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Prayer as an Incense Offering (Part 1 of 3)

What is prayer? One can say: praying is speaking to God. Yes, but what therefore does prayer involve? What is expected of us? What does the Lord delight in and what prayer is he pleased with? What are the prayers from our hearts and lips to be like?

According to Scripture, the prayers of God's people are like and are to be like an incense offering. In Psalm 141 David says: "May my prayer be set before you like incense; may the lifting up of my hands be like the evening sacrifice" (Ps 141:2). We can also think, for example, of the last book of Scripture where this image occurs as well. We read in Revelation 5:8, "And when he [the lamb] had taken it [the scroll with seven seals], the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb. Each one had a harp and they were holding golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints" (cf. Rev 8:3, 4). These two examples show that our prayers are to be as an incense offering to God. The Old Testament incense offering therefore spoke of and symbolized the prayers of God's people.

Now, if we can understand what an Old Testament incense offering involved, we will be helped in knowing what praying is all about and what it should entail. For our prayers are to be as an incense offering! So we see that although the incense offering itself is a thing of the past, yet the instruction that we can receive from the regulations about the incense offering as we find them in Exodus 30 are still very relevant for us today. Indeed, in Article 25 of the Belgic Confession we confess that

We believe that the ceremonies and symbols of the law have ceased with the coming of Christ, and that all shadows have been fulfilled, so that the use of them ought to be abolished among Christians. Yet their truth and substance remain for us in Jesus Christ, in whom they have been fulfilled. In the meantime we still use the testimonies taken from

the law and the prophets, both to confirm us in the doctrine of the gospel and to order our life in all honesty, according to God's will and to his glory. So let's apply this truth to our topic. Because our prayers are to be like the incense offering, we need to understand this sacrifice as well as possible. Then we will better understand God's will for our prayers today.

The position of the incense offering

If one entered the tabernacle, the Holy Place, and walked straight down the middle of it to the curtain, behind which was the Most Holy Place, one would walk directly to the altar of incense. This altar stood in the middle, directly in front of the Most Holy Place. A curtain separated it from the ark of the covenant which was in the Most Holy Place. Thus it was close to the place where God met his people (Exod 25:22; cf. 29:42) and is therefore described in Leviticus 16:18 as the altar "before the Lord" indicating in this way its close association with the mercy seat.

Not surprisingly, being this close to God's presence, the altar of incense was a beautiful altar, all covered with gold and known therefore as the golden altar (Num 4:11). This altar was normally the closest the priests got to the Most Holy Place. The altar of incense stood in the Holy Place immediately before the curtain behind which God was enthroned on the ark in the midst of Israel (Ps 80:1; also 1 Sam 4:4; 2 Sam 6:2; 2 Kings 19:15; Ps 99:1).

Now because this close relationship of the incense altar with the ark is of utmost importance, therefore Scripture sometimes omits the fact that there was a curtain separating the two. In Exodus 40:5, we simply read, "You shall put the golden altar for incense before the ark of the testimony." There is no reference to a curtain until verse 26. It was more important, given the

context of Exodus 40:5, to mention the close relationship of the incense altar to the ark than to dwell on the fact of a separating curtain. In this light, we can also understand why 1 Kings 6:22 associates the incense altar so closely with the ark, that it says that this altar belongs to the inner sanctuary. This description is not a contradiction to the altar's standing outside the Most Holy Place, but only stresses the close association. Similarly we can appreciate Hebrews 9:3, 4 which states that "behind the second curtain was a room called the Most Holy Place having the golden altar of incense and the ark of the covenant." This does not mean that the author of Hebrews did not know the place of this altar. But, considering his theological concern with atonement and forgiveness and the entrance into God's presence, it is not surprising that the ark and the incense altar are brought here into a very close association, as was already done in the Old Testament. Furthermore the term, "having," does not need to mean that the altar stood *in* the Most Holy Place. The preposition "in" is not used. A very close relationship is expressed in the "having" of the altar (cf. Rev 8:3).

The aroma of the incense

It was here at this altar of gold that the priest offered the precious offering of incense (cf. 2 Chron 13:10-11). The very best was burned before God and so given to him. The offering of the costly incense was a recognition of the LORD's place as God.

