

Exodus 30

In this and the following chapter, God gives final instructions relative to worship in the tabernacle. He emphasizes that priests can be killed if they do not approach God as He instructs.

TRANSLATION - 30:1-10:

1 And you will make an altar of burning incense; of trees of acacia you will make it. **2** A cubit its length, a cubit its width it will be; and two cubits its height from it [will be] its horns. **3** And you will overlay it with pure gold, its top and its sides around and its horns and you will make its border of gold around. **4** And two rings of gold you will make for it underneath for its border on the two walls you will make on its two sides and it will be to hold the poles to carry it by them. **5** And you will make the poles of acacia wood and you will overlay them with gold. **6** And you will put it before the veil which [is] before the ark of the testimony, before the atonement cover which [is] on the testimony where I will meet you there. **7** And Aaron will burn on it fragrant incense from morning to morning when he trims the lamps; he will burn it. **8** And when Aaron lights the lamps between the evenings, he will burn incense regularly before Jehovah for your generations.

9 And you will not lift up on it foreign incense or burnt offering or gift or drink offering you will not pour on it. **10** And Aaron will atone on its horns once a year from the blood of the sin offering; the atonements once a year he will atone on it for your generations, a holy of holiness it will be to Jehovah.

HEBREW WORDS:

There are two words, closely related, which are “incense” in the Hebrew language. We have translated the first word as “burning.” But both words would literally be translated “incense.” The word is used 60 times in the OT. The first word, translated “burning,” is only used once in the OT. The second word is used 19 times in Exodus. See comments at 25:5 for the word “acacia,” which is often transliterated as “Shittim.” The verb “to overlay” (ver. 3) was used earlier at 25:11. The word “border” was used earlier at the same passage.

The “veil” (ver. 6) is mentioned earlier in 26:31, 33. The word “testimony” was used earlier at 16:34 and relative to the ark at 25:16. The phrase “atonement cover” was used (and its translation explained) at 25:17-22. “To meet” or “to appoint” was used earlier at 21:8-9. The verb “to burn” in verse 7 is related to the noun used earlier, “incense.” Thus, the verb means “to burn incense.” It is used 115 times in the OT. The word “fragrance” was used earlier at 25:6. The verb “to trim” is used only at 1:20 and 30:7. “Lamps” were used earlier at 25:37; 27:20. The verb “to light” (ver. 8) was used earlier 25:37; the verb means “to lift” or “to go up.” Here, it refers to light “going up.” “Foreign” (ver. 9) was used earlier at 29:33. “Gift” was used earlier at 29:41. “To pour” was used earlier at 25:29. “Drink offering” was used earlier at 29:40-41. The verb “to atone” (ver. 10) means “to cover.” In spiritual contexts, it means “to cover sin” or “to forgive.” It was used earlier at 29:33, 36-37. The phrase “holy of holies” denotes the superlative: “most holy.”

THE ACTUAL FULFILLMENT IS RECORDED IN:

See Exodus 37:25-28 for the fulfillment of this command.

ARCHAEOLOGY:

See comments on chapter 25 (25:10) on the measurement “cubit.”

COMMENTARY:

This altar (ver. 1) is for burning incense. The recipe for the incense will be given shortly. As with the other furniture, it was to be made of acacia wood. The dimensions are found in verse 2: one cubit (18”) long by one cubit (18”) wide and two cubits (36”) high. The horns were

to be made as one part of the altar itself (ver. 2). It was to be covered, overlaid, in gold as well as a molding around it, also of gold (ver. 3). As with the other furniture, this altar was to have two rings made under the molding, on each side, to hold the poles which were to be used in transporting the altar (ver. 4). The poles were made of acacia wood and overlaid with gold (ver. 5).

The altar was put in front of the veil near the most holy place, close to the ark of the covenant ("testimony") as well as the atonement cover (since it was on top of the ark). That is the place where God would meet with Israel, in the person of the high priest (ver. 6). "Fragrant" incense was to be burned on the altar and it was to be burned every morning when Aaron (and subsequent high priests) trimmed the lamps (ver. 7). At twilight (ver. 8), the incense was also burned when Aaron trimmed the lamps. This was to be a statute for Israel indefinitely, until Christ came and fulfilled the need for a temple and a priesthood (ver. 8).

