

The Tabernacle

The Golden Altar - Part 2- The Construction

The Materials

Summary of the parts of the incense altar and significance:

- a) It is recorded that men are viewed as “trees” (Josh. 9:8-14; Isa. 61:3; Dan. 4:23; Mk. 8:24; Jude 1:12; Rev. 11:4). On reading these passages it is then to be understood the wood of the altar, table, ark all indicate some aspect of the humanity of our Lord. The gold indicates glory (Ex. 25:18; Heb. 9:5). Since the altar was made of wood and gold it indicates the glory of the man Jesus. There was also a crown of gold thus indicating the majestic glory of Jesus. In the scriptures the “horn” is indicator of “power” (Deut. 33:17-18), deliverance from enemies (Lk. 1:69-74), and a firm foundation (Psa. 18:2). Therefore, putting them all together, the construction of the altar indicates a man of glory who is majestic (kingly), and (by the four horns) universal dominion and glory.

1) Acacia Wood

- a) It is called “shittim” with the “im” indicating plurality, i.e.; Cherubim, seraphim, and the word means tangled thickets into which the trunk expands. It is a thorny wood, very hard and durable, and is called the uncorrupting or undecaying wood in the Septuagint. It is a wood of the desert, and in this respect shadows the Lord as: “A Root out of a dry ground” (Isa. 53:2). If we consider it as a picture of ourselves, how wonderful that God can take people as twisted and devious as we, filled with the evidence of sin (the thorns), and make us something beautiful for God.
- b) The word “shittim” comes from a root word which means to pierce, and the root word is translated “scourges” (Josh. 23:13). Thus, it foreshadows the Lord who was scourged and pierced (Matt. 27:26; Mk. 15:15; Jn. 19:1, 34; Zech. 12:10; Psa. 22:16; Rev. 1:7).
- c) While shittim wood does indicate humanity, “wood” indicates a particular category of humanity:
 - i) Nebuchadnezzar was viewed as a tree, that is wood (Dan. 4:10); Pharaoh (Ezek. 31:10); the Assyrian (Ezek. 31:3-7).
 - ii) The interesting observation is that all three were mighty kings! That which we have here in this avenue of thought is that Christ, the great King (Matt. 5:35; Rom. 15:12; Rev. 11:15), lived as a King over temptation and sin. When applied to us, we reign in life, therefore Paul wrote, “Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body” (Rom. 6:12), we are kings unto God (Rom. 5:17; 6:12; 2 Tim. 2:12).

2) Gold

- a) Gold, as with other metals in the scriptures, carries a number of significances depending on the context.
 - i) Preeminence: In Genesis the river (Gen. 2:10) is divided into four and at the end of one of them was gold. It is the first metal mentioned in the scriptures (Gen. 2:11), thus indicative of preeminence.
 - ii) Preciousness: When the Holy Spirit refers to the gold at the end of the river, He says: “The gold of that land is good” (Gen. 2:12). The Hebrew word translated “good” is also translated:
 1. Precious, as in ointment (Psa. 133:2); a name (Ecc. 7:1); persons (Lam. 4:2).
 2. Beautiful, as with Abigail (1 Sam. 25:3); Esther (Est. 2:7); Bathsheba (2 Sam. 11:2); and the feet of those who spread the gospel (Isa. 52:7).
 3. Our Lord is picturesquely spoken of as the “altogether lovely” (Song of Sol. 5:16).
 - iii) Governmental Authority:
 1. Joseph was arrayed in gold and fine linen (Gen. 41:42).
 2. Mordecai, the man whom the King delighteth to honor, was clothed in gold, fine linen, and purple (Est. 8:15).
 3. The kings of Midian were clothed in purple and gold (Jud. 8:26).
 4. David has a crown of pure gold set on his head (1 Chron. 20:2).

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5. Solomon sits on a throne of gold (2 Chron. 9:17).
- iv) Pledge:
 1. Of future enrichment. When the servant came to the well and saw the young woman at her home, he gave her earrings and bracelets of gold which were an indicator of enrichment to come (Gen. 24:22).
- v) Glory:
 1. The cherubim of gold (Ex. 25:18), but in Hebrews it is the cherubim of glory (Heb. 9:5).
 2. The New Jerusalem was pure gold, and she had the glory of God (Rev. 21:11, 18).
- vi) Purity:
 1. "He knoweth the way that I take: when He hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold" (Job 23:10).
 2. "The trial of your faith, being much more precious than gold" (1 Pet. 1:7).
- vii) Purchasing:
 1. David bought the field from Ornan for 600 shekels of gold (1 Chron. 21:25).
 2. "Ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold" (1 Pet. 1:18).
- viii) Wisdom of Speech:
 1. "A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in pictures of silver. As an earring of gold, and an ornament of fine gold, so is a wise reprovew upon an obedient ear" (Prov. 25:11-12).
- ix) Clothing
 1. "The Queen stands in gold of Ophir" (Psa. 45:9, 13).

The Size

The incense altar was quite small but big enough for its intended use. God is very practical for He gave commands relative to each so that it was perfectly suited to its purpose. Lifting it to the spiritual level, God fits each of us for the work He has for us to do. I recall my father telling me that, "God will never give you a work He has not prepared you for".