This offering was performed twice a day, every morning and evening (Exod 30:7, 8). As one can imagine, in the closed surroundings of the tabernacle, the smoke and smell of this offering would always be hanging in the air and never really leave. Indeed, verse 8 literally speaks of "a constant / perpetual incense before the LORD for the generations to come."

However, this was not all. More was necessary. On the Day of Atonement the incense had to be brought *inside* the Most Holy Place. We read in Leviticus 16:11-14, Aaron shall present the bull as a sin offering for himself, and shall make atonement for himself and for his house; he shall kill the bull as a sin offering for himself. And he shall take a censer full of coals of fire from the altar before the Lord, and two handfuls of sweet incense beaten small; and he shall bring it within the veil and put the incense on the fire before the Lord, that the cloud of the incense may cover the mercy seat which is upon the testimony, lest he die; and he shall take some of the blood of the bull, and sprinkle it with his finger on the front of the mercy seat, and before the mercy

seat he shall sprinkle the blood with his finger seven times.

Notice the superlatives in verse 12. "A censer full of coals of fire" and "two handfuls of sweet incense" – as much fiery coal and incense as possible. The burning coals came "from the altar before the LORD," that is, the whole burnt altar outside in the court. There was always fire on that altar (Lev 9:9; cf. Num 16:46), so the coals could readily be retrieved.

If we can understand what an Old Testament incense offering involved, we will be helped in knowing what praying is all about and what it should entail

In verses 12-13, notice that only after entering the Most Holy Place was the incense to be burned. The purpose was to cover the mercy-seat with the smoke lest the high priest die. No one can see God and live (cf. Judg 6:22-24; 13:22; Isa 6:5). So the incense was brought directly into the very presence of God. Usually the smoke of the incense came to the Most Holy Place by going through the veil, but on the annual Day of Atonement it was brought right into the presence of God by the high priest.

Why was this continual smoke, smell, and burning demanded by the LORD? To answer this question properly, one must realize that the crucial element was not the smoke but the smell of the incense. This is clear, for example, from the exact directions that the Lord gave for the preparation of the mixture of incense. The parts have to be mixed exactly so! God instructed Moses to "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" (Exod 30:34, 35). God wanted the right fragrance, the sweet smelling savour of a well composed incense!

Because the altar of incense was immediately in front of the curtain of the Most Holy Place, the fragrance would work its way through the curtain to the throne of the LORD! God demanded that sacrifice of incense, that burning, so that, he the LORD could take in the sweet savour. What is behind this? Surely, God is not man that he simply needs and desires a perfumed house. What is the point?

To be continued 



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Prayer as an Incense Offering (Part 2 of 3)

In the first article, we saw that prayer was like an incense offering and we ended with the question why the fragrance of this sacrifice was so important.

The meaning of the aroma

The scent or aroma of the incense offering had to be brought close to God. The fragrance of sacrifice played an important role with other offerings as well. When Noah sacrificed after the great flood, we read that the Lord smelled the “pleasing odour” of his sacrifices (Gen 8:21). The phrase “pleasing odour” occurs quite frequently in Leviticus and in Numbers. For example, it is used of the burnt offering of cattle (Lev 1:9), of smaller animals (Lev 1:13), and even of birds (Lev 1:17). With each offering we read “an offering by fire, a pleasing odour to the Lord.” Similarly with the cereal offering (Lev 2:2, 9, 12), the peace offering (Lev 3:5), and the sin offering (Lev 4:31). Indeed, with all sacrifices the odour is important. The verb used for the sacrifice of the whole burnt offering (Lev 1) emphasizes the fact that the sacrifice goes up in smoke and has a smell. This emphasis is also found with the cereal offering (Lev 2:2, 9), the peace offering (Lev 3:5), and the sin offering (Lev 4:31). In all cases, the verb for producing smoke and odour as well as the phrase “pleasing odour” is used. These features indicate something basic to sacrifice.

Literally the phrase “pleasing odour” means a smell or a scent of rest (or pleasantness). This is a smell that brings to rest. So, when the Lord smelled the sacrifice of Noah, or of his people Israel, then it was not the outward smell as such in which he rejoiced. No, he was brought to inner rest by the disposition and attitude shown by the bringing of the sacrifice – in the case of Noah by his gratitude and giving of what was available to God.

But more is involved in terms of God being brought to rest by the aroma of sacrifice. For God made sacrifice an integral part of the worship he demanded. It was

part of his service of reconciliation. Sacrifice spoke of substitution and atonement. Blood is a key element (Lev 17:11). Sacrifice as established by God ultimately pointed to his great gift of love in Christ.