"Strange" incense was not to be burned on the altar nor was Israel to offer sacrifices on the altar, such as the burnt offering or the meal offering or the drink offering (ver. 9). As a part of the incense-burning ritual, Aaron would make "atonement" on its horns once a year (referring to the "Day of Atonement" further recorded in Leviticus 16 and 23:27-32), when he offered the blood of the sin offering (ver. 10). This practice was holy, a behavior separate and distinctly dedicated to the Lord.

The OT never tells why God commanded the burning of incense. The emphasis in the text is on the burning of it with the smoke that arises. Some have suggested that this smoke was to obscure the presence of God when He came into the tabernacle to receive the sacrifices. Others suggest that it was to cover the smell of the dead animals as they were being sacrificed.

APPLICATION:

Moses' contemporaries - Nadab and Abihu offered strange incense on this altar (Lev. 10:1-2) and God sent fire from heaven and consumed them in flames, alive. They violated this specific commandment and God does not ignore disobedience. Aaron burned incense in order to stop a plague from Jehovah in Numbers 17:11-13.

Scritorii evrei de mai târziu - King Solomon burned incense and sacrificed to false gods (1 Kings 11:8; 2 Kings 22:17), which led to God causing his kingdom to be divided. Israel later burned incense to the bronze serpent Moses had set up (in Numbers 21), which King Hezekiah destroyed (2 Kings 18:4). King Uzziah (from the tribe of Judah) burned incense in 2 Chronicles 26:16-19 and God struck him with leprosy because he was not from the sons of Aaron. David will be the first (see "NT writers" below) who compared prayer to incense: Psalm 141:1-2.

NT writers - "Incense" is mentioned 8 times in the NT. John the baptizer's father was burning incense when the angel appeared to him to inform him about his wife's pregnancy: Luke 1:9-11. The Hebrew writer mentions the altar of incense in Hebrews 9:4. Three times in Revelation (5:8; 8:3-4), John uses incense as a symbol of Christians' prayers rising to the throne of God. Incense is also mentioned among the exports of the nation of Rome in Revelation 18:13.

TRANSLATION - 30:11-16:

11 And Jehovah spoke to Moses saying, **12** that "you will lift up the head of the sons of Israel for their number and each will give a ransom for his soul to Jehovah when He visits them and it will not be among them a stumbling block when He visits them. **13** This they will give all the numbered at the number a half shekel by shekel, the one according to the sanctuary, twenty gerahs, the shekel one half the shekel a contribution to Jehovah. **14** All the numbered at the number from twenty years and above will give the contribution of Jehovah. **15** The wealthy will not increase nor the poor will not diminish from half shekel to give the contribution of Jehovah in order to atone for your souls. **16** And you will take the silver of the atonements from the sons of Israel and you will give it for the work of the tent of meeting and it will be for the sons of Israel for a memorial before Jehovah.

HEBREW WORDS:

“Number” (ver. 12) is related to the verb “to visit.” The verb suggests the idea of counting a census. The word “number” is used three times in this chapter (30:12-14); 38:21, 25, 26. It is used 24 times in the OT. The verb, used in this verse, was used earlier at 3:16. The word “ransom” is used earlier at 21:30. “Soul” is used earlier at 1:5. “Stumbling block” was used earlier at 12:13. “The numbered” (ver. 13) was used earlier at 12:12. “Contribution” was used earlier at 25:2. “The wealthy” (ver. 15) is used 23 times in the OT; only here in Exodus. “To increase” was used earlier at 1:7. “The poor” was used earlier at 23:3. “To diminish” was used earlier at 12:4.

“Memorial” (ver. 16) was used earlier at 12:14.

THE ACTUAL FULFILLMENT IS RECORDED IN:

A second census is finally taken and recorded in Numbers 1.

ARCHAEOLOGY:

See comments at 21:32 for the shekel. The half shekel would be about 5 grams, maybe 0.2 ounces of silver. The “gerah” is only used 5 times in the OT: 30:13; Lev. 27:25; Num. 3:47; 18:16; Eze. 45:12. It is an Akkadian term. It appears to have been the smallest Israelite measurement, weighing perhaps 0.018 ounces or 1 gram, being 1/20 of a shekel.

