

Exodus Chapter 30

Verses 1-10: "Altar to burn incense:" The position of the altar was to be in the Holy Place, in front of "the veil that is by the ark of the testimony, before the mercy seat that is over the testimony, where I will meet with thee." (Hebrews 9:3-4), notes that the altar of incense was considered as belonging to the Most Holy Place. This was the first place the priests came as they approached the sacred presence of God above the mercy seat. The priests were not permitted to go beyond that point except on the Day of Atonement.

The design for this piece of furniture for the Holy Place was not given with the other two (25:23-40), but follows the instructions about the priesthood perhaps because it was the last piece to which the High-Priest came before he entered the Holy of Holies once a year. Right after Aaron's consecration ceremony had been noted, his duties of:

- (1) Ensuring proper incense was offered continually upon this altar and that;
- (2) He was also once a year to cleanse it with blood from the atonement offering (verse 10).

Aaron and his sons were responsible for offering "a perpetual incense" upon it in the morning and in the evening. Offering strange incense (that is, incense not composed like that in verses 34-35), was strictly forbidden. In Scripture, incense often symbolizes prayer and communion with God the Father (Psalm 141:2; Luke 1:10; Rev. 5:8; 8:3-4). The continual burning is an example of the necessity for continuous and persistent prayer (Psalms 16:8; 55:17; 1 Thess. 5:17-18). Incense, or perfume, denotes that which produces a sweet-smelling odor when burned (Prov. 27:9).

The small "altar" for "incense" was like the Ark of the Covenant (25:10-22). It was to have four "horns," one at each corner, along with the same type of molding, rings and poles for transport. Its "sweet, pure" incense was intended to perpetually provide a holy aroma to the Lord. Annual atonement was to be made for the incense altar, perhaps to show the association of things with people.

Exodus 30:1 "And thou shalt make an altar to burn incense upon: [of] shittim wood shalt thou make it."

The altar of incense was to be a casing of boards of shittim wood (Exodus 25:5; 37:25-28; 40:26-27). Four "horns" were to project upward at the corners like those of the altar of burnt-offering (Exodus 27:2). A crown or molding of gold was to run around the top. On each of two opposite sides there was to be a gold ring through which the staves were to be put when it was moved from place to place.

As this altar was a type of Christ, the shittim wood may respect his human nature. Which wood, though it sprung out of the earth, was not common, but choice and excellent, and very strong durable, and incorruptible. And so, Christ, though he was man made of an earthly woman in his human nature, yet was chosen out of the people, is the chiefest among ten thousand. And excellent as the cedars, the man of God's right hand, whom he made strong for himself. And

though he died in it, he saw no corruption. He now lives, and will live for evermore. In which nature he acts the part of a Mediator, and intercedes for his people, and offers up their prayers, perfumed with the much incense of his mediation. To which this altar has a special respect.

Exodus 30:2 "A cubit [shall be] the length thereof, and a cubit the breadth thereof; foursquare shall it be: and two cubits [shall be] the height thereof: the horns thereof [shall be] of the same."

Of the same shape with "the brazen altar" (Exodus 27:1), but much smaller. Two cubits high instead of three cubits, and a cubit square at top instead of five cubits. This small space was ample for the burning of so precious a material, which could only be offered in small quantities.

"The horns thereof" (compare Exodus 27:2).

"Shall be of the same": Meaning it is made of one piece with the altar and is not made separately and then attached to it.

We see here, an altar made of shittim wood. It was 18 inches by 18 inches and 3 feet high. This altar was made to burn this sweet-smelling frankincense and other perfumes on. It kept a nice smell in the tabernacle all the time. The horns at the edge were to be made of wood also. This altar sat in front of the veil. This altar was also called the altar of wood and the altar of prayer.

Exodus 30:3 "And thou shalt overlay it with pure gold, the top thereof, and the sides thereof round about, and the horns thereof; and thou shalt make unto it a crown of gold round about."

Next to the Ark of the Covenant the most holy article of furniture contained either in the sanctuary or in its court was the altar of incense. It symbolized prayer in its general use (Psalm 141:2; Luke 1:10). And it symbolized expiation in the purpose whereto it was to be applied on certain occasions. As when the high priest had sinned in his official capacity: (Lev. 4:3-12), or when the whole congregation had sinned through inadvertence (Lev. 4:13-21). It was, therefore, "most holy to the Lord." Hence, its materials were to be the same with those of the Ark of the Covenant, and its place was to be directly opposite the ark, near to it, but on the outer side of the veil (Exodus 40:5).

