

# **From the Altar to Glory: The Altar of Incense: When Prayer Fills the Room A Spirit-Filled Journey Through the Temple Sanctuary**

**Dr. John Carmichael**

**[Exo 30:1-10 NASB95] 1 "Moreover, you shall make an altar as a place for burning incense; you shall make it of acacia wood. 2 "Its length [shall be] a cubit, and its width a cubit, it shall be square, and its height [shall be] two cubits; its horns [shall be] of one piece with it. 3 "You shall overlay it with pure gold, its top and its sides all around, and its horns; and you shall make a gold molding all around for it. 4 "You shall make two gold rings for it under its molding; you shall make [them] on its two side walls--on opposite sides--and they shall be holders for poles with which to carry it. 5 "You shall make the poles of acacia wood and overlay them with gold. 6 "You shall put this altar in front of the veil that is near the ark of the testimony, in front of the mercy seat that is over [the ark of] the testimony, where I will meet with you. 7 "Aaron shall burn fragrant incense on it; he shall burn it every morning when he trims the lamps. 8 "When Aaron trims the lamps at twilight, he shall burn incense. [There shall be] perpetual incense before the LORD throughout your generations. 9 "You shall not offer any strange incense on this altar, or burnt offering or meal offering; and you shall not pour out a drink offering on it. 10 "Aaron shall make atonement on its horns once a year; he shall make atonement on it with the blood of the sin offering of atonement once a year throughout your generations. It is most holy to the LORD."**

- Of all the furnishings in the Tabernacle, the Altar of Incense stood closest to the Holy of Holies. Every morning and every evening the priest offered incense before Yahweh. The fragrance continually rose upward as a symbol of worship, devotion, and intercession.
- The altar teaches us that God does not merely desire our service; He desires our fellowship. Before the veil was crossed, incense had to rise. Before glory was revealed, prayer had to fill the room.
- Today many believers desire public power without private prayer, ministry without intimacy, and revival without intercession. Yet throughout Scripture, every great move of God has been preceded by people who prayed until heaven touched earth.

**What happens when God's people become a praying people and allow the incense of worship and intercession to fill the room?**

**The Altar of Incense reveals several truths about prayer that every Spirit-filled believer must understand.**

## **I. Prayer Brings Us Near to the Presence of God**

- a. [Exo 30:6 NASB95] 6 "You shall put this altar in front of the veil that is near the ark of the testimony, in front of the mercy seat that is over [the ark of] the testimony, where I will meet with you."
- b. [Psa 141:2 NASB95] 2 May my prayer be counted as incense before You; The lifting up of my hands as the evening offering.
- c. The altar stood directly before the veil, the closest place to God's manifested presence before entering the Holy of Holies.
- d. Prayer is not merely presenting requests; it is drawing near to God Himself.
- e. Prayer is communion before it is communication. God's presence is the greatest reward of prayer. The closer we get to God, the clearer His voice becomes.
- f. Application: Establish a daily prayer time. Prioritize God's presence above merely receiving answers.
- g. Learn to linger in worship rather than rushing through prayer.

## **II. Prayer Releases the Ministry of the Holy Spirit**

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- a. [Rom 8:26-28 NASB95] 26 In the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for [us] with groanings too deep for words; 27 and He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He intercedes for the saints according to [the will of] God. 28 And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to [His] purpose.
- b. The priest could not create incense from ordinary ingredients. God prescribed a holy mixture. Likewise, effective prayer is empowered by the Holy Spirit.
- c. When we reach the limits of human understanding, the Spirit helps us pray according to the will of God.
- d. The Holy Spirit strengthens our weakness. Praying in tongues allows Spirit-led prayer beyond human limitations. Intercession becomes powerful when partnered with the Spirit.
- e. The connection between intercession (v.26-27) and “all things...work together for good” (v.28) is undeniable.
- f. Application: Spend time praying in the Spirit daily. Yield your prayer life to the leadership of the Holy Spirit. Trust God even when you do not fully understand what He is doing.

### **III. Prayer Is Spiritual Warfare That Moves Heaven and Earth**

- a. [Rev 8:3-5 NASB95] 3 Another angel came and stood at the altar, holding a golden censer; and much incense was given to him, so that he might add it to the prayers of all the saints on the golden altar which was before the throne. 4 And the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, went up before God out of the angel's hand. 5 Then the angel took the censer and filled it with the fire of the altar, and threw it to the earth; and there followed peals of thunder and sounds and flashes of lightning and an earthquake.
- b. In Revelation, the prayers of the saints rise before God as incense. Immediately afterward, heaven responds with thunder, lightning, and divine activity.
- c. Prayer is not passive; it is powerful.
- d. Prayer confronts darkness. Prayer opens doors that human effort cannot open. Prayer releases God's purposes into the earth. The enemy fears a praying church because prayer invites God's intervention.
- e. Application: Pray over your family, church, community, and nation. Refuse to surrender battles to discouragement or fear. Turn anxiety into intercession.

### **IV. Prayer Creates an Atmosphere for God's Miracles**

- a. [Luk 1:8-13 NASB95] 8 Now it happened [that] while he was performing his priestly service before God in the [appointed] order of his division, 9 according to the custom of the priestly office, he was chosen by lot to enter the temple of the Lord and burn incense. 10 And the whole multitude of the people were in prayer outside at the hour of the incense offering. 11 And an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing to the right of the altar of incense. 12 Zacharias was troubled when he saw [the angel,] and fear gripped him. 13 But the angel said to him, "Do not be afraid, Zacharias, for your petition has been heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you will give him the name John.
- b. While incense was being offered in the Temple, an angel appeared to Zacharias with a message that would change history.
- c. The atmosphere of prayer became the setting for divine visitation.

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- d. Throughout Scripture: Pentecost happened in a prayer meeting. Breakthroughs happened in prayer meetings. Revival was birthed in prayer meetings.
- e. God often speaks where prayer is prioritized.
- f. Application: Be faithful in corporate prayer gatherings. Participate in preservice prayer. Expect God to move when believers gather to seek Him.

**V. Prayer Prepares Us for the Glory Beyond the Veil**

- a. [Heb 10:19-22 NASB95] 19 Therefore, brethren, since we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus, 20 by a new and living way which He inaugurated for us through the veil, that is, His flesh, 21 and since [we have] a great priest over the house of God, 22 let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled [clean] from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.
- b. [Rev 5:8 NASB95] 8 When He had taken the book, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each one holding a harp and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints.
- c. The Altar of Incense was the final piece before the Holy of Holies.
- d. Prayer prepares hearts for deeper encounters with God. Prayer softens hearts. Prayer aligns our will with God's will. Prayer positions us for greater manifestations of God's presence.
- e. The pathway to glory still passes through the prayer room.
- f. Application: Develop consistency rather than occasional intensity. Make prayer your first response instead of your last resort. Pursue intimacy with God above platform, position, or recognition.

- **Prayer is not empty religious smoke; it is holy incense that fills heaven, moves earth, and prepares the way for glory.**
- The Altar of Incense reminds us that prayer is not a religious obligation—it is a holy privilege. The fragrance of worship and intercession rises before God continually.
- If we want fresh fire, fresh power, and fresh glory, we must return to the altar of incense.
- Before there is public breakthrough, there must be private incense.
- Before there is glory in the sanctuary, there must be prayer in the secret place.