

KINGDOM BIBLE STUDIES

"Teaching the things concerning the kingdom of God..."

FROM THE CANDLESTICK TO THE THRONE

Part 102

MINISTRY FROM THE GOLDEN ALTAR

“And when he had opened the *seventh seal*, there was *silence in heaven about the space of half an hour*” (Rev. 8:1).

What we have in the words of the text quoted above is indeed a most beautiful and also a most meaningful passage of the book of Revelation! It is significant to note that the first seal opens with the noise of thunder, but at the seventh seal there is *silence in heaven*. A trumpet voice announces the opening of the unveiling, whereas great silence marks the consummation! When you look at the chapters preceding this passage you find that there were six seals that had been broken. When the first seal was opened there was a great voice from the throne that said, “Come!” When the second seal was opened another voice cried, “Come!” At the opening of the third and fourth seals the command was again given, “Come!” Each time a seal was ready to be opened there was a coming forth of the Christ in greater glory and great and mighty events unfolded before the wondering eyes of the prophet of Patmos. John saw and heard marvelous things in the heavens of the Spirit that staggered the imagination and left him dumbfounded with awe and contemplation.

Finally the seventh seal was opened, a seal unlike any other, for it was the last of the seals. When the Lamb opened the seventh seal there were not great voices, there were not thunderings and lightnings, there were not mighty commotions, movement, activities, and events. **THERE WAS SILENCE IN HEAVEN FOR ABOUT THE SPACE OF HALF AN HOUR. SILENCE!** One half hour of silence! What is that silence? Obviously, according to verse two, the seven angels were prepared to blast away on their trumpets: they were alerted and at attention, prepared and expecting to go into immediate action. But the word in power had gone forth: “Hold that blast!” Time crawls by, half an hour passes; then the first angel receives the word, and he sounds forth his trumpet.

In this dramatic scene all heaven is hushed! For about half an hour the twenty-four elders kneel in silent wonder. The living creatures fold their wings, stilled and speechless in awe. The saints before the throne are breathless and unable to utter a word. Angelic choirs put away their hymnals, the harps are laid aside; there is not a sound from anywhere throughout the vast celestial world. All is hushed. Why? As our thoughts ascend upward among divine mysteries we see that it is because the seventh seal has been broken! At the breaking of the seventh seal all creation beholds with astonished wonder the beauty and perfection of the *completion* of God’s work in His many-membered Christ! Christ in His glorified body is fully unveiled! This new priesthood of the sons of God after the order of Melchizedek is about to minister on behalf of creation in the spiritual temple of God in the heavenlies! As you read the verses that follow in chapter eight you see that the indescribable silence has something to do with **PRAYER!** It has to do with **INCENSE!** It has to do with holy **FIRE** upon the altar! It has to do with the **ROYAL PRIESTHOOD!** The time has come for God to bring to the golden altar **every prayer** of His elect. And He will add to them the anointing and power of the omnipotent Spirit! And they will be a sweet smelling savor — not the stench of the flesh, the foul smell of soulish zeal and emotion, the offensive odor of carnal religious exercise — but the sweet fragrance and pleasing scent of a priestly ministry that is in the Spirit and by the Spirit!

Then John saw the angel take the censer and fill it with fire from the altar of incense and cast it into the *earth* — into that earth which *we are*, into the world of humanity; and “there were voices, and thunderings, and lightnings, and an earthquake” — great commotions, intense dealings, powerful words, marvelous unveilings, deep revelations, fearful manifestations, fiery processings, and judgment of such intensity and severity that the soulical mind and emotions, the natural human constitution, the fleshly will, ways, and desires, and all the wisdom of this world reel to and fro, shaken to their very foundations. This is the ministry that shall break forth from the golden altar in the heavens of the Spirit of the Lord when the Christ of God is fully formed and unveiled within all the holy sons of God!

Talk about judgment unto victory! God is bringing forth His “firstfruit company” who are undefiled before God. These are they that have repented of sin and every work of the flesh. With Christ Jesus, their victorious Head, they have died to all the desires of the flesh and mind, and all the vain religious platitudes of the church systems of man. They have fixed all their hopes in Christ the Lord! Their hearts cry not for the tinsel of the world, nor yet for the trinkets of popular religion, but their prayer ascends to God day and night, “Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.” Purged of all pride, self-interest, filthiness of the flesh, and of all soulish works and worship, these shall be accounted worthy to reign with Christ as kings and judges from the spirit realm, and those who rule from henceforth are a royal priesthood like unto their Lord, after the order of Melchizedek, which is the order of the Son of God.

The implication of such a momentous event as *silence in heaven* is staggering to the imagination. But the implication it holds, not only for God’s elect in this present hour, but for the entire creation in the age and the ages to come, is beyond human comprehension. But I tell you the truth when I say that there can be no other result when GOD’S FINISHED WORK IS SEEN IN ALL ITS BEAUTY AND GLORY IN THE MANIFEST SONS OF GOD!

