

Holy Anointing Oil



HOLY ANOINTING OIL

A description of the holy anointing oil, which was used in the Tabernacle of Moses, is found in the thirtieth chapter of the Book of Exodus.

"Moreover the LORD spake unto Moses, saying,

"Take thou also unto thee principal spices, of pure myrrh five hundred shekels, and of sweet cinnamon half so much, even two hundred and fifty shekels, and of sweet calamus two hundred and fifty shekels,

"And of cassia five hundred shekels, after the shekel of the sanctuary, and of oil olive an hin:

"And thou shalt make it an oil of holy ointment, an ointment compound after the art of the apothecary: it shall be an holy anointing oil.

"And thou shalt anoint the tabernacle of the congregation therewith, and the ark of the testimony,

"And the table and all his vessels, and the candlestick and his vessels, and the altar of incense,

"And the altar of burnt offering with all his vessels, and the laver and his foot.

"And thou shalt sanctify them, that they may be most holy: whatsoever toucheth them shall be holy.

"And thou shalt anoint Aaron and his sons, and consecrate them, that they may minister unto me in the priest's office.

"And thou shalt speak unto the children of Israel, saying, This shall be an holy anointing oil unto me throughout your generations.

"Upon man's flesh shall it not be poured, neither shall ye make any other like it, after the composition of it: it is holy, and it shall be holy unto you.

"Whosoever compoundeth any like it, or whosoever putteth any of it upon a stranger, shall even be cut off from his people." (Exod. 30:22-33)

The holy anointing oil is of great interest to the Christian because the Scriptures, in speaking of the Holy Spirit, liken it to olive oil (Matt. 25:4; Heb. 1:9; Rev. 6:6). However, here the olive oil, instead of being pure without any ingredients, served as a base in which four principal spices were suspended: myrrh, cinnamon, calamus, and cassia. And there was a mathematical proportion for each of the four spices; that is, the ingredients were measured by weight according to a specific formula. The result was a representation of God's Holy Spirit in a comprehensive manner. The olive oil base itself beautifully represents the quality of the Holy Spirit as an unguent. Spiritually speaking, the olive oil is soothing, comforting, and restful—it is a blessing to the Christian.

The four principal spices indicate that God's Holy Spirit can be broken down into four primary ingredients or parts. The Lord used myrrh in the proportion of 500 shekels to symbolize one ingredient of the Holy Spirit. A dried gum and also a resin, myrrh is called "the balsam of Mecca" by the Arabs. Myrrh comes from the Hebrew word *mor* or *mara*, and in the Greek, it is the word *smurna*. All of these words signify "bitter."

The account speaks of myrrh as free-flowing or "pure." To be free-flowing does not mean that the myrrh was liquid, for it was in a dried form that resembled salt, as described in an advertising slogan a number of years ago: "When it rains, it pours." In other words, salt is specially prepared so that even in damp weather, it pours freely. The myrrh, in a dried gum form, was put in a mortar made of porcelain or another stonelike material and ground with a pestle until it was very, very fine with no lumps or unevenness so that it would freely flow as "pure myrrh."

Myrrh comes from a shrub that yields a gummy resin. The gum can be said to bleed in that a white or yellow substance or globules emanate from the bark somewhat like tears. At the First Advent, myrrh was one of the gifts the wise men gave to our Lord Jesus as a babe (Matt. 2:11). Esther used myrrh in her ritual of purification in preparation for the beauty contest to replace Queen Vashti in the kingdom of Ahasuerus (Esther 2:12). Since

myrrh has a preservative effect, it was used in preparing bodies for burial. Accordingly, Nicodemus used that spice in connection with Jesus' burial and the embalming of his body (John 19:39,40). And Psalm 45:8 speaks of Jesus' garments in a spiritual sense as having the fragrance of myrrh and aloes: "All thy garments smell of myrrh, and aloes, and cassia, out of the ivory palaces, whereby they have made thee glad."

As a perfume, myrrh has certain qualities that represent God's Holy Spirit. For instance, it represents wisdom, but in what way? The word "myrrh" basically means "bitterness," and it is the experience in life of being submissive to God's providences that has the accumulative effect over many years of producing wisdom in the hearts of those who are rightly exercised. Even though Jesus originally had much wisdom, which is noted in Scripture from his birth up, he learned lessons during his ministry at his First Advent, and the wisdom he gained is pictured by myrrh (Luke 2:52; Heb. 2:10). Myrrh represents wisdom based primarily upon experience.

