

In preparation for the Tabernacle display at Scentsy Commons, the Meridian Idaho North Stake Presidency of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints requested that several members of the Stake write research papers on various subjects relating to the ancient Tabernacle revealed to Moses in the Old Testament. The authors of these nine papers are not Bible scholars, but spent significant time, effort, and prayer as they studied their subjects and honed their messages. Their hope was to provide meaningful information for readers of all faiths and backgrounds who want to gain a deeper understanding of the doctrine and symbolism of Jesus Christ surrounding the Tabernacle. The authors' intent was for the writings to be from a Christian perspective, yet free from bias towards any one Christian religion. Further, the facts and opinions represented in these papers are the work of the individual authors and do not necessarily represent the doctrine and teachings of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints or its leaders.

We welcome your questions or feedback on how we can improve the content of these research papers:  
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## The Bronze Altar, Laver and Altar of Incense – Executive Summary

By Cordell Moon

### Bronze Altar (or Altar of Burnt Offering)

- Design Overview (The Holy Bible, Ex. 27:1-8)
  - Position: in courtyard, toward gate on the east
  - 7 ½ ft square x 4 ½ ft tall
  - Made of shittim wood (i.e. acacia) completely overlaid with bronze
  - Horns in four corners overlaid with bronze
  - Grate made of bronze
  - Bronze rings on 4 corners with bronze overlaid staves of shittim wood for transporting the altar
  - Various bronze tools and utensils for managing the fire, ashes and sacrifices
- Usage Overview
  - Communal offerings each morning and even (twilight), each sabbath, 1st of each month, on seven days of Passover and during Festival of Weeks (Num. 28)
  - Individual sacrifices throughout each day (Lev. 1-4; 6; 7; 10):
    - Individual voluntarily presents sacrifice
    - Worshipper transfers sins to animal, via laying on of hands, as atonement for sins
    - Animal slaughtered
    - Priest sprinkles blood on altar, pours blood around altar and at times on horns
    - Sacrifice burned
    - Sacrificial meal
  - Various sacrifices were to be without blemish
- Symbolisms of Jesus Christ
  - “Blood that maketh an atonement for the soul” (Lev. 17:11)
    - Atonement = *kaphar* in Hebrew, meaning to cover, purge or make reconciliation (“Kaphar”)
  - Sacrifices symbolic of Christ’s atonement covering or purging our sins (Rom. 5:10-11)
  - Sacrifices lifted up on altar as Jesus was lifted up when He sacrificed His life (John 3:14; 12:34)
    - Christ raises up those who commune with Him (John 6:54; 12:32)
  - Jesus is the “Lamb of God” (John 1:29)
  - Christ was without spot or blemish (Heb. 9:14; 1 Pet. 1:19)
  - Christ voluntarily sacrificed Himself (Heb. 7:27; 9:14)
  - Christ’s blood redeems, cleanses and restores us to God’s presence (1 Pet. 1:18-19; 1 Jn. 1:7; Heb. 10:19)
  - Our sins laid upon the Lamb of God (Isa. 53:6-7)

### Bronze Laver

- Design Overview (Ex. 30:18)
  - Position: in courtyard, between the tabernacle of the congregation and the bronze altar
  - No dimensions specified
  - Basin and pedestal made of bronze
  - Basin contained water
- Usage Overview
  - Priests consecrated to officiate in priest’s office by being washed (Ex. 29:1-4; 40:12; Lev. 8:6)
  - Priests to wash hands and feet before entering tabernacle or coming near to the altar to burn offerings “that they die not” (Ex. 30:19-21)

- Symbolisms of Jesus Christ
  - Hebrews mentions “divers washings” (Heb. 9:10)
  - Christ is source of living water (John 4:10)
  - Our bodies “washed with pure water” (Heb. 10:22)
  - Christ washes away our filth (Isa. 4:4)
  - Compare to washing of baptism that washes away our sins (Acts 22:16)