"A crown of gold round about": Compare what is said of the table of shewbread (Exodus 25:24). In both cases a raised rim or edging is meant, which would prevent what was on the top from falling off.

This overlay of pure gold had to be on this entire altar because of its close location to the presence of God. Everything in God's presence had to be covered in pure 24 karat gold or be solid 24 karat gold. This crown of gold was like a border around the altar.

Exodus 30:4 "And two golden rings shalt thou make to it under the crown of it, by the two corners thereof, upon the two sides of it shalt thou make [it]; and they shall be for places for the staves to bear it withal."

The golden altar was so much smaller and lighter than the brazen one that two rings only were required for carrying it, instead of the “four rings” needed by the brazen altar (Exodus 27:4).

"By the two corners thereof": Rather, on the two sides thereof. The word used means, literally, “ribs,” and is explained in the clause which follows.

These rings were so a rod could be put through them to carry the altar. The altar could not be carried by directly touching it, but had to be carried by these poles.

Exodus 30:5 "And thou shalt make the staves [of] shittim wood, and overlay them with gold."

Of the same wood the altar itself was made.

““And overlay them with gold”; as that was. These rings and staves may be an emblem of the precious ordinances of Christ, in which he grants his presence. And where he is held forth in different ages and places as the interceding high priest of his people who is their advocate with the Father. Pleading continually his propitiatory sacrifice in their favor.

We see in this that all of this had to be overlaid with gold.

Exodus 30:6 "And thou shalt put it before the veil that [is] by the ark of the testimony, before the mercy seat that [is] over the testimony, where I will meet with thee."

“Before the veil”: This places the altar outside of the Holy of Holies in the Holy Place. (Heb. 9:3-4), speaks of the altar in the Holy of Holies in the sense of its proximity to the ark and in relation to its cleansing on the Day of Atonement. The priests could not go beyond it on any other day.

You see the presence of God was over the mercy seat. This ark later would contain the stone 10 commandments, the Manna and Aaron's rod that bloomed.

Exodus 30:7 "And Aaron shall burn thereon sweet incense every morning: when he dresseth the lamps, he shall burn incense upon it."

(Hebrew, incense of spices). "Every morning": On the composition of the incense (see Exodus 30:34-35). That the offering of incense regularly accompanied both the morning and evening sacrifice appears from (Psalm 141:2; Luke 1:10). That it was symbolical of prayer may be gathered both from those passages and also from (Rev. 5:8; 8:3-4).

"When he dresseth the lamps" (compare Exodus 27:21).

Incense is symbolic of prayer. This altar of incense was symbolic of Christ, our intercessor. You see that the light was never to go out and this was one of the duties of the priest; to see that there was always oil in the lamp. This incense was symbolic of constant prayer, because the incense was to be burned continually.

1 Thess. 5:17, "Pray without ceasing."

You see, God intends for us to depend upon Him; to call on Him in prayer continually.

Exodus 30:8 "And when Aaron lighteth the lamps at even, he shall burn incense upon it, a perpetual incense before the LORD throughout your generations."

The offering of the incense accompanied that of the morning and evening sacrifice. The two forms of offering symbolized the spirit of man reaching after communion with Yahweh, both in act and utterance (see Psalm 141:2).

The light was perpetual in the true sense, in that it never went out. But this perpetual means that every day, twice a day, morning and evening, the incense (prayers), was to go up to God.

Exodus 30:9 "Ye shall offer no strange incense thereon, nor burnt sacrifice, nor meat offering; neither shall ye pour drink offering thereon."

By "strange incense" is meant any that was composed differently from that of which the composition is laid down (in Exodus 30:34-35).

"Strange incense" (see verse 38).

This was a very special altar for a very special purpose. Anything, except the special incense God had them to make for this altar, was strange and not to be offered on this altar. This altar was not to be used as a substitute for the brazen altar. This altar was not to be used for burnt offering, or meat offering, nor drink offering.