There have been many explanations of the “silence in heaven” and most commentators simply pass swiftly over it with the admission that they don’t understand what it signifies. Some interpret it in the light of various scriptures that speak of “let the *earth* keep *silence* before Him.” But it is not the *earth* that is silent here! The silence is in *heaven*! We must keep in mind that the book of Revelation is a *spiritual drama* and the breaking of the seven seals denotes *revelation* — the *unveiling* of the Christ life within us. The Father has also designed that in the opening of the seven-sealed book, there would be a careful process connected to exposing the contents. Christ Jesus possesses every power that the Father has, for the deity of Jesus **is** the almighty Father! However, the full glory and authority of the Christ has been hidden beneath the veil of **our flesh**, for we are the body of Christ and the temple of God. The restoration of all men and all things to God requires the full disclosure of Jesus Christ **in and through His body on earth**. There are seven seals upon this book. The number seven denotes that contained within this book is the totality of God’s character, the fullness of His power, and the complete revelation of His mind, will, and purpose. So, the opening of each seal is connected to a brighter and clearer revelation of all that Christ is, which is all that God is! Awesome beyond human words to articulate is the divine wonder of the work of God in the lives of His called and chosen elect as He removes all that hinders and obstructs, releasing the glory of the living Christ, the fullness of God, within! We are living in momentous times! The Lamb is opening the seals of that book which we are, to bring forth the revelation of Jesus Christ within us! Can you not see the mystery?

As the seven seals are loosed in God’s people they progressively experience the fullness of all that God is. There has never been an expression of God at this level in the earth at any time except in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ, for it pleased the Father that in Him should all fullness dwell. But now there is a people, His body, the completion of Him, that has been sealed unto the day of redemption, and when God has loosed within them all the seals there will be brought forth in the earth a many-membered expression of the Lord at the same level of GOD’S FULLNESS. We will know Him no longer by measure, we will receive no longer merely His gifts, we will see Him no more through a glass darkly, or as a reality beyond or outside of ourselves. We will know Him even as we are known by Him and will see Him face to face. And all creation will be able to see His face *in us*!

Oh, the wonder of these things! It should not seem strange that when the seventh seal is opened, denoting the completion of the wonderful work of God to bring forth the fullness of Christ in us and out of

us, there should be “silence in heaven” for the symbolic brief period of “half an hour.” Here is what silence in heaven means to me. It means a revelation or an expectation that is so awesome there are no words to be said about it! We must think about these things in terms of Old Testament shadows. John is writing to people who think that way, for the only scriptures used by the early church were the books of the Old Testament. When we read that they “searched the scriptures daily whether these things were so” it was the Old Testament scriptures they were searching out. The imagery of “silence in heaven” is drawn from the book of Psalms where at the end of a profound proclamation of exalted truth and revelation, we find the word *Selah* which means, “pause, and think,” or “pause, and behold.” How often king David reminded those that read him, “Meditate — pause and think about that!”

In the twenty-fourth Psalm (and numerous other passages) we find the famous word *Selah*. “Lift up your heads, O ye gates; and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in. Who is this King of glory? The Lord strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle. Lift up your heads, O ye gates; even lift them up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in. Who is this King of glory? The Lord of hosts, He is the King of glory. *Selah*” (Ps. 24:7-10). And again, “As we have heard, so have we seen in the city of the Lord of hosts, in the city of our God: God will establish it for ever. *Selah*” (Ps. 48:8). Typically in scripture readings, we include this word as though it were saying “amen” or “hallelujah.” But “*Selah*” is not intended to be a spoken word in Hebrew. Instead, it is a musical notation used just as *crescendo* and *ritardo* are in modern manuscripts. It means “to pause.” It is not a word to be spoken, it is a word to be *obeyed*!

It will be noted (as in the passages quoted above) that the word *Selah* usually occurs at a place where a very significant statement has been made, making that a good place for a break or pause, and therefore evoking contemplation or emotional response on the part of the hearers. Spiritually, it bespeaks of the contemplation and response of those who receive the revelation of truth and behold the majesty of the Lord! Here, the “silence in heaven” is the “*Selah*” at the end of the loosing of the seals! It means, “Pause, think, meditate, consider, behold, contemplate within yourself *who you are*, what great things God has done, the beauty of His plan and the wonder of His purpose! Consider, contemplate THE REVELATION OF JESUS CHRIST IN YOU! Observe, behold THE REVELATION OF JESUS CHRIST IN MANY SONS BROUGHT TO GLORY!” Finally, the little word “about” is most interesting. “There was silence in heaven *about* the space of half an hour.” It certainly does not denote a *literal* time period! In its symbolism it is undetermined, indefinite, left open to the unique response in each of us to the awesome inworkings of the Lord! Isn’t it wonderful!

