

Bethel Bible-Presbyterian Church

10 Downing St. Oakleigh, VIC. 3166

DHW

LESSON 24

THE BOOK OF EXODUS

Chapters 30 & 31

INTRODUCTION

Two more items of the furniture of the Tabernacle are mentioned now, namely, *the altar of incense* and *the laver*. The LORD did not give the reason why these two items were not mentioned earlier together with the other items. If the LORD had not given any reason, it is best that we do not speculate. This is always a good principle in studying and interpreting the Word of God. The rest of the things mentioned in these two chapters complete the articles and requirements for the building of the Tabernacle. As before these items of the Tabernacle present a clear picture of the true Tabernacle in which the Lord Jesus Christ is the High Priest even now in the presence of God

the Father interceding on behalf of all the children of God.

In this lesson we also learn that the LORD chose and enabled two master-craftsmen to work on the furniture of the Tabernacle. And the LORD reminded the children of Israel to observe the LORD'S Sabbath. And the LORD ended His speaking to Moses and gave him Two Tablets of Testimony made with stones written by the finger of God (31:18)!

The two chapters can be outlined as follows to facilitate our study:

- 1) The Altar of Incense was to be made to burn incense unto the LORD (30:1-10);
- 2) The imposition of Ransom Money for every soul unto the LORD (30:11-16);
- 3) The Laver of Water was to be made for the washing of the priests (30:17-21);
- 4) The making of the Holy Anointing Oil and Perfume

for service in the Tabernacle (30:22-33);

- 5) The LORD chose and enabled His craftsmen reminding the children of Israel to strictly observe the Sabbath (31:1-18).

STUDY THE WORD

The Altar of Incense

The Altar of Incense was the final piece of furniture to be put in the Tabernacle proper. It was made with the same material as all the other furniture. It was made of shittim wood with an overlay of pure gold. It was smaller than the Ark of Testimony. The length and breadth of the altar were each a cubit (about 18 inches), that means, a square. The height was two cubits. There were also four horns at its four corners like those of the Brazen Altar. There were rings on the altar for staves to be inserted on two sides for carrying the altar. It would be placed between the Lampstand and the Table of Shewbread, next to the

Veil which separated the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies.

Whenever Aaron attended to the Lampstand in the morning and in the evening, he was required to burn *sweet incense* (fragrant incense) on the altar. Scripturally, burning incense often symbolizes prayer. The Psalmist cried out (141:2), *Let my prayer be set forth before Thee as incense; and the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice.* In the New Testament when Zacharias the priest entered into the Temple of the Lord to burn incense the children of Israel were praying outside (Luke 1:9, 10). And in the book of Revelation the *smoke of the incense, which came with the prayers of the saints, ascended up before God out of the angel's hand* (Rev. 8:3, 4). The offering of *strange incense* which was not made according to the LORD'S prescription, was a very serious violation.¹ And once a year Aaron

¹ Leviticus 10:1 *And Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, took either of them his censer, and put fire therein, and put incense thereon, and offered strange*

should offer a sin offering of atonement and smear the four horns with the blood of the offering. It must be kept throughout his generations. It was *most holy unto the LORD* (30:10).

The Ransom Money

The LORD spoke to Moses next about taking a census of the children of Israel. This is the first mention of taking a census of the Israelites. Every man (Hebrew *iysh*, male) above the age of twenty must give *a ransom* (the Hebrew word, *kaphar*, is the same for atonement) of *half a shekel* (30:12, 14). The male children would all gather in one place and every person who had been counted would pay the ransom money as he crossed over to the other side (30:13). The fact that only men of the age of twenty and above were liable to pay strongly suggests that these young men could be mustered for military service.

fire before the LORD, which he commanded them not. ² And there went out *fire* from the LORD, and devoured them, and they died before the LORD.