These elements of giving in gratitude to God a precious gift and the element of atonement are found in or associated closely with the incense offering, as we shall see shortly. So, when the Lord savoured the sweet smell of the incense and took in its fragrance, then God rejoiced and it brought the Lord to inner rest and peace. After all, was this not part and parcel of the ministry of reconciliation which made it possible for him to dwell as holy God in the midst of a people which by nature was sinful? Did the offering of incense not speak of the good covenant relationship between him and Israel, for was all not well between Israel and God? They lived in covenant communion! He, in the midst of Israel, his people! The sweet smelling savour symbolized that reality and it was therefore an apt symbol of the prayers of Israel to their God. It indicated that there was peace and good covenant communion.

So by commanding that the incense be burned twice a day in the confines of the Holy Place, the Lord indicated that he wanted to savour the burnt incense constantly. It was to be a continuing symbol of the beautiful bond of peace between him and Israel. The living God in the midst of his people – a reality made possible because fellowship had been restored between God and man. The truth of the sweet fellowship was expressed in the aromatic fragrance of the incense offering.

Fellowship interrupted

That this is indeed all involved in the incense offering is clear from what, for example, happened later during Israel’s wandering in the desert. In Numbers 16 we read that Israel was still grumbling and murmuring against Moses and Aaron (yes and therefore against

God) even though Korah, Dathan, and Abiram had just been punished in a terrible way the day before by being swallowed up alive by the earth. Because of this constant sinful grumbling in spite of divine discipline, the Lord intervened and came down in glory to the tabernacle. He said to Moses: "Get away from this assembly so I can put an end to them at once" (Num 16:45). The fellowship with God had been broken. There was only the stench of sin and iniquity and it hurt the holy nostrils of God. He was very angry and was ready to make an end to the whole stinking business! The aroma of sweet communion and fellowship was no more.

*Sacrifice as established by God
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What could Moses and Aaron do?! The Lord had told them to distance themselves from the congregation and he apparently gave Moses and Aaron no opportunity to pray for the people as they had done before on an earlier and similar occasion (Num 16:22). Moses then did the next best. He ordered Aaron to get the incense and burn it. He ordered Aaron to use that symbol of prayer. The sweet smelling savour of what the real communion of God and Israel can be like must be produced! The Lord must smell something different from the rebellion and sin. He must be reminded of the sweet savour of the prayers that he had in the past received from Israel, prayers that were possible because of the ministry of reconciliation, prayers symbolized by the burning of incense. So Aaron had taken his censer, gotten fire from the altar, and burned incense.

The Lord's glory filled the tabernacle and therefore Aaron could not enter there and so Aaron burned incense in his censer and ran and stood in the midst of Israel that was being consumed by the wrath of God. He stood among the living and the dead with the burning incense. The symbol of prayer for the peace of Zion, the high priestly incense offering, spoke of the atonement and communion with God and was therefore a sweet smelling savour in the midst of the foul odour of rebellion.

And the Lord responded. He wanted peace and covenant unity with Israel in righteousness. After all, he had ordained this offering. He stopped the plague (Num

16:48)! He had smelled the fragrant symbol of the prayer of peace and thanksgiving based on the ministry of reconciliation with shed blood. Yes, this peace was possible because of the service of atonement!

The sweet fragrance of prayer

So the incense offering was needed. It was something the Lord rejoiced in! The sweet smell of fellowship based on his redeeming work, the sweet smell of prayer. The Lord therefore demanded what the incense offering represented, namely, prayer. And Israel understood. It therefore became a custom that as the sign of their prayer was being offered in the morning and evening, people gathered outside the temple and prayed. We see this custom in the New Testament. Zechariah had been chosen by lot to burn incense in the temple. Then we read in Luke 1:10 "And when the time for the burning of incense came, all the assembled worshippers were praying outside." The incense offering spoke of prayer. Another example is found in Acts 3:1. "Peter and John were going up to the temple at the hour of prayer, the ninth hour." This was the hour of the evening sacrifice and, therefore, also the incense sacrifice.

As the Lord demanded the sign of prayer, he certainly demands prayer itself from us. God wants to hear from us in prayer. Prayer is necessary. It is to be the fragrant savour of a glad and happy sinner who knows he has peace with God! Indeed, because it is to be the sweet savour of the covenant fellowship, it must be above all a prayer of thanksgiving.