MINISTRY FROM THE GOLDEN ALTAR

“And I saw the seven angels which stood before God; and to them were given seven trumpets. And *another angel* came and *stood at the altar*, having a *golden censer*; and there was given unto him *much incense*, that he should *offer it with the prayers of all saints* upon the golden altar which was before the throne. And the *smoke* of the incense, which came with the prayers of the saints, *ascended up before God* out of the angel’s hand. And the angel took the censer, and *filled it with fire of the altar*, and *cast it into the earth*: and there were voices, and thunderings, and lightnings, and an earthquake” (Rev. 8:2-5).

To understand the mysteries written above is of eternal importance, for until we do understand them we will be ineffectual in our ministry as the priesthood of God. I would draw your attention to seven specific items set forth in this wonderful vision. There is an angel, an altar, a golden censer, incense, fire, prayers, and smoke. We must be very certain about the identity of each of these objects! The setting is the “holy place,” the location of the golden altar within the typical tabernacle of Moses, or later the temple in Jerusalem. It was stationed just before the veil of entrance into the “most holy place” of the throne of God over the ark of the covenant from whence proceeded God’s mercy — the throne of the mercy seat.

The golden altar of incense was made of wood, overlaid with pure gold. It was three feet high and one and one-half feet square. It was the tallest piece of furniture in the holy place and speaks of the highest act of worship possible, that of praise and prayer and priestly intercession. On the top of it rests a pan-shaped vessel, called the golden censer, on which coals (pieces of burning wood taken from the brazen altar in the outer court) are burning. There is no chimney for the smoke to escape by, so the room is full of it; but

the smoke is so pleasant that every priest of God ministering in that holy place would not like to be without it; the fragrance is sweeter than anything ever smelt before! But it is not the wood which gives forth such a sweet odor when under the action of fire; it is the incense which the high priest has put on those burning coals that smells so pleasant, and which feels so refreshing to the spirits of those who minister there. This incense was made of four sweet spices, which gave forth their fragrance by burning. Their sweetness is not known till they are submitted to the action of fire, when the odor is sent forth in the smoke. The ingredients are enumerated in Exodus 30:34-35.

The high priest would fill his censer with fresh coals, and put on incense every morning and every evening, so that day and night there would be the sweet odor going up to God. It was called “a perpetual incense before the Lord” (Ex. 30:8), because night and day it was ever burning, and the smoke was ever ascending before the veil, and going through the veil, and passing under it, and by the sides of it, into the holy of holies before the Lord, who dwelt there on the mercy seat. And on the tenth day of the seventh month, when the high priest went into the holy of holies to make atonement for all the people of Israel, he carried the golden censer in his hand, and placed it on the floor of the holiest of all; and as he stood in the presence of God and before the majesty of His power, and sprinkled the blood seven times on the mercy seat, and before the mercy seat, he would be enveloped in smoke; his garments would smell of sweet incense, and every part of the room would be filled with it, and the glory of the Lord would be softened by it (Lev. 16:11-14).

The “angel” John saw standing by the altar, having the golden censer in his hand, administering in the whole procedure, is none other than our Lord Jesus Christ, for this angel occupies the place of the high priest in the temple worship, who alone was the one to carry the golden censer beyond the veil into the presence of God and His throne. The writer to the Hebrews identifies our heavenly high priest with these words, “Now of the things which we have spoken, this is the sum: We have such an high priest, who is set on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens; a minister of the sanctuary, and of the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, and not man... Christ becoming an high priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this material creation...” (Heb. 8:1-2; 9:11).

There are those who teach and preach that Christ Jesus is **now** the high priest for all the peoples of the world, but that is not true. Throughout this age of the formation of the Christ-body He is the high priest of His redeemed, blood-washed, spirit-begotten elect — **only!** “For it became Him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing **many sons** unto glory, to make the captain of **their** salvation perfect through sufferings. For both He that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified are all **of one**: for which cause He is not ashamed to call **them brethren**...wherefore in all things it behooved Him to be made like unto **His brethren**, that He might be a **merciful and faithful high priest** in things pertaining to God” (Heb. 2:10-11,17).

Here we see clearly that Christ is the great high priest for “the brethren” — the sons of God, kings and priests, partakers of the heavenly calling! He is the great high priest over the *house of God* made of *living stones*, the habitation of God by the spirit! “Having therefore, **brethren**, boldness to enter into the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way, which He hath consecrated **for us**, through the veil...and having an **high priest over the house of God**; let **us** draw near...” (Heb. 10:19-22).