The phrase *that there should be no plague among them, when thou numberest them* means that if a man did not pay the ransom money he would be in danger of being inflicted with a deadly plague probably like those which the LORD had inflicted on the Egyptians. It is difficult to understand the rationale for this penalty. The *half a shekel* was an offering unto the LORD, and it was for the atonement of his life. However, the collection of this ransom money was also for the service of the Tabernacle (30:16).² The rich should not pay more and the poor should not pay less; every man should pay the same amount, nothing more and nothing less.

The Laver

The Laver was made of brass and was placed between the Tabernacle proper and the Brazen Altar. The Laver was filled with

² King David took a census of the people (2 Samuel 24). He suffered a terrible punishment by the Lord. The Lord was displeased. The reason could be that he overlooked the collection of ransom money as required by the Lord. Another strong reason was his pride in trusting in the military strength of his army instead of God.

water. Aaron and his sons would have to wash their hands and feet before they could enter the Tabernacle or when they would make burnt offering at the altar (30:19, 20). The violation of this requirement would be the penalty of death. This teaches us the absolute holiness of God and serving Him must never be taken for granted or done in a free manner. God had clearly prescribed the way, and violating the law means death to the priests. God took worshipping and serving Him in the manner that He had prescribed very seriously.

The Anointing Oil

Then the LORD spoke again to Moses pertaining to the making of *an oil of holy ointment* or *an holy anointing oil* (30:25). The LORD gave the precise recipe for the production of the anointing oil (30:23, 24). The oil was for the anointing of the Tabernacle, the Ark of the Testimony, the Table of Shewbread and all its utensils, the Lampstand and with its

accessories, the Altar of Incense, the Brazen Altar together with all its utensils and the Laver and its base. All these anointed pieces of furniture would be made holy and whoever touched them would also be holy (30:29).

Moses was commanded to consecrate Aaron and his sons with this holy anointing oil so that they might minister as priests unto the LORD. The children of Israel would be taught and be constantly reminded that this holy anointing oil was for these uses throughout their generations. The holy anointing oil might not be used for any personal use. The children of Israel might not use the same recipe to produce the oil for personal use. Anyone who made it for personal use or even use it for a visitor would *be cut off from his people*, meaning excommunicated from the community (30:33). In those days it was a heavy penalty. In desert land, people needed one another to live, and to be *cut off*

from one's people would mean deprivation and hardship.

The Fragrant Oil

Next the LORD instructed Moses to make *a perfume* (30:35). The specific ingredients for making the perfume were told to Moses (30:34). It must be made in a special and artful way free from any impurities. It would also be holy. A small portion of it would be placed before the Ark of Testimony and it would be most holy. Like the holy anointing oil, the children of Israel were prohibited from making a similar perfume with the same recipe. Once again the penalty of breaching this commandment was to be excommunicated from the community (30:38). What was sacred and not sacred was very clearly identified. In this respect we must learn that not all things in life may be presented and be accepted before the Lord. The things which have been consecrated for use unto the Lord should not be for private use.

The Skilful Craftsmen

The LORD had called master-craftsmen to make every article of the Tabernacle. He had called two men specially to work on the pieces of the furniture of the Tabernacle, the garments of the priests, the holy anointing oil, and the perfume. *Bezaleel, the son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah* is mentioned first, and probably he was the chief craftsman (31:2). The LORD *filled him with the spirit of God* and endowed him with wisdom, understanding, knowledge and all kinds of skill so that he was able to produce intricate works in gold, silver, and brass, in the cutting of stones and carving of wood (31:3-5). The LORD also said that He had assigned *Aholiab, the son of Ahisamach, of the tribe of Dan* to work with Bezaleel. The LORD then said that He had put wisdom in the hearts of all who helped so that they might be able to make all the things which He had commanded them – all the pieces of furniture of the Tabernacle, and

the garments of the priests, and the holy anointing oil and perfume (31:6-11). Bezaleel and Aholiab were specially and suitably equipped to make all these things. He had filled Bezaleel with the *spirit of God* who would undoubtedly be the Holy Spirit just as Christians today are filled with the Holy Spirit to guide and enable them to do the work of God. Obviously other people would be called by these two to carry out the making of the various things relating to the Tabernacle. God had given the blueprint of the Tabernacle. All the things connected with it would have to be worked skilfully according to the LORD'S specifications.

