

### EXODUS

#### Lesson 29 - Chapters 30 and 31

Today we're going to continue to study various aspects of the Tabernacle; it's furnishings, and the priesthood that the Lord is establishing. All of these things are designed to accomplish a way for Him to dwell among His people, Israel. Let's read Exodus chapter 30 together.

#### READ CHAPTER 30 all

Chapter 30 begins by God giving Moses instructions for the 2nd most holy piece of furniture in the Sanctuary. This item goes by a number of names, but the Golden Altar and the Altar of Incense are the two most common.

Burning incense in conjunction with worship was a rather common practice of Middle Eastern cultures of that day. In fact, sacrificing, incense burning, and prayer were central to most of the known world's religious practices in that era. So, were the Israelites just adopting these standard cultural activities they were already familiar with, as their own? To a degree, yes....but it was at God's decree that they do so. Yehoveh deals with man in ways we can understand, and so He deals with us on OUR level. It would be utterly impossible for God to deal with us on HIS level, because we're but men. It's for OUR sake that God gives us instructions and guidelines for living and for worshipping. God used methods that were familiar and normal in ancient Middle Eastern cultures; but, the ways and reasons for these various worship activities, and what they meant, were to be VERY different from other religions.

The overriding difference between what was customary pagan religious ceremony for that day, and what Yehoveh was ordaining for Israel, was this: the pagan rituals revolved around **appeasing** or indulging the supposed needs of a particular god. The Hebrew rituals were all about following instructions that God laid down for the benefit of man. We must never think that anything we do of a worshipful nature even if it is apparently commanded of us in the Bible is for God's benefit. He has no needs, and requires no appeasements.

The context of the worship practices and ceremonies that are being created here in Exodus is of God showering His love and mercy upon His people; and of establishing a system of justice in which man can be redeemed, so reconciliation between God and man can occur. It's about the Lord teaching His people who He is, and of the value He places on them. Of both giving the people a way to commune with God **then**, and of preparing mankind for a **future** revelation that would bring permanent reconciliation between God and man.

The Altar of Incense was fashioned in a way we are now familiar with: an acacia wood frame

was built and then overlaid with gold. It was about 18" square, and 3 feet high. Similar to the much larger Brazen Altar that rested in the Outer Courtyard...the altar upon which the sacrifices were burnt up..... the Altar of Incense had 4 horns, one on each corner. A rim was built around the top, and rings of gold were put under the rim so that wooden poles could be inserted and the Golden Altar moved as needed.

This piece was to be placed in front of the veil, the parokhet, which separated the Holy of Holies from the Holy Place. So it took its place among 2 other furnishings that occupied that room of the Sanctuary called the Holy Place, of which we have already examined the Menorah (Golden Lamp Stand), and the Table of Showbread. It was placed on the west side of the Holy Place, just as the Ark of the Covenant was placed on the west side of the Holy of Holies. This was an indication of its importance.

Once per year, the Golden Altar of Incense was to have sacrificial blood placed on its horns to purify it. Now, exactly WHEN this cleansing of the Altar of Incense occurred, is unsure. One might think it would be on Yom Kippur, that one day per year when the High Priest entered the Holy of Holies and sprinkled blood on the Mercy Seat. I suspect that IS when it happened, because on Yom Kippur ancient writings indicate that the High Priest performed a different ritual concerning the Altar of Incense.

A specially concocted incense was to be burnt, continuously, on the Altar of Incense. The smoke of the incense, which curled upward, symbolized the prayers of God's people. Apparently it was the High Priest's job to add incense and hot coals to the Altar, to keep it burning although since it was in the Holy Place (where the regular priests were allowed) the regular priests probably tended this Altar most of the time. Yehoveh was quite specific about just WHEN the incense was to be added; it was at the time the Menorah's lamp wicks were being trimmed and oil added. This happened twice a day, in the morning and in the evening.