COMMENTARY:

The last time the phrase “Jehovah spoke” was at 25:1. The phrase is used 17 times in Exodus. Here, He commands Moses to take a census of Israel (ver. 12) and once that is done, each individual is to give a “ransom.” If Israel refuses to do that, or if an individual Israelite refuses, then one or more Israelites could be struck by a plague.

The “ransom” is half a shekel according to the “shekel of the sanctuary,” which means it was for the use of the sanctuary (ver. 16). For the purpose of Moses’ audience, he identifies a shekel as worth “twenty gerahs” (ver. 13). Unfortunately, scholars today do not know how much a “gerah” is, nor exactly how much a shekel was. Minted coins were not used in Israel until around the 500s B. C. or later. These “shekels” were made of metal which could be used for jewelry, utensils, or other useful items.

Those numbered would be over twenty years old (ver. 14). This “temple tax” was to be paid by everyone, regardless of his or her personal wealth (ver. 15). Every Israelite was received on equal terms by Jehovah God. This half-shekel was a contribution to the sanctuary, “to the Lord,” for atonement. This “atonement money” would be given for the use of the tent of meeting, the “sanctuary.” It would be also a memorial for Israel that God had redeemed them from Egypt and had atoned (covered) their sins so that they could be a holy nation in His sight (ver. 16).

APPLICATION:

Moses’ contemporaries - God did not want Israel to take pride in its military, but He did command a census again in Numbers 1:2-3. According to Numbers 1:3, men had to reach the age of 20 years old before they could be enlisted into military service.

Later Jewish writers - The point that God did not want Israel to take pride in its military is vividly seen in the sin that King David commits in 2 Sam. 24:1-2 (compare 1 Chronicles 21:1-5). See also 2 Chronicles 2:17-18. This “temple tax” was taken up during the days of Nehemiah: 10:32.

NT writers - For references to the “temple tax” in the NT, see Matthew 17:24-27; 22:15-22. All Christians are to give as God has blessed them: 1 Corinthians 16:1-2. A wealthy Christian, naturally would give more than a Christian with a modest income. However, all Christians should show their love and trust in God by giving from their blessings.

TRANSLATION - 30:17-21:

17 And Jehovah spoke to Moses saying, **18** “And you will make a laver of bronze and its base of bronze to wash and you will put it between the tent of meeting and the altar and you will put there water. **19** And Aaron will wash and his sons their hands and their feet. **20** When they come to the tent of meeting they will wash in water and they will not die nor when they approach the altar to serve to burn incense in fire to Jehovah. **21** And they will wash their hands and their feet and they will not die and it will be for them a statute indefinite for him and for a memorial for their generations.

HEBREW WORDS:

The word “laver” (ver. 18) is used 9 times in Exodus, 56 times in the OT. The word “base” is used 11 times; in Exodus, it is used at 30:18, 28; 31:9; 35:16; 38:8; 39:39; 40:11. The verb “to wash” was used earlier at 2:5.

THE ACTUAL FULFILLMENT IS RECORDED IN:

See Exodus 38:8 for the fulfillment of this command.

COMMENTARY:

Again, Jehovah spoke to Moses (ver. 17). These phrases in this chapter serve to separate the different items of instruction in this chapter. Here, God informs Moses that Israel should make a “laver” of bronze (ver. 18). Its base was also made of bronze. The laver was used for washing. It was in the courtyard, between the tent of meeting and the altar of incense. The priests were to wash their hands and their feet in the laver (ver. 19). God does not give any dimensions for the laver.

If the priests neglect or refuse to wash before they enter the tabernacle, they would die (ver. 20). They would wash their hands and their feet (ver. 21) lest they die (God repeated Himself a second time). This would be a regulation indefinitely for the priests, until Christ fulfills the need to wash physically, offering His blood for mankind to wash them spiritually (see under “NT writers”).

APPLICATION:

Later Jewish writers - The lavers in King Solomon’s temple were likely considerably larger than this one (1 Kings 7:27-39). His stood around 8’ (2,44 m) tall and held two hundred and forty-three gallons (989,86 L) each.

NT writers - “Washing” by the blood of Christ, under the New Covenant happens when one is immersed into water for the forgiveness of his or her sins (Acts 16:33; 22:16; 1 Cor. 6:11; Eph. 5:26; Titus 3:5; Heb. 10:22; 1 Peter 3:21). The NT teaches that the “pure in heart” are those who will see God: Matthew 5:8; 1 Tim. 1:5; 2 Tim. 2:22.

