

Exodus 30-31 - “Further Instructions on the Mountain”

We look tonight at various furnishings of the tabernacle once again. But don't tune this out, because as we've been seeing in our study of the tabernacle, not only does it prescribe the way back into the presence of God, but it all speaks of and points to Jesus so wonderfully and clearly.

1. The Altar of Incense – 30:1-10

30:1-6 - *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 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.*

This altar was 18” square and 3’ high. It was made of wood but overlaid in gold. The wood speaks of *humanity*, gold of *deity*. Again, we know that Jesus came to us as perfectly man, but completely God.

This altar is very different than the altar we were introduced to in Exodus 27. That was the altar of burnt offering. It was much larger and it was covered in bronze. Bronze is the metal of judgment and as we saw, gold is the metal of deity. These two altars picture for us the work done at the two comings of Christ.

- Jesus came at His first coming to redeem mankind. He bore our sins on the cross and took the judgment of God that we deserved, upon Himself. And now because of the work that Jesus completed, He is sitting at the right hand of God. He's ready to come back again and receive us to Himself that where He is, we might be also.

Notice this altar of incense is not outside the tabernacle, it is right beside the holy of holies, the place God's presence would be evident (30:6).

It was to have a ***molding of gold all around*** (30:4). In the KJV it uses the word *crown*. That's fitting, because when Jesus comes back He's not coming again as a Lamb slain for the sins of the world, He's coming back as King! Our conquering, reigning Saviour.

30:7-10 - 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 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.

Aaron was to burn sweet incense on this altar every morning and evening. Incense in the Bible is a picture of prayer.

- **Psalm 141:2**, *“Let my prayer be set before You as incense...”*
- **Revelation 5:8**, *“Now when He had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each having a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints.”*
- **Revelation 8:3–4**, *“Then another angel, having a golden censer, came and stood at the altar. He was given much incense, that he should offer it with the prayers of all the saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne. ⁴ And the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, ascended before God from the angel’s hand.”*

Aaron was to burn incense upon this altar twice daily. A wonderful opportunity for the priest to worship before God. We have this same privilege today. We can come before a holy God and pray, commune, and fellowship. The line is never busy, there’s never a dead spot with no service. He is there – always!

There are wonderful things that take place when we pray. We don’t always even need that much faith (**Acts 12:5-17** – Peter was in prison, yet the church prayed and he was freed, despite their lack of confidence).

- God loves to see His people come before Him and pray.
- **2 Chronicles 7:14**, *“If My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land.”*

This was to be a **perpetual incense before the Lord throughout your generations** (30:8). In other words, this was to be offered continually.

- **1 Thessalonians 5:17**, *“pray without ceasing,”*

Our prayers are more than just bringing a grocery list of requests before the Lord. Our prayer is simply about communion with God. You may wonder, *‘How can I pray without ceasing? I’ve got stuff to do; responsibilities to take care of through the day.’* But praying without ceasing isn’t about stopping all activity. It’s not a *posture* of prayer we need to be concerned about, but an *attitude* of prayer. In other words, we’re to remain in a constant consciousness of the presence of God. We have opportunity to commune with Him in all our activities throughout the day. That is praying without ceasing.

Again, the brazen altar shows us what Christ did for us on earth, whereas the altar of incense shows us what Christ is doing for us in heaven.

Hebrews 7:25 tells us that Jesus, who is our great High Priest, *“always lives to make intercession for them [for those who have come to God].”*

- Just as Christ is praying for us, so too are we to be people of prayer. We are a royal priesthood after all (1 Peter 2:5,9). That means interceding for others as well as praying for your own needs. Simply take advantage of the fact that sacrifice has been made and we can now enjoy fellowship with God through prayer.

Where did this golden altar of incense sit? Right before the veil that led to the Holy of Holies (30:6). It was the article closest to the ark of the covenant and mercy seat. So too when we are people of prayer we will experience the presence of God in a real and powerful way. Some people go through life questioning why God feels so distant from them. He’s not distant, He hasn’t moved, we just sometimes fail to draw near through prayer.

God is very specific about how things are to be done. Though this was an altar, it was not an altar of sacrifice.

