

# THE INCENSE

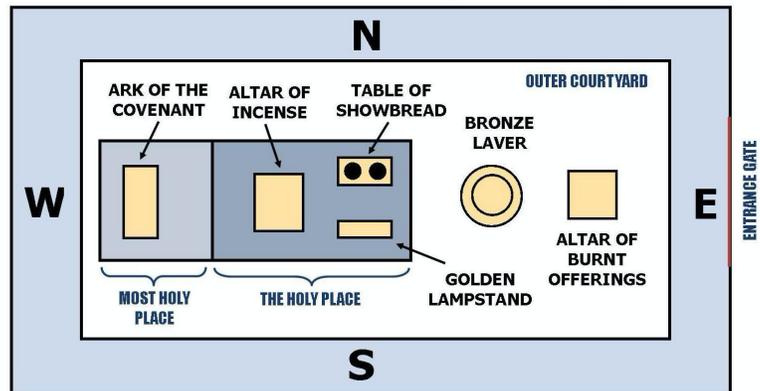
## FACILITATOR GUIDE

**Exodus 30:1**— You shall make an altar on which to burn incense; you shall make it of acacia wood.

With those words, Moses was given the next set of instructions for the next piece of furniture to be placed in the Tabernacle—the Altar of Incense.

It wasn't the biggest piece in the Tabernacle, but what took place there was full of more power than even the priest understood.

THE TABERNACLE OF MOSES (EXODUS 35-40)



### What the Priest Did

**Exodus 30:7-8**—And Aaron shall burn fragrant incense on it. Every morning when he dresses the lamps he shall burn it, 8 and when Aaron sets up the lamps at twilight, he shall burn it, a regular incense offering before the Lord throughout your generations

### The Incense

**Exodus 30:34-38**— The Lord said to Moses, “Take sweet spices, stacte, and onycha, and galbanum, sweet spices with pure frankincense (of each shall there be an equal part), 35 and make an incense blended as by the perfumer, seasoned with salt, pure and holy. 36 You shall beat some of it very small, and put part of it before the testimony in the tent of meeting where I shall meet with you. It shall be most holy for you. 37 And the incense that you shall make according to its composition, you shall not make for yourselves. It shall be for you holy to the Lord. 38 Whoever makes any like it to use as perfume shall be cut off from his people.”



The burning incense would have been a sweet smell that filled The Holy Place while the priest prayed and conducted his daily tasks. While burning incense was a duty performed at the Altar, the main work done there was **PRAYER**.

The incense used in The Holy Place was a special concoction. The recipe was created by God Himself. The ingredients were a closely-guarded secret, passed down from generation to generation within one certain Levite family who was put in charge of its production.

Jewish historians reported that one of the secret ingredients used would cause the smoke to rise straight up in a column. It was believed that prayers said at the Altar of Incense would attach themselves to the smoke and rise up directly before God.

**Do you burn candles, essential oils, or wax fragrances in your home? If so, why?**

**Have you ever had a “smell” that triggered a memory?**

**What are some of your favorite “smells?”**

**Think about your most favorite smell. What thought does that aroma trigger for you?**

**What thoughts do you think the smell of the incense triggered for the priests? [It's time to pray. Their thoughts would be on God. They would remember the needs of the people as they interceded for them to God. Maybe it would remind them that God is listening closely to what they have to say. It would give a feeling of reverence or sacredness.]**

Only a few of its ingredients are mentioned by name in the Scripture. Let's look at those for a moment.

- **Stacte** (stack-tee) is collected from a myrrh tree. The tree is bruised and an incision is cut. The sap comes out slowly one drop at a time and is collected like liquid tears. **[This is a shadow of Christ on the tree. He was bruised and cut for our redemption. Remember, this was one of the gifts brought to baby Jesus by the Wise Men.]**
- **Galbanum** (gal-bum-um) is known as the “things are going to get better” essential oil. **[“Things are going to get better.” Now that's a reminder that we all need! ]**
- **Frankincense** is known to have many healing benefits, from improved arthritis and digestion to reduced asthma and better oral health. It has a woody, spicy smell. **[This, too, was one of the gifts brought to baby Jesus. Perhaps it was a foreshadowing of His healing ministry.]**
- **Onycha** (On-a-kuh) is used as a perfume and as an ointment to heal skin wounds. It is collected as sap from the benzoin tree. Many of us are familiar with benzoyl peroxide used to heal skin blemishes.

**Do these ingredients say anything to you about prayer? [God is certainly interested in your healing. And it is okay to pray for all manner of healing. When you pray, believe**

that “things are going to get better.” We know that our prayers are only made possible by Jesus who grew up to accomplish the will of His Father by being the sacrifice for our salvation. ]

## **DISTRACTION: THE ENEMY OF PRAYER**

**Psalm 46:10a** —Be still, and know that I am God.

**How difficult is it for you to spend quiet time with God daily?**

**What are the things that prohibit you from being still? [Job, family, chores, sleep, etc.]**

**Luke 10:38-42**—Now as they went on their way, Jesus entered a village. And a woman named Martha welcomed Him into her house. And she had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord’s feet and listened to His teaching. But Martha was distracted with much serving. And she went up to Him and said, “Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her then to help me.” But the Lord answered her, “Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her.”