The “washing” in the laver is also the background for the Jews’ beliefs that pots and pans needed to be washed before one could eat: Mark 7:3-4.

TRANSLATION - 30:22-33:

22 And Jehovah spoke to Moses saying, **23** “And you, take for yourself spices the best, bitter myrrh five hundred and cinnamon spices half, two hundred and fifty and cane spices the two hundred and fifty. **24** And cassia five hundred, by the holy [place] and olive oil, a hin. **25** And you will make it the oil of anointing of holiness, the spice a mixture the work of perfumer; the oil of anointing of holiness it will be.

26 And you will anoint with it the tent of meeting and the ark of the testimony **27** and the table and all its utensils and the lamp stand and its utensils and the altar of incense **28** and the altar of burnt offering and all its utensils and the laver and its base. **29** And you will sanctify them and they will be most holy; all touching it will be sanctified, **30** and Aaron and his sons it will anoint and you will sanctify them to be priests to Me.

31 And to the sons of Israel you will speak, saying, “The oil of anointing of holiness will be this to Me for your generations. **32** On the flesh of man it will not be anointed and its proportions you will not do as it; holiness it [is] holy; it will be for you. **33** A man who mixes the perfume after it and who gives from it on a foreigner then he will be cut off from his people.

HEBREW WORDS:

“Best” (ver. 23) translates the word “head.” The word “spices” was used earlier at 25:6. “Bitter” was used at 15:23. This is the only use of “myrrh” in the OT. “Cinnamon” is used three times in the OT: 30:23; Prov. 7:17; Song of Solomon 4:14. “Cane” was used earlier at 25:31-33. “Cassia” (ver. 24) is used only here and Ezekiel 27:19. The word for “spice” in verse 25 is only used here (30:25, 35) and Song of Solomon 8:2. “Mixture” is only used here and 1 Chronicles 9:30; 2 Chronicles 16:14. “Perfumer” denotes something like the work of a pharmacist, who mixes elements together; it is used here (30:25, 35); 37:29; Ecc. 10:1; 1 Chronicles 9:30. The verb “to anoint” (ver. 30) was used earlier at 28:41.

“Man” (ver. 32) is the Hebrew word translated “Adam.” This word is used earlier at 4:11. “To anoint” is used only here (30:32) and 40:21 in Exodus. It is used only 10 times in the OT. “Proportions” is used earlier at 5:8. It is only used 5 times in the OT: Exo. 5:8; 30:32, 37; Ezek. 45:11; 2 Chron. 24:13. “To mix perfume” (ver. 33) is one word in the Hebrew; it is only used three times in the OT: Exo. 30:33; Ezek. 24:10; 2 Chron. 16:14. “To be cut off” was used earlier at 4:25.

ARCHAEOLOGY:

See 29:40 for the measurement “hin.” One hin of oil would be about 6 quarts (5,68 L). The total amount of these spices would be about 38 pounds (17,24 kg; 1500 shekels). “Myrrh” is a resin from a shrub in Arabia (*commiphora*). Cane is perhaps from a reed (*calamus*). “Cassia” is perhaps a type of cinnamon, which is found in India and Sri Lanka. Most of the spices were solid resins; any of them could be obtained by trading with caravans.

COMMENTARY:

This section begins, again, with the phrase “Jehovah spoke to Moses” (ver. 22). This first paragraph details the recipe to use for the “holy anointing oil.” “Sanctified” (or “holy”) and the related verb are used 11 times in verses 22-33. This oil will be used extensively in the ordination of the priests as well as other aspects of Israelite worship. They were to use 500 shekel-weight of myrrh and half that amount of cinnamon and fragrant cane a 250-shekel weight of each (ver. 23). They were also to use a 500-shekel weight of cassia (ver. 24) and then a hin of olive oil. To put this into modern terms, around 16 pounds, 10 oz (5,7 kg) each of cinnamon and cane spice were added to one gallon of olive oil.