Now, a warning is also issued: no other kind of incense than that which God formulated is to be used, and the Golden Altar is not to be used for the various kinds of sacrificing of animals that have been ordained. The word used in vs. 9 to describe any alternate form of incense is, in Hebrew, **ketoret zarah**. Most Bibles will translate this as "strange" or "unholy" or "alien"...all acceptable translations. There is kind of a double meaning intended here: 1st, is that that which God **declares** holy is holy.....nothing else. The reality is that the ingredients used in that special incense didn't have some magical quality when they were mixed together in proper proportion and then burned. Rather, God simply **declared** it to be holy, and therefore, all else was not. This demonstrates a principle of God that we need to always keep in mind. You see pagan religions believed that certain ground, certain foods, certain formulations of incense or potions, certain animals, and other items were, of themselves, inherently holy and magical. God says nothing is, of itself, holy. It is His decision, by fiat, to simply declare what is Holy and what isn't. It doesn't necessarily meet with any human rationale. For instance, Mt. Sinai was just dirt and rock like the rest of planet earth. But, when God was present and active there, He declared that it was holy because His holiness is so transcendent that it literally infects whatever is near it with holiness; and the summit of Mt. Sinai was virtually untouchable except by Moses for that reason. When Yehoveh was no longer present and active there Mt. Sinai wasn't anymore holy than any other mountain in the world. Nowhere are we told to revere Mt.

Sinai, to stay away from its summit, to treat it as a permanently holy spot, or make a pilgrimage to it. Certainly, it must be awesome to stand at the very place Moses received the 10 Commandments. But that does not make the place holy. On the other hand, God has said He has set apart, forever, a very specific piece of land for Himself and His people.....Israel. The dirt and rocks and foliage found there isn't unique. I don't know why God chose that particular piece of geography in all the earth to set apart for Himself as an inheritance to Israel.....but He did. Just as with the special incense He instructed to be made for the Golden Altar, it is not for us to scrutinize and apply scientific methods or man's philosophies to determine why THIS and why THAT is holy and something else isn't. Sadly, it's come to the point, today, that if what the Word of God says doesn't meet the approval of man's intellect, we say the Word must be in error. God's declaration of what is and what isn't has NOTHING to do with man's view of reason and logic.

The 2nd part of this double meaning of the phrase *ketoret zarah* is that since it WAS common that other cultures burned incense to their gods, and used incense as an ancient deodorizer, not only could those other incenses not be used but also this special holy incense was not to come from OUTSIDE the nation of Israel. They couldn't outsource its making. A very good modern word that captures the essence of *ketoret zarah* is "incense from an outsider". God is putting another layer onto the wall that was meant to separate Israel from everyone else.

In order for the High Priest to burn the incense he had to follow a procedure. First, he had to perform the morning, and then later the evening, animal sacrifice at the Brazen Altar. Next, he had to ritually wash himself at the Brazen Laver (feet and hands), a large container for holding water (we'll come to that shortly). Finally, he had to enter the Holy Place, before he could approach the Altar of Incense.

When the High Priest added coals on top of the Golden Altar, they had to be coals taken from the Brazen Altar, where the sacrifices were made. Later, we'll hear of this term "strange fire"; no "strange fire" was to be put onto the Golden Altar. The word used for strange fire was the one we just learned: *zarah*. So, strange fire literally meant "outsider" fire. Strange fire was, essentially, coals taken from anywhere except the Brazen Altar. As we move along, particularly in Leviticus, we'll study further requirements and prohibitions in the Tabernacle rituals. But, for now, let me just draw you a picture of the symbolism that is being painted, here, regarding the Golden Altar.

What all the ritual surrounding the Altar of Incense is demonstrating is that when we come to God in prayer, it is on His terms. We cannot do it anyway we like. He has set out a model, a procedure if you would, for us to be able to come to him in prayer.

