

# Exodus 30:7-10

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/exod/exod-30/exodus-307-10/>

*The high priest was to burn incense every morning and evening, resulting in incense being before the LORD all day, every day. Only certain incense could be burned, and atonement needed to be made for the altar every year.*

Only Aaron, the high priest, is mentioned in this passage. It could be because the altar of incense was placed just before the veil as one goes into the Holy of Holies. It likely means Aaron bore the responsibility to see that this was done, even if he delegated the duties to other priests. The LORD clearly communicated the responsibility to see these things done rested with Aaron.

We will see that Aaron's sons also burn incense. The LORD instructed him to *burn fragrant incense on it*. The Hebrew word for *burn* ("qatar") means "to cause to rise up in smoke." It is used most often to refer to ritual burning, which is the case here with incense. The formula for how to make the incense is given later in this chapter ([Exodus 30:34 – 38](#)).

Aaron was to burn incense *every morning when he trims the lamps*. Trimming the *lamps* involved pruning the wicks and ensuring they were in working order, including cleaning them. In addition, *when Aaron trims the lamps at twilight, he shall burn incense*. What Aaron did in the morning was to happen also at dusk. Thus, there was to be *perpetual incense before the Lord throughout your generations*.

The LORD warned Aaron that he was never to *offer any strange incense on this altar*. This probably means that no incense containing ingredients not listed in verses 34 – 38 would be allowed. The prohibition could have been given to ensure that some incense designed for pagan use would not be associated with the worship of the LORD. It also could be given to deter the priests from substituting cheaper ingredients, and "skimming" from what is offered.

Ultimately, two of Aaron's sons would go on to burn "strange incense" at the altar. The consequence of their violation of this prohibition was that fire from the LORD consumed them ([Leviticus 10:1-2](#)). God instructed they not be mourned, because they had profaned God's altar of incense.

Along with prohibiting *strange incense*, the priests were not to present a *burnt offering or meal offering* on the altar of incense. It was only to be used for its intended purpose. Further, God stated *you shall not pour out a drink offering on it*. These offerings were likely not allowed for the same reason as the *strange incense*—placing meat, grain, and drink on an altar was common in pagan religions to provide the god/goddess with food and drink. The LORD made clear that He did not want anything that hinted at pagan practices to be associated with worship of Him.

The LORD also commanded that *Aaron* should *make atonement* on the altar's *horns once a year*. The altar of incense itself, because of its holy purpose as the place of intercessory prayer, needed to be purified. So, Aaron needed to smear *blood "on its horns."* The four *horns* were located on each corner of the altar of incense, as with the bronze altar, and were probably a symbol of power. The *blood* was smeared on the *horns* to *make atonement on it with the blood of the sin offering of atonement*.

The *sin offering* was described in [Exodus 29:14](#) to purify the priests from their sins. Some of the blood from that offering was to be used here to purify the altar of incense, which was an earthly device that could be used in the service of the LORD. It was to be done *once a year throughout your generations*. The high priest probably did this on the most sacred day of the year, the Day of Atonement. [Leviticus 23:27-32](#) tells us that the Day of Atonement fell "on exactly the tenth day" of the seventh month in the religious calendar of Israel (which was a lunar calendar). This roughly corresponds to mid-September through mid-October in our (solar) calendar. It was on that day that the high priest would enter the Holy of Holies.

All of this was necessary because the altar of incense was *most holy to the Lord*. It was to be used only for the designated purpose commanded by the LORD. And it was to be sanctified each year along with the priests through the sprinkling of blood. The Day of Atonement looked forward to the death of Jesus on the cross, whose blood was shed once for all people ([Hebrews 9:11-12](#)).

Burning incense on the altar was symbolic for intercessory prayer (see [Psalms 141:2](#); [Luke 1:10](#); [Revelation 5:8, 8:3 – 4](#)), and the golden altar of incense was the place of prayer. It was the place for intercession, not the atonement of sacrifice as was the other (bronze) altar. This was not a place for offerings—it was a place to come before the LORD in humble petition.

The altar of incense can be seen in the New Testament as well. In [Luke 1:11](#), the angel of the LORD appeared to Zechariah as he was burning incense in the temple. Incense is also mentioned in [Heb. 9:4](#) and in several places in Revelation ([Revelation 5:8](#); [8:3, 4](#); [18:13](#)).

### **Biblical Text:**

**<sup>7</sup> Aaron shall burn fragrant incense on it; he shall burn it every morning when he trims the lamps. <sup>8</sup> When Aaron trims the lamps at twilight, he shall burn incense. There shall be perpetual incense before the Lord throughout your generations. <sup>9</sup> You shall not offer any strange incense on this altar, or burnt offering or meal offering; and you shall not pour out a drink offering on it. <sup>10</sup> Aaron shall make atonement on its horns once a year; he shall make atonement on it with the blood of the sin offering of atonement once a year throughout your generations. It is most holy to the Lord.”**