

Further Instructions about Furnishings for the Tabernacle

Exodus 30

Exodus 30 – “You shall make an altar to burn incense on; you shall make it of acacia wood. ² A cubit 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. ³ And you shall overlay its top, its sides all around, and its horns with pure gold; and you shall make for it a ^[a]molding of gold all around. ⁴ 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. ⁵ You shall make the poles of acacia wood, and overlay them with gold. ⁶ 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.

⁷ “Aaron shall burn on it sweet incense every morning; when he tends the lamps, he shall burn incense on it. ⁸ And when Aaron lights the lamps ^[b]at twilight, he shall burn incense on it, a perpetual incense before the Lord throughout your generations. ⁹ You shall not offer strange incense on it, or a burnt offering, or a grain offering; nor shall you pour a drink offering on it. ¹⁰ And Aaron shall make atonement 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.”

¹¹ Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying: ¹² “When you take the census of the children of Israel for their number, then every man shall give ^[c]ransom for himself to the Lord, when you number them, that there may be no plague among them when you number them. ¹³ This is what everyone among those who are numbered shall give: half a shekel according to the shekel of the sanctuary (a shekel is twenty gerahs). The half-shekel shall be an offering to the Lord. ¹⁴ Everyone included among those who are numbered, from twenty years old and above, shall give an ^[d]offering to the Lord. ¹⁵ The rich shall not give more and the poor shall not give less than half a shekel, when you give an offering to the Lord, to make atonement for yourselves. ¹⁶ And you shall take the atonement money of the children of Israel, and shall ^[e]appoint it for the service of the tabernacle of meeting, that it may be a memorial for the children of Israel before the Lord, to make atonement for yourselves.”

¹⁷ Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying: ¹⁸ “You shall also make a ^[f]laver of bronze, with its base also of bronze, for washing. You shall put it between the tabernacle of meeting and the altar. And you shall put water in it, ¹⁹ for Aaron and his sons shall wash their hands and their feet in water from it. ²⁰ When they go into the tabernacle of meeting, or when they come near the altar to minister, to burn an offering made by fire to the Lord, they shall wash with water, lest they die. ²¹ So they shall wash their hands and their feet, lest they die. And it shall be a ^[g]statute forever to them—to him and his descendants throughout their generations.”

²² Moreover the Lord spoke to Moses, saying: ²³ “Also take for yourself quality spices—five hundred shekels of liquid myrrh, half as much sweet-smelling cinnamon (two hundred and fifty shekels), two hundred and fifty shekels of sweet-smelling cane, ²⁴ five hundred shekels of cassia, according to the shekel of the sanctuary, and a hin of olive

oil. ²⁵ And you shall make from these a holy anointing oil, an ointment compounded according to the art of the perfumer. It shall be a holy anointing oil. ²⁶ With it you shall anoint the tabernacle of meeting and the ark of the Testimony; ²⁷ the table and all its utensils, the lampstand and its utensils, and the altar of incense; ²⁸ the altar of burnt offering with all its utensils, and the laver and its base. ²⁹ You shall consecrate them, that they may be most holy; whatever touches them must be holy. ³⁰ And you shall anoint Aaron and his sons, and consecrate them, that they may minister to Me as priests.

³¹ “And you shall speak to the children of Israel, saying: ‘This shall be a holy anointing oil to Me throughout your generations. ³² It shall not be poured on man’s flesh; nor shall you make any other like it, according to its composition. It is holy, and it shall be holy to you. ³³ Whoever ^[h]compounds any like it, or whoever puts any of it on an outsider, shall be ^[u]cut off from his people.’ ”

³⁴ 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. ³⁵ You shall make of these an incense, a compound according to the art of the perfumer, salted, pure, and holy. ³⁶ And you shall beat some of it very fine, and put some of it before the Testimony in the tabernacle of meeting where I will meet with you. It shall be most holy to you. ³⁷ But as for the incense which you shall make, you shall not make any for yourselves, according to its ^[j]composition. It shall be to you holy for the Lord. ³⁸ Whoever makes any like it, to smell it, he shall be cut off from his people.”

Background Notes

Exodus 27 gave the instructions for the construction of an altar, and in Exodus 30 we find instructions about the construction of another altar. These are different altars -- so don't confuse the Bronze Altar of Exodus 27 with the Altar of Incense here in Exodus 30! All the animal sacrifices took place at the Bronze Altar. It was much larger, and was located outside the Tabernacle in the courtyard.

The Altar of Incense, also called the Golden Altar, was inside the Tabernacle. It was used only for burning incense, not for animal sacrifices. This Altar of Incense was, therefore, much smaller—about eighteen inches on each side, and only about three feet tall.