- a) It is impossible to tell exactly the size of the altar or most of the furnishings of the Tabernacle for the cubit had three different measurements and we do not know which was used. It would be similar to us today having "knots, Kilometres and distance miles". If someone was to say the distance from Vancouver to Edmonton is 1000 and them not only knowing which one of the three was being used, how would they know the actual distance? What we do know exactly which cubit was used for is that the cubit ranged from approximately 18-23 inches. If the average priest was our average height, then the best measurement would be 18 inches, which would make the altar the same height as the stove in our homes. It would be 18 inches square.

The Crown

One aspect of the glory of the Lord's Priesthood is that it is associated with Kingship. He is both Priest and King.

- a) King Uzziah was one of the good kings of Israel. However, on one occasion he made a bad error in judgment. It is recorded that despite the protests from the priests he determined to go into the sanctuary with the censer to burn incense. God had made it clear that the kingship belonged to Judah and the house of David whereas the priesthood belonged to the tribe of Levi. No one of Levi was to sit on the throne of Israel or was any king permitted to go into the holy Temple's sanctuary. Uzziah defied God and went in,

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and at that moment God smote him with leprosy (2 Chron. 26:16-21). What is not considered is, “What if Christ was a priest but not the king of righteousness and peace, or what if He was King of righteousness and peace but not a priest? In other words, “Why do I need Him to be a King-Priest?

- i) To be a righteous King and Priest but not a High Priest who could make atonement, would leave me convicted of my failings and sins with no peace in my soul.
 - ii) To have a priest who could make atonement but was not righteous in Himself and at perpetual peace with God would leave me without a perfect salvation.
 - iii) To have a priest who was short tempered or moody etc., would sympathizing have me avoiding him and approaching God.
 - iv) To have a King who was righteous but void of sympathizing succouring would leave me despondent.
 - v) The main emphasis is not on His kingship but His priesthood.
- b) The provision of the Most High God was far superior than the accumulations of earth. Compare, “He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?” (Rom. 8:32). What are the transient accumulations of earth, whither it is in possessions, position, prestige compared to eternal glory, or the assurance that all sins are forgiven and we have peace with God?

The Staves and Rings

These were simply the practical means by which to convey the altar from one place to another. However, they do convey to us that the Lord is our functioning High Priest irrespective of where we are on this wilderness trail. It must not be thought that the Sinai desert was a flat sandy beach like place. God describes it as a “waste howling wilderness” (Deut. 32:10). Sometimes the pathway was flat and sometimes had deep mountain sides as they journeyed through deep ravines. Probably four men carried the altar on their shoulders. Thank God we do not have four men carrying a piece of furniture, or four earth bound men praying for us who themselves needed prayer. We have a real man in Heaven ever interceding for us.

The Censer

The word “censer” is mentioned seven times in the scriptures (Lev. 10:1; 16:12; Num. 16:17, 18, 46; 2 Chron. 26:19; Ezek. 8:11). The plural occurs 8 times (Num. 4:14; 16:6, 17, 37, 38, 39; 1 Kgs. 7:50; 2 Chron. 4:22). Of all these references only one of them has reference to the golden altar. The Hebrew word translated “censer” is also translated as “snuffdishes” (Ex. 25:38; 37:23; Num. 4:9); “fire-pans” (Ex. 27:3; 38:3; 2 Kgs. 25:15; Jer. 52:19). Therefore, there is only one distinct reference either in Hebrew or English to a censer being connected to the golden altar.

Our first observation is it is only on one occasion the censer is mentioned in the Holy Place. That was on the Day of Atonement of which we read, “And he (the High priest) shall take a censer full of burning coals of fire from off the altar before the LORD, and his hands full of sweet incense beaten small, and bring it within the veil: And he shall put the incense upon the fire before the LORD, that the cloud of the incense may cover the mercy seat that is upon the testimony, that he die not” (Lev. 16:12-13). This has resulted in much discussion and questioning. For consideration I make the following suggestions:

- a) Within the context of Hebrews the ancient writer is dealing with the Day of Atonement, consequently, I fail to see any difficulties. The Scriptures inform the readers, “and the high priest (that is Aaron) shall take a censer for burning coals of fire from all the altar before the Lord and his hands full of sweet incense beaten small and bring it within the veil” (Lev. 16:12). From that it is evident the censer represented the golden altar just as the coals on it represented the fire from the brazen altar.
- b) Furthermore, God is very practical and since there were staves on two rings of the golden altar, it is clear two men were needed to carry it. Now, since the priest was the only one allowed into the holiest of all,

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there could be no other man with him to assist in carrying the altar. As I said, two items, the censer with the incense and the coals represented both the truths of both altars.

- c) By means of the censor coals were carried into the holiest, and then with this handful of incense joined them together causing a sweet fragrance to rise before the throne.
- d) Regarding it's actual shape we know nothing, but due to the same Hebrew word being used for fire-pans and snuffdishes I would think it was a covered vessel, possibly bowl shaped, but we cannot be dogmatic.
- e) God also gave strict instructions as to what was to be put on the golden altar (Ex. 30:9) yet Nadab and Abihu offered strange fire and were immediately struck dead by fire from God (Lev. 10:1-2). This showed that it was a very serious matter to come before the Living God in any way not appointed by Himself. Wherever they got the fire from, it was not from the Brazen Altar else it would never have been called "strange fire". The Hebrew word indicates that which is profane. It was an indication that in heart these two men had gone from God and gone their own way.
- f) On the practical level this begs the question, "would the fragrance of the incense be on the hands of the high priest since he carried it"? Then, if we handle the bread and a cup, are not our hands to have the aroma of the fragrance of Christ?

**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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