



Exodus - Chapter Thirty

II. Exodus 19:1-40:38 - The Covenant at Sinai (continues)

II.d Exodus 25:1-31:17 - Instructions for the tabernacle (continues)

Summary of Chapter Thirty

The chapter commences with instructions for the construction and use of the Altar of Incense that was to be placed within the Holy Place. Its use included the place where the annual rite of atonement would take place.

The Lord then instructed Moses that, when the census of the people was taken, everyone registered over the age of 20 years was to make an offering of half a shekel that would be used for the upkeep and operation of the tabernacle.

A bronze basin to be used by the priests was to be built and placed in the courtyard between the altar and the tent of meeting. The priests were always to wash their hands and feet before coming to minister to God else they would die.

Finally, detailed instructions are given in the preparation of holy anointing oil that was forbidden for any purpose other than for the consecration of items within the tabernacle and those serving as priests within it. Anything that was anointed with this oil would be holy. Any improper use of the oil would render the person to be cut off from the people.

II.d.xii Exodus 30:1-10 - The Altar of Incense

The altar for burning incense is similar in construction to the altar for burnt-offering (27:1-8), except that it is smaller and is overlaid with pure gold (v.3) since it is one of the three pieces that serve in the Holy Place.

¹ You shall make an altar on which to offer incense; you shall make it of acacia wood. ² It shall be one cubit long, and one cubit wide; it shall

be square, and shall be two cubits high; its horns shall be of one piece with it. ³ You shall overlay it with pure gold, its top, and its sides all round and its horns; and you shall make for it a moulding of gold all round. ⁴ And you shall make two golden rings for it; under its moulding on two opposite sides of it you shall make them, and they shall hold the poles with which to carry it. ⁵ You shall make the poles of acacia wood, and overlay them with gold.

Exodus 30:1-5

You shall make an altar on which to offer incense. The altar of incense was made of acacia wood overlaid with gold. It was 18 inches square and 3 feet high. Zechariah was ministering at this altar when the angel appeared to him: <<*Then there appeared to him an angel of the Lord, standing at the right side of the altar of incense*>> (Luke 1:11). The altar, or the one that its design was based upon, would later be revealed in the throne room of heaven: <<*Then the sixth angel blew his trumpet, and I heard a voice from the four horns of the golden altar before God*>> (Revelation 9:13).

You shall overlay it with pure gold. Unlike the altar that was placed in the courtyard, this altar was to be within the Holy Place and therefore had to be covered in precious metal to honour the Lord.

You shall make two golden rings for it; they shall hold the poles with which to carry it. The altar of incense was also carried by the system of rings and poles, just like the Ark of the Covenant, the table of showbread, and the brazen altar with its grate.

⁶ You shall place it in front of the curtain that is above the ark of the covenant, in front of the mercy-seat that is over the covenant, where I will meet you. ⁷ Aaron shall offer fragrant incense on it; every morning when he dresses the lamps he shall offer it, ⁸ and when Aaron sets up the lamps in the evening he shall offer it, a regular incense-offering before the Lord throughout your generations.

Exodus 30:6-8

The altar is to be placed in the Holy Place before the curtain that separates it from the Most Holy Place and the Ark of the Covenant. Aaron is to burn incense on the altar as an offering before the Lord in the morning and the evening, which correspond to the times when he is also to tend the lamps (27:21).

Where I will meet you. Sprinkled throughout this description of the tabernacle and the furnishings were reminders of the purpose of the tabernacle. It was a place for man to meet with God.

Aaron shall offer fragrant incense on it; every morning when he dresses the lamps he shall offer it. Aaron, and other priests after him, were instructed to burn incense on this altar every day as part of their normal priestly duties, both in the morning and in the evening, as confirmed by the parallel statement: when Aaron sets up the lamps in the evening he shall offer it.

⁹ You shall not offer unholy incense on it, or a burnt-offering, or a grain-offering; and you shall not pour a drink-offering on it. ¹⁰ Once a year Aaron shall perform the rite of atonement on its horns. Throughout your generations he shall perform the atonement for it once a year with the blood of the atoning sin-offering. It is most holy to the Lord.

Exodus 30:9-10

You shall not offer unholy incense on it, or a burnt-offering, or a grain-offering; and you shall not pour a drink-offering on it. It was called the altar of incense, therefore an animal sacrifice or drink offering was never placed upon it. Prayer is not the place sacrificial atonement is made; it is the place sacrificial atonement is enjoyed. Believers do not save themselves through prayer; they pray because of Jesus' saving work on the Cross: <<*For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing*>> (2 Corinthians 2:15).

The prohibition against the priests offering unholy incense, like all the other tabernacle regulations, emphasises that the Lord is holy; refer also to Leviticus 10:1-3. The holiness of the incense means that it must not be made for any other purpose (vv.34-38).

Once a year Aaron shall perform the rite of atonement on its horns. The altar of incense was not a place of sacrifice, but it was a place for atoning blood. On the Day of Atonement, Aaron had to anoint the horns of the altar of incense with blood from the atoning sacrifice.