- “Prayer is not the place sacrificial atonement is made; it is the place sacrificial atonement is enjoyed. We don’t *save* ourselves through prayer; we pray because of Jesus’ saving work on the cross.”¹

So too, the priests were not to offer strange incense on this altar. They weren’t to come with their own concoction. Nadab and Abihu paid a serious price for doing this (Leviticus 10:1-2).

- Our prayers are not to be self-serving. We’re to pray that God’s will be done.

¹ Guzik, D. (2013). *Exodus* (Ex 30:6–10). David Guzik.

And Aaron shall make atonement upon its horns once a year with the blood of the sin offering of atonement (30:10).

Again, no sacrifice was to be put on the altar, but here we see the blood of the sin offering was to be placed on this altar once a year, on the Day of Atonement.

It's because of the blood that was shed for us that we can come freely into the presence of God and enjoy fellowship with Him. Our prayer is not to earn our way, or cleanse our way. That cleansing has already been done, and we can now come boldly before a holy and just God and commune with Him.

- **Hebrews 10:19–23**, *"Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus,²⁰ by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh,²¹ and having a High Priest over the house of God,²² let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.²³ Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful."*

2. The Redemption Money – 30:11-16

30:11-14 - 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 a 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 offering to the Lord.

The people were to pay a half shekel (1/5 ounce of silver) as ransom money. As the money was taken, the number of the people would be clear.

- This census was to be a reminder of God's redemption and deliverance of His people out of slavery and bondage in Egypt. This was to be for the glory of God.
- David took a census in 1 Chronicles 21 without this 'redemption money'. He was being prideful about their strength and didn't rely on God's strength. Because God wasn't getting the glory (and because of David's disobedience) God sent a plague upon them and 70,000 people died.

- There's a lot of things we can do that is done for our own sakes, and to feed our pride. That's a work that isn't honored by the Lord because it's not honoring to the Lord.

30:15-16 - *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 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.*

Notice this, everyone gave an equal amount, whether rich or poor. The cost of our redemption stays the same. We're all on equal ground at the cross. Nobody needed salvation a little bit more than someone else. Nobody was just about there on their own. We were all dead in our trespasses and sins and perishing. God has saved us by His mercy and grace. We are all on equal level and equal need of His salvation and redemption.

To make atonement for yourselves... The Catholic church used this to say you could get people out of purgatory into heaven by buying a candle and lighting it for your dead friend. This is of course not true! This verse shows us though that salvation must be purchased, and that only comes through Jesus (1 Peter 1:18-19).

- This silver made the sockets that held the boards (26:19). It kept these boards off the ground and stable.

3. The Bronze Laver – 30:17-21

30:17-21 - *Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying: ¹⁸ “You shall also make a 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 statute forever to them—to him and his descendants throughout their generations.”*

This laver or basin sat between the bronze altar of offering and the tabernacle. It's a reminder that we need ongoing cleansing as we serve the Lord.

The priests were cleansed whole at their consecration (Exodus 29:20-21), but this laver now cleansed their hands and feet and prepared them for service.

I'm glad that there is a laver. We need to be cleansed when we come before the Lord. The issue of sin was taken care of at the altar, yet we as Christians do not live in sinless perfection.

As one poet said:

*To dwell above With saints in love
O that will be glory!
But to stay below With saints I know
That is another story!*

We need a cleansing daily in our lives from the dirt we pick up.

1 John 1:9, *“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”*

Before we go to church, before we go to bed, before we approach God, we need to be washed (not a full bath as Jesus told Peter in John 13) but a cleansing, presenting ourselves as holy before God.

The question arises, ‘How can I continue in cleanliness?’ The Word of God is our cleansing agent!

Jesus said in **John 15:3**, *“You are already clean because of the Word which I have spoken to you.”*

Psalms 119:9+11, *“How can a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed according to Your word. Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against You!”*

Bible study is more than an intellectual growth process, it is coming into contact with the living God. Receiving His truth is a cleansing agent in our lives. Paul echoed this thought in **Ephesians 5:26**, *“that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word.”*

Notice that the laver had no measurement. Just as there is no limitation to the Word of God. You can pick it apart day by day and it will continue to speak to you and breathe life into your soul.

Interestingly, this laver was made from women’s bronze mirrors (Exodus 38:8).

