - 3. Thus, they had the responsibility to serve in the Tabernacle.
- D. Nadab and Abihu had been blessed to approach very close to God when He appeared at Mount Sinai (Exodus 24:1-9).
- E. They had been blessed to be chosen out of all the nation of Israel to serve as priests (Exodus 28:1ff).
- F. However, in spite of their many blessings, they did not have a proper respect for the commands of God.
- G. They "offered strange fire before the LORD, which he commanded them not."
  - 1. The word "strange" means, "Foreign, alien, loathsome."
  - 2. The fire they offered was "strange" because it was not authorized by God.
  - 3. It was still fire, but the wrong kind – which God had not commanded.
  - 4. In fact, God had said **not** to offer strange fire upon His altar (Exodus 30:9).
- H. Because they disobeyed God, He sent fire from heaven upon them and they died.
- I. We must learn an important lesson from this story: We must give to God only what He has commanded and authorized.
  - 1. God has commanded one plan of salvation – *we must not change it.*
  - 2. God has commanded one type of bread for the Lord's Supper – *we must not change it.*
  - 3. God has commanded one type of drink for the Lord's Supper – *we must not change it.*
  - 4. God has commanded one type of music in worship – *we must not change it.*
- J. Whatever God commands in His Word, let us obey faithfully.