The Song of Solomon speaks of myrrh as being sweet-smelling like lilies (Song 5:13). Jesus' messages and his sermons to the people were very strong in some instances, yet they had a wholesome counsel or influence (John 7:46). There was a purifying atmosphere when he spoke, and the people were aware of a

ministration of grace. Even his criticisms were constructive, and his counsel contained a tender solicitude that was designed to bring good results. To such a degree was this true that if we had lived back in our Lord's day and had been privileged with his fellowship, and if our hearts were rightly exercised, we would have said: "I would like to be near him as much as possible because his words lift me to an elevated plane." His words then and now are a blessing; they have a powerful effect that changes the right-hearted. Those who submit to the Lord's influence become in love with him and his counsel. This intense feeling is the love of the Bride class, who long to be joined to their Lord (Song 2:16).

Thus myrrh represents a constructive, wholesome, blessed, preservative influence that purifies Christians and the atmosphere about them. And myrrh is only one of the ingredients of the oil of the Holy Spirit that were noticeable in our Lord's works and counsel and words.

The next ingredient was sweet cinnamon, in proportion half as much as the myrrh. Coupled with the cinnamon was another ingredient called sweet calamus, also half as much as the myrrh. With the myrrh being 500 shekels and the sweet cinnamon and the calamus each being 250 shekels, for a total of 500 shekels, it is as though the Holy Spirit is telling us that cinnamon and calamus

are to be thought of not as separate ingredients but as a *combined* representation. And cassia, the last ingredient, was a quantity of 500 shekels. Therefore, the holy anointing oil really consisted of three parts, as follows:

Myrrh	-	500 shekels
Cinnamon and Calamus	-	500 shekels
Cassia	-	500 shekels

Whatever interpretation we give to the cinnamon and the calamus, it is obvious that we must consider them together, as a combined ingredient, and that there is a harmonious agreement between the two whereby each complements the other in a very intimate sense of the word. With the myrrh, the emphasis is on the adjective “pure,” but with both the cinnamon and the calamus, the emphasis is on the adjective “sweet.” In fact, cinnamon is used today as a sweet spice or flavoring substance in food. In addition, its inner bark and oil are used as a perfume, and cinnamon is an astringent. The Book of Proverbs mentions myrrh and cinnamon in connection with perfume: “I have perfumed my bed with myrrh, aloes, and cinnamon” (Prov. 7:17). And the Song of Solomon couples calamus and cinnamon: “Spikenard and saffron; calamus and cinnamon, with all trees of frankincense; myrrh and aloes, with all the chief spices” (Song 4:14). What might this calamus-cinnamon combination signify?

Cinnamon represents knowledge but knowledge not necessarily secured from suffering. "Cinnamon" knowledge is the gift and the privilege of understanding matters. This very satisfying blessing to the soul can be discerned by others and is usually acquired through study. While calamus is a closely related thought, it is based upon instruction from another standpoint. Calamus, a reed or sweet cane, represents discipline and hard experiences that produce understanding. Although both cinnamon and calamus represent knowledge, cinnamon is a *theoretical, intellectual* kind of knowledge, whereas calamus is *experimental* knowledge. In life, people frequently possess only the one kind of knowledge and not the other. "Calamus" is related to the word "calamity."

The last ingredient, cassia, represents God's workmanship, as evidenced by the results that are obtained from the holy anointing oil, that is, by the operation of the Holy Spirit on an individual's life and character.

Probably the best way to come to an understanding of how the four ingredients of the holy anointing oil work together is to consider some Scriptures where the antitypical significance is given. In the Book of Exodus, following the account of the anointing oil, we are told that in the construction of the Tabernacle, God placed His Spirit on an individual named Bezaleel of the tribe of

Judah. Bezaleel was “filled ... with the spirit of God, in wisdom, and in understanding, and in knowledge, and in all manner of workmanship” (Exod. 31:2,3). Here we have the explanation of the meaning of the four ingredients of the holy anointing oil. Being filled “with the spirit of God” corresponds to the olive oil base of the holy anointing oil. “Wisdom” is the myrrh, “understanding” and “knowledge” are the coupling of the cinnamon and the calamus, and “workmanship” is the cassia.

The Book of Isaiah further substantiates these explanations in the context of Jesus’ work in the next age, that is, in the Kingdom soon to come (Matt. 6:10). The eleventh chapter begins, “And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots: And the spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him” (Isa. 11:1,2a). Just as olive oil clings to the body, so the Holy Spirit is depicted here as an unction that *rests upon* the individual. It has an *abiding* influence. Then chapter 11 begins to delineate what is signified by the Holy Spirit’s resting upon the individual. It is “the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD; And shall make him of quick understanding in the fear of the LORD: and he shall not judge after the sight of his eyes, neither reprove after the hearing of his ears: But with righteousness shall he judge the poor, and reprove with equity for the meek of the earth” (Isa. 11:2b-4a).