### **Altar of Incense (or Incense Altar, Golden Altar or Altar of Gold)**

- Design Overview (Ex. 30:1-6, 34)
  - Position: in front of the veil in the holy place
  - 1 ½ ft square x 3 ft tall
  - Made of shittim wood (i.e. acacia) overlaid with gold
  - Horns in four corners overlaid with gold
  - Crown of gold round about
  - Gold rings on 4 corners with gold overlaid staves of shittim wood used for transporting the altar
  - Incense made of equal parts stacte, onycha, galbanum and frankincense for a sweet fragrance
- Usage Overview
  - No burned sacrifice or other offerings (Ex. 30:9)
  - Prescribed incense considered holy and the only incense to be used (Ex. 30:9, 26)
  - Precise incense formula not to be used personally by penalty of being cut off (Ex. 30:37-38)
  - Priests to burn incense on golden altar every morning and even (Ex. 30:7-8)
  - On annual day of atonement, priest placed blood of the sin offering on the horns (Ex. 30:10)
  - Blood of sin sacrifice for those who sinned in ignorance placed on the horns (Lev. 4:1-18)
- Symbolisms of Jesus Christ
  - Upward drifting incense symbolic of prayers (Ps. 141:2; Rev. 8:3-4)
  - Horns represent power and strength (Easton “Horn”)
    - Jesus referenced as the “horn of...salvation” (2 Sam. 22:3; Ps. 18:2; Luke 1:67-69)
  - Signifies that prayer, the atoning blood of Christ and Christ (represented by the veil, which hung directly behind the altar) are essential for us to enter God’s dwelling (Heb. 10:19-20)

# The Bronze Altar, Laver and Altar of Incense

By Cordell Moon

## Introduction – The Tabernacle, Tabernacle Layout and the Positions of the Bronze Altar, Bronze Laver and Altar of Incense

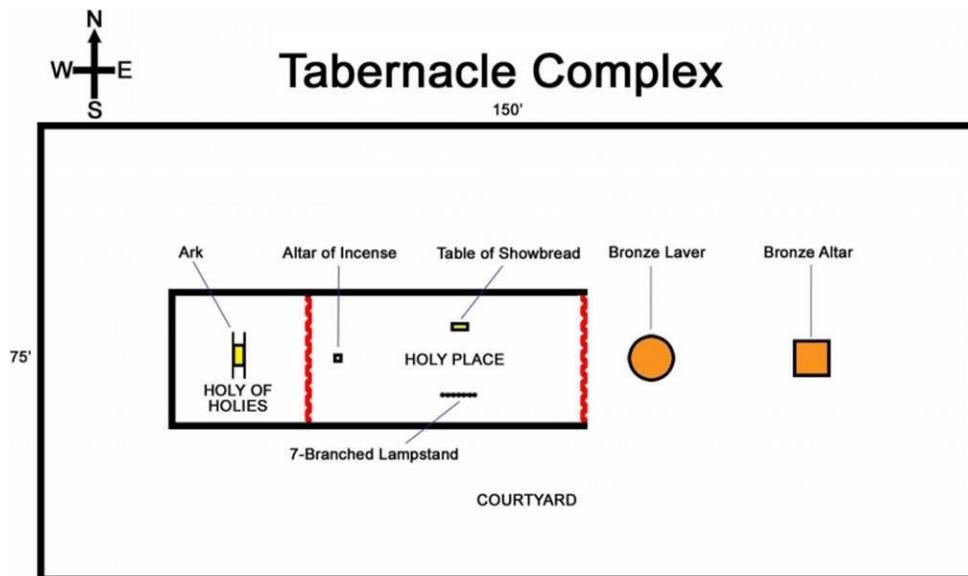
The tabernacle was a sacred place to the children of Israel and the principal place of their daily worship and rituals. Numerous representations of Jesus Christ were found in the tabernacle. It was a place of spiritual cleansing, for receiving atonement and that prepared them to receive Christ and progress into the presence of God.

After the children of Israel were delivered from their Egyptian bondage, the LORD summoned Moses to mount Sinai where he was instructed for forty days and forty nights (Ex. 24:12-18). On Sinai, the LORD commanded Moses to build a sanctuary (Ex. 25:8). The transliterated Hebrew word for sanctuary is *miqdash*, meaning a sacred or holy place (“Miqdash”). The LORD further referred to this place as the tabernacle (Ex. 25:9), for which the transliterated Hebrew word *mishkan* means a dwelling place (“Mishkan”).