The high priestly intercession of the Christ is a dual ministry, as is all priestly ministry, both Godward and usward. In its Godward aspect we hear His own words: “I pray **not** for the world” (Jn. 17:9). There is no need of making any mistake about it! With all the grace and redemptive inclusiveness we may attribute to Him it is an outstanding fact. Christ does not **now** pray for the world, for those who are not yet awakened to Him. This is what He says: “I pray not for the world, but — **FOR THEM WHICH THOU HAST GIVEN ME**” (Jn. 17:9). What a mark of separation from the world and separation unto Himself there is in that statement and the truth of it! Oh yes, there is a ministry which shall yet touch the whole world and all of mankind through the body of Christ, but the high priestly ministry of Jesus during this age of the selecting, calling, and perfecting of the many brethren, is uniquely on behalf of the church which is His body. The world shall yet be blessed and restored through that people that is **perfected in Him**, as Jesus also said, “That they all may be one; as Thou, Father, art in me, and I in Thee, that they also may be **one in us: THAT**

THE W-O-R-L-D MAY BELIEVE THAT THOU HAST SENT ME” (Jn. 17:21). When the Lord turns His hand to save the world and deliver the whole creation it will be a glorious day indeed! But the work of God today is with **us** — the firstfruits of His redemption, His kings and priests for the age and the ages yet to come!

What an amazing fact it is, that He who is the Master of the heavens and the earth prays for **US** — and prays in heaven on the throne of the Highest! It is not that He is praying for just the things we wish, nor even such as we dream we need, but the fact that He is praying for us is beyond definition and demonstrates the deep mystery of His grace, His love, His care, and divine purpose for us. There is a priesthood arising to rule over the earth and reign over the nations, but our Lord Jesus Christ is now high priest on behalf of those who are called to share His sonship. It should not be necessary to enlarge on this thought. Nothing could be more reasonable and just than the great truth that Christ is a Son and High Priest over **His own house**, “whose house **ye are**” (Heb. 3:6).

Notice the pronouns in the following verses: “Wherefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of **our** profession” (Heb. 3:1). “Which hope **we** have as an anchor of the soul, and which entereth into that within the veil; whither the forerunner is for **us** entered, even Jesus...” (Heb. 6:19-20). “For Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands...but into heaven itself, **now** to appear in the presence of God **for us**” (Heb. 9:24). Ah, all is now for **us**, not for the world! “Seeing then that **we** have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let **us** hold fast **our** profession. For **we** have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feelings of **our** infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as **we** are, yet without sin. Let **us** therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that **we** may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need” (Heb. 4:14-16).

“Wherefore He is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him, seeing He ever liveth to make intercession for them” (Heb. 7:25). Just what does it mean to “save to the uttermost”? This phrase is given by Phillips as “He can save fully and completely.” Young’s Literal says, “He is able to save to the very end.” The Amplified Bible reads, “He is able to save to the uttermost — completely, perfectly, finally, for all time and eternity.” As one has pointed out, “The Greek words used here are most interesting, *eis to panteles*, or INTO THE ALWAYS. It is only used twice in the New Testament, here, and one other time. The Greek points out that He is able to save COMPLETELY. He is able to save ALL THE WAY, even unto the valley of the shadow of death, saving into incorruption and immortality, or *into the always*. He is able to save altogether, NOTHING LACKING — complete salvation with no flaw, complete as only a holy, omniscient, and omnipotent God knows completeness and perfection. This “salvation unto the uttermost” is a complete salvation of spirit, soul, and body reserved for those who “come unto God *by Him*” — those who follow all the way into the Holiest, within the veil, to know Him in ALL His glorious and eternal reality!

There is nothing ordinary about our Christ. As someone has written, everything about Him is superlative. His perfection is far beyond all question. Our Christ is the most powerful among the powerful, the mightiest among the holy and the holiest among the mighty. With His nail-pierced hands He has lifted empires off their hinges. With the same nail-pierced hands He has lifted prodigals out of the hog pen. Our superlative Christ has turned the stream of time into new channels. **HE MAKETH ALL THINGS NEW!** Whatsoever He touches, whatsoever touches Him, becomes new. Our Christ governs the ages of the ages, and when we look unto Him we are changed from glory to glory into the very same image. The *love* of Christ is unknowable (Eph. 3:19). The *riches* of Christ are unsearchable (Eph. 3:8). The *joy* of Christ is unspeakable (I Pet. 1:8). The *ways* of our Christ are untraceable (Rom. 11:33). The *grace* of Christ is inexhaustible (II Cor. 9:8). The *peace* given by our Christ is unfathomable (Phil. 4:7). The *power* of Christ is unlimited (Mat. 28:18). **CHRIST HIMSELF** is unsurpassable: “Who is like unto Thee, O Lord, among the gods? Who is like Thee, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders?” (Ex. 15:11).