Once a year the altar of incense received the blood of atonement, but it was a place where atonement was remembered and enjoyed, not made. This illustrates the principle that prayer does not atone for sins, but must always be made in reference to Jesus' atoning blood. The Day of Atonement was only once a year, but every day when the priests brought a morning and evening offering of incense they saw the blood stained horns of the altar. This was a constant reminder of the work of atoning blood.

II.d.xiii Exodus 30:11-16 - The Half-Shekel for the Sanctuary

Every person numbered in a census is to give half a shekel (v.13) for the service of the tabernacle (v.16). The instructions emphasise that it is to be understood as an offering to the Lord (vv.13-14), either as a ransom (v.12) or to make atonement for their lives (vv.15-16).

¹¹ The Lord spoke to Moses: ¹² When you take a census of the Israelites to register them, at registration all of them shall give a ransom for their lives to the Lord, so that no plague may come upon them for being registered.

Exodus 30:11-12

When you take a census of the Israelites to register them. Later in the Book of Numbers, two significant censuses were recorded of the nation of Israel. Here God made provision to make a census without being plagued.

The fact that the ransom is explained as averting a plague warns Israel against allowing a census to replace their dependence upon the Lord. Pride in numbers appears to be the reason for the adverse judgement on David's census; refer to 2 Samuel 24:1-17 and 1 Chronicles 21:1-17.

¹³ This is what each one who is registered shall give: half a shekel according to the shekel of the sanctuary (the shekel is twenty gerahs), half a shekel as an offering to the Lord. ¹⁴ Each one who is registered, from twenty years old and upwards, shall give the Lord's offering. ¹⁵ The rich shall not give more, and the poor shall not give less, than the half-shekel, when you bring this offering to the Lord to make atonement for your lives. ¹⁶ You shall take the atonement money from the Israelites and shall designate it for the service of the tent of meeting; before the Lord it will be a reminder to the Israelites of the ransom given for your lives.

Exodus 30:13-16

Each one who is registered, from twenty years old and upwards, shall give the Lord's offering. The census was to include everyone aged twenty years and over. This seems to be the Israelite age of full adulthood in this sense. Everyone also had to give an equal amount, one-half shekel. This payment is most likely the one that was later referred to as the temple tax: <<*When they reached Capernaum, the collectors of the temple tax came to Peter and said, 'Does your teacher not pay the temple tax?'*>> (Matthew 17:24).

The rich shall not give more, and the poor shall not give less; to make atonement for your lives. This was not a request for a free-will offering, nor was it a proportional tithe. This was more like a flat rate tax, where everyone paid the same amount, rich or poor, because this was to make atonement. It was not that the money was the atonement, but it marked the ones who were atoned. In this sense, it is not a pattern for giving under the New Covenant. New Covenant giving should be proportional, under the principle that a believer should give in proportion to their blessing: <<*On the first day of every week, each of you is to put aside and save whatever extra you earn, so that collections need not be taken when I come*>> (1 Corinthians 16:2), and: <<*For if the eagerness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has – not according to what one does not have*>> (2 Corinthians 8:12). Equal payment of this tax indicated an equality in the sight of God: <<*The rich and the poor have this in common: the Lord is the maker of them all*>> (Proverbs 22:2), <<*And, masters, do the same to them. Stop threatening them, for you know that both of you have the same Master in heaven, and with him there is no partiality*>> (Ephesians 6:9). In addition, everyone had to pay their own redemption money. No lump sum for every member of the tribe or family could satisfy this obligation: <<*Truly, no ransom avails for one's life, there is no price one can give to God for it. For the ransom of life is costly, and can never suffice, that one should live on for ever and never see the grave*>> (Psalm 49:7-9).

Designate it for the service of the tent of meeting. This money was given to the service of the tabernacle. There was a large amount of silver needed in the building of the tabernacle, and this is how it was obtained.

II.d.xiv Exodus 30:17-21 - The Bronze Basin

The basin of bronze was for the priests to wash themselves before serving either in the tent of meeting or at the altar for burnt-offering. It was placed between them in the court of the sanctuary. The basin may also have been used to wash the sacrifices: <<*Aaron's sons the priests shall arrange the parts, with the head and the suet, on the wood that is on the fire on the altar; but its entrails and its legs shall be washed with water*>> (Leviticus 1:8-9a), although a separate, unlisted receptacle may have been used for this purpose.

¹⁷ The Lord spoke to Moses: ¹⁸ You shall make a bronze basin with a bronze stand for washing. You shall put it between the tent of meeting and the altar, and you shall put water in it; ¹⁹ with the water Aaron and his sons shall wash their hands and their feet. ²⁰ When they go into the tent of meeting, or when they come near the altar to minister, to make an offering by fire to the Lord, they shall wash with water, so that they may not die. ²¹ They shall wash their hands and their feet, so

that they may not die: it shall be a perpetual ordinance for them, for him and for his descendants throughout their generations.