Torah means teaching, or instruction. Everything the priests did was teaching the people some aspect about the Kingdom of God. In the case of burning incense on the Golden Altar, God was teaching that, first, to come to Him in prayer, we must be cleansed by means of blood at the Altar of Sacrifice just as the High Priest had to do. The Cross is the true altar of sacrifice that the Brazen Altar symbolized; and Yeshua is the sacrificial animal that makes clean. We must identify with what Jesus did for us, in order to be cleansed as the first step in being able to commune with God.

Second, we must be washed clean by means of water, just as the High Priest did in his ritual washing at the Brazen Laver. Christ says He is our Living Water. We are told that we must be washed clean by Him before we can approach Yehoveh. But, there is also another aspect; the ritual washing is also symbolic of confessing and repenting of our sins. Just as the priests washed the dirt and soil from their feet and hands, we must leave our sins behind if we are to approach the Most High God.

Next, we must enter the Holy Place. In Moses day, the Holy Place was a tent. Later it would be a wood and stone building we call the Temple. But, today, the Holy Place is within US.....its where the Spirit of God resides. We don't have to be anywhere in particular nor go to a special building to meet God. In fact, as Believers there is no place that we can go that we are NOT in His presence. The priests of Moses' day had to enter into the Sanctuary to be in a Holy Place. Today, the sanctuary is LITERALLY US.....disciples of Yeshua.

Now, one more thing about the Altar of Incense and we'll move on. I said that it symbolized prayer. Some one you might say, 'where in the world does it say THAT in these passages'. Well, truthfully, it doesn't directly say so. However, I'd like to show you something that I hope helps for you to see the cohesiveness and one-ness of the Bible, further evidence that the Wilderness Tabernacle is an earthly physical model of God's heavenly spiritual tabernacle, and proof that the smoke of the incense does indeed represent prayer that has been made acceptable to God.

Turn to Revelation 8.

In Exodus, we see God creating His set apart nation....or as I have called it on other occasions, the Gospel act 1; and in Revelation we see the final redemption of His set apart nation and the final chapters of human history as we know it; the Gospel act 3, the final act.

Let's read Rev 8:1-4

***When the Lamb broke the 7th seal, there was silence in heaven for what seemed like half an hour. Then I saw the 7 angels who stand before God, and they were given 7 shofars. Another angel came and stood at the altar with a gold incense bowl, and he was given a large quantity of incense to add to the prayers of all God's people on the gold altar in front of the throne. The smoke of the incense went up with the prayers of God's people from the hand of the angel before God.***

I don't think we need be concerned that we might be indulging in allegory or illustration when we speak of the symbolism of the Altar of Incense as the prayers of God's people that by adding the quality of the incense.....a quality of holiness...have become acceptable to God. And, we also can know that in heaven there exists a spiritual altar of incense.

Verse 11 now takes a sudden turn, and we see Yehoveh instructing Moses to take a census. New scholarship has determined (for a number of good reasons) that this census is entirely separate from the census of Numbers chapter 1. The coins collected from this census would be used to form the sockets for the posts of the sanctuary. Although this is a one-time

happening, a more permanent ordinance will be set in place later in the Torah. However, beyond the use of the money, the spiritual purpose for it is another thing.

Suffice it to say that there are several reasons for this census. The one that is given us here in Exodus is that each man is required to pay a ransom for his life. This idea of ransom is at the heart of God's plan of salvation. A ransom being paid is what redeems us. We of the Church speak of being redeemed, and of the "plan of redemption", quite often. But, I don't think many of us know what it actually means, nor where the idea came from.

In a nutshell, it is this: Yehoveh set up a system whereby every father had to pay to the priesthood a set amount of money to redeem the life of the first male child born to him (formally called the firstborn). Typically, it had to be paid within 30 days of birth. In addition, there was another facet or kind of redemption that involved a kinsman redeemer. The idea here had to do with a relative being responsible.... duty-bound in fact..... to redeem the property or life of a family member who had fallen into debt, and was going to lose their property or be sold as a slave, or both, to the creditor.