In this sacred place where deity would meet and commune with man (Ex. 25:22; 33:9-11) and that the apostle Paul described as a pattern of what is in heaven (Heb. 8:5), it is little wonder that Moses was commanded to follow the revealed pattern of the tabernacle with precision (Ex. 25:9). The LORD provided in intricate details the dimensions, types and colors of materials, quantities, instruments, décor, cardinal directions, layout of the tabernacle, various sacrificial rites and more (Ex. 25-40).

The tabernacle dimensions recorded in the Bible are stated in cubits, a measurement representing the arm’s length from the elbow to the tip of the middle finger. Although a widely used measurement in the ancient world, the length varied among different cultures over time. A commonly accepted conversion is 1 cubit = 18 inches (“Cubit”). This paper will use the equivalent U.S. customary units of feet and inches based on said conversion.

Figure 1 demonstrates the layout of the tabernacle, which was oriented along the cardinal points, with the sole gate and entrance oriented to the east (Ex. 27:9-18; 38:9-18). This paper will address the bronze altar, the bronze laver and the altar of incense.



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Figure 1. Layout of Tabernacle Complex from: Wilson, Ralph F. “The Tabernacle, Priesthood, and Sacrifices”

## Bronze versus Brass

A potentially confusing nomenclature when describing materials in the tabernacle is the use of “bronze” versus “brass”. The translators of the King James Version chose to translate the material being used as “brass” or “brasen” (see Ex. 38:3-4 as example). The transliterated Hebrew word *nechosheth* is translated today to mean bronze or copper (“N@chosheth”). The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia states “[t]he word translated ‘brass’ in the King James Version would be more correctly rendered bronze” (“Brass; Brazen”). Although this paper references the King James Version, it will adhere to the more standard terminology of “bronze”. Ultimately, this metallurgic difference should not distract the reader from the more important recognition that while progressing through the tabernacle, the materials advance in refinement symbolizing the progression of holiness (see “Sacred Space” paper within this compilation).

## Bronze Altar – Overview and Specifications

Upon entering the eastern gate into the courtyard of the tabernacle, the participant would quickly be greeted by a large altar of sacrifice (see Figure 1 and Figure 2). The detailed dimensions revealed to Moses for the altar were as follows (Ex. 27:1-8):

- 7 ½ feet square x 4 ½ feet tall
- Made of shittim wood (i.e. acacia)
- Completely overlaid with bronze
- Horns in the four corners overlaid with bronze
- Grate made of bronze
- Bronze rings on the 4 corners with bronze overlaid staves of shittim wood used to transport the altar
- Various bronze tools and utensils (for managing the fire, ashes and the sacrifices)



Figure 2. Bronze Altar from: Moon, Cordell R.

## Bronze Altar – Sacrifices in the Old Testament

The altar was called the bronze altar (Ex. 39:39) but was frequently referred to as the altar of burnt offering (Ex. 38:1; 40:6, 10, 29; Lev. 4:7; 1 Chr. 21:26, 29; 2 Chr. 29:18). This name aptly describes the frequent and various sacrifices made upon the grate of the altar by the priests. The priest’s office was delegated to Aaron and his sons (Ex. 28:1) and their posterity (Ex. 29:9) who were solely recognized as having the rights to officiate in the sacrificial offerings (Lev. 1-7; 16-18; see “The Role of Priests and High Priests in Biblical Times” paper within this compilation).

While the paper, “Sacrifice and Offerings Under Mosaic Law,” within this compilation goes into greater details about the sacrifices, there are noteworthy sacrificial activities that happened regularly at and on the bronze altar. First, the LORD prescribed certain sacrifices and their frequency that were made by the priest on behalf of the children of Israel (Num. 28):