Exodus 30:17-21

You shall make a bronze basin with a bronze stand for washing. The bronze basin had no specific dimensions. It was essentially a pool for ceremonial washings, set between the brazen altar and the tent of meeting. When it was made, the metal for the bronze basin came from the mirrors of the women of Israel (38:8). It was a wonderful thing for people to give up the measure of their own appearance for God's cleansing.

You shall put it between the tent of meeting and the altar. The basin was to be located in the courtyard so that the priests could be ritually cleansed before either offering sacrifices on the altar or entering the Holy Place to perform their duties.

They shall wash with water, so that they may not die. The bronze basin speaks of the washing that is necessary for anyone who would come into the presence God. The idea was later expressed in a Psalm by David: <<*Who shall ascend the hill of the Lord? And who shall stand in his holy place? Those who have clean hands and pure hearts, who do not lift up their souls to what is false, and do not swear deceitfully*>> (Psalm 24:3-4).

When Jesus washed the disciple's feet, he told them: <<*One who has bathed does not need to wash, except for the feet, but is entirely clean*>> (John 13:10b). When a believer comes to Jesus they are initially cleansed: <<*And this is what some of you used to be. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God*>> (1 Corinthians 6:11), but must also be continually washed from the dust and dirt of the world by having their feet washed by Jesus. Refer also to the comments made on 28:35.

II.d.xv Exodus 30:22-38 - The Anointing-Oil and Incense

These verses give instructions for making the anointing oil (vv.22-33) and the incense (vv.34-38). Since the oil is to be used to consecrate the elements of the tabernacle and the priests (vv.26-30), and the incense is to be burned on the altar inside the Holy Place (v.36), this passage repeatedly emphasises that each is to be treated as holy (v.25, v.29 and vv.31-32), and not to be used for any other purpose (v.32 and v.37).

²² The Lord spoke to Moses: ²³ Take the finest spices: of liquid myrrh five hundred shekels, and of sweet-smelling cinnamon half as much, that is, two hundred and fifty, and two hundred and fifty of aromatic cane, ²⁴ and five hundred of cassia – measured by the sanctuary shekel

— and a hin of olive oil; ²⁵ and you shall make of these a sacred anointing-oil blended as by the perfumer; it shall be a holy anointing-oil. ²⁶ With it you shall anoint the tent of meeting and the ark of the covenant, ²⁷ and the table and all its utensils, and the lampstand and its utensils, and the altar of incense, ²⁸ and the altar of burnt-offering with all its utensils, and the basin with its stand; ²⁹ you shall consecrate them, so that they may be most holy; whatever touches them will become holy. ³⁰ You shall anoint Aaron and his sons, and consecrate them, in order that they may serve me as priests. ³¹ You shall say to the Israelites, ‘This shall be my holy anointing-oil throughout your generations. ³² It shall not be used in any ordinary anointing of the body, and you shall make no other like it in composition; it is holy, and it shall be holy to you. ³³ Whoever compounds any like it or whoever puts any of it on an unqualified person shall be cut off from the people.’

Exodus 30:22-33

You shall make of these a sacred anointing-oil blended as by the perfumer. This oil was used for anointing the priests and the articles pertaining to service. It was regarded as a sacred compound that could not be imitated nor used as normal perfuming oil.

It shall not be used in any ordinary anointing of the body. Since oil is emblematic of the Holy Spirit, this indicates that the Holy Spirit is not poured out to enhance the flesh of a person, but to glorify God.

You shall make no other like it in composition; it is holy, and it shall be holy to you. This shows that the work of the Holy Spirit is never to be imitated. There is to be no place for encouraging a man-made imitation of the gifts or operations of the Holy Spirit. To do this denies the holiness of the Holy Spirit, regarding his work as something that can be done in one’s own strength or according to human will.

Shall be cut off from the people. Just as it was with the eating of leavened bread at festivals when it was forbidden, the act of using the anointing oil inappropriately was seen as direct disobedience to God, which is the root of all sin. Refer also to the comment made on 12:15.

³⁴ The Lord said to Moses: Take sweet spices, stacte, and onycha, and galbanum, sweet spices with pure frankincense (an equal part of each), ³⁵ and make an incense blended as by the perfumer, seasoned with salt, pure and holy; ³⁶ and you shall beat some of it into powder,

and put part of it before the covenant in the tent of meeting where I shall meet you; it shall be for you most holy. ³⁷ When you make incense according to this composition, you shall not make it for yourselves; it shall be regarded by you as holy to the Lord. ³⁸ Whoever makes any like it to use as perfume shall be cut off from the people.

Exodus 30:34-38

Make an incense blended as by the perfumer, seasoned with salt, pure and holy. The special incense for the tabernacle was made according to the same principles as the anointing oil. God did not want this sacred smell, which symbolises the sweetness of prayer, to be used for human attraction or adornment.

Whoever makes any like it to use as perfume shall be cut off from the people. As with its inappropriate use (v.33), God was so concerned to protect the unique character of the tabernacle incense that he commanded excommunication for anyone who would make these holy things common.