Now, while this system was used as an everyday practical element of civil law for Israel, it was created by God to **teach** Israel a principle, and it is this: we, as humans, are BORN in debt to God. He created us, He owns us. We are the debtors, He is the creditor. Further, as descendants of Adam and Eve, we are born as sinners, and by all rights, should be destroyed. If our lives are to be spared, we must be redeemed from our debt to God for not destroying us; the debt which is the result of sin. Redemption is NOT free. It ALWAYS costs. Somebody pays. But, its NOT the person (the infant firstborn) in debt who pays, it's the father. Even more, only a relative has the right, and duty, to perform the redemption. Another aspect is that the firstborn carries a higher value than the remaining children. The firstborn was the favored son; he had the right to inherit double the amount of all of his brothers, and would also inherit the ruler ship over that family when the father died.

Let me state again: God created this system as a shadow and a type of what was to come; just as he created the priesthood and the Tabernacle as a shadow and type of what was to come. It served a very practical purpose in its time in addition to be being a shadow.....but nonetheless, God did it the way He did in order to TEACH mankind His principles.

Yeshua, Jesus Christ, was what the redemption system pointed to. First, it had to be made clear to Israel, then to every nation, that we all NEED to be redeemed. The whole problem with the unsaved world is that they just don't get the basic God-principle that we are BORN needing to have our lives...our ETERNAL lives....redeemed. And, if our eternal lives are NOT redeemed, then we suffer death....eternal death. In our church-speak, we say we all need to be saved. Jesus, God's firstborn son, was given as the redemption price....often times called the RANSOM..... for redemption of His firstborn nation, Israel.

So, this census in Exodus is because Israel is God's firstborn nation, among all the nations of the world. And, just like the firstborn son of a family, it must be redeemed. This practice of redeeming indicates on the one hand that the Israelite people do indeed belong to God; they are His.....He virtually owns them, because He created them in every possible sense of the

word. On the other hand, it shows that Israel is set apart, made holy, to Yehoveh.

Notice that each man must pay an amount of money.....in this case a half-shekel.....as the redemption price.....the ransom. And, no matter how rich or how poor that man is, the price is the same. Naturally, it is exactly the same for us. God paid the price of Jesus as the ransom for redeeming the debt that each human ever born owes to Him for his eternal life. And whether a King or a slave, rich or poor, male or female, black, brown, or white skinned, the price is the same: no ups and no extras and no substitutes. Jesus is both our kinsman who had the right to redeem us, AND he is the price of that redemption.

In vs. 17, Yehoveh instructs Moses to manufacture the Brazen Laver; that is, a large bronze container for holding water to be used for the ritual washing that will occur many times a day. The size of the Laver is not given; but it had to be a pretty good size to hold all the water that would be needed.

Whereas the ordinary Israelites would stand at the Brazen Altar, even killing the animals and cutting them up there, it was ONLY the priests who were permitted to use the bronze Laver. The Laver was positioned between the Altar of Sacrifice (aka the Brazen Altar) and the door to the Holy Place.

It's interesting that not too much in the way of construction detail is given by God to Moses for the Laver, except that it is to consist of two pieces: a pedestal, and then the container of water that sits on the pedestal.

As we have already discussed, the purpose of the Laver was to hold water for washing. The priests ALWAYS had to wash before entering the Sanctuary. The washing symbolized purification and regeneration.

Procedurally speaking, the priests would walk up to the Laver, and dip their right hands into the Laver washing their right hand first, and then their right foot. Then they washed their left hand and their left foot. Just so you don't get the wrong picture, only their hands dipped into the water; they washed their feet WITH their hands. Once again, get the picture of Jesus washing the disciples FEET with his hands. And, let me remind you, that this procedure was reserved ONLY for priests.

The next subject of this chapter is the aromatic anointing oil to be used in rituals. The money and ingredients were not to come out of the funds of given as offerings by the people to the Tabernacle; rather this was to be paid for by the tribal chieftains. Part of the reason for this is the enormous cost of the spices and perfumes that were needed. The most important ingredients had to be brought from long distances such as Arabia, India, and China. They were rare and difficult to manufacture. Therefore they were prime targets for bandits and thieves during their transport and a goodly quantity never made it to its intended destinations.