God wants to hear from us in prayer

From God's point of view, how beautiful and wonderful for him when he sees us falling down before him in prayer – what a fruit of his salvation work. By nature we want to stand up against God. But God sees us, hands folded in prayer to him and so experiencing communion with him and expressing thanks by making use of that means of fellowship. God delights in that. It is an incense offering to him! It is the sweet savour he delights in amidst all the stench of sin that hurts and irritates him. So God sees results on his work of redemption: communion is possible between God and man.

Prayer must therefore occupy a central place in our life, for God rejoices in it and it reminds God continually of his beautiful work of redemption. From a

rotten and decaying world there is a people who know the Lord and experience the new life. Yes, a people who go to God in prayer and, as with the sacrifice of incense, give their best.

*Prayer must occupy a central place
in our lives*

For what is prayer? Is it not an opening of our hearts, and most hidden thoughts and secrets to God? Is it not a sacrifice of our lips in which we lay everything before him as sacrifice of gratitude? Now our gratitude to God can be shown in many ways, but it starts with prayer. That is the chief part of thankfulness as we confess in the Heidelberg Catechism (LD 45). Without prayer no true acts of thankfulness are possible. Yes and that is why it in particular is the

sweet savour of incense in which God delights. And therefore prayer is demanded by him.

And like the incense offering, our prayers must continue without end. As the sacrifice of incense was to be offered continually and just as the beautiful smell never left the mercy seat, so God demands our prayers continually. God's Word exhorts us: "pray continually" (1 Thess 5:17). Indeed, our life must be characterized by prayer, by the realization of the bond of peace we have with God and a making use of that reality. In this way we live in communion with him and show our thanks. God is then wellpleased. He forgives and forgets the stench of sin that can also foul our life.

This brings us to another element we need to consider about the incense offering. The One who gave the law about the incense offering is holy and he gave very precise rules for it.

To be continued 





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Prayer as an Incense Offering (Part 3 of 3)

In the preceding article, we saw that as God demanded the incense offering so he expects prayer from us. But the one who gave precise rules for the incense offering also has certain expectations with respect to our prayers.

Precise rules for the incense offering

The precise nature of God's rules for the incense offering is obvious from the legislation in Exodus 30. God was very particular and exact. We can think, for example, of the ingredients of the incense. Everything was very precisely spelled out. Similarly, exact instructions were given for the structure of the altar. In Exodus 30 and elsewhere in the Books of Moses, it is very clear what the Lord desired with respect to the incense sacrifice.

However, sinful man easily underestimated God's strict demands and so underestimated the fact that God was serious when he laid down certain rules. The Lord is holy. He is God! He is awesome in majesty and splendour and he will be approached properly. Otherwise even the incense, and the prayers of Israel, are not sweet smelling and good.

There are several examples of how the Lord struck with death or other punishment when the holiness of the incense offering was not reckoned with (Lev 10:13; Num 16:35; 2 Chron 26:16-21). Take, for example, the incident in Leviticus 10. We read that "Aaron's sons Nadab and Abihu took their censers, put fire in them and added incense; and they offered unauthorized fire before the Lord, contrary to his command. So fire came out from the presence of the Lord and consumed them, and they died before the Lord" (Lev 10:1-2).

The unauthorized fire they offered was that they apparently did not use holy fire, namely, fire from the great altar of burnt offering in the court outside the tabernacle, as God had required. Instead they apparently had simply taken fire from elsewhere—

unholy fire, and apparently walked right into the Most Holy Place (cf. Lev 16:1, 2).

It is so easy to underestimate the holiness of God, who wants everything dedicated to him in love with perfection. In sinful human hearts the question can easily arise: did the Lord not overreact by killing these men for this oversight? But in neglecting to use the fire from the great sacrifice of atonement, they despised God's grace and underestimated their sinful condition. Fire from atonement sacrifice was needed. Therefore God struck them down.

By nature we too are sinful and we too can very easily be careless when it comes to appreciating God's holiness. The Lord continually reminded Israel of how holy the sacrifice of incense had to be kept. Think, also, for example, how King Uzziah was struck with leprosy for offering incense (2 Chron 26:66). Not he but the priest had to do that. So the Lord constantly reminded Israel that if the sacrifice of incense was to be pleasing to me, it must be kept holy!