That's what the Word of God is like, it's like looking into a mirror. Look into the Bible and it will give you a great make over.

- **2 Corinthians 3:18**, *"But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord."*

4. The Holy Anointing Oil – 30:22-33

30:22-25 - *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.*

This anointing oil is emblematic of the Holy Spirit (oil is consistently seen that way throughout Scripture).

In order to minister for the Lord and unto the Lord, we need a fresh filling of the Holy Spirit.

30:26-31 - *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.*

Everything in the tabernacle and what was to be used for the Lord was to be anointed with this oil. This signified a setting apart of these items, they were to be holy unto the Lord.

Just as each of these items pictured Jesus in a beautiful way, so too the Holy Spirit's role today is to make Jesus known and draw people to Him.

And we can have this anointing today. An anointing is not some magical or mystical thing, it's just the filling of the Holy Spirit in the believer's life that leads us into truth. When we are abiding in the Lord we are walking in this anointing.

- **1 John 2:20**, *"But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and you know all things."*
- **1 John 2:24**, *"Therefore let that abide in you which you heard from the beginning. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, you also will abide in the Son and in the Father."*

30:32-33 - ***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 compounds any like it, or whoever puts any of it on an outsider, shall be cut off from his people.' "***

The oil was not to be poured on flesh. Unfortunately, there have been cases today where people use the filling of the Holy Spirit as a license to act oddly and perhaps act in the flesh.

- When we are filled with the Spirit it's not to create excess of emotion, it's to reveal Christ.
- Look at the fruit of the Spirit and you will see Jesus (Galatians 5:22).

5. The Incense – 30:34-38

30:34-36 - ***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.***

Most of the ingredients of this incense came from outside Israel. In other words, they wouldn't find these things through their own resources.

- In the same way, we can't expect to be a sweet fragrance to God by our own means. It's not found within us but it comes to us from a faraway place: Heaven and through the Holy Spirit.
- **2 Corinthians 2:14–15**, *"Now thanks be to God who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and through us diffuses the fragrance of His knowledge in every place. ¹⁵ For we are to God the fragrance of Christ among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing."*

30:37-38 - *But as for the incense which you shall make, you shall not make any for yourselves, according to its 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.*”

The incense was not to be for the personal pleasure of the people, just as prayer is not to be a formula to bring pleasure or our own wants into our lives. Prayer is to bring about God’s will, not our will. Which is why the Word tells us, *“If you ask anything in My name, I will do it.”* (**John 14:14**). Not meaning we now have the power to name it and claim it. We can now pray for expensive cars and get it if we pray in *His* name. This verse means that when we pray, we pray that which is glorifying the Lord, that which is according to His will.

- Prayer is not to be used for our vain desires and comforts. Prayer is not to plead with God to align with our will, it’s so that we will get in alignment with His will.
- Yet the beauty of prayer is that as we learn to pray according to His will, and begin to grow in the Lord, we will find much pleasure. We will have peace in our lives and benefit from it.
- There will be a sweet fragrance from our lives as we learn to yield to God and wait upon Him in prayer.

6. Skilled Workers – 31:1-11

31:1-11 - *“Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying: ² “See, I have called by name Bezalel the son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah. ³ And I have filled him with the Spirit of God, in wisdom, in understanding, in knowledge, and in all manner of workmanship, ⁴ to design artistic works, to work in gold, in silver, in bronze, ⁵ in cutting jewels for setting, in carving wood, and to work in all manner of workmanship. ⁶ “And I, indeed I, have appointed with him Aholiab the son of Ahisamach, of the tribe of Dan; and I have put wisdom in the hearts of all the gifted artisans, that they may make all that I have commanded you: ⁷ the tabernacle of meeting, the ark of the Testimony and the mercy seat that is on it, and all the furniture of the tabernacle—⁸ the table and its utensils, the pure gold lampstand with all its utensils, the altar of incense, ⁹ the altar of burnt offering with all its utensils, and the laver and its base—¹⁰ the garments of ministry, the holy garments for Aaron the priest and the garments of his sons, to minister as*

priests, ¹¹ and the anointing oil and sweet incense for the holy place.

According to all that I have commanded you they shall do.”