Timing	Sacrifice
Daily	Two yearling lambs without spot or blemish One in the morning and one at even (twilight) (Num. 28:3-4)
Sabbath Day	In addition to the daily sacrifice: Two yearling lambs without spot or blemish (Num. 28:9-10)
First of the Month	In addition to the daily sacrifice: Two young bullocks, one ram, seven yearling lambs (all without defect) One kid goat (Num. 28:11-15)
Passover	In addition to the daily sacrifice on the seven days of Passover: Two young bullocks, one ram, seven yearling lambs (all without defect) One male goat (Num. 28:16-24)
Feast of First fruits or Festival of Weeks	In addition to the daily sacrifice: Two young bullocks, one ram, seven yearling lambs (all without defect) One kid goat (Num. 28:26-30)

In addition to these set sacrifices, individuals also voluntarily presented at the tabernacle their own sacrifices—animals without blemish. While some variations are noted based on the type of offering, the common acts follow. North of the bronze altar, the worshipper laid their hands on the animal’s head, whereby it was accepted as an atonement on behalf of the worshipper. The animal was then killed and the priest carried out the ritual of sprinkling the blood on the altar, pouring the blood around the altar and for certain sacrifices placing blood upon the horns of the altar. The priest then burned all or part of the animal on the altar (depending on the sacrifice), followed by partaking of the sacrificial meal with participation dependent on the type of sacrifice (Lev. 1-4; 6; 7; 10).

Given the frequent sacrifices, it is little wonder that the LORD instructed Moses that the fire should ever be burning and never go out (Lev. 6:13).

### **Bronze Altar – Symbolisms of Jesus Christ**

Christians readily recognize many aspects of the bronze altar and the sacrifices performed thereon as symbolic of Jesus Christ and His great sacrifice and atonement. The transliterated Hebrew word for atonement is *kaphar*, meaning to cover, purge or make reconciliation (“Kaphar”). Thus, we recognize the covering, purging and reconciling of our sins through Christ.

Standing 4 ½ feet tall, sacrifices were lifted up on the bronze altar symbolizing Jesus being lifted up when he sacrificed his life (John 3:14; 12:34). And beautifully, Jesus promised to raise up those who commune with him (eating of his flesh and drinking of his blood) (John 6:54; 12:32).

We recognize in the lambs that were regularly sacrificed Jesus, who was referred to as the “Lamb of God” (John 1:29) and was prophesied by Isaiah as the lamb brought to the slaughter who had “laid on him the iniquity of us all” (Isa. 53:6-7). Furthermore, the sacrifices required of the children of Israel were to be without blemish, which foreshadowed Jesus, who was without spot or blemish (Heb. 9:14; 1 Pet. 1:19).

As the worshippers voluntarily or willingly brought their sacrifice (Ex. 25:2; 35:21; Lev. 1:3), so Jesus willingly submitted his will to God and offered himself as the ultimate sacrifice (Heb. 7:27; 9:14).

The shedding of blood plays a major theme in the sacrifices at the bronze altar. When providing instructions to Moses, the LORD specified that he was giving to mankind “upon the altar to make an atonement...for it is the blood that maketh an atonement for the soul” (Lev. 17:11). Paul makes clear in his epistle to the Jewish members of the Church that there would be no remission of sin without the shedding of blood (Heb. 9:22). Yet he makes it equally clear that it is not the blood of the sacrificed animals that purged our sins (Heb. 9:12; 10:4, 11) but rather it is the sacrificed blood of Jesus that brings us to God’s presence, i.e. the holiest place (Heb. 10:19). Peter taught that we are redeemed with the precious blood of Christ (1 Pet. 1:18-19); John taught we are cleansed from sin through the blood of Christ (1 Jn. 1:7); and Paul taught we are forgiven of our sins (Eph. 1:7) and justified by His blood (Rom. 5:9).

Jesus himself declared that the shedding of His blood was for the remission of sins (Matt. 26:28).

Ultimately, the atonement or *kaphar*, i.e. covering, purging or reconciliation, came to us through the sacrifice of the Son of God: “we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son...by whom we have now received the atonement” (Rom. 5:10-11).

There is incredible beauty in the portrayal of the worshipper laying hands upon the sacrificial animal, one which has likely been tended, fed and cared for personally by the worshipper, and symbolically transferring his sins onto this animal (see Lev. 16:21) whose blood is about to be spilled to “make atonement for him” (Lev. 1:4). Likewise, we symbolically place our sins upon the unblemished Lamb of God, who voluntarily sacrificed Himself, that we could be made clean—that our robes would be made “white in the blood of the Lamb” (Rev. 7:14).