We observe first that when God calls a person to serve Him, He would enable him. He would empower him and give him the necessary gifts to carry out His work. If a person is called to preach and teach the Word of God, God would bless him with the wisdom, understanding, and

knowledge of His Word. God would also enable him the ability to communicate.

Another thing we learn is that the Christian, who is called, must do according to what God has commanded him to do. Obedience is the most important characteristic of a servant of God. He has to do everything in accordance with His will. We can know the will of God in His Word. The servant also must be careful that when he does the work of God it has to be done in God's way. God's work must be done in God's way and not in any other way even though it may seem to be more attractive and acceptable to men.

Remembering Sabbath

The LORD concluded His instructions concerning the Tabernacle by reminding the children of Israel the need to keep the Sabbath (Exodus 31:13). The LORD revealed some new significant thoughts about the Sabbath. Observe that the LORD called it *my sabbaths* (31:13). One

day in the week belonged to the LORD. Keeping the LORD'S Sabbaths was a sign between the LORD and the children of Israel. They must observe it throughout their generations so that they might know that the LORD had set them apart holy unto Him. They had been set apart to serve the LORD.

The violation of this commandment was so serious that the soul who broke this commandment would be sentenced to death. To break the fourth commandment was to sin against a thrice holy God. The law stipulated the death penalty for the offender (32:14, 15). The faithful observance of the LORD'S Sabbath was a permanent sign of God's covenant made with Israel. Not to be obedient to this Fourth Commandment was a direct show of a servant's attitude of self-importance. It was tantamount to saying, "Who is God? I don't care." So we can understand why God imposed the penalty of death

to every Israelite who did not observe the Sabbath.

PRACTICAL VALUE

The Tabernacle in the wilderness, the priestly service, and the sacrifices before the LORD pictured the Person and Work of the Lord Jesus Christ our Saviour. Born-again Christians today are all priests unto God. We learn how God required the priests to conduct themselves a way only acceptable by God. We should follow the same principle that when we worship God either personally and privately or corporately in the church, we ought to conduct ourselves in like manner before the Lord. We may not worship God in our own way.

The burning of incense every morning and evening when the priests daily tended and lit the Lampstand teaches us that God delights His children to pray daily to Him or as often as they can, praising, thanking and asking for His grace whenever in need. Remember what our Lord Jesus

Christ teaches us that we ought always to pray and not to faint. The Apostle Paul exhorts us to pray without ceasing (1 Thessalonians 5:17). How sad it is for Christians not to engage themselves in this privileged spiritual exercise. Not to pray is to deprive ourselves of God's ordained means of seeking God's help in time of need.

Before the priests could serve in doing the duties in the Tabernacle, they had to offer a sin offering unto the LORD. Although Christ is our sin-offering once and for all time, a daily confession and repentance of sins which we have committed needs to be done. We need to examine our speech, thoughts and actions on a daily basis and prepare ourselves before entering into His holy presence to pray. Daily confession and repentance of our sins before the Lord is a necessary aspect of our walk before God.

God had called the Sabbath *my sabbaths*. Of the seven days in

a week, one day belongs to God. Most of us, if not all, observe Sunday the first day of the week as the Lord's Day. That day belongs to God. And God requires that we, His people, ought to assemble together to worship Him in spirit and in truth. We should religiously and faithfully keep this commandment of God. If we have to work on the Lord's Day, we either change the work to another day or delay it after worshipping God. God delights that His children do this. When His children really honour God, He will honour them.

Finally, when we faithfully keep the Lord's Day, we acknowledge that God has made His covenant with us in Christ Jesus. At the same time, we testify to others, especially, unbelievers that we are the children of the Most High God and that we are a special people sanctified unto the Lord. AMEN