Exodus 30:10 "And Aaron shall make an atonement upon the horns of it once in a year with the blood of the sin offering of atonements: once in the year shall he make atonement upon it throughout your generations: it [is] most holy unto the LORD."

This passage seems to determine the sense of (Lev. 16:18), where some have supposed that "the altar that is before the Lord" is the brazen altar. Once in the year, on the great Day of Atonement, the high priest, after entering within the vail and sprinkling the blood of the offerings upon the mercy seat (Lev. 16:14-15), was to "go out unto the altar that was before the Lord. And put of the blood of the bullock, and of the blood of the goat, upon the horns of the altar round about, and sprinkle of the blood upon it with his finger seven times." And so "cleanse it, and hallow it," and "make an atonement for it" (Lev. 16:18-19).

"With the blood of the sin offering of atonement": By sprinkling the blood of that offering upon the horns of it, as we learn from the afore mentioned place. And this shows that Christ's mediation and intercession is founded upon the virtue of his blood, and the efficacy of his atoning sacrifice (see 1 John 2:1).

"Once in the year shall he make atonement upon it, throughout your generations": Which proves the insufficiency of all legal sacrifices of themselves to take away sin. Since every year, as the apostle observes, there was a remembrance of it (Heb.10:3).

"It is most holy unto the Lord": Either the atonement made on the Day of Atonement, which was a most holy part of service, and pointed at the great atonement made by the most Holy One, the Son of God. Or this altar thus expiated, and devoted to sacred use, was reckoned a most sacred one to the Lord, and so was to have nothing offered upon it but what he ordered. With which Jarchi agrees in his note, "the altar is sanctified to these things only, and not to any other service".

This atonement was to be made once a year, on the Day of Atonement, which is the tenth day of the seventh month. This seventh month is about October on our calendar. The high priest, after burning incense inside the Holy of Holies, took the blood and sprinkled it on the mercy seat. He took some of the blood and put it on the horns of the altar of incense. This blood on the mercy seat was to cover the sins of the people. The blood on the horns showed that the power and strength was in the shed blood.

This blood once a year was to cleanse the altar spiritually. To cleanse it from the unholiness of the children of Israel. The blood on the horns of the altar of incense was for the cleansing from sin of the high priest and his people, the children of Israel. The bronze altar was for sins of individual people. This blood on the horns had to do with the priest and his whole congregation. Next to the ark and the mercy seat, this altar of incense was most holy. The value of this altar of incense lets us know the importance of prayer in God's sight. We should be praying at least twice a day.

Verses 11-16: A "census" of the nation would be taken (Num. 1:2). And a "ransom" payment would be required from "every man" over the age of 20. That the payment was the same, whether one was rich or poor, was perhaps a symbol that every life has equal value before the Lord.

Exodus 30:11 "And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying,"

Perhaps the repetition of those words here and afterward (Exodus 30:17; 30:22; 30:34), intimates that God did not deliver these precepts to Moses in a continued discourse. But with many intermissions, giving him time either to write what was said to him, or at least to charge his memory with it.

Exodus 30:12 "When thou takest the sum of the children of Israel after their number, then shall they give every man a ransom for his soul unto the LORD, when thou numberest them; that there be no plague among them, when [thou] numberest them."

“Sum”: The reason for the numbering of all males of military age (verse 14), was not stated, but its seriousness surfaces in the dire warning given about a plague and the use of the term “ransom” in connection with it (1 Chron. Chapter 21).

We see here, a source of money to help with the expenses of the church. Those who were not willing to pay their fair share would not be included in the promise God had made to these people, that they would not have any of the Egyptian diseases. A person's heart is where they put their money and this is what this was saying here. To be numbered in the congregation, they each had to give one half of a shekel to the tabernacle.

Exodus 30:13 "This they shall give, every one that passeth among them that are numbered, half a shekel after the shekel of the sanctuary: (a shekel [is] twenty gerahs:) a half shekel [shall be] the offering of the LORD."

“Shekel of the sanctuary”: A shekel weighed about .4 ounce (Leviticus 5:15; 27:3, 25; Numbers 3:47; 7:13).

A shekel was ten penny weights of silver. Then a half shekel was 5 penny weights of silver. The number 5 has to do with the grace of God and silver means redemption. We see here, God redeeming these Israelites through His grace. When you multiplied the people, who were numbered by 5 penny weights of silver, you would come up with a huge amount of money. regardless of how much silver was valued at per penny weight.