The “spirit of wisdom,” which corresponds with the myrrh, is the pure, wholesome, purgative influence and the mature judgment of Christ that will be manifest to his subjects in his Kingdom reign. But why are the spirit of “wisdom” and the spirit of “understanding” coupled together in this text? The answer is that the design of Jesus’ wisdom is not to destroy his subjects but to extend a tender solicitude or understanding to them.

The next quality of Jesus is described as the “spirit of counsel and might,” that is, the spirit of workmanship, which corresponds with the cassia. (Although the sequence of Jesus’ qualities in Isaiah chapter 11 differs from that in the Exodus account of the ingredients of the holy anointing oil, the lessons are the same.) A person may possess wisdom—and others may even admire that wisdom—but the individual may not have the ability to transmit his wisdom to others and thus bless them by it. Hence the “spirit of counsel and might” represents the ability of Jesus to impart his wisdom to others in a way that is constructive and helpful. Others can thus do certain things because of the wisdom he has given them. Jesus works his will in individuals by giving them knowledge in a sense that enables them to work out in their own lives blessings that they crave.

The “spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD” corresponds to the cinnamon and the calamus together, the

“spirit of knowledge” being the cinnamon and the “fear of the LORD” being the calamus or the discipline. By being under God’s tutelage at the First Advent, Christ learned obedience (Heb. 5:8). Of course he was not previously disobedient, but he learned the lesson of obedience under *great strain or trial*. To obey when conditions are very favorable is one thing, but to obey under conditions of duress and hardship is a much different matter. Jesus’ experience and example have proved to be a blessing to others.

In summary, the eleventh chapter of the Book of Isaiah is a prophecy of the wonderful qualities Jesus would possess in the office of King. In his own person, he has all of these beautiful characteristics, which will be a great blessing to his subjects. Indeed he has all the intellectual knowledge of the world. Imagine the tremendous knowledge and wisdom Christ has just from a theoretical standpoint, and then, because of his experience and discipline down here at his First Advent, he learned things firsthand. He took upon himself the human flesh that we possess, being made of the seed of men. God designed that by this experience, His Son would become a very sympathetic High Priest, as revealed in Hebrews 2:17; 4:15. The discipline gave Jesus special insight into the experiences and trials of humanity so that he would be tender and considerate of them and not too strict in his judgment.

All of these qualities—the spirit of wisdom and understanding (myrrh), the spirit of counsel and might (cassia), the spirit of theoretical knowledge coupled with experimental knowledge called the fear of God (cinnamon and calamus)—are together in Jesus to such a superlative degree that they combine to make him “of quick understanding in the fear [reverence] of the LORD [Jehovah].” The literal meaning of the term “quick understanding” is “quick scent or smell.” Possessing all of the qualities, Jesus can *instantly* see through any situation that might arise. To such an extent is this true—and in view of his faithfulness, reward, ascension to heaven, and glorification to the divine nature as the highest created being underneath Jehovah—that it is as though Messiah now begins to possess a quality almost like that of his Father, namely, *intuitive* knowledge. This ability of quick understanding in the fear of God means that excelling qualities in Jesus’ being enable him to intuitively judge a matter and correctly ascertain a situation—an ability that only Jehovah previously had. In the Kingdom, therefore, Messiah will not judge “after the sight of his eyes, neither reprove after the hearing of his ears,” but will judge with righteousness and equity all who have ever lived.

There is no Christian, let alone anyone in the world, who has not at some time in his life done or said something he would not want the Master to know about, and to have the wrong disclosed to others would be very shameful. Therefore, it is comforting to

realize that Jesus knows our heart condition and the motivation in back of our problems. Despite our shortcomings, he knows if we really love God and desire to serve Him. Even though we make errors in judgment, actions, and words that could condemn us, Jesus searches deep into our heart and life to discern our true intent and, accordingly, judges us in the most favorable light possible. If he reproved or corrected us according to our deeds, we would all fail and come short of the glory of God (Rom. 3:23).

Isaiah 9:6,7 tells how the people in the next age will reflect upon Jesus and his ability to judge.

**“For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given:
and the government shall be upon his shoulder:
and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsel-
lor, The mighty God, The everlasting [age-lasting]
Father, The Prince of Peace.**

**“Of the increase of his government and peace there
shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and
upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it
with judgment and with justice from henceforth
even for ever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will
perform this.”**

Frank Shallieu