We're given list a spices that are to make up this oil: Myrrh, cinnamon, aromatic cane, and cassia. And after blending by a specialist, it would be used to consecrate people and ritual implements into divine service. In fact, without this special concoction it was not possible to

consecrate priests into service to the Lord.

But verse 31-33 also tells us that this is the ONLY permitted use for this special blend; no one but the priesthood may administer it, and it can be used on nothing else. The consequence of violating this command is terribly serious; **karet**. **Karet** is what we usually translate to “cut-off”. Let me remind you that what is being contemplated here is being permanently separated from the community of God, Israel; and from God Himself. It doesn’t necessarily mean physical death, like execution.....although it can. It is really the equivalent of eternal damnation without hope for redemption. So **karet** is in most ways far more serious than mere physical death and it was greatly feared.

The final instructions of chapter 30 concern the ingredients for the holy incense that will be burned on the Altar of Incense. It is to consist of 4 ingredients: balsam resin, onycha, galbanum, and frankincense. Balsam is a kind of tree and the ingredient is basically sap from the Balsam tree. Onycha is not quite as well understood. The Hebrew word used here is **shekelet** and unless it has a double meaning, it is referring to a sea creature.....a mollusk.....from which they extracted a fragrant substance. The next ingredient is called galbanum and it comes from a plant in the area of Persia, and finally frankincense is added. Frankincense was a very expensive aromatic gum that comes from a tree that grows in Arabia.

This special mixture is to be used ONLY on the Golden Altar and never in a common means. By common means I’m indicating that it is not to be used as a way to simply deodorize or make the air smell sweeter, which was it’s most common use among well-to-do folks. One can only imagine in that day the rather foul odors floating through every encampment, town and village from the burnt sacrifices, animals literally living with the people, the slaughtering process, and of course the people themselves who didn’t bathe with any regularity.

Let’s move on to Exodus chapter 31.

### **READ EXODUS CHAPTER 31 all**

Moses is STILL up on the summit of Mt. Sinai; he has been there since the beginning of chapter 24, and many days have passed. All told, he will be up there 40 days. I cannot begin to imagine what transformation was going on within Moses, being in the presence of such pure holiness. How often I’ve heard a Christian leader say, ‘ we may not know the answer to that mystery until we stand before God’. Well, Moses WAS standing before God; and the knowledge and understanding he must have been absorbing is mind-boggling. The questions that Moses must have formed in his mind as he climbed up that mountain.....private and deeply hidden doubts, suspicions, and worries.....these and more must have been addressed and answered. For, a different Moses came down that mountain after each of the several times that he went up.

As Moses’ time in God’s presence is nearing its end, for now, and the last few instructions are being dispensed to Moses for the Tabernacle, Yehoveh specifically names the person that is to be the chief designer and maker of all that God has commanded to be constructed for the

Tabernacle. While much detail has been given, much has not. Who would decide what Cherubim looked like? How big was the Bronze Laver of water to be, and how much water should it hold? Was a pillar for holding up the veil to the entrance to the Holy of Holies to be square, or round, or something else? These sorts of decisions would be left up to a pair of men God Himself chose and anointed for that purpose. The headman would be Betzalel. He is the grandson of Hur, who was Aaron's 2nd in command. Interestingly, one might think that Aaron would have picked a son, or at least a fellow Levite to be his assistant; but Hur, and therefore Betzalel, was from the tribe of Judah. Betzalel's name means, "in the shadow of El", or as we more commonly think of it, "in the shadow of God". How appropriate.

As his 2nd in command, God assigns to Betzalel a man named Oholiab.... which, poignantly in Hebrew means "in my father's tent"... who was of the tribe of Dan. Notice that these men represent 2 of the 4 dominant leader tribes.....Judah and Dan. And, we're told in vs. 6 that Yehoveh supernaturally placed what He wanted everything to look like in these two men's minds. How did He do that if the Holy Spirit didn't live in them? I have no idea. But, if He can do that without the Holy Spirit actually being within them, only resting upon them, imagine what a greater advantage we have, as Believers, that the Spirit of God resides in us.

