

Let my prayer be **كَالْبَخُورِ**
Psalm 141:2
set before you as
incense



Incense & Prayer
Reflections from Saudi Arabia

Arise, shine!

For your light has come,
the glory of the Lord
has risen upon you.
And nations shall come
to your light, and kings
to the brightness
of your rising...
Lift up your eyes
all around and see...



A multitude of camels
shall cover you,
young camels of
Midian and Ephah
all those from Sheba
bringing gold and frankincense,
bringing good news,
and praises of the Lord.
(Isaiah 60:1-7)

Frankincense

لَبَّان

Arabic – *Labaan*

Frankincense is a precious resin that is harvested from the *Boswellia* tree native to the southern regions of the Arabian Peninsula.

Frankincense has been used for thousands of years as a burnt incense, for perfumes, and as a cure for various sicknesses. Since ancient times, frankincense has also played an important role in religious practices and ceremonies, particularly with respect to offerings and prayers.

Frankincense was very expensive, partly because of its spiritual and healing value, but also because it was transported over vast deserts by caravan.

Frankincense, along with myrrh, onycha, and galbanum, was used for the sacred incense that was prescribed by God as an essential part of daily worship in the tabernacle (Ex 30:34-38). It was also placed on the Bread of the Presence to be burned as an offering (Lev 24:5-7).

It is precisely these connections with spiritual offerings, prayer and worship, and with the Showbread (representing the Bread of Life) that made a gift of frankincense so fitting for the Christ child!

In the Song of Solomon (4:6-7), frankincense and myrrh are used as poetic symbols of intimacy between Christ and the Church.

The great prophecy of Isaiah 60 foretells that nations --- and in particular, throngs of people from the Arabian Peninsula --- would come to the Light, and that they would bring gifts of gold, frankincense (offerings, prayers, worship, honor) and good news.

Many names are mentioned by Isaiah as the bearers of this good news --- **Sheba** (a kingdom of southern Arabia), **Midian** (the Sinai and present-day northwestern Saudi Arabia), **Ephah** (Abha in the 'Aseer region of Saudi Arabia claims this as its old name, although in English it has been locally branded as "Eva"), **Nabaioth** (associated with Mada'in Saleh of Saudi Arabia), and **Kedar** (ancient Arab tribe in the north of Saudi Arabia and Tayma).

Let us pray for the peoples and tribes of the Arabian Peninsula, that they would come to the light of Christ, bearing their gifts and offerings of worship to the King.



Myrrh

مر

Arabic – *Murr*

Myrrh is a gum resin taken from the *Commiphora* tree native to southwestern Arabia. Valued since antiquity, myrrh is still readily available and can be found in shops and markets throughout the Arabian Peninsula.

Myrrh is an ancient form of incense that was exported from southwestern Arabia for centuries as a precious commodity. Myrrh was one of the four ingredients used in the sacred incense that was offered daily in the Old Testament Tabernacle (Exodus 30:34-38). Though *myrrh* means “bitter” in Arabic, it has a fragrant aroma.

Apart from incense, myrrh was also used in the Scriptures for both purification (Esther 2:12) and anointing (Exodus 30:22-25).

Myrrh was one of Jesus’ first gifts, given to him by the Magi when he was a small child (Matthew 2:1-12). Jesus was later offered myrrh in a very different context --- when he hung upon the cross, to lessen his pain --- “but he did not take it” (Mark 15:23).

Myrrh was then applied to Jesus’ body during his burial (John 19:39).

Just as myrrh was used for centuries as an analgesic to alleviate pain, and as a medication, it is still used in the Arabian Peninsula to this day for headaches, pain, and for various illnesses.

It is no wonder that myrrh is so closely associated with the life of Jesus, both at his birth and his death. Jesus is the Anointed One (لم سري ح), the One who knew no sin and purified us from all unrighteousness, the One who suffered the bitterness of our sins, and the One who is our Healer.

Let us pray for the peoples of the Arabian Peninsula, that they would fully comprehend the purpose of Christ’s life so fittingly represented by the gift of the Magi --- that He came to suffer and die for them, to bring healing and purification for sins. Pray that a spirit of repentance would come upon every tribe and family. Pray for those who now suffer with Christ for Christ, that they would know the sweet fragrance of his presence even through the bitterness of suffering.



Agarwood



Arabic – ‘Oud

‘Oud is a fragrant wood taken from the *Aquilaria* tree, extensively used throughout Arabia for incense and perfumes. The perfume that is made from oil extracts from the wood is called by the same name. Some varieties of ‘oud can be very expensive (as much as \$15,000 per kg). It is customary to measure ‘oud by a unit called *tola* (تول). ‘Oud incense is typically sold in the form of wooden chips, while ‘oud perfume is sold in small bottles (see the picture showing standard ‘oud bottle sizes: 1 tola, ½ tola, and ¼ tola).

