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Introduction

The altar of burnt incense, Exodus 30:1. Dimensions, Exodus 30:2. Golden crown, Exodus 30:3. Rings and staves, Exodus 30:4, Exodus 30:5. Where placed, Exodus 30:6, Exodus 30:7. Use, Exodus 30:8-10. The ransom price of half a shekel, Exodus 30:11-13. Who were to pay it, Exodus 30:14. The rich and the poor to pay alike, Exodus 30:15. The use to which it was applied, Exodus 30:16. The brazen laver, and its uses, Exodus 30:17-21. The holy anointing oil, and its component parts, Exodus 30:22-25. To be applied to the tabernacle, ark, golden table, candlestick, altar of burnt-offerings, and the laver, Exodus 30:26-29. And to Aaron and his sons, Exodus 30:30. Never to be applied to any other uses, and none like it ever to be made, Exodus 30:31-33. The perfume, and how made, Exodus 30:34, Exodus 30:35. Its use, Exodus 30:36. Nothing similar to it ever to be made, Exodus 30:37, Exodus 30:38.

Verse 1

Altar to burn incense - The Samaritan omits the ten first verses of this chapter, because it inserts them after Exodus 26:32 (note).

Shittim wood - The same of which the preceding articles were made, because it was abundant in those parts, and because it was very durable; hence everywhere the Septuagint translation, which was made in Egypt, renders the original by ἰνδοκάρῳ, incorruptible wood.

Verse 2

Four-square - That is, on the upper or under surface, as it showed four equal sides; but it was twice as high as it was broad, being twenty-one inches broad, and three feet six inches high. It was called, not only the altar of incense, but also the golden altar, Numbers 4:11. For the crown, horns, staves, etc., see on the altar of burnt-offering, Exodus 27:1 (note), etc.

Verse 6

Before the mercy-seat that is over the testimony - These words in the original are supposed to be a repetition, by mistake, of the preceding clause; the word חַפְצֵי־חַיִּים (happarochoth), the veil, being corrupted by interchanging two letters into חַפְצֵי־חַיִּים (haccapporeth), the mercy-seat; and this, as Dr. Kennicott observes, places the altar of incense before the mercy-seat, and consequently in the holy of holies! Now this could not be, as the altar of incense was attended every day, and the holy of holies entered only once in the year. The five words which appear to be a repetition are wanting in twenty-six of Kennicott's and De Rossi's MSS., and in the Samaritan. The verse reads better without them, and is more consistent with the rest of the account.

Verse 7

When he dresseth the lamps - Prepares the wicks, and puts in fresh oil for the evening.

Shall burn incense upon it - Where so many sacrifices were offered it was essentially necessary to have some pleasing perfume to counteract the disagreeable smells that must have arisen from the slaughter of so many animals, the sprinkling of so much blood, and the burning of so much flesh, etc. The perfume that was to be burnt on this altar is described Exodus 30:34. No blood was ever sprinkled on this altar, except on the day of general expiation, which happened only once in the year, Exodus 30:10. But the perfume was necessary in every part of the tabernacle and its environs.

Verse 9

No strange incense - None made in any other way.

Nor burnt-sacrifice - It should be an altar for incense, and for no other use.

Verse 10

An atonement - once in a year - On the tenth day of the seventh month. See Leviticus 16:18 (note), etc., and the notes there. See Clarke on Leviticus 16:21 (note), etc.

Verse 12

Then shall they give every man a ransom for his soul - This was a very important ordinance, and should be seriously considered. See Exodus 30:13 (note).

Verse 13

Half a shekel - Each of the Israelites was ordered to give as a ransom for his soul (i.e., for his life) half a shekel, according to the shekel of the sanctuary. From this we may learn,

1. That the life of every man was considered as being forfeited to Divine justice.

2. That the redemption money given, which was doubtless used in the service of the sanctuary, was ultimately devoted to the use and profit of those who gave it.

3. That the standard by which the value of coin was ascertained, was kept in the sanctuary; for this appears to be the meaning of the words, after the shekel of the sanctuary.