In vs. 12, Yehoveh gives Moses the instruction to, once again, remind the people of the important nature of the Sabbath. In vs. 13, where most Bibles will say "however", or "Nevertheless", or "You Shall....keep my Sabbaths", the Hebrew word being translated is "akh". A translation other than "however" or "you shall" that better captures the sense of it, in our American mindset, might be "above all". That is, this is a reminder from Yehoveh that in all the busy-ness that is going to transpire with the building of the Tabernacle, and the Altars, and the making of the priests' garments, and the implements, and so on, that **nothing** is more important to God than keeping the Sabbath.

What is clear in this section is that the rationale for observing the Sabbath Law is not so much that it is associated with the Covenant of Moses; rather it is associated with the Creation. It is the Creation narrative of Genesis where we find the Lord concluding His creative work and then declaring the following day to be set apart as holy.

**NAS Genesis 2:1 Thus the heavens and the earth were completed, and all their hosts. 2 And by the seventh day God completed His work which He had done; and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done. 3 Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made.**

The idea here is that God ordained a day to celebrate the ceasing of His creative activity; and the form of the celebration amounted to men ceasing our normal work....our creative activity. But it's not that the Lord has ordained something new, here, at Mt. Sinai in making a Sabbath Day or making it something only for Israel. Rather, He says, "you must keep my Sabbaths.." In other words, Sabbath was created a long time ago for all men to observe but apparently men quit paying attention to Sabbath. So the Lord says, Israel, YOU are to make a point of observing it because YOU are a people set apart for Me. So you will be the example of what people should be doing on the 7th day, Shabbat.....and this is resting from their normal activities



and instead being with their families and worshipping the Lord.

I won't go into my spiel about Saturday being the Sabbath, and Sunday being the Lord's Day again because it is simply historical fact. Rather I'd like to point out that the sense of this scriptural passage is something like this: "Once you start your building program, don't forget about Me, nor my commands to you." How human it is that we get a calling from God to do something, and off we go praising God and happily knowing that we have a divine purpose... and then we let our passions run amuck. We forget all about God's principles and commands, as though they have been put into a state of suspension just for us, because our project is so important it transcends His Laws and Commands. I've seen Churches have construction crews working 7 days a week to finish their building project, because of the excitement of nearing their goal. I've seen men AND women neglecting their spouses or children in the name of carrying out their ministries. I've seen ministries that were so intent on producing as much as possible every day, making every minute count, that prayer was all but forgotten. And, much too often in our day and age, I see ministries that, seemingly, do nothing but raise money, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year for the next in a series of grand human enterprises that makes God little more than a marketing tool.

I find it most instructional that of all the principles and observances that God has now laid out, He commands Moses to put above EVERYTHING else, the Sabbath. And, yet, here we are in our time, most Believers claiming that St. Paul has instructed us that Sabbath is an obsolete and worthless observance, or that we have been given latitude to change it to whatever is most convenient for us. And, where does this idea come from? It is that the OT is OLD, and the NT is NEW, so the New replaces the Old. Never mind that in the Sermon on the Mount Jesus said the exact opposite, that not one jot or tittle, not the smallest detail would pass from the Torah until heaven and earth passed away; and nothing could be a more central teaching to the Torah than the Sabbath.

And, no, we can't get out of this Sabbath issue just because God says the Sabbath is a perpetual covenant between **Israel** and Him.....because the NT makes it abundantly clear that when we accept Messiah Yeshua, we become part of a group called TRUE Israel.....we become spiritual seeds of Abraham.....we are joined to Israel's covenants and all their blessings and obligations.....in the most real way there is, spiritually. Not my words, but directly, plainly, and literally from scripture as I've shown you on a number of occasions.

We'll finish up with chapter 31 next week.