Ah, my beloved, does it seem that you shall never overcome the flesh, the carnal mind, and the world, never live the abundant life, never arrive at perfection or come into the image of God’s Son, never be filled with God’s fullness, never be changed from the mortal to the immortal, never be a manifest son of God? Be encouraged, dear one, for we have a *great high priest* who can **save to the uttermost** because He is **ever living** to make intercession for us — there is never a single moment in which His priestly action, His

watchful care, His loving sympathy and succor, His working in us in the power of His endless life, is not in full operation. Therefore HE CAN SAVE TO THE UTTERMOST — COMPLETELY, PERFECTLY, ALL THE WAY, FLAWLESSLY, AND ETERNALLY! There is no bondage He cannot break, no weakness He cannot undergird, no fear He cannot calm, no sickness He cannot heal, no pain He cannot alleviate, no sorrow He cannot assuage, no trait of Adam's nature He cannot slay, no victory He cannot gain, no lack He cannot supply, and no death He cannot conquer. Blessed be the Lord! My earnest prayer is that God shall make this a living hope in the hearts of all who read these lines!

The symbolic *angel* standing at the golden altar is our great high priest, the Lord Jesus Christ.

The *fire* upon the altar is the energizing, quickening, presence and power of God Himself who “*is a consuming fire*” (Heb. 12:29). The purpose of the fire was to consume and transform every sacrifice placed upon the altar. At the institution of the Aaronic priestly ceremonies, God Himself sent fire **out from Himself** to consume the first offering (Lev. 9:24) to show His acceptance. The fire flashed from the Holiest of all like a bolt of lightning and lit up the fresh sacrifice upon the brazen altar in the outer court. From whence originated that fire? It proceeded from the blazing Shekinah Glory which dwelt upon the mercy-throne of the ark of the Lord between the Cherubim! The fire was God Himself! This same fire, divine fire, was to be kept burning continually (Lev. 6:9), so that every burnt offering was consumed by the very fire of God! This fire, started by Yahweh, was kept burning by the priests, and was carried from place to place so it could be used to start other holy fires (Lev. 16:12-13; Num. 16:45-50). That is why it was such an abomination when Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, lit a fire by their own hands and offered “strange fire” before the Lord so that He destroyed them. Thus, it is GOD HIMSELF who consumes the sacrifice!

The *golden censer* represents each member of God's elect, for the fire of God resides in the life of every man and woman who has been baptized with the Holy Ghost and with fire.

The *prayers* offered at the altar are the effectual prayers of those saints who minister as priests in the Spirit and by the Spirit. From of old God had among His people intercessors to whose voice He listened and gave deliverance. As someone has pointed out, on one occasion it was strangely said of God, “He saw that there was no man, and wondered that there was no intercessor” (Isa. 59:16). Here we read of a time of trouble when He sought for an intercessor, but in vain. And He *wondered!* Think of what that means — the amazement of God that there should be none who loved the people enough, or who had sufficient understanding of God's will and faith in His power to deliver, to intercede, on their behalf! If there had been an intercessor, He would have given deliverance; without an intercessor His judgment came down (Isa. 64:7; Eze. 22:30-31). But when it was said of God that He wondered that there was no intercessor, there followed the words: “Therefore His arm brought salvation unto Him. The Redeemer shall come to Sion” (Isa. 59:16,20). God Himself would provide the true intercessor, in Christ His Son, of whom it had already been said, “He bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors” (Isa. 53:12). And now, “He ever liveth to make intercession *for us!*” Christ the Head is intercessor in heaven; we, the members of His body, are partners and participators with Him in the earth. Because there was no intercessor, God has Himself raised up His INTERCESSOR COMPANY to bring deliverance!

This brings us to the *incense*. On many occasions incense is the symbol of prayer. David cried, “Let my prayer be set forth before Thee as incense” (Ps. 141:2). As the burning of incense produces a fragrance, so the prayers, combined with the high praises of the saints, brings forth a sweet-smelling fragrance to the Lord. After the close of the giving of the Old Testament Canon, heaven was silent for about four hundred years. Then the silence was broken by the intrusion of the presence of an angel at the time of incense: “And it came to pass, that while he (Zacharias) executed the priest's office before God in the order of his course, according to the custom of the priest's office, his lot was to burn incense when he went into the temple of the Lord. And the whole multitude of the people were praying without at the time of the incense” (Lk. 1:8-10).

Here in John's vision of the ministry at the golden altar, however, there is a difference! The incense is *not* the prayers of the saints, but is offered up *with* the prayers of the saints. This concept is most interesting. It suggests that the prayers of the saints were lying on the altar and the angel came with incense to cense the holy things. Incense mingled with the prayers of the saints can only be ***prayer mingled with prayer!*** PRAYER OF A HIGHER, PURER TYPE INTERMIXED WITH THE PRAYERS OF THE

SAINTS! All of this declares to us that the incense is the activity of the Holy Spirit in our praying, for we are exhorted to pray “with the Spirit” and “in the Spirit.” This “with our prayers” activity of the indwelling Spirit is seen so clearly in Paul’s admonition wherein he says, “Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself *maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered*. And He that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because He *maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God*” (Rom. 8:26-27).