Doctrinal Points

1. The Incense Altar emphasizes continual praise in the worship of the Lord.

Thus far in our studies of Exodus we've seen that everything about the Tabernacle in some way portrays both the way of true worship and the person and work of Christ. In the Golden Altar of Incense we have the spiritual picture of Jesus Christ as the only basis of our acceptable worship of God. The incense offered on this altar represents our Christ-centered prayers and praises. I Peter 2:5 tells us that believers are a holy Priesthood, and we are to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. This is typified in the Old Testament by the incense offered by the priests on the Golden Altar of Incense.

Psalm 141:2 says, *“Let my prayer be set forth before thee as incense, and the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice.”* Notice that fragrant incense was to be presented before the Lord every morning and every evening, *“a perpetual incense before the Lord throughout your generations”* (v7-8). Our worship of the Lord is to be continuous, is it not? Hebrews 13:15 says: *Therefore by Him [that is, by Christ], let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name.”* This continual sacrifice of praise is portrayed in the Golden Altar of Incense.

Is your worship of the Lord continuous, or do you worship only on Sunday? The Incense Altar emphasizes continual praise in the worship of the Lord.

2. The Atonement Money emphasizes continual support for the work of the Lord.

How was the work of the Lord supported, in Old Testament times? After all, there were the needs of all the priests and Levites, and the maintenance of the Tabernacle, and later the Temple. So how was all this work of the Lord supported?

The Lord's work was supported by tithes and offerings, and by the “atonement money” that we read about here in Exodus 30. Whenever a census was taken in Israel, every male 20 years and older was required to give a half shekel as a ransom for himself, because he belonged to the Lord and had been redeemed out of Egypt. Thus, this money was known as “atonement money” and it was used to support the work of the Lord. Verse 16: *“And you shall take the atonement money of the children of Israel, and shall appoint it for the service of the Tabernacle of the congregation....”* This atonement money became known as the “Temple Tax” by New Testament times. Every time the people were numbered, the atonement money was required from every male, 20 years old and up, no matter how many times he had given before and no matter how he felt about it. It was a required responsibility.

In the spiritual picture, the atonement money emphasizes continual support for the work of the Lord. Let me ask you – since you have been ransomed from sin and now belong to the Lord, do you continually give back to Him to support the Lord's work? Or do you only give occasionally and not regularly—maybe just when you feel “moved to give”? Do you only give token amounts to the Lord, when you could give much more? Under the Law of Moses, if you didn't support the work of the Lord with the atonement money, you were in danger of bringing the plague to the community (v12)! The atonement money emphasizes that support for the work of the Lord is an important responsibility of every believer. The Atonement Money emphasizes continual support for the work of the Lord.

3. The Bronze Laver emphasizes continual cleansing by the Word of the Lord.

The Laver, a large bronze basin filled with water, was positioned in the Tabernacle courtyard between the Bronze Altar and the Tabernacle itself. Before the priests could enter the Tabernacle, they had to wash their hands and their feet with water from the Laver. This was done every time the priests entered the Tabernacle. Without the continual cleansing, the priests could not enter the Tabernacle to offer incense on the Golden Altar in the Holy Place.

The lesson for us should be obvious: The spiritual picture portrayed in the continual washing with the water from the Laver is the continual washing by the Word. We, as priests, need this continual cleansing because of the defiling effects of the sin on what we do—the hands—and where we go—the feet. All this has to do with the **continual process of sanctification**.

Our justification was emphasized in the application of blood in the consecration of the priests, and in the sacrifices of the Bronze Altar. As Romans 5:9 says, “.... *being justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him.*” Our continual sanctification is emphasized in the continual washings of the Laver. I John 1:9 says: “*If we confess our sin, He is faithful and just to forgive our sin and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*” The Lord cleanses us from the daily defiling effects of sin by the use of His Word. That’s why it’s so important to read the Word every day. Ephesians 5:26 tells us that the Lord cleanses His Church “*by the washing of water by the Word.*” The Bronze Laver emphasizes continual cleansing by the Word of the Lord.

Practical Application

Don’t get involved with “strange oil” or “strange incense.”

The anointing oil and the incense for the Golden Altar had to be prepared by the **exact, God-given** instructions. Notice that verse 9 refers to unorthodox incense as “strange incense.” Verses 33 and 38 say that there was a penalty for unorthodox mixtures of oil or incense, or for using the holy Incense as a personal perfume. Death or banishment was the penalty.

The serious nature of this sin can be appreciated from the spiritual picture God intended to portray. The anointing oil is a picture of the Holy Spirit, as we’ve mentioned before, and the incense typifies Christ-centered prayers and praises. Here’s the practical application. Is your understanding of the Holy Spirit orthodox? Is your doctrine of the Holy Spirit biblically sound, or is it a strange mixture of experiences and unbiblical teachings? Are your prayers Christ-centered, or are they “strange incense”? Are your prayers and praises lifted to God the Father through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, or are they an unbiblical mixture of your own ideas, prayed to a “god” who will accept any “sincere” person? Don’t get involved with strange oil or strange incense!