



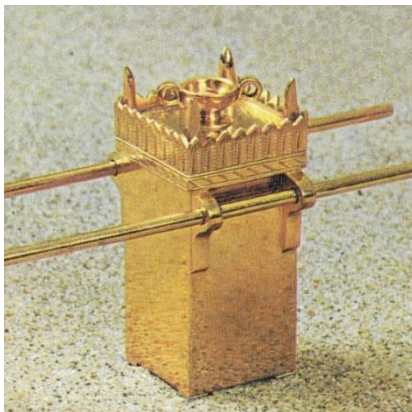
The **fifth** study in this series describes what it means when the priest/disciple enters the **Holy Place** of the tabernacle, through the second curtain, and encounters Jesus therein as the **Light**, borne by the **lampstand**.<sup>1</sup>

The **sixth** part describes the meaning of the **second** symbol in the Holy Place, Jesus as the **bread** that is laid on the **display table** and is enlightened by the light on the lampstand.<sup>2</sup>

In this **seventh** and last part, the priest in the order of Melchizedek finally comes to stand before the **altar of incense** in the **Holy Place**. Here he/she stands in the immediate vicinity of **God the Father**, who is enthroned in the **Most Holy Place** above the cherubim on the atonement covering of the **ark**.

### The altar of incense.

The altar of incense was also made according to God's instructions:



- *Make an altar of acacia wood for burning incense. It is to be square, a cubit long and a cubit wide, and two cubits high - its horns of one piece with it. Overlay the top and all the sides and the horns with pure gold, and make a gold molding around it. (Exodus 1:1-3)*

The altar of incense was 45 cm square and 90 cm high. It too was provided with poles, each made of acacia wood and covered with **pure (sterling) gold**. It was **most holy** to God. In Hebrew, Exodus 30:10 speaks of the altar of incense being holy, holy, and 2 x holy thus.

The expression **holy, holy** is always translated as **most holy**. (NIV translation)

The altar of incense stood before the third curtain, called the **veil**, which separated the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place.

- *Put the altar in front of the curtain that shields the ark of the covenant law ... (Exodus 30:6)*

According to Exodus 30:7-9 it was the high priest who was to bring incense to this altar.

- *Aaron must burn fragrant incense on the altar every morning when he tends the lamps. He must burn incense again when he lights the lamps at twilight so incense will burn regularly before the Lord for the generations to come. Do not offer on this altar any other incense or any burnt offering or grain offering, and do not pour a drink offering on it. (Exodus 30:7-9)*

According to 1 Chronicles 6:49 this was also one of the duties of the priests.

- *But **Aaron and his descendants** were the ones who presented offerings on the altar of burnt offering and on the altar of incense in connection with all that was done in the Most Holy Place, making atonement for Israel, in accordance with all that Moses the servant of God had commanded. (1 Chronicles 6:49)*

1 Study: The priest in the order of Melchizedek (5).

2 Study: The priest in the order of Melchizedek (6).

As Luke 1 describes how the priest Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist, was appointed to offer the incense according to the priestly rules of that time.

### The incense.

God gave special instructions to Moses concerning the incense placed on this altar:

- *Take fragrant spices - gum resin, onycha and galbanum - and **pure frankincense**, all in equal amounts, and make a fragrant blend of incense, the work of a perfumer. It is to be salted and pure and **sacred**. (Exodus 30:34-35)*

This **incense** was **sacred to God**. Manufactured according to this recipe, it could not be used for anything else and no one but the priests could smell it. (Exodus 30:37)

### Symbolism:

The book of Revelation describes how 24 elders prostrate themselves before the Lamb:

- *Each one had a harp and they were holding golden bowls full of incense, which are the **prayers** of God's people. (Revelation 5:8)*

The incense symbolises the priest/disciple's prayers therefore. They are holy to God. And, just as the composition of the incense should not be used for anything other than being burned on the altar of incense, so the priest/disciple may direct his/her prayers only to God.

The priest/disciple has received spiritual training along the way through the tabernacle.

He/she has stowed Jesus as Light (kindled by the Spirit) and Bread (the Word of God, the Truth), in his/her heart, through life in the Holy Place.

The priest/disciple will therefore offer his/her prayers on the altar of incense, as a true worshiper, as Jesus said to the Samaritan woman:

- *Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in the **Spirit and in truth** ... (John 4:23)*

Whereby **Spirit** indicates that, in the spirit, the priest/disciple is completely focused on Jesus, as the Light, and hereby submits to the Truth, the Word, symbolised in the loaves on the table of the bread of the Presence.