The *smoke* of the incense, which ascended up with the prayers of the saints, bespeaks of the *fragrance* of our prayers which ascends up before God as a sweet-smelling savor — that which is well pleasing and acceptable unto the Lord. If we have prayers without fire and incense, they aren’t going to ascend any higher than our heads! The aroma is produced *from the incense that is quickened by the fire!* The apostle James tells us that “the *effectual fervent prayer* of a righteous man availeth much” (James 5:16). The words “effectual fervent” are from one Greek word, *energeo*, which is the word from which is derived our English word “energize.” A better rendering would be “The ***energized*** prayer of a righteous man availeth much,” which means a prayer within a prayer, a voice within a voice. It is only the prayer that is offered on the golden altar of incense, ***energized by the fire of God within our spirit***, that will ascend as a fragrant odor into the presence of the Lord!

The message is clear — prayer is *not* priestly prayer unless it is *in the Spirit* and *by the Spirit!* Ah, yes, anyone can pray, the meanest sinner can cry, “God be merciful to me!” and the Father will hear that cry. Believers on all levels of spiritual maturity pray, most often for *blessings* and *things*, and God hears and answers, meeting many needs. But none of these constitute PRIESTHOOD PRAYER. Priesthood prayer is prayed by an order of saints possessed of a priestly nature and a priestly heart, those called and chosen by the Lord to be kings and priests to reign on the earth (Rev. 5:9-10). Any kind of prayer may secure a blessing from God, but only priesthood prayer can bring the kingdom of God to pass in the earth! Priesthood prayer reconciles men to God! Priesthood prayer sets the captives free! Priesthood prayer delivers creation from the bondage of corruption! Priesthood prayer restores all things back into God again! Priesthood prayer is the ***ministry from the golden altar!***

All the various works of God know their appointed times. The wise man said, “To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under heaven” (Ecc. 3:1). Everything in nature sets the example of precise order and patterns, and so it is also in the realm of the spirit. Every spiritual activity has its appointed time and season. There is a time to be a babe in Christ, a time to grow, a time to learn, a time to mature. There is a time to give oneself to prayer, a time to devote oneself to the word, a time to share and witness, a time to work and bless, a time to heal and encourage, a time to correct, admonish, or rebuke, and a time to simply BE the expression of God in the earth. But while I am asserting the necessity of *seasons* for prayer and all other spiritual activities, let no one think that I am suggesting that we should *carnally* determine these seasons, for instance, “I will pray for an hour every morning between 5:00 and 6:00,” or “I will study the scriptures each night just before I go to bed.” While such resolutions sound logical and appear laudable to the natural mind, they are usually *soulical* determinations and ***spiritually they just don’t work!*** Spiritually, such self-efforts are mere rubbish! There is a “spiritual time” for the sacrifice at the golden altar, and there must be the fire of God burning upon the altar, and the incense given from the hand of the high priest to offer *with* our prayers, or they are just so many words! Can you not see the mystery?

The *seasons* for spiritual work are *spiritual seasons*, not natural. They have nothing to do with the position of the hands on the clock or the date on the calendar — they depend solely upon the leading and moving of the Spirit of God, the flow of His life, the discernment of His mind, the unction of His will! Are you familiar with the legend of Chanticleer, the rooster? Chanticleer thought that his crowing caused the sun to rise. He even felt that if one day by accident he should fail to crow, the sun would not rise at all. Of course, the universe is quite different from what Chanticleer imagined. For in fact it was the sun with its soft rays of dawn that awoke Chanticleer. He was only a herald, the announcer of all the light and warmth contained in the sun. It is so with God and us! We do not move God by our efforts and prayers — it is God who moves us *to pray!*

There are times when I have “decided” to spend time in prayer, but when I turned aside to give myself to it, no matter how I labored there was no sense of His presence, no flow of His life, no quickening of His Spirit; the heavens were brass and God seemed a million miles away! I could get nowhere and the

whole time proved unproductive. But there are other times when I found myself praying, I found myself desiring to pray, deeply moved and compelled to pray, and that was the Holy Spirit urging me to do what was necessary to enable things to happen the way they were supposed to happen. It's a mystery I don't fully understand, but there are times when I have to pray, there are times when the altar of my soul is full of clouds of holy incense as I send up petitions, as I decree a word, not for myself, but for others and for the manifestation of the kingdom of God. This is the spiritual "season" of prayer of which I speak determined, not by my carnal understanding or soulish effort, but set by the Spirit Himself!

