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## ***THE NEW TESTAMENT PRIEST — INCENSE & OFFERING***

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**INTRODUCTION** — The sacrificial system of the Old Covenant was mediated by the Levitical priests. They ministered to God by offering animals upon a wooden altar; New Testament priests minister to God by offering words of love from the altar of a burning heart.

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### **I. THE INCENSE & OFFERINGS OF THE LEVITICAL PRIESTS**

- A. **GOD’S DWELLING:** The Lord delivered Israel from the hand of the Egyptians so that He may have a dwelling place amongst them (Exod 25:8, 29:45-46). God gave the laws of purity so that His manifest presence could rest amongst the Israelites.
- B. **THE SYSTEM:** Yet, due to God’s holiness and Israel’s sin, it would have been impossible for them relate to God without a sacrificial system to cleanse them from their iniquity. Therefore, God established a way for His people to approach Him.
1. *The Altars* — There were two altars that the priests would minister from: The altar of burnt offering (courtyard) and the altar of incense (Holy Place). The fire on both altars was always to be burning (Exod 30:6-8; Lev 6:12-13).
  2. *The Offerings* — The people would bring various sacrifices and offerings for the priests to set on the altar of burnt offerings (courtyard): burnt, grain, peace, sin, and trespass offerings (Lev 1-5). These would include animals and grain.
  3. *The Blood* — The power of the animal sacrifices was the blood that was shed. Atonement [payment] for sins was only achieved by the shedding of an animal’s blood; the animal’s life was given to save the life of the sinner (Lev 17:10-16).
- C. **THE DAY OF ATONEMENT:** The most important day of every year was the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur). On this day the High Priest would consecrate himself to enter into the Most Holy Place (where God dwelled) to atone for all the sins of Israel.

***And Aaron shall lay both his hands on the head of the live goat, and confess over it all the iniquities of the people of Israel, and all their transgressions, all their sins... The goat shall bear all their iniquities on itself...(Lev 16:21-22).***

- D. **LEVITICAL LIMITATIONS:** Though the Levitical priesthood was glorious, the sacrificial system was unable to permanently remiss Israel’s sins. Therefore, a need arose for a superior sacrifice to take place that the sins of the world may be forgiven.

***For since the law has but a shadow of the good things to come instead of the true form of these realities, it can never, by the same sacrifices that are continually offered every year, make perfect those who draw near (Heb 10:1).***

## II. THE INCENSE & OFFERINGS OF THE NEW TESTAMENT PRIESTS

- A. **OUR GREAT HIGH PRIEST:** Jesus, our Great High Priest and the spotless Lamb of God offered Himself upon the cross as the atoning sacrifice for the sins of the world. The power of His sacrifice, like in the Old Covenant, was the blood that was spilled.

**But when Christ appeared as a high priest...he entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption (Heb 9:11-12).**

- B. **FIRE ON THE ALTAR:** In the Gospels, Jesus is described as the baptizer with the Holy Spirit and fire (Matt 3:11; Lk 3:16). On the day of Pentecost Jesus released the fire of the Holy Spirit upon the altar of His disciples' hearts (cf. 2 Chron 7:1).

**When the day of Pentecost arrived...suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind...And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them (Acts 2:1-3).**

- C. **INCENSE:** Naturally, with the fire of the presence of the Holy Spirit upon the hearts of all who believe, the incense of prayer arises. Just as the incense was burned before the Lord in the Tabernacle, so also is the incense of our prayers burning before God.

**And when he had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each holding a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints (Rev 5:8).**

- D. **WORSHIP:** The transition of the New Covenant rendered the sacrifices of the Old Covenant obsolete, causing the sacrificial system to adopt a new form. The sacrifice of worship no longer consists of animals and grain but the believer themselves!

1. **Praise** — One of the forms of worship for the New Testament priest is the sacrifice of praise we give unto the Lord. This is often expressed through music.

**Through him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name (Heb 13:15).**

2. **Good Deeds** — Another form of worship for the New Testament priest is the sacrifice of good deeds. This includes caring for the poor, widowed, orphaned, etc.

**Do not neglect to do good...for such sacrifices are pleasing to God (Heb 13:16).**

3. **Our Bodies** — The greatest act of worship for the New Testament priest is the sacrifice of our lives expressed through obedience to God unto death (martyrdom).

**I appeal to you...present your bodies as a living sacrifice...(Rom 12:1).**