This mixture was for the holy anointing oil, the work of a (in our modern terms) “professional” (ver. 25). It was to be taken seriously because it was “holy anointing oil.” In verse 26, Jehovah God gets explicit on what items are to be anointed with the oil: the tent itself and the ark (ver. 26); the table, lamp stand, and their respective utensils, and the altar of incense (ver. 27), the altar of burnt offering and its utensils and the laver with its stand (ver. 28). Each of these items were to be anointed with the oil, to sanctify them, that they could be used in service to the Holy God (ver. 29). Additionally, Aaron and his sons (the priests) were to be anointed so that they could serve as priests to Jehovah (ver. 30).

Moses was to tell Israel that the holy anointing oil was to be used by Israel throughout their generations (ver. 31). It was not to be used for profane purposes, like anointing anyone nor could its recipe be replicated for use at home (ver. 32). That specific recipe was given to God for His use and it was not to be used for common purposes; it was holy. To emphasize this importance, God tells Israel in verse 33 that if anyone does create a similar recipe and uses it for common purposes, that individual would be “cut off” (kicked out of) the community of Israel and separated from God’s presence.

APPLICATION:

Moses' contemporaries - Consult Leviticus 8:10-11 for a record of this practice. The priests' heads were anointed (29:7; 40:15) as well as their garments (29:21).

Scritorii evrei de mai târziu - Uzzah is struck dead by Jehovah in 2 Samuel 6 because he did not treat the ark as holy as God had commanded. The error was also committed by King David for not following the pattern revealed in the Law.

TRANSLATION - 30:34-38:

34 And Jehovah said to Moses, "Take for yourself spices of stacte and onycha and galbanum, spices and pure frankincense part by part in will be. **35** And you will make them the incense of spice,, the work of a perfumer, salted, pure, holy. **36** And you will beat out from it to crush and he will put from it before the testimony in the tent of meeting where I will meet with you there; the most holy it will be for you. **37** And the incense which you will make by its proportions you will not make for yourself; holy it will be to you, for Jehovah. **38** A man who will make according to it to smell it, he will be cut off from his people.

HEBREW WORDS:

"Spices" (ver. 34) is used earlier at 25:6. The word translated "stacte" is used only here and Job 36:27. "Onycha" is only used here. "Galbanum" is only used here. "Frankincense" is only used here in Exodus. It is used 21 times in the OT. "Salted" (ver. 35) is used only here in the OT. "To beat out" is used only 4 times: Exo. 30:16; 2 Sam. 22:43; Psa. 18:43; Job 14:19. "To crush" is only used twice in Exodus: 30:36; 32:20. It is used 13 times in the OT.

ARCHAEOLOGY:

The "stacte" (ver. 34) was perhaps from the balsam tree or persimmon. "Onycha" is believed to be from a mollusk. "Galbanum" is resin from a plant in Persia. "Frankincense" was from a resin from a plant in Arabia (*boswellia*).

COMMENTARY:

Finally (relative to this chapter), Jehovah spoke to Moses again (ver. 34). This time, it is to give a recipe for the incense. It consisted of spices, not all of which are known today: stacte, onycha, galbanum, pure frankincense in equal parts. A "professional" was to be in charge of making the incense (ver. 35), which was to be mixed, salted, and kept pure so that it would be "holy," that is, set apart for special use for God.

The dried spices were beaten very fine (ver. 36). Some of it would be kept near the ark where God would meet with Moses and the high priest on the day of atonement. There, it would be kept sanctified for service to Jehovah God. As with the holy anointing oil, the incense was not to be used for common purposes; its recipe was to be used solely for worship to Jehovah (ver. 37). This also shows that "worship" is distinct and is to be kept distinct from common daily activities. If someone were to copy the recipe for the incense and then use it for common purposes, that individual would be excluded from God's community.

APPLICATION:

NT writers - As a misapplication of Romans 12:1, many people today believe that all of life is worship. While Paul does suggest that our lives are a "sacrifice" (an act of worship) to Jehovah God, he is not thereby suggesting that everything we do on a daily basis is an act of worship. The idea of life as a "sacrifice" is using the OT concept as a metaphor. In the recipe for both the anointing oil and the incense, we see that there is a distinction between daily life and worship. We also note that some things can be done in worship which cannot be done in daily life; it is also true that we can do some things in daily life which cannot be offered to God in worship. Worship must be regulated by Jehovah God; otherwise, we would suffer the wrath of God ourselves. Worship is composed of specific acts (authorized by God), fulfilled at specific times, for a specific purpose, with specific intent.