4. The shekel is here said to be twenty gerahs. A gerah, according to Maimonides, weighed sixteen barleycorns, a shekel three hundred and twenty of pure silver. The shekel is generally considered to be equal in value to three shillings English; the redemption money, therefore, must be about one shilling and sixpence.

5. The rich were not to give more, the poor not to give less; to signify that all souls were equally precious in the sight of God, and that no difference of outward circumstances could affect the state of the soul; all had sinned, and all must be redeemed by the same price.

6. This atonement must be made that there might be no plague among them, intimating that a plague or curse from God must light on those souls for whom the atonement was not made.

7. This was to be a memorial unto the children of Israel, Exodus 30:16, to bring to their remembrance their past deliverance, and to keep in view their future redemption.

8. St. Peter seems to allude to this, and to intimate that this mode of atonement was ineffectual in itself, and only pointed out the great sacrifice which, in the fullness of time, should be made for the sin of the world. "Ye know," says he, "that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot: who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world," etc.; 1 Peter 1:18, 1 Peter 1:19, 1 Peter 1:20.

9. Therefore all these things seem to refer to Christ alone, and to the atonement made by his blood; and upon him who is not interested in this atonement, God's plagues must be expected to fall.

Reader, acquaint now thyself with God and be at peace, and thereby good shall come unto thee.

Verse 18

A laver of brass - כִּיּוֹר (kiyor) sometimes signifies a caldron, 1 Samuel 2:14; but it seems to signify any large round vessel or basin used for washing the hands and feet. There were doubtless cocks or spigots in it to draw off the water, as it is not likely the feet were put into it in order to be washed. The foot of the laver must mean the pedestal on which it stood.

Verse 20

They shall wash with water, that they die not - This was certainly an emblematical washing; and as the hands and the feet are particularly mentioned, it must refer to the purity of their whole conduct. Their hands - all their works, their feet - all their goings, must be washed - must be holiness unto the Lord. And this washing must be repeated every time they entered into the tabernacle, or when they came near to the altar to minister. This washing was needful because the priests all ministered barefoot; but it was equally so because of the guilt they might have contracted, for the washing was emblematical of the putting away of sin, or what St. Paul calls the laver of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Ghost, (Titus 3:5), as the influences of the Spirit must be repeated for the purification of the soul, as frequently as any moral defilement has been contracted.

Verse 21

And it shall be a statute for ever - To continue, in its literal meaning, as long as the Jewish economy lasted, and, in its spiritual meaning, to the end of time. What an important lesson does this teach the ministers of the Gospel of Christ! Each time they minister in public, whether in dispensing the Word or the Sacraments, they should take heed that they have a fresh application of the grace and spirit of Christ, to do away past transgressions or unfaithfulness, and to enable them to minister with the greater effect, as being in the Divine favor, and consequently entitled to expect all the necessary assistances of the Divine unction, to make their ministrations spirit and life to the people. See Clarke's note on Exodus 29:20.

Verse 23

Take - unto thee principal spices - From this and the following verse we learn that the holy anointing oil was compounded of the following ingredients: -

Pure myrrh, מִרְרָה (mar deror), 500 shekels

Sweet cinnamon, קִינָמוֹן (kinnemon besem), 250 shekels. (probably from Arabia)

Sweet calamus, חֲסִי חֲסִי (keneh bosem), or sweet 250 shekels. cane, Jeremiah 6:20 - Calamus aromaticus. Cassia, חֲסִי חֲסִי (kiddah), (cassia lignea), brought 500 shekels. Also from Arabia. Olive oil, חֲסִי חֲסִי חֲסִי (shemen sayith), one hin, about 5 quarts.

Myrrh is the produce of an oriental tree not well known, and is collected by making an incision in the tree. What is now called by this name is precisely the same with that of the ancients.

500 shekels of the first and last, make 48 lbs. 4 oz. 12 dwts. 21 21/31 grs.
250 of the cinnamon and calamus. 24 lbs. 2 oz. 6 dwts. 10 26/31 grs.
Olive oil is supposed to be the best preservative of odours.