**What was the thing that had Martha distracted? [housework, serving]**

**Was what she was doing anything bad? [No, in fact, it was considered admirable to be a good hostess to your houseguests.]**

**What was wrong with Martha’s service?**

**1. She mistook a SERVANT’S HEART with a PRODIGAL ATTITUDE.**

A true servant wants to use their gifts for the glory of God.

A prodigal is one who feels they have an excuse not to participate.

**How can we fall into this trap today? [When we place more emphasis on what we DO in church over worshiping and focusing on God, we can get out of balance. Serving in the church is of utmost importance, but you need to maintain a healthy balance. If you have a tendency to ONLY attend church on the Sundays that you are serving, something may be out of balance in your life. Some people can use their service to the church as an excuse to avoid those most intimate moments with God. ]**

**2. She believed the lie that more WORK makes you more HOLY.**

This is a lie from Satan. If he can get you to believe that doing more can make you a Christian, he will work you to death! In doing so, he will keep you distracted from having

a closer relationship with God. The work you do may be good, but again, you must keep a balance. Martha's imbalance showed itself in her verbal comparison of her hard work to her sister's lack of service.

### **How's this for a distraction...**

**1 Samuel 17:3-4,10-11, 16** —The Philistines were standing on one hill, and the Israelites were standing on another hill with a ravine between them. 4 Then a champion named Goliath, from Gath, came out from the Philistine camp. .... 10 Then the Philistine said, "I defy the ranks of Israel today. Send me a man so we can fight each other!" 11 When Saul and all Israel heard these words from the Philistine, they lost their courage and were terrified.

16 Every morning and evening for forty days the Philistine came forward and took his stand.

**When did giant Goliath come out and rail against the Israelites? [Every morning and every evening]**

**When was the time of prayer and incense for Israel? [Every morning and every evening]**

**What happened to Saul and the whole army of Israel when they listened to what the enemy said instead of focusing on God during their prayer time? [v11 "they lost their courage and were terrified."]**

**Why does the devil want to keep you distracted from your prayer time? [So you will grow more and more discouraged and fearful. ]**

## **BEFORE THE PRESENCE OF GOD**

The Day of Atonement was the one day that the High Priest could enter into the Holy of Holies and stand and pray before the Ark of the Covenant and the Mercy Seat. The Presence of God would have been strong in that room. God's Presence would have been visible in the form of a cloud on the Mercy Seat. This one day would have been the grand highlight of the year for the High Priest. It was an honor.

It was also a risk. If he should enter the Holy of Holies with sin in his life or in the wrong way, he could be struck dead.

**Leviticus 16:2**— The Lord said to Moses, "Tell your brother Aaron that he may not come whenever he wants into the holy place behind the curtain in front of the mercy seat on the ark or else he will die, because I appear in the cloud above the mercy seat.

Oral Jewish tradition teaches that the High Priest spent hours in constant prayer before entering into the Holy of Holies. To help keep him awake and keep his mind focused on prayer, he took two or three priests with him.

Now flash forward to the night before Jesus was crucified:

**Mark 14:32-34**—Then they came to a place named Gethsemane, and He told His disciples, “Sit here while I pray.” 33 He took Peter, James, and John with Him, and He began to be deeply distressed and troubled. 34 He said to them, “I am deeply grieved to the point of death. Remain here and stay awake.”

Before Jesus entered back into the Presence of His Father, He spent hours praying just as the High Priest did. **SPOILER ALERT:** Three times that night, Jesus found His friends sleeping. Sleep can also be another distraction that keeps us from following through with our prayers.

**What might Jesus’ actions say to us about our need for prayer? [If Jesus needed to pray, then most assuredly, we do too.]**

Intense prayer preceded the priest taking the step through the curtain into the Presence of God. Intense prayer also preceded Jesus taking the next step to fulfill the Father’s Will.

**What might this tell us about going to a new level in our relationship with God? [Before going deeper with God, we should spend some effort in intense prayer, seeking God’s wisdom and strength.]**

The purpose of the High Priest entering into the Holy of Holies was to intercede on behalf of the people. But on this side of the cross, who is the one who pleads our case to God?

**Hebrews 9:11-12**— So Christ has now become the High Priest over all the good things that have come. He has entered that greater, more perfect Tabernacle in heaven, which was not made by human hands and is not part of this created world. 12 With His own blood—not the blood of goats and calves—He entered the Most Holy Place once for all time and secured our redemption forever.

**Romans 8:34**—Who is going to convict them? It is Christ Jesus who died, even more, who was raised, and who also is at God’s right side. It is Christ Jesus who also pleads our case for us.

**Who is our High Priest? [Jesus]**

**Where is He now? [Seated at the right hand of God.]**

**And what is His purpose to be there? [To plead our case before God. When we mess up and ask for forgiveness, He turns to God and says, “It’s okay, go ahead and forgive him/her. I shed blood for them. I’m okay with you giving them another chance.”]**