

THE HOLY PLACE: PRAYER

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Lesson: Exodus 25:23-40

The Holy of Holies in the Tabernacle was the innermost chamber, cloaked in darkness. Only one piece of furniture was in the room, and that was the Ark of God. In that golden Ark, with the cherubim stretching their wings above it for protection, were the Ten Commandments. These wonderful words, which the Lord God spoke with thunder and lightning from the top of Mount Sinai, were written by the Lord on tables of stone. And these tables were laid in the Ark in that most special place, the Holy of Holies.

This tells us how we should take care of the Lord's Word and keep it in a special place, just the way the Children of Israel kept the Lord's Word—the Ten Commandments—in a special place in the Tabernacle. Also, whatever we learn about the Lord, any story we learn from His Word, we should keep in a special, holy place in our minds. For what the Lord tells us in His Word is the most important thing in our whole life. We must have an inmost chamber in our minds, a beautiful place covered with gold, where we keep these things and carefully protect them.

Now, there was a second chamber in the Tabernacle, a larger room to the east of the Holy of Holies, called the Holy Place. In that chamber were kept three special pieces of furniture: a table of shewbread, a seven-branched golden lampstand, and an altar of incense. We should try to remember these pieces of furniture and what their purpose was.

The table of shewbread was made of shittim wood, covered with gold. It was called the table of shewbread because the Children of Israel kept bread, wine, and various other things spread on it before the Lord. It was as if they were always inviting the Lord to a special supper. As the Lord said, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me" (Revelation 3:20). The table was not very large, just two cubits long, and a cubit wide, and a cubit and a half high.

On the opposite side of the room from the table of shewbread was the great lampstand. It was taller than any of us! The lampstand was made out of pure gold, and it had seven branches, with a light at the top of each branch. It is sometimes called a seven-branched *candlestick*, but they didn't have candles in

those days. Instead, they burned oil in little cups at the top of each branch. The priests took special care of these lamps and kept the light burning.

The third piece of furniture, the altar of incense, was two cubits high, a cubit wide, and a cubit long. On it was kept the incense, which the priests burned for the Lord. Incense smells like fragrant perfume when you burn it. The incense would make a sweet smell that would fill the Holy Place and even go through the veil into the Holy of Holies. It would fill the whole Tabernacle with a very beautiful scent. The high priest burned the incense when the people were praying to the Lord and asking Him for help.

Think of the beautiful veil of blue and purple and scarlet, of fine linen and needlework, and of the gold-covered boards that made the walls of this second room. You can imagine how beautiful a place it was with the three special pieces of furniture! So, too, we must try to make everything we do in worship as beautiful as we possibly can.

Now let us think about these three pieces of furniture in the Holy Place and what they mean for us. You know that no one can learn about the Lord unless he wants to. No one learns anything unless he is willing to try. That wanting to learn about the Lord is what is meant by the table of shewbread. When we want to learn about the Lord, it is like inviting Him to dine with us. And every one of us, if we are really going to worship the Lord, must want to learn about Him.

On the other side of the room, you remember, was the lampstand. Now we know that we cannot do anything, no matter how much we want to, unless we know *how*. You can want to play baseball, or play a musical instrument, but unless you take the time to learn how, you will never be able to. So the great beautiful lampstand giving light shows us that we need to learn, we need to have the light of truth in our minds.

Now, though, if we don't actually do the things we know how to do, we aren't really using those truths, are we? We're just filling up our memories. And so there are three things in the Holy Place: the table of shewbread, representing our will; the lampstand, representing our understanding; and the altar of incense, representing our use, or us trying to do what we know we should.

Remember that the altar of incense was *inside* the Tabernacle. The Children of Israel could look at the great altar out in the courtyard where they offered sacrifices. But the incense and the altar of incense were inside the Tabernacle. So this incense was like the secret prayers we offer to the Lord, asking Him to help us do what is right. These are not the open prayers we say with everyone, and that everyone else hears, like in church. They are the secret prayers that go up to the Lord from the heart of everyone who loves Him.

These prayers go up to the Lord like the smoke of beautiful incense, and they are received by the Lord and prepare a place for us in heaven. We must never offer selfish prayers to the Lord, for these are like strange incense and are against His commands. But, instead, we should try to keep our hearts pure, and our lives good, so that the Lord can dwell in our lives.

When worship is spoken of, that holiness is meant which is effected by means of prayers, adorations, confessions, and the like that proceed from the internals which are of love and charity. These are the acts of worship which are meant by 'burning incense' (Arcana Coelestia 10177:7).

Prayer regarded in itself is speech with God... If a person prays from love and faith, and for only heavenly and spiritual things, there then comes forth in the prayer something like a revelation as to hope, consolation, or a certain inward joy (Arcana Coelestia 2535).