

(1) The altar of incense

• *Smaller, square top and covered in gold*

• *Located close to the veil*

• *Morning and evening offering*

• *Symbolises prayer*

• *Fulfilment – the praying of Jesus*

(2) The census tax

• *Payment of a half-shekel ransomed the first-born – so avoiding human sacrifice*

• *The law illustrates the idea of ‘ransoming’*

Now we have (1) a description of **the altar of incense**^{□1}, which we might have expected earlier. It was a smaller altar than the large one out in the courtyard. The basic structure was made from wood. It was two cubits high. Its top was a square with sides of one cubit. It was carved so that the projections of the altar, called the ‘horns’, were all of one piece with the rest^{□2}. It was entirely covered with gold and had gold rings so that it could be carried without being touched^{□3}. The carrying poles were also gold-covered^{□4}.



The altar of incense

The altar was to be positioned very near the curtain belonging to the holy of holies^{□1}. Many commentators think that Hebrews 9:14 puts the altar of incense **inside** the veil. Actually this is not quite true. It depends how you translate Hebrews 9:14. Strictly it says that the inner court ‘has’ the altar of incense. What this probably means is that the altar was so close to the veil that one could think of it as belonging more to the inner court than the outer one. It is because of its closeness to the veil that we may say the holy of holies ‘has’ it. But Hebrews 9:14 does **not** actually (in a literal translation) put the altar of incense inside the veil.

The altar of incense was used for offering incense every morning and every evening^{□1}. Not much else was done with it, but once a year on the day of atonement, blood was sprinkled on it^{□2□3}.

The altar of incense symbolizes prayer. But it is not **our** praying that is symbolized; it represents someone else praying for us. In the laws of Moses it represents the intercessions of the whole sacrificial system. The sacrifices and ceremonies of the priests spoke of our approaching God through something that God was doing for us to make it possible for us to get near to Him.

In its fulfilment the altar of incense represents the praying of Jesus. The incense was offered to God daily, morning and evening. So Jesus presents requests concerning us daily to His heavenly Father.

Our next paragraph speaks of (2) **the census tax**^{□1}. The people would soon be listed. It is possible but not certain that the first chapter of Numbers records the occasion (although the counting in Numbers 1 focuses only on soldiers). Every first-born son should theoretically be sacrificed to Yahweh^{□2}. This was a symbol of the fact that the **whole** of Israel was like a firstborn son to God^{□3}. But the firstborn sons could not actually be sacrificed, because human sacrifice was not allowed in the law of Moses. So the sacrifice was changed into a payment. Each Israelite paid a half-shekel and ransomed himself for Yahweh^{□4}. God should punish the people if every first-born son were not sacrificed to Yahweh. But an atonement, a ‘covering’ of the guilt so that it no longer had any existence, was provided by the payment of the half-shekel. **The law illustrates the idea of ‘ransoming’.** Sinners have forfeited their life and should be punished; Jesus ‘ransoms’ us from judgement by the price- paying of His death upon the cross.

□1 30:1-10

□2 30:1-2

□3 30:3-4

□4 30:5

□1 30:6

□1 30:7-9

□2 30:10

□3 Leviticus

16:1-34;

23:26-32

□1 30:11-16

□2 13:13

□3 4:22

□4 30:11-12

Soon everyone is to be counted^{□1}, everyone will pay a half-shekel, and the money will go to the work of the tabernacle.

□1 30:13

(3) The bronze laver

• Illustrates cleaning

Next (3) we have **the bronze laver**^{□1}. It was placed in the courtyard between the tabernacle and the large altar^{□2}. The high-priest and the priests had to wash their hands and feet in it before entering the tabernacle^{□3}. There can be no fellowship with God, not even symbolical fellowship, unless the sins that make us feel so guilty are cleansed. What the priests had done, and where they had gone – their hands and their feet – needed washing before they were ready for the holy work of God.

□1 30:17-21

□2 30:17-18

□3 30:19-21



The bronze laver

(4) Instruction concerning the anointing oil

• A pleasant fragrance – enabling and commissioning by God

Next (4) is **instruction concerning the anointing oil**^{□1}. There were four ingredients: myrrh, cinnamon, calamus and cassia^{□2}. They were added to the olive oil to give it a sweet and attractive fragrance.

□1 30:22-33

□2 30:22-25

It is probably a mistake to over-interpret each ingredient and each figure mentioned here. The overall point is that the anointing oil had a pleasant fragrance, and spoke of enablement and commissioning by God.

The various parts of the sacrificial system all had to be anointed with oil: the tent itself, the ark^{□1}, the three items of furniture in the holy place^{□2}, the two items outside in the courtyard^{□3}. They all became sacred to God. If a priest touched them he too was sacred to God^{□4}. Then the priests themselves were anointed also^{□5}. The oil was never to be used for any other purpose^{□6}. Anyone who misused oil of similar composition would be cut off from the people of Israel^{□7}.

□1 30:26

□2 30:27

□3 30:28

□4 30:29

□5 30:30

□6 30:31-32

□7 30:33

(5) Instruction concerning the incense for the small altar of incense

• A reminder that we live on the never-failing, never-ending, intercession of Jesus

The last item in this chapter is (5) **instruction concerning the incense for the small altar of incense**^{□1}. Three spices were mixed in incense in equal proportions. Salt was added^{□2}. It was kept inside the tabernacle^{□3}. Again it was never to be used for any other purpose^{□4}. Anyone who misused incense of similar composition would be cut off from the people of Israel^{□5}. The composition of the incense guaranteed a sweet fragrance. It is a reminder to the Christian that what God finds sweet and pleasant is petition to Him. The people of God who were near to the tabernacle could constantly smell this sweet fragrance. It reminded them that their entire lives were dependent on the intercession of a great high-priest. In the same way the sweetest part of the Christian gospel is our knowledge that we live on the never-failing, never-ending, intercession of Jesus.

□1 30:34-38

□2 30:34-35

□3 30:36

□4 30:37

□5 30:38



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