



LifeLight: Exodus-Part 2

Session 6 - Exodus 30-31

The Elements of Worship

God's instruction to Moses on the Tabernacle and corporate worship is drawing to a close. After He has the various objects and elements of worship, Yahweh brings this "mountain top" experience to a culmination by sending Moses back down to the people with tablets in hand.

BEGIN AT THE END

By the end of this section, Moses will have received all the instruction on the covenant terms and covenant worship. But to help place these events in context let's remember some of the following:

- Ex 1-12 Israel is in slavery and God raises up Moses to deliver them through plagues and wonders
- Ex 12-15 Israel narrowly escapes from Pharaoh who changes his mind and tries to recapture them
- Ex 15-18 The Israelites travel through the wilderness and experience God's provision for 3 months
- Ex 19 Moses & Israel arrive at the mountain and God prepares to establish his covenant with them
- Ex 20 Moses and Israel are given the 10 commandments
- Ex 21-23 Moses goes up the mountain and receives the ordinances that will become "the Book of the Covenant"
- Ex 24 Moses comes down and writes these things out as "the Book of the Covenant" brings them before the people, they agree to all it says and the covenant is confirmed
- Ex 25-31 Moses THEN goes back up the mountain, receives instruction on the tabernacle and worship, and receives the covenant written not as a book but in STONE.

THE ALTAR OF INCENSE (Ex 30:1-10)

A separate altar is given for the offering of incense. These two altars (incense and burnt-offerings) are to be kept separate, the only time their purposes are intermingled is on the Day of Atonement. Incense is often connected with prayer and sacrifices with atonement for sins. Prayer and sacrifice are important parts of worship.

ATONEMENT MONEY (Ex 30:11-16)

Atonement money (a temple tax) is demanded of every male 20 years and older. The amount is a half shekel (2/5 of an ounce or 11 grams, reasonable for even the poor to pay). It is also called ransom or redemption money because it represents a need to "buy" your way out of captivity or slavery, in this case captivity to death and sin. The reader should not confuse her/himself with the idea that these men are being forced to *buy* their salvation, nor should we assume that a person must give the atonement money or be stricken with a plague (we might assume the opposite, that there is a promise of *protection* to those who give rather than a threat to those who don't). Largely, this "tax" is a symbolic gesture offered to the God who has *already* ransomed Israel by his covenant promise. Further, it is a way to lay the foundations for a special place that God has provided in order for sins to be atoned for, for generations to come.

It's interesting that God commands this at a time when resources were needed for the building of the tabernacle and the service of the temple. A cynical reader could see a connection between this instance and the Roman church of the Middle Ages who sold indulgences to build the Basilica of St. Peter.

But stepping back from this, we must ask,

- Didn't God already rescue Israel from slavery?
- Didn't God protect Israel from all kinds of plagues, disasters, calamities, and enemies?
- Didn't God spare the firstborn of Israel from death when the firstborn of Egypt were all stricken?
- Didn't God gift the Israelites with plunder when they left Egypt?

- Didn't God provide for Israelites needs for food, water, and shelter?
- Didn't God make a covenant promise to be the God of these people?

Therefore, in light of all that God had done for his people, we surely cannot imply that these men were forced to buy their forgiveness! And surely a half shekel given to the service of God's "house" is not too large an amount in response to all God has already done!

GO DEEPER: The Modern believer has received a ransom/redemption far superior through the work of Jesus Christ (Mark 10:45; 1Cor 6:19-20; Heb 9:12), **therefore...**

- When a local church needs financing for its mission, is it not also acceptable for people to be reminded of their "debt" to God's grace and instructed to respond accordingly? Why or why not?
- Though forgiveness is free and a present reality through Christ, might it also be wise for modern believers to give of their gifts (time, skills, abilities, money) to build communities or places of worship where the atonement through Christ can be offered in an ongoing way through Word and Sacrament to all? Why or why not?
- Some might see this section of Scripture as supportive of charging a "tax" on believers even today. What would your scriptural response be to such an idea?

THE BASIN/LAVER (Ex 30:17-21)

Washing regularly was an important part of worship, and the priests were to be physically clean for their duties. To show disregard for their personal cleanliness would be to dishonor the work they'd been called to do and God would punish them with death.

GO DEEPER: How do we, priests of God through Jesus, prepare ourselves to ensure that we stand clean before God?

ANOINTING OIL AND INCENSE (Ex 30:22-38)

Special oil and incense is to be made for temple service. They are to be "holy" in that no one is allowed to use them for anything else, no one may even copy the formula. In this way these substances will be truly "set-apart" used ONLY in sacred worship of a holy God.

THE CRAFTSMAN (Ex 31:1-11)

Two workmen are also called and set-apart by God to be the builders of the tabernacle and to fabricate all its components. They are distinct in that they have (1) God's Spirit (2) special skill (3) ability (4) knowledge.

THE SABBATH (Ex 31:12-18)

The last way that Yahweh makes Israel and their worship "holy" is by again commanding the Israelites to observe the Sabbaths. The Sabbath, and the proper observance of it, is going to be a "sign" of the relationship (covenant) between God and Israel.

To go deeper, the word "sign" is used to denote a marker of some promise or significant action. This word for "sign" is the same word that God uses when he gives Noah the rainbow as a "sign" that he will never destroy the earth by flood again (Gen 9:12).

Israel will be set apart by NOT laboring all week long like they did in Egypt and like the rest of the world does. They will be *like* God, who after creating the world, rested. In this way they will reflect HIS pattern of action rather than the world's pattern.

Therefore, the Sabbath will become a "marker" for all to see, of the intimate and peculiar relationship Israel has with God.

For Israel, the Sabbath will be a "marker" of the kind of God Yahweh is, a God who gives rest to his people!