As the gifts and graces of the Holy Spirit are termed the anointing of the Holy Ghost, therefore this holy ointment appears to have been designed as emblematical of those gifts and graces. See Acts 1:5; Acts 10:38; 2 Corinthians 1:21; 1 John 2:20, 1 John 2:27.

Verse 25

After the art of the apothecary - The original, חֲסִי חֲסִי (rokeach), signifies a compounder or confectioner; any person who compounds drugs, aromatics, etc.

Verse 30

Thou shalt anoint Aaron and his sons - For the reason of this anointing, see Clarke's note on Exodus 29:7. It seems that this anointing oil was an emblem of Divine teaching, and especially of those influences by which the Church of Christ was, in the beginning, guided into all truth; as is evident from the allusion to it by St. John: "Ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye know all things. The anointing which ye have received from him abideth in you, and ye need not that any man teach you; but as the same anointing teacheth you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie, and even as it hath taught you, ye shall abide in Him; 1 John 2:20, 1 John 2:27.

Verse 34

Take unto thee sweet spices - The holy perfume was compounded of the following ingredients: Stacte - חֲסִי חֲסִי (nataph), supposed to be the same with what was afterwards called the balm of Jericho. Stacte is the gum which spontaneously flows from the tree which produces myrrh. See Clarke's note on Exodus 30:23.

Onycha - חֲסִי חֲסִי (shecheleth), allowed by the best critics to be the unguis odoriferans described by Rumph, which is the external crust of the shell-fish purpura or murex, and is the basis of the principal perfumes made in the East Indies.

Galbanum - חֲסִי חֲסִי (chelbenah), the bubon gummiferum or African ferula; it rises with a ligneous stalk from eight to ten feet, and is garnished with leaves at each joint. The top of the stock is terminated by an umbel of yellow flowers, which are succeeded by oblong channelled seeds, which have a thin membrane or wing on their border. When any part of the plant is broken, there issues out a little thin milk of a cream color. The gummy resinous juice which proceeds from this plant is what is commonly called galbanum, from the chelbench of the Hebrews.

Pure frankincense - חֲסִי חֲסִי (lebonah zaccah). Frankincense is supposed to derive its name from frank, free, because of its liberal or ready distribution of its odours. It is a dry resinous substance, in pieces or drops of a pale yellowish white color, has a strong smell, and bitter acrid taste. The tree which produces it is not well known. Dioscorides mentions it as gotten in India. What is called here pure frankincense is no doubt the same with the mascula thura of Virgil, and signifies what is first obtained from the tree - that which is strongest and most free from all adventitious mixtures. See Clarke's note on Exodus 30:7.

The Israelites were most strictly prohibited, on the most awful penalties, from making any anointing oil or perfume similar to those described in this chapter. He that should compound such, or apply any of this to any common purpose, even to smell to, Exodus 30:38, should be cut off, that is, excommunicated from his people, and so lose all right, title, and interest in the promises of God and the redemption of Israel. From all this we may learn how careful the Divine Being is to preserve his own worship and his own truth, so as to prevent them from being adulterated by human inventions; for he will save men in his own way, and upon his own terms. What are called human inventions in matters of religion, are not only of no worth, but are in general deceptive and ruinous. Arts and sciences in a certain way may be called inventions of men, for the spirit of a man knoweth the things of a man - can comprehend, plan, and execute, under the general influence of God, every thing in which human life is immediately concerned; but religion, as it is the gift, so it is the invention, of God: its doctrines and its ceremonies proceed from his wisdom and goodness, for he alone could devise the plan by which the human race may be restored to his favor and image, and taught to worship him in spirit and in truth. And that

worship which himself has prescribed, we may rest assured, will be most pleasing in his sight. Nadab and Abihu offered strange fire before the Lord; and their destruction by the fire of Jehovah is recorded as a lasting warning to all presumptuous worshippers, and to all who attempt to model his religion, according to their own caprice, and to minister in sacred things without that authority which proceeds from himself alone. The imposition of hands whether of pope, cardinal, or bishop can avail nothing here. The call and unction of God alone can qualify the minister of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.