### **Bronze Laver – Overview and Specifications**

Beyond the bronze altar towards the tent of the congregation sits the bronze laver (see Figure 1). Unlike other furnishings of the tabernacle, specifications of its construction are limited. No dimensions are given leaving its size obscured. We know both the basin and the pedestal were made of bronze and the basin was to have water therein (Ex. 30:18). Figures 3 and 4 are representative pictures of the bronze laver and the basin with water.



Figure 3. Bronze Laver from: Moon, Cordell R.



Figure 4. Bronze Laver Basin from: Moon, Cordell R.

### **Bronze Laver – Washings in the Old Testament**

The LORD commanded Moses that the priests (Aaron and his sons) should wash their hands and their feet at the bronze laver. The priests were to wash before entering the tabernacle of the congregation or before coming near to the altar to burn offerings, “that they die not” (Ex. 30:19-21). While washing with water had the practical application of physical cleansing, at the laver a spiritual cleansing from sin and uncleanness is evident in the following.

As part of the ritual to hallow Aaron and his sons that they could minister in the priest’s office, they were brought to the door of the tabernacle of the congregation (where the bronze laver was) and washed with water (Ex. 29:1-4; see also Ex. 40:12; Lev. 8:6). The transliterated Hebrew word for hallow is *qadash*, meaning to consecrate (declare sacred) or sanctify (declare holy) (“Qadash”). This washing with water was a spiritual cleansing.

### **Bronze Laver – Symbolisms of Jesus Christ**

The scriptures mention “divers washings” (Heb. 9:10) and having “our bodies washed with pure water” (Heb. 10:22). The LORD through Isaiah implored the people to wash and make themselves clean (Isa. 1:16). While the bronze laver was not a baptism of water, the rite of baptism is also a well understood washing that washes away our sins (Acts 22:16).

Ultimately, as Paul declared, no “unclean person...hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God” (Eph. 5:5). Jesus declared that he was the source of living water (John 4:10); through this living water of Christ will Isaiah’s promise be fulfilled that the LORD will wash away the filth of his people (Isa. 4:4), thereby allowing us to enter a holier place, just as the priests were allowed through their washing at the bronze altar to enter the holy place.

### **Altar of Incense – Overview and Specifications**

To the west of the bronze altar and bronze laver stands the tent of the congregation, encompassing the holy place and the most holy place or holy of holies. Upon entering the holy place, one’s gaze would quickly fix across the 30-foot length room upon the blue, purple and scarlet veil with cherubim separating the holy place from the most holy place (Ex. 26:31-33). In front of the veil stood the altar of incense (Ex. 30:6; see Figure 1).

The altar of incense was also frequently called the incense altar (Ex. 35:15; 37:25; 2 Chr. 26:19), the golden altar (Ex. 39:38; 40:26; Num. 4:11; 2 Chr. 4:19; Rev. 8:3; 9:13), or the altar of gold (Ex. 40:5; 1 Kgs. 7:48).

Like the bronze altar, the specific dimensions and materials of the altar of incense were revealed to Moses as follows (Ex. 30:1-6):

- 1 ½ feet square x 3 feet tall
- Made of shittim wood (i.e. acacia)
- Completely overlaid with pure gold
- Horns in the four corners
- A crown of gold round about
- Gold rings on the 4 corners with gold overlaid staves of shittim wood used to transport the altar

Figure 5 shows a representation of the altar of incense. Figure 6 shows the top of the altar, with a censer wherein incense is burned.



Figure 5. Altar of Incense from: Moon, Cordell R.



Figure 6. Altar of Incense Top from: Moon, Cordell R.

Only incense was to be offered on this altar; no burned sacrifice or other offerings were made on it (Ex. 30:9). The type of incense to be burned at the altar was also specifically revealed to Moses. The incense was made of equal parts of stacte, onycha, galbanum and pure frankincense (Ex. 30:34). While the precise meaning of all these ingredients is not certain, the following information can be used as a guideline.