We can very easily be careless when it comes to appreciating God's holiness

All this is very relevant for us because God is just as insistent with the reality that the incense sacrifice represented, namely our prayers. Also with our prayer, God is very strict as to what he wants from us. He wants our prayers to be just so. That is, he wants them offered up in the realization that we speak to God who is holy. He wants our prayers to be holy! Otherwise our prayer is not acceptable to him, and it is not a sweet savour of fellowship but breathes the spirit of sin and unholiness.

Living in the twenty-first century, we face some challenges here. Our culture is egalitarian and we can therefore use this reminder of the holiness of God.



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Respect and awe for God, as God, is sorely lacking in the world of sin around us. Let us beware that none of this attitude rubs off on us. For, the incense offering and its regulations remind us of the seriousness of that which it represents, prayer. The earnestness of what prayer and praying is cannot be overestimated. We are not talking with our neighbour or to ourselves when we pray, but we are addressing the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords, the one whom the angels and seraphim addressed as "Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord of hosts." And as they said this, they covered their faces, for great and awesome is his glory (Isa 6:3)! It is to this God of holiness that the incense offering was given before the most Holy Place and whom we address in prayer.

We are addressing the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords

The strict regulations governing the incense offering therefore tell us that when we offer our sacrifice of incense of prayer, we need to be aware that it meets the Lord's demands for holiness and that it is truly pleasing to him. To put it differently, there is to be no unauthorized fire on the altar – no strange ingredients – lest our sacrifice of incense in prayer be not pleasing to him.

Perhaps one of the biggest dangers threatening our own prayers, our own incense offering to God, is that we can grow so accustomed to praying that the danger is real that we forget God's awesome holiness and our unworthiness and sin. Scripture teaches that there is nothing that turns the Lord off as much as seeing his people approach him with the wrong attitude. Our prayers may be technically flawless. We may even be praying the Lord's Prayer, the perfect prayer; but if such a prayer is not accompanied with a humble and contrite heart that knows: I approach God, the holy one, who of grace has redeemed me, then the Lord despises it.

In the time of Isaiah, the sacrifices were done in a technically correct way. But Isaiah said Israel no longer knew their God (1:3) and therefore no longer knew their true position over against God. O, they sacrificed and prayed, but not in the awareness of holiness of God or in the knowledge of their natural unworthiness. Therefore God said: "Stop bringing meaningless offerings! Your incense is detestable to me. . . . When you spread out your hands in prayer, I will hide my eyes from you; even if you offer many prayers, I will not listen" (Isa 1:13a, 15a).

So praying is a serious activity no matter where it is held. It is offering a sacrifice of gratitude to God. And as Psalm 51:17 says, "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise."

So through the incense offering which speaks of the prayers of God's people, we are taught that our prayers need to be a sweet smelling savour and a fragrance pleasing to God. This can only be accomplished if we approach God, knowing our sin and appreciating his grace and salvation. For then there is a real covenant relationship and an awareness of God's redemption and peace.

But one may ask, how can we ever bring an incense sacrifice of prayer that is truly pleasing to God? After all, the inclination of our heart is evil. This issue brings us to a final aspect of the incense offering, namely, how this offering was made acceptable to God.

The incense offering acceptable to God

How was the incense sacrifice made acceptable to God? To answer that question properly we need to remember that there was a close relationship between the incense sacrifice and the burnt offering presented on the great altar outside the tabernacle and temple. The incense sacrifice did not function on its own as an isolated gift to God. No, it functioned along with the whole burnt offering and there was a close relationship between these sacrifices and their altars.

This close relationship is seen in the fact that both altars were similar in design. The golden altar of incense was, as it were, a miniature version of the altar of the burnt offering.

Also, both sacrifices were offered at the same time (cf. Exod 29:39; 30:7-8; Num 28:2, 8). So the smoke from both sacrifices ascended to the Lord simultaneously. On top of that, the fire for the incense offering had to come from the fire used in the burnt offering and this offering had to burn continually (Lev 6:13; 10:1; cf. 16:12; Num 16:46). So there was a unity between the two sacrifices. They used the same fire and their effect was felt continually. There was the constant fragrance of the incense offering inside the tabernacle or temple and there was the constant burning and smoke and therefore smell arising from the altar outside.

