

## What Guarantee Is There That God Hears Our Prayers?

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It is not easy for any human being to know for sure that Almighty God hears their prayers. However for those who believe in God's word and seek to obey it, there are a number of scriptures showing that prayers are heard when specific steps are followed.

One vital key to answering the question, "what guarantee is there that God hears our prayers," is a better understanding of the animal sacrificial system and the spiritual realities it pointed to. As the animal sacrificial system was part of the First Covenant, and as Christianity has marginalized many of the writings contained within the Old Testament, essential truths regarding the subject of prayer are hidden. For those who believe they should live by every word of God, an accurate discernment of the writings of the First Covenant will be an integral part of a correct understanding of the gospel. For those who believe that Jesus Christ spoke under the direction of Almighty God, they have his witness that mankind is supposed to live by every word that proceeds from God,

But he (Christ) answered and said, **"It has been written, 'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God.'"** (Mt. 4:4; RNT; cf. Dt. 8:3; Ed. notes in parentheses).

With this in mind, it is important to consider the spiritual instruction that is provided through the symbolism of the sin offering on the Day of Atonement (cf. Lev. 16:1-34).

Although all the animal sacrifices pointed to different aspects of Christ's work, the sin offering on the Day of Atonement had a special connection with the altar of incense. Once this connection is properly understood, there should be no doubt that Almighty God hears the prayers of those who seek to obey Him,

You shall make an altar to burn incense on; you shall make it of acacia wood. <sup>2</sup>A cubit (approx. 18 inches) shall be its length and a cubit its width – it shall be square – and two cubits shall be its height. Its horns shall be of one piece with it. <sup>3</sup>And you shall overlay its top, its sides all around, and its horns with pure gold; and you shall make for it a molding (border) of gold all around. <sup>4</sup>Two gold rings you shall make for it, under the molding on both its sides. You shall place them on its two sides, and they will be holders for the poles with which to bear it. <sup>5</sup>You shall make the poles of acacia wood, and overlay them with gold. <sup>6</sup>And you shall put it before the veil that is before the ark of the Testimony, before the mercy seat that is over the Testimony where I will meet with you. <sup>7</sup>Aaron shall burn on it sweet incense every morning; when he tends the lamps, he shall burn incense on it. <sup>8</sup>And when Aaron lights the lamps at twilight (between the evenings), he shall burn incense on it, a perpetual incense before the Lord throughout your (Israel as long as they remained an obedient nation) generations. <sup>9</sup>You shall not offer strange incense on it, or a burnt offering, or a meal offering; nor shall you pour a drink offering on it. <sup>10</sup>And Aaron shall make atonement (covering for sin) upon its horns once a year with the blood of the sin offering of atonement; once a year he shall make atonement upon it

throughout your generations. It is most holy to the Lord (Ex. 30: 1-10; Ed notes in parentheses).

On the Day of Atonement, the high priest was to come with the blood of a young bull,

Thus Aaron shall come into the Holy Place: with the blood of a young bull as a sin offering (Lev. 16:3a).

As Jesus Christ died for the sins of mankind and the fallen host of heaven when he was still a young man, it was appropriate that Almighty God designated a young bull as a sacrifice for sin. Some of the blood from this young bull was then placed on the altar of incense. This was to picture the cleansing of everything that was offered on this altar through the blood of Jesus Christ that would be shed,

But if we walk in the light as He (Almighty God) is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His son cleanses us from all sin (1Jn. 1:7; Ed. note in parenthesis; emphasis added).

Almighty God was very specific about what could be offered on this altar and when it was to be offered (cf. Ex. 30:7-9). Only sweet incense could be placed on this altar and the composition was described in detail,

And the Lord said to Moses: 'Take sweet spices, stacte and onycha and galbanum, and pure frankincense with these sweet spices; there shall be equal amounts of each. <sup>35</sup>You shall make of these an incense, a compound according to the art of the perfumer, salted, pure, and holy. <sup>36</sup>And you shall beat some of it very fine, and put some of it before the Testimony (cf. Ex. 25:22) in the tabernacle of meeting where I will meet with you. It shall be most holy to you. <sup>37</sup>But as for the incense which you make, you shall not make any for yourselves (for your own personal use), according to its composition. It shall be to you holy for the Lord. <sup>38</sup>Whoever makes any like it, to smell it, he shall be cut off from his people (Ex. 30:34-38; Ed. notes in parentheses).