Ah, my beloved, discern the "mood" of the Spirit, be sensitive to the "times" of the Spirit, find the "stream" of the Spirit, and FLOW WITH IT! Pray when the anointing for prayer comes! Pray when the coals of fire are in the censer! Pray when the incense is mingled with your prayers! I do not hesitate to tell you that more will be accomplished in ten minutes in the flow of HIS LIFE than can be wrought in many hours of praying or ministering after the flesh. Learn this and you will understand a great secret: If a person is not moved to pray by the unction of the Spirit he can hardly succeed in prayer. Except we be quickened inwardly, we cannot pray in the Spirit or by the Spirit. When we pray "in season" we touch the throne of the Most High, and just as the apple tree bears its apples "in season," just so will our prayers bring forth a mighty harvest when they function in season! We mount above the stars beyond creation's limit, and the soul is alone with God. The electric current which thrills every fiber of the human frame, is but a faint image of that spiritual force that comes forth at this contact with the celestial and the divine. At the golden altar we touch, in union with Him, all things that are lawful and high in His eternal dwelling place!

If we would fulfill the divine function of the kingdom of God on earth let us cherish the motions of God's Spirit in our hearts. The mariner may spread his sails, but the ship cannot go to its destination without a gale of wind; so we may spread the sails of our endeavor, but we cannot bring the kingdom of God on earth without the moving wind of God's Spirit! How vital then becomes our sensitivity and yieldedness to the motions of the Spirit, motions to prayer, motions to intercession, motions to praise and worship and thanksgiving. "When thou hearest the sound of a going in the tops of the mulberry tress, then thou shalt bestir thyself, for then shall the Lord go out before thee" (II Sam. 5:24). So, when we hear the voice within us, the secret inspiration stirring us up to pray, we must hasten to move with God. It is the power of His kingdom in manifestation! While the Spirit works in us, we should work with the Spirit. Oh! make much of the motion of the Spirit — it is the energizing of the fire of God within to accomplish great and mighty things for the kingdom!

God is bringing a great and wonderful change in the lives of His sons in this realm of prayer! If you are still living out of your human consciousness you will believe that your prayers will influence and convince God to do things. That is still part of the carnal, human, religious nature to believe that whatever ***we want*** God will accede to and give us if only we pray loud enough, fast long enough, make enough promises to God, or something else to ***force His hand***. Now don't misunderstand what I say! I'm not saying we shouldn't pray, nor am I saying there is no power in prayer to move the hand of God and change things. What we need to do is change our understanding of prayer and our concept of God! We get into this religious thing where we think that if we ask enough we can somehow influence God to grant whatever it is that ***we think*** is good or needful. Don't we understand yet that God ***is God***, and God is going to do what God is going to do! No amount of praying, pleading, begging, beseeching, or reminding God of His promises is going to ***force the hand of God*** to do something ***for us***. The great truth is just this — the only prayer that will ever be answered is the prayer that God puts in our hearts to pray! The high priest must put the incense upon the coals with our prayers in order for them to ascend — He's not going to answer anything else! That's why we must pray "in the Spirit" and "with the Spirit." It is only in and by the Spirit that our prayers can be "according to the will of God." As we pray out of the mind of Christ instead of out of our own carnal understanding and desire, our prayer becomes effectual — energized — for such prayer is the very word of the Lord going forth to proclaim and creatively accomplish His redemptive plan and purpose! Isn't it wonderful!

The broad scope of the wonderful ministry of prayer is given us by the apostle Paul — yet even in this it must be as we are prompted and guided by the indwelling Spirit. "I exhort therefore, that, first of all, SUPPLICATIONS, PRAYERS, INTERCESSIONS, AND GIVING OF THANKS be made for A-L-L M-E-N...for this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour; who WILL HAVE ALL MEN TO BE

SAVED, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; who gave Himself a RANSOM FOR A-L-L, to be testified (proven, demonstrated, fulfilled) IN DUE TIME” (I Tim. 2:1-6).

You will note that the command to pray for all men is rooted in the fact that God **will have all men to be saved!** We must ever distinguish between the *fact* of the ultimate salvation of all mankind and the *manner* in which God brings it to pass. He condescends to work through human instrumentality. Since God purposes to save all men, He has a **plan**, a **process**, and an **instrumentality** by which to accomplish this! Part of the process is **the intercessory prayers of the saints!** An intercessor is God’s strategist — he sees what God is after, and goes along with Him. The men of the Bible always understood their specific commission. So do the sons of God! That all men be saved is God’s **purpose**. Intercessory prayer is part of the **process**. The manifest sons of God are His ultimate **instrument**. That is why this ministry from the golden altar is revealed immediately following the opening of the seventh seal. Christ is fully revealed in the many sons brought to glory! The whole earth shall be impacted by the ministry of God’s Royal Priesthood! The kingdoms of this world shall become the kingdoms of our God and of His Christ! This is a scene in the heavenly temple of God which we are! As the sweet odor of our prayers and praise and worship ascends before God from the golden altar within us — there is produced an effect! To say that since God will save all men we need not pray for them, is to say that God has a **purpose** to save them, while we reject the **means** by which He chooses to accomplish it! That would be like saying that a contractor is going to build a skyscraper and, since HE is going to build it, there is no need for nails, hammers, saws, heavy equipment, plumbers, electricians, carpenters, etc. How ridiculous! All those things are necessary instruments and means for the accomplishing of his will and plans!