Ingredient	Description
Stacte	Fragrant drops of gum from pure myrrh or of storax (“Stacte”)
Onycha	Part of a marine mollusk (“Onycha”)
Galbanum	A gum resin from the galbaniflua or rubricaulis plant (“Galbanum”)
Frankincense	A gum resin from Boswellia trees (“Frankincense”)

This specific incense formula was considered holy and the only incense to be burned on the golden altar (Ex. 30:9, 26). Furthermore, this precise formula was forbidden to be used personally—those who did so were to be cut off (Ex. 30:37-38).

### **Altar of Incense – Rituals in the Old Testament**

After cleansing themselves at the bronze laver, the priests would enter the tent of the tabernacle every morning and every even (twilight) and burn incense on the golden altar (Ex. 30:7-8). This responsibility rested with the priests and the sacredness of that charge and its rights upon the sons of Aaron was powerfully manifest when King Uzziah was smitten with leprosy when he wrongfully attempted to burn incense upon the altar of incense (2 Chr. 26:16-20; see also Num. 16 for an example of unauthorized incense burning).

Each year on the 10<sup>th</sup> day of the 7<sup>th</sup> month of the Hebrew calendar (Lev. 23:27), the children of Israel observed the day of atonement. Today this day is known as Yom Kippur (“Yom Kippur Judaism”). This most solemn day was set aside for the atonement of the sins of the entire nation (Easton “Atonement, Day of”). On this day, the priest was instructed to enter the tabernacle of the congregation and place the blood of the sin offering upon the horns of the altar of incense (Ex. 30:10).

In addition to this annual event, the blood of the sin sacrifice made for those who had sinned in ignorance was taken by the priest and put upon the horns of the altar of incense (Lev. 4:1-18).

### **Altar of Incense – Symbolisms of Jesus Christ**

As the incense burns, smoke would gently rise from the altar and drift upwards with its sweet fragrance. Likewise, our sweetly uttered earthly prayers symbolically drift upwards to God. David pled that his “prayer be set forth before thee as incense” (Ps. 141:2). John the Revelator saw an angel stand at the altar with a golden censer with much incense that he offered along with the prayers of all the saints. “And the smoke of the incense, which came with the prayers of the saints, ascended up before God” (Rev. 8:3-4; see also Rev. 5:8).

The altar of incense stood directly in front of the veil of the tabernacle, which veil Paul likened to Jesus’ flesh (Heb. 10:20) and which separated one from the holiest place that represented the dwelling place of God—where the LORD communed with Moses above the mercy seat (Ex. 25:22). In like manner, the altar of incense signifies that prayer and Christ are essential for us to approach God.

We recognize the horns of the altar to be symbolic of Jesus Christ. Horns are representative of power and strength and for animals with them they are the means for both attack and defense (Easton “Horn”). David praised the LORD and declared him to be the “horn of my salvation” (2 Sam. 22:3; Ps. 18:2). We also find examples in the Old Testament where people would run to the bronze altar and lay hold on the horns seeking mercy (1 Kgs. 1:50; 2:28). Likewise, we also lay hold on the “horn of [our] salvation,” Jesus Christ, seeking refuge and mercy (2 Sam. 22:3).

In New Testament times, we read of a priest named Zacharias, whose lot was to burn incense in the temple, and an angel stood on the right side of the altar of incense declaring to Zacharias the birth of a son to him and his wife, Elisabeth. This son, later known as John the Baptist, was to “make ready a people prepared for the LORD” (Luke 1:5-17) and declare to the people “the remission of their sins, through the tender mercy of our God” (Luke 1:76-77). Later, when John was presented for circumcision, Zacharias prophesied of Jesus’ imminent arrival by declaring that the God of Israel “hath redeemed his people” and “hath raised up an horn of salvation” (Luke 1:67-69).

### **Conclusion**

The tabernacle with all its symbolic representations of Jesus Christ was a holy place to the children of Israel; the central place of their daily worship and rituals. It was a place of precision and exactness with its detailed and prescribed rites. The tabernacle with its associated rituals was a place of spiritual cleansing and for receiving atonement. Ultimately the tabernacle was a sacred place that prepared the children of Israel to receive Christ and progress into God’s presence.

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