Furthermore, the blood of the sin offering sacrificed on the large altar outside had to be smeared not only on the horns of the altar outside (Lev 16:18-19), but also had to go on the smaller golden incense altar

inside. This had to be done once a year on the great Day of Atonement when the horns of the incense altar had to be smeared with blood (Exod 30:10; Lev 16:16, 18-19; Heb 9:22-23). Thus atonement was made for both the altar for sacrifice outside and for the incense altar inside. Both were therefore pure before God and the offerings, including the incense, were acceptable to him.

The importance of all of this for that which the incense offering symbolized and stood for is clear. The incense sacrifice of our prayers has a close relationship to *the* great atonement sacrifice of all time. Our prayers are acceptable to God only because of the cleansing blood of the great sacrifice of atonement, the Lord Jesus Christ. He fulfilled the incense offering. Does it not say in Ephesians 5:2 that "Christ gave himself for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God"? He is the fulfilment of the incense sacrifice. And therefore, he sanctifies our prayers and makes them holy and acceptable to God. He makes it possible for holy God in heaven to receive our incense offering of prayers into his glorious presence (cf. 2 Cor 2:14-16). Without Christ and his atoning blood and sacrifice our prayers would not be acceptable to God. Christ sanctifies our prayers and makes them acceptable. He cleanses and washes away all sin remaining in them against our will.

So our prayers reach the throne of God and are found pleasing to him for Christ's sake. But there is more. Not only are our prayers made holy by Christ, but they are accompanied by Christ's prayer of intercession for forgiveness and for covenant peace. We can think of the promise in 1 John 2:1, ". . . if anyone does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense – Jesus Christ, the Righteous One." He pleads and prays for us as our advocate and high priest (also cf. Rom 8:26-27).

In Revelation 8 we start a new overview of the last age (Rev 8-11). In Revelation 8:3, the Apostle John sees a vision of the prayers of the saints that rise as incense to God. But added to those prayers is more incense, much heavenly incense. We read:

Another angel, who had a golden censer, came and stood at the altar. He was given much incense to offer, with the prayers of all the saints, on the golden altar before the throne. The smoke of the incense, together with the prayers of the saints, went up before God from the angel's hand. (Rev 8:3-4)

Notice that the angel does not bring his own incense offering. It was *given* to him. *Much* of it was given to him. And when the incense rose to heaven, it carried the prayers of the saints with it to the throne of God.

May we then not assume that this heavenly incense was the incense of Christ's intercessory work? Does Christ not enable the incense and the prayers of the saints to rise to God? Of themselves the prayers of the saints lack so much and therefore so much incense from Another is necessary to make them acceptable. Is Christ's intercession, based on the atonement, not what purifies or sanctifies our prayers?

Our prayers reach the very presence of God because they are accompanied by our heavenly high priest, Jesus Christ

And so John saw the mixture of the heavenly and the earthly incense reaching the throne of God. So our prayers also reach the throne of grace. What a beautiful reminder that also today our prayers reach the very presence of God because they are accompanied by our heavenly high priest, Jesus Christ (cf. Rom 8:26-27). And God hears and responds. In Revelation 8 we see God's response by the angel taking the censer, now emptied of prayer, and filling it with fire from the altar and emptying it upon the earth. Thunder, lightning, and earthquakes follow. The seven trumpets of God's judgments are blown (Rev 8:9) in response to the prayers of the saints (cf. Rev 6:9-10).

When one considers this scene in Revelation 8, one is comforted. In Christ, our incense offering, our prayers, are always a pleasing incense aroma – a pleasing fragrance giving our heavenly Father rest and joy in his work of salvation as seen in his children. So, the Father delights in our prayers, in our thanksgivings, in our pleas, in our joys, in our requests made in sorrow. He receives our sacrifice of incense and he will accept them and listen to them. He will provide, for in Christ and because of his atonement, our prayers are acceptable! That is our comfort every time we offer our prayers to him in the awareness of Christ's atoning work. He will surely hear and in his own divine way, he will answer them. For Christ's sake and for the sake of the covenant peace in which he delights. He will work all things for the good of those who love him (Rom 8:28), hurrying to the great day of Jesus Christ when the heavenly Most Holy Place will come on earth to be his dwelling place with man (Rev 21:15-22). There the incense offering will be replaced by the sanctified praises of his people at rest in the joy of their Lord (cf. Rev 5:6-14).