The prayers of the saints! The prayer of God’s elect in the heavenly realms of God’s Spirit is not a useless exercise, it is part of God’s cosmic purpose. Many of the Lord’s people have missed the importance of prayer in the redemptive, reconstructive, and restorative processes of God! Our prayers **are** important! As we walk in the mind and Spirit of our great high priest we will find ourselves praying, for there is a relationship between the decrees of God and the response of God’s people! God created all things by a **word**. God **said**, “Let there be...and it was so.” That’s a CREATIVE WORD! Prayer is a participation in the creative processes of God by which the new creation is **spoken into existence**. It is a mystery I don’t fully understand, but as I stand at the golden altar there is that deep inner consciousness that somehow I am participating in the great tableau and drama of history.

Once when the Lord was walking this earthly sod there came unto Him a Roman centurion whose servant was sick. “And when Jesus was entered into Capernaum, there came unto Him a centurion, beseeching Him, and saying, Lord, my servant lieth at home sick of the palsy, grievously tormented. And Jesus said unto him, I will come and heal him. The centurion answered and said, Lord, I am not worthy that Thou shouldest come under my roof: but **SPEAK THE WORD ONLY**, and my servant will be healed” (Mat. 8:5-8). Jesus spoke the word and the servant was healed in the same moment. The Lord wasn’t near the place, but He spoke and a healing took place. How did this happen? When He spoke His spirit went forth and did the work! God speaks, His Spirit goes forth and things are created! Christ speaks, His spirit goes forth and people are healed, the dead raised, the blind see, the lame walk, lives are transformed, and great and mighty things are accomplished for the kingdom of God! The Lord speaks and mighty empires rise and fall. Did you ever notice that the Lord never did any great works without *speaking*. To the man with the withered arm He said, “Stretch out your hand.” To the paralytic He said, “Arise, take up your bed and walk.” To the dead He said, “Come forth!” And at the tomb of Lazarus He said, “Father, I thank Thee that Thou hast heard me. And I knew that Thou hearest me always...” When Jesus spoke marvelous things happened! He had already rehearsed it with the Father, and had heard from the Father. We are to do the same.

When we speak, whatever kind of spirit we are speaking by, we transmit it to others. When we pray in the Spirit we are not just asking God to do something He is reluctant to do, we are sending forth His Spirit to do the work we are presenting before the Father. We are actually answering our own prayer by releasing the Spirit within us to do the work, for it is by the Spirit of the Lord that all things are accomplished. We are beginning to understand what it means to speak the word! We can only speak that word with authority **WHICH WE HAVE HEARD FROM OUR FATHER!** That is the secret. If we hear nothing, we speak nothing. What we do hear, that we speak. The firstborn Son of God said, “I do only those things which I see

my Father do...I speak what I hear from my Father.” When we pray and speak by the Holy Spirit tremendous things will take place! We have experienced this only by measure at the present time, but soon, very soon this old earth is going to see something it has never seen before when God has His sons ready and sends them forth speaking the word by His Spirit!

We can't take the golden altar out of God's temple! Prayer is irreplaceable. Nothing can take its place! Substitutes are readily available for almost everything else. A prosthesis is a good replacement for a lost leg. A hearing aid is an excellent device for the hearing impaired. Organs of the body can be replaced by man-made gadgets and machines. If telephone communications break down, the fax machine, overnight express mail, the automobile, or the airplane can serve in its place. One could even carry the message on foot. A poor substitute is better than none. Not so with prayer, however! It has no replacement. There are no substitutes. Some have tried to substitute “meditation” for prayer. Even that won't work. It would be like sitting silently in the presence of your spouse, or your boss, expecting your unspoken love or attention to satisfy. The whole world moves by *words*! Your spouse needs to communicate, your boss has to communicate! Ask God to form afresh the Lord Jesus in all His beauty and power in your innermost being, that you might think His thoughts, desire what He desires, love as He loves, and pray His prayers! This is the secret of sonship prayer, which is priesthood prayer. Oh! God is raising up a mighty army of priests after the order of Melchizedek who are so able to cooperate with the high priest of this divine order that He shall be able to perform His perfect will and work through them. As our great high priest intercedes for us, let us intercede for creation!

To be continued...

J. PRESTON EBY