So this incense belonged only to God and was not to be shared by anyone else. This will have great significance when all the symbolism is clearly understood. Once the incense was placed on the altar it was burned so the aroma would rise up to God and it represented something that He would imbibe and enjoy. When the writings of the Second Covenant are examined, the fulfillment of what the altar of incense represented can be understood,

Now when he (Jesus Christ) had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb (of Almighty God; cf. Jn. 1:29), each having a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are (represent) the prayers of the saints (those cleansed by the blood of Christ) (Rev. 5:8; Ed. notes in parentheses; emphasis added).

So the blood that was sprinkled on the altar of incense represented the blood of Christ that was shed for the sins of mankind and the fallen host. This shed blood was the means through which forgiveness of sin could be accomplished,

And according to the law almost all things are purged (cleansed) with blood, and without shedding of blood there is no remission (forgiveness) (Heb. 9:22; Ed. notes in parentheses).

However, the blood of Christ cannot be applied to those who refuse to repent of sin (Ac. 2:38) and it cannot be applied to those who continue to live in sin,

All who generate sin also generate lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness (1Jn. 3:4; RNT).

For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins (Heb. 10:26ff)

Everyone who repents of sin and begins living a new way of life in accordance with the law and commandments of Almighty God (cf. Rom. 6:4; 7:6), will have their prayers heard because they have been cleansed by Christ's shed blood. This is their guarantee. Christ assured his followers that, if they ask anything in his name, Almighty God will respond,

You did not choose me (Christ), but I chose you, and I have appointed you that you would go and bear fruit and that your fruit remain, so that whatever you might ask the Father in my name He may give to you (Jn. 15:16; RNT; cf. 16:23, 24, 26; Ed. note in parenthesis).

When an individual prays to Almighty God, or on behalf of a group, they need to end their prayer by making their requests in the name of Jesus Christ because this brings to remembrance the symbolism associated with the blood of a young bull being applied to the horns of the altar of incense. This is the assurance at the close of every prayer that God has heard whatever has been discussed because it took the death of His son, Jesus Christ, to make it possible for repentant sinners to have direct access to Almighty God (Heb. 4:16). Also, just as the incense was to be directed only to Almighty God and no one else was to get involved with its manufacture or use, our prayers go directly to the Father and no one else is to have access to these prayers (cf. Mt. 6:8-9).

As mentioned in the opening paragraph of this document, Almighty God hears the prayers of those who seek to obey Him. Jesus Christ used the phrase, "that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain." So Christ pointed out in this scripture that the fruit of God's Holy Spirit should grow and remain within an individual so that God continues to hear their prayers. The apostle Paul described some of the fruit that is produced as a result of God's Holy Spirit working within someone,

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness (meekness), self-control... (Gal. 5:22-23a; Ed. note in parenthesis).

In contrast, all those who persist in walking contrary to God's will, as expressed in His law and commandments, cannot expect to have their prayers heard as long as they remain in this condition,

Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; nor His ear heavy, that it cannot hear. <sup>2</sup>But your iniquities (sins) have separated you from your God; and your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He will not hear (Isa. 59:1-2; Ed. note in parenthesis; emphasis added).

Almighty God wants to hear everyone's prayers, but He not while an individual continues to walk contrary to His law (cf. Zech. 1:2-4),

He who turns away his ear from listening to the law, even his prayer is an abomination (Prov. 28:9).

Once there is a change of attitude, accompanied by a deep desire and effort to obey God resulting in baptism (see studies on Baptism), then the shed blood of Jesus Christ that was figuratively applied to the horns of the altar of incense, will take effect. When this occurs there is no doubt that Almighty God will accept the prayers of those who have repented of sin (Isa. 1:18-20).

Again, this guarantee is confirmed in the symbolism of the altar of incense in the temple, which was part of the animal sacrificial system (often referred to simply as "the law") of the First Covenant. This fact demonstrates the symbolic purpose and significance of the sacrificial system, which Paul refers to as a tutor (schoolmaster, guardian, disciplinarian), pointing us to Christ and other important spiritual truths (Gal. 3:24-25).

This document is the collaborative work of individuals who believe God's truth should be given freely (Mt. 10:8; 1Cor. 2:12; 2Cor.11:7; Rom. 10:14-21) and the message of the one true God should be made available to all nations (Mt. 24:14) as a prerequisite to the return of Jesus Christ as King of kings (Mt. 17:10; 19:17; Mk. 9:11; Lk. 1:17; Rev. 19:11-16).

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