Two guys are singled out as being key craftsmen to carry out the work of the Lord in the furnishings of the tabernacle – Bezalel and Aholiab.

[Interestingly, the national art academy in modern Israel is named after Bezalel.]

Bezalel is also the first person in the Bible said to be filled with the Spirit of God. He had special wisdom and understanding in workmanship to carry out all the plans and articles for the tabernacle given in Exodus 25-30.

And there wasn't to be any artistic license taken in the design and creation of these things, they were to do according to all that the Lord has commanded.

What's cool is that we often think of the Spirit filling people for sensational things; that great and mighty deeds might be performed. But here is just very ordinary things that they will be doing, but they'll be doing it through the gifting of the Spirit. We don't need to expect grandiose things to be done, we just want the work of the Lord to prevail through the power of the Spirit; whether grand or small.

- “May God help us, in this age of celebrity Christianity, not to lose sight of this biblical vision of the Spirit's work. The Spirit of God enables us to do the work of God, and the Spirit's work through us may not be considered “sensational work,” but it is “important work.” ²

7. The Sabbath – 31:12-18

31:12-17 - And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, ¹³ “Speak also to the children of Israel, saying: ‘Surely My Sabbaths you shall keep, for it is a sign between Me and you throughout your generations, that you may know that I am the Lord who sanctifies you. ¹⁴ You shall keep the Sabbath, therefore, for it is holy to you. Everyone who profanes it shall surely be put to death; for whoever does any work on it, that person shall be cut off from among his people. ¹⁵ Work shall be done for six days, but the seventh is the Sabbath of rest, holy to the Lord. Whoever does any work on the Sabbath day, he shall surely be put to death. ¹⁶ Therefore the children of Israel shall keep the Sabbath, to observe the Sabbath throughout their generations as a perpetual covenant. ¹⁷ It is a sign between Me and the children of Israel

² Merida, T. (2014). *Exalting Jesus in Exodus* (Ex 31:1–11). Holman Reference.

forever; for in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, and on the seventh day He rested and was refreshed.’ ”

The Sabbath is reviewed because after all this talk on building and creating, there's a tendency to get busy and stay busy. But God reveals again that His heart is for them to take rest. This is what the Sabbath was all about, a provision of rest amongst the work.

This was modeled to us by God and this reflects the whole creation account. God worked for 6 days, but rested on the 7th. We see in this account from Exodus 25-31 the phrase: “*The Lord spoke/said*” repeated 7 times, just as in creation.

- “Structurally, the **creation** account consists of seven acts each marked by divine speech (“And God said,” Gen. 1:3, 6, 9, 14, 20, 24, 26). Structurally, the **tabernacle** account consists of seven acts each introduced by divine speech (“And the Lord said,” Exod. 25:1; 30:11, 17, 22, 34; 31:1, 12).”³
- Six times it was to speak of a job to be done, and the 7th is here in 32:12 to speak of rest.
- This was such a serious thing that the person that profaned this would be put to death (32:14).

Notice something though, this was to be a sign between God and the children of Israel. We're no longer obligated to keep the Sabbath. Jesus has become our Sabbath rest.

- Of all the 10 commandments, only the Sabbath is not repeated in the New Testament.

But you would be a fool to think you can just work and work and work and not pay a price for it. God has modeled a principle of 6 and 1, work 6 rest 1. This goes beyond the giving of the law and right back to creation.

Though we're not bound to keep the Sabbath, you're bound to break if you don't observe a time of rest.

- Notice, when God rested on the seventh day, He ***was refreshed***. I need that. You need that. Spiritually, our refreshment comes in knowing Jesus has completed the work of salvation for us. We rest in Him.
- But practically, take a day off to be rejuvenated. The Sabbath is for *rest* and *remembrance* of all that God has done!

³ <https://planobiblechapel.org/tcon/notes/pdf/exodus.pdf> [Adapted from Sailhamer, The Pentateuch... pp. 298]

31:18 - *And when He had made an end of speaking with him on Mount Sinai, He gave Moses two tablets of the Testimony, tablets of stone, written with the finger of God.*

Once God was done with instructions, everything was written on 2 tablets of stone. This was by the finger of God, this was His doing, His law, and it was to be permanent.

Next week we'll see how well the people will do in managing obedience to these things.