The Levitical priest, who presented the incense, stood before the veil that closed off the Most Holy Place.

The priest in the order of Melchizedek, however, is right in front of the ark, directly before the face of God, for when Jesus died, ...

- *The curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. (Mark 15:38)*

### The veil:

God had told Moses concerning the veil:

- *Make a curtain of blue, purple and scarlet yarn and finely twisted linen, with **cherubim woven into it** by a skilled worker. (Exodus 26:31)*
- *The curtain will **separate** the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place. (Exodus 26:33)*

The veil was made in the same way as the curtains that gave access to the courtyard and the Holy Place, the only difference being that images of **cherubim** were now woven into it.

Cherubim signify that access is closed. They guarded the Most Holy Place, which was off limits to the Levitical priests, just as the cherubim guarded the entrance to the tree of life after the fall of Adam and Eve.

Only once a year, on the Great Day of Atonement, was the Levitical high priest alone allowed to enter the Most Holy Place.

When Jesus offered Himself on the cross at Golgotha, the forgiveness of sins became possible through faith in Him. For:

- *But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin. (1 John 1:7)*

The priest/disciple, cleansed by the blood of Jesus and sanctified in the Holy Place, through a life with Jesus as the Word, may, standing before the altar of incense, approach the throne of God. It says in the letter to the Hebrews:

- *Let us then approach God's **throne of grace** (kindness<sup>3</sup>), with **confidence**, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us (literally: and encounter friendly help) in our time of need. (Hebrews 4:16)*

For this the entrance to the Holy of Holies had to be opened.

The evangelists describe that this happened at the death of Jesus:

- *With a loud cry, Jesus breathed his last. The **curtain** of the temple was **torn in two** from top to bottom. (Mark 15:37-38) (see also: Matthew 27:51 en Luke 23:45)*

By tearing the veil, God made it possible for the disciple/priest in the order of Melchizedek to appear before Him at the altar of incense:

- coming to stand before His face,
- which signifies that God Himself wants to enter into **a relationship** with him/her.

This is very remarkable, because the priest/disciple is not perfect and still stumbles regularly.

- *But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin. (1 John 1:7)*

He says to the priest/disciple who thus appears before God at the altar of incense:

- *I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people. (2 Corinthians 6:16)*
- *"Therefore, ... Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you." And, "I will be a Father to you, and you will be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty. (2 Corinthians 6:16-17)*

This is a great privilege, but not without a commission:

- *Therefore, since we have these promises, dear friends, let us **purify** ourselves from everything that **contaminates body and spirit**, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God. (1 Corinthians 7:1)*

---

<sup>3</sup> Study: Grace - definition.

## The ark.

The ark was made according to the Divine instructions:

- *Have them make an ark of acacia wood - two and a half cubits long, a cubit and a half wide, and a cubit and a half high. Overlay it with pure gold, both inside and out, and make a gold molding around it. (Exodus 25:10-11)*



The ark was a small chest of acacia wood, measuring 112.5 cm by 67.5 cm and 67.5 cm high, overlaid with gold inside and out. The chest was closed with the atonement cover of the same size (Ex. 25:17), covered with two golden cherubim (Ex. 25:18) facing each other and forming a whole with the atonement cover (Ex. 25: 18-19).

The ark was equipped with poles to carry it along the way through the desert.

In the privacy of the ark, covered by the atonement cover, lay 'the Testimony':

- *Place the cover on top of the ark and put in the ark the tablets of the **covenant law** that I will give you. (Exodus 25:21)*

This 'testimony' consisted of three objects:

- the **10 commandments**, chiselled on two slabs of stone, **rock-hard** and **indelible** (Deuteronomy 9:5)
- a **pot** with 1 gomer = 2.2 l = 1.3 kg of **manna** (Exodus 16:33)
- **Aaron's staff**, which had bloomed with blossoms, flowers and **almonds** (Numbers 17:8) (**Almonds**: God leaves no doubt that He watches over the fulfilment of His Word - as explained in the study about the lampstand)<sup>4</sup>

The testimony in the ark speaks not only of the 10 commandments, but also, through the manna, of the entire law, of which Moses said to the people:

- *He (God) humbled you, ... and then feeding you with manna, ... to teach you **that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord.*** (Deuteronomy 8:3)

