

Psalms 141:2

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Let my prayer be set forth before thee as incense; and the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice.

Analysis

"Let my prayer be set forth before thee as incense; and the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice." The metaphor: tikon tefillati ketoret lefanekha (may be established my prayer as incense before You). Kun (be established/set forth) suggests placement; tefillah (prayer); ketoret (incense) was burned on the golden altar twice daily (Exodus 30:7-8, 34-38). Incense symbolized prayers ascending to God (Revelation 5:8, 8:3-4). Mas'at kapai minchat arev (the lifting of my hands, the evening offering). Nasa (lift up); kaph (palm of hand); minchah (grain offering/gift offering); erev (evening). Lifted hands expressed supplication, praise, surrender. The verse connects prayer with worship—prayer as spiritual sacrifice replacing physical offerings. Hebrews 13:15 similarly speaks of offering "the sacrifice of praise...the fruit of our lips."

Historical Context

The tabernacle/temple liturgy included twice-daily incense offerings (morning and evening) on the golden altar in the Holy Place (Exodus 30:7-8). The incense's fragrant smoke symbolized prayers ascending to God's throne. Only priests could offer incense, entering the Holy Place for this sacred duty. When Zacharias entered to burn incense, the angel Gabriel appeared announcing John's birth (Luke 1:8-22). Jesus's crucifixion occurred at the hour of evening sacrifice (3 PM). The tearing of the temple veil (Matthew 27:51) symbolized direct access to God through Christ's sacrifice. Believers became priests offering spiritual sacrifices (1 Peter 2:5, 9), with prayers as incense before God's throne.

Related Passages

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Study Questions

1. How does viewing prayer as "incense" (sweet-smelling sacrifice) transform your prayer life?
2. What does it mean that believers now have direct access to offer prayers without earthly priests or altars?
3. In what ways should prayer be as regular and intentional as the twice-daily incense offerings?

Interlinear Text

תָּכֻן	תְּפִלַּתִּי	קִטְרֶת	לִפְנֵי יְיָ	מִשָּׂאֵת
be set forth	Let my prayer	thee as incense	before	and the lifting up
H3559	H8605	H7004	H6440	H4864
כִּפִּי	מִנְחָת	עֶרֶב:		
of my hands	sacrifice	as the evening		
H3709	H4503	H6153		

Additional Cross-References

Revelation 5:8 (Prayer): And when he had taken the book, the four beasts and four and twenty elders fell down before the Lamb, having every one of them harps, and golden vials full of odours, which are the prayers of saints.

1 Timothy 2:8 (Prayer): I will therefore that men pray every where, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting.

Daniel 9:21 (Prayer): Yea, whiles I was speaking in prayer, even the man Gabriel, whom I had seen in the vision at the beginning, being caused to fly swiftly, touched me about the time of the evening oblation.

Proverbs 15:8 (Prayer): The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the LORD: but the prayer of the upright is his delight.

Malachi 1:11 (Sacrifice): For from the rising of the sun even unto the going down of the same my name shall be great among the Gentiles; and in every place incense shall be offered unto my name, and a pure offering: for my name shall be great among the heathen, saith the LORD of hosts.

Psalms 134:2 (Parallel theme): Lift up your hands in the sanctuary, and bless the LORD.

Psalms 5:3 (Prayer): My voice shalt thou hear in the morning, O LORD; in the morning will I direct my prayer unto thee, and will look up.

Psalms 63:4 (Parallel theme): Thus will I bless thee while I live: I will lift up my hands in thy name.

Psalms 28:2 (Parallel theme): Hear the voice of my supplications, when I cry unto thee, when I lift up my hands toward thy holy oracle.

Acts 3:1 (Prayer): Now Peter and John went up together into the temple at the hour of prayer, being the ninth hour.