‘Oud is an important part of Arabian heritage, especially with respect to hospitality. As a gesture of hospitality and honor, an incense burner with ‘oud is often passed around to guests before departure. Likewise, ‘oud perfume is often applied to female guests when taking leave. ‘Oud is often considered a suitable gift for weddings and engagements.

‘Oud perfume is long-lasting. The strong fragrance can last for several days once applied to the body or clothing.

In Matthew 26:6-13, we read of a woman with an alabaster jar of very expensive perfume who anointed Jesus before His death and resurrection (Matt 26:6-13).

Pray for the unity of local believers, expressed through hospitality, fellowship, and the honoring of one another in Christ. Pray that God would reveal the truth of Jesus’ death and resurrection to many throughout Arabia, that the fragrance of Christ would emanate from believers, and that they would be perseverant (long-lasting) during times of persecution.



Onycha

ظفرلّ طي ب

Arabic - *DhifrAl Teeb*

According to God's design, the holy incense that was burned daily in the Tabernacle was to be a blend of four ingredients, one being onycha. Onycha is the Greek word for "fingernail" which was used to translate the Old Testament Hebrew. Interestingly, to this day onycha is called *Dhifr* in the Arabian Peninsula, which also means "fingernail" in Arabic.

Onycha is the *operculum*, or lid-like covering, that protects certain sea snails. In ancient times, onycha was expensive, no doubt partly because they had to be collected - like pearls - from the ocean floor.

Onycha is a remarkable choice as an ingredient for the sacred incense of the Tabernacle. It reminds us to pray for the following:

- ❖ ***The protective covering of God over the Church of Arabia. His people are very small, weak, and frail in their own power.***
- ❖ ***A spirit of humility and dependence upon God. Onycha does not by itself look very impressive, but the Kingdom is kindled in His people by the fire of God's Spirit.***
- ❖ ***A passion for God's word and for spiritual discipline, that the people of Arabia would go deep in Him.***



Benzoin Resin

جَاوِي

Arabic- *Jāwy*

Jāwy, or *Benzoin resin*, is a fragrant incense found in traditional souqs throughout Arabia. *Jāwy* is made from the sap of the *Styrax* tree of Indonesia (hence the Arabic name, which means “Javanese”). Similar in appearance to raw granite rock, *Jāwy* comes in three general forms - red, white, and black. This incense is often used in Saudi Arabia to ward off evil spirits, as well as for purification and cleansing of homes, and to cure various sicknesses.

Pray for protection against spiritual attack and the lies of the enemy. Pray that the beautiful fragrance of the Gospel of Truth will pervade every home in this land. Pray that God Almighty will transform hearts of stone into an offering of praise.



Mixed Incense

بَخْ وَرْمَعْمُول

Arabic – *Bakhour Ma'moul*

Ma'moul is a ground, fermented mixture of various fragrant ingredients, including:

- 'Oud wood and sandalwood (burned)
- 'Oud perfume
- Other perfumes and fragrances (e.g., musk)
- Rose water and oil
- Sugar or dates
- Onycha
- 'Anbar - sweet acacia fragrance (*acacia farnesiana*)

Ma'moul is reminiscent of the sacred mixture of incense that was prepared (literally, "ma'moul," which means made or prepared) as part of daily worship in the Tabernacle (Exodus 30:34-38). This offering of sacred incense was:

- **Offered daily** – Let us faithfully and persistently call out to God on behalf of the Church of Arabia (Exodus 30:8, Luke 1:10– 11).
- **Costly** – All ingredients were precious and costly. The incense altar itself was made of both acacia wood (foretelling Christ's costly sacrifice on the cross) and gold (reflecting Christ's glory).
- **Essential** – The incense offering was central to both worship and for ministry to the nations. It is critical that prayer maintains this central place in our ministry today.
- **Ground and beaten fine** – As prayer and worship goes up across this land, there will be a personal sacrifice for many. Pray that local believers would not live in a spirit of fear and that God would protect them.
- **Sweet** – Prayer and worship is a pleasing fragrance that bring pleasure and honor to God, and it is also a fragrance to the nations (2 Cor. 2:15-17). Prayer and worship is about making His Name great among the nations (Mal. 1:11).
- **Kindled and empowered** by His Living Spirit – Incense is a very dependent ingredient which doesn't release any fragrance on its own. It is kindled and brought to life by the fire.
- **Sacred** – This offering was holy and sacred, and represented a special ministry that could not to be imitated by the world (2 Chronicles 26:16-21, Revelation 8:1-4).
- **Blended together** – Pray for the unity of Christ's Body in this region. May a pleasing incense of praise arise from every tribe and people of Arabia!

Let my prayer be *كَالْبُخُورِ*
Psalm 141:2 set before you as

incense

From the rising of the sun to its setting

MY NAME WILL BE GREAT

among the nations

and in every place

incense will be offered

TO MY NAME,

a pure offering.

MY NAME WILL BE GREAT

among the nations

says the LORD of Hosts.

Malachi 1:11