### The atonement cover:

The law that was in the ark was covered by the atonement cover, as God said:

- *Make an atonement cover of pure gold - two and a half cubits long and a cubit and a half wide. And make two cherubim out of hammered gold at the ends of the cover. (Exodus 25:17-18)*
- *... make the cherubim of one piece with the cover, at the two ends. The cherubim are to have their wings spread upward, overshadowing the cover with them. The cherubim are to face each other, **looking toward the cover.*** (Exodus 25:19-20)

The atonement cover speaks of Jesus, and not only of forgiveness through faith in His blood, but especially of who He himself is, because:

<sup>4</sup> Study: The priest in the order of Melchizedek (5).



- *He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world. (1 John 2:2)*

The two cherubim on the atonement cover formed an integral part of it. Their gaze was fixed on the atonement cover, which they overshadowed with their wings.

They seem to keep watch over the law, carved on stone, so that it would not leave the privacy of the ark without the atonement. The law was given as teaching as to how God wanted people to live in relationship with Him and in fellowship with one another.

This is not life with the 10 commandments alone, but with the whole law, the whole Word of God, which, from the love of God and His Word, stimulates love for the neighbour, as Peter writes:

- *Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for each other, **love one another deeply, from the heart.** For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, **through the living and enduring word of God.** (1 Peter 1:22-23)*

A person's character is not formed by conscientiously following the law, although it is an advantage if the priest/disciple adopts habits and routines in life that are based on the law. However, the intention is that the priest/disciple should learn to **understand why** God instituted these rules. His/her character will thus be moulded in the image of Jesus Christ, when the priest/disciple submits to His authority, whereby the Holy Spirit pours out the love of God into his/her heart.<sup>5</sup> The priest/disciple who is thus focused in the spirit on Jesus Christ will discover the abundant life that He has promised. Paul put it this way:

- *... but our competence comes from God. He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant - not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life. (2 Corinthians 3:5-6)*

### **The ark reveals the character of God:**

The objects in the ark symbolise the law and the prophets as a measure of life.

This is the Word that God is watching over to ensure that it will be accomplished, and that He had spoken about:

- *Cursed is anyone who does not uphold the words of this law by carrying them out. (Deuteronomy 27:26)*

God is not enthroned upon the law however. The atonement cover speaks of Him asking Jesus to go into the world, to take this curse upon Himself, by dying on a cross.<sup>6</sup>

God is love and as a good Father, He longs for the priest/disciple, as His son/daughter, to experience what is good in life in the Holy Place, under His watchful eye, as Jesus said:

- *Very truly I tell you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be judged but has crossed over from death to life. (John 5:24)*

### **The abundant life:**

The objects in the tabernacle provide much food for thought about what it means to be a disciple of Jesus Christ.

John expresses the foundation of a life with Jesus Christ as follows:

---

<sup>5</sup> Study: Discipleship (2).

<sup>6</sup> Study: The law and the curse.



- **For God so loved the world** that he gave his one and only Son, that **whoever believes in him** shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. (John 3:16-17)

That is why Paul was able to write boldly:

- Therefore, there is now **no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus**, because **through Christ Jesus** the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death. (Romans 8:1-2)

The secret to the experience of the abundant life that Jesus promised is:

**1. The realisation of the fact that the primary purpose why Jesus came to the world is not the forgiveness of sins. Jesus came to the world so that a person would be able to live anew in a relationship with his/her Creator, God the Father.**

Forgiveness of sins is a first condition.

Forgiveness of sins, through faith in Jesus Christ, is thus the door to the superlative life, for those who will enter through this door to.....

**2. Following Jesus.** Living daily in a relationship with Jesus Christ, under the teaching the Bible, the infallible Word of God, as a guideline for life.

The symbolism of the objects in the tabernacle is intended to provide guidelines.

**3. Trusting God**, that He does not condemn those who, through faith in His Son Jesus Christ, live consciously among the objects in the tabernacle.

This series of studies about the priest aims to help you understand what this means.

**4. Not judging the neighbour**, by realising that one is him/herself not condemned by God, but from compassion to uphold the neighbour in love, as far as possible, in following Jesus.

Paul described this as follows:

- Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, ... (1 Thessalonians 5:11)
- I pray that out of his (the Father) glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established **in love**, may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is **the love** of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge - that you may be filled to the measure of all the **fullness** of God. (Ephesians 3:16-19)