Exodus 30:14 "Every one that passeth among them that are numbered, from twenty years old and above, shall give an offering unto the LORD."

The time when they began to be fit for employment; and capable of getting and paying money. Women and children are not included here, because they are reckoned in their fathers or husbands.

When a young man became twenty years old, he was not thought of as a youth anymore. He was suddenly old enough to join the military. This was also the age that the Levites went to work in the temple.

Exodus 30:15 "The rich shall not give more, and the poor shall not give less than half a shekel, when [they] give an offering unto the LORD, to make an atonement for your souls."

The tribute was half a shekel. The rich were not to give more, nor the poor less. The souls of the rich and poor are alike precious, and God is no respecter of persons (Acts 10:34; Job 34:19). In other offerings men were to give according to their worldly ability. But this, which was the ransom of the soul, must be alike for all. The souls of all are of equal value, equally in danger, and all equally need a ransom. The money raised was to be used in the service of the tabernacle. Those who have the benefit must not grudge the necessary charges of God's public worship. Money cannot make atonement for the soul, but it may be used for the honor of Him who has made the atonement, and for the maintenance of the gospel by which the atonement is applied.

We are not to get this confused with the tithes. A tithe to God would be 10% of what each of them made. This was an entirely different thing. This 1/2 shekel of silver was to show their loyalty to the church and was to redeem them from the world. The one thing this says to me about our churches today is that every member needs to give whatever he can to the building of the temple. Everyone, regardless of how rich or how poor, should be involved. It is the people's church. The tithe is returning to God 10% to help keep God's work going, but everyone should be in this one time gift to establish the church.

Exodus 30:16 "And thou shalt take the atonement money of the children of Israel, and shalt appoint it for the service of the tabernacle of the congregation; that it may be a memorial unto the children of Israel before the LORD, to make an atonement for your souls."

The half shekel is the ransom of their souls.

"And shall appoint it for the service of the tabernacle of the congregation": For the building of the tabernacle. For the repairs of it, and for the sacrifices offered in it. Particularly we find that this first collection this way was appropriated to the silver sockets of the sanctuary, and the vail, for the silver hooks, and for the pillars (Exodus 38:27).

"That it may be a memorial unto the children of Israel before the Lord, to make an atonement for your souls": To put them in mind that they were sinners, that their lives were forfeited, that a ransom price was given and accepted of God, that hereby atonement. In a typical sense, was made for them; and this was before the Lord, as a token of their gratitude to him, and of their acknowledgment of the favor.

This silver would be needed to make the sockets and other ornaments for the temple that would be made of silver. Again, I say silver has to do with redemption. We will see this silver used in cups to set the legs upon to keep the godly things out of direct contact with the sinful earth. We will symbolically see redemption between the sinful earth and Almighty God, even out here in the tabernacle in the wilderness. The teaching of the tabernacle is so beautiful, because it shows how God had planned all along to redeem sinful man.

Exodus Chapter 30 Questions

1. What was the altar of incense to be made of?
2. What were the measurements of it?
3. What was it covered in?
4. What was its use?
5. What were the horns made of?

6. What were two other names for this altar?
7. What was to be made round about it?
8. Why was it covered in gold?
9. What were the golden rings for?
10. What were the staves made of?
11. Where was this altar to be located?
12. Where was the mercy seat?
13. What would the ark contain (3 things)?
14. What was to be burned on the altar of incense?
15. How often was it burned?
16. Incense is symbolic of what?
17. What was this altar of incense symbolic of?
18. What was truly perpetual?
19. What 3 offerings were not to be offered on this altar?
20. Once a year the high priest was to put blood on the horns of this altar for what?
21. What is the 7th month, here, on our calendar?
22. When did the high priest put blood on the mercy seat?
23. The blood on the horns symbolized what?
24. This altar of incense being so holy showed us what?
25. What blessing were they promised if they ransomed their souls?
26. What was the offering for each person to ransom his soul?
27. What was a shekel?
28. What does the 1/2 shekel symbolize?
29. How old were they before they had to be ransomed?
30. What is the difference in this offering and the tithe?

31. What was this offering used for?

32. What did the silver cups the legs of the tabernacle sat in mean spiritually?