

## *Open Heart, Open Bible*

Exodus and John's Gospel

Linking Theme: Redemption

*Passage for weekly reading (week 19):*

*Exodus ch.'s 27 – 33*

### The Intercession of Moses

The Lord now reveals the detail of the outer court to Moses, together with its main item of furniture, the altar of burnt offering. This altar is overlaid in bronze, together with all its utensils, whereas the altar of incense, placed within the Tent itself, is covered in gold (ch.30, v.'s 1-6). All sacrifices were offered in the courtyard area, on the altar described here. The final instruction of this chapter, concerning oil for the lampstand, is important in that the lamp was to be kept burning continuously, a perpetual symbol of the continuity of the Lord's presence with His people.

We are now given the detail regarding the priests' garments. The office of the High Priest was one of great dignity, and the robes were to display that dignity. The Priest was the intermediary between God and His people, and He could only fulfil that role by presenting himself before the Lord in the precise manner revealed to Moses. The colours of the yarn to be used (gold, blue, purple, scarlet, v.5), are colours which befit royalty. The twelve tribes are named in two places in the High Priests' regalia – on the shoulder clasps of the ephod (a sort of "surplice" in terms of the vestments worn by clergy to-day), and on the breastpiece. The precious stones on the latter were in 4 rows of 3, and represented the tribes as follows:

<b>ruby - <i>Reuben</i></b>	<b>topaz - <i>Simeon</i></b>	<b>beryl - <i>Levi</i></b>
<b>turquoise - <i>Judah</i></b>	<b>sapphire - <i>Issachar</i></b>	<b>emerald - <i>Zebulun</i></b>
<b>jacinth - <i>Dan</i></b>	<b>agate - <i>Naphtali</i></b>	<b>amethyst - <i>Gad</i></b>
<b>chrysolite - <i>Asher</i></b>	<b>onyx - <i>Joseph</i></b>	<b>jasper - <i>Benjamin</i></b>

There is a significant Biblical link here with the Eternal City described in Revelation 21 v.'s 12-21, where the names of the 12 tribes are written on each of the 12 City gates, and the foundations of the City were covered with 12 precious stones similar but not identical to the stones listed in Exodus 28. Perhaps the important thread is the number 12 which symbolises completeness, the number of government in a Biblical sense.

Ch. 28 v.30 gives the first O.T. reference to the Urim and Thummin, sacred objects, possibly stones, which were cast, like dice, to determine God's will in certain cases. Urim gave a "no" answer, Thummin a "yes". As the prophetic ministry developed in the nation of Israel, from Samuel onwards, these devices seem to fall into disuse (scripture makes no reference to them). It appears that the Lord reveals Himself and His purposes more to chosen men than through priestly ritual. For now, though, Aaron represented God to the people, and carried the people on his heart in representing them before God.

The chapter ends by detailing the remaining garments to be worn by the Priest. Underneath the ephod was a blue robe, an undergarment for it. The bells and pomegranates at the hem of this robe made a sound unique to the High Priest, a sound known to God (v.35), but also known to the people. If the sound of the bells stopped whilst the Priest was ministering before the Lord, those outside would know that His mediation had been unacceptable, and that he had been put to death! Every detail of the revelation given to Moses had to be observed carefully. The gold plate in the Priest's turban made the point exactly – "Holy to the Lord".

All that remained to be done was that the High Priest, along with his sons, be ordained for ministry. Again, the procedure had to be followed precisely, and blood shed to make atonement for sin. Thus, the bull was sacrificed as a sin offering (v.14), the first ram as a fellowship offering (peace made with God), the second as the ordination offering (v.22), along with the wave offering from the unleavened bread already prepared (v.2). The wave offering symbolised the consecration of the High Priest to the Lord, his offering of himself in his God-given calling. The importance of the ordination ceremony is emphasised by the fact that it is to be of seven days' duration (v.35). V.'s 38-42 refer to the regular offerings to be made at the Tabernacle by the Priests, having completed their ordination. As these procedures are faithfully followed, the conditions for God to dwell with His people are fulfilled. The living God has a place where He can "tabernacle", where sin can be forgiven and where His peace can reside. (The verb to "tabernacle" means simply that – to "dwell".)

Ch.30 begins with the description of the altar of incense, situated in the Holy Place, within the Tabernacle itself. It is overlaid with gold, and its function is to continually offer to the Lord a pleasing aroma, a fragrant offering (see Ephesians 5 v.2). The incense to be used on it is prescribed precisely, as everything else, for it also is "holy to the Lord" (v.57). Similarly, the oil for anointing is to be a "fragrant" blend to be used in the consecration of all the Tabernacle furnishings. The oil is "sacred", and everything anointed by it becomes sacred. If any of these things are profaned in any way, the penalty is to be cut off from the people. Holiness requires concentrated discipline!

When the Lord wants work to be done of a specific nature, He gifts and chooses specific people to do it. So it is with Bezalel and Oholiab, his assistant, and the “craftsmen” who will be working with them (v.6). Sabbath observance is the outward sign of consecration to the Lord (v.13), and the rhythm of God in creation is the model for the Sabbath rest. This concludes God’s revelation to Moses on the mountain, after which He gave to him the tablets of stone, inscribed with His “finger”.

Forty days have passed, long enough for the people to forget about the God who had delivered them and His appointed leader (32 v.1). The complicity of Aaron in this is hard to take, knowing all that God has revealed to Moses about the Priesthood, but, of course, his brother has not been privy to this. Aaron is merely carried along by the tide of the people’s rebellion, a strong tide indeed! Before Moses begins the descent, the Lord shows him what is going on at the foot of Sinai, but the power of Moses’ intercession prevails with God, as he pleads the covenant promise to Abraham – **“the Lord relented”** (v.14). Nothing can fully prepare Moses for the sight which would greet him when approaching the camp, however, so much so that anger gets the better of him. He throws the stone tablets to the ground, shattering them. He destroys the calf-idol (making the Israelites drink it in its liquidised form – imagine how it must have tasted!), and then turns on Aaron, who tries to excuse his own infidelity, and lies in the process (v.’s 22-24). The Levites respond to Moses’ rallying call, and order is brought back to the people, but only at the cost of much bloodshed. This is the origin of the call on Levi as the priestly tribe, the one devoted to the Lord in the service of the Tabernacle. Remember that Moses and Aaron were Levites (Exodus 2 v.’s 1&2).

Again we see the heart of Moses as God’s chosen leader. He intercedes for the people once more, this time having experienced at first hand the devastation of their unfaithfulness. **“Blot me out of Your book”**, but please forgive them! Paul prays in similar vein for modern-day Israel, that he may be accursed if it would help in securing their salvation (Romans 9 v.3). What a prayer! This is a reflection of God’s heart in longing to redeem His special creation, fallen from grace but still so dearly loved. In Moses’ case, it reminds us of Abraham, as he prayed for Sodom and Gomorrah, knowing that his nephew, Lot, could perish along with all the other inhabitants (Genesis 18). We then read in Genesis the “God remembered Abraham”, and here in Exodus God is mindful of Moses. Having told His leader that He will no longer accompany the people on their journey to Canaan, Moses again pleads their case, and again God responds to his prayerful heart-cry. The short account of Moses being hidden in the cleft of the rock is amongst the best-known incidents in the O.T. Like all effective intercessors, he longs to see God’s glory! He did see it, on earth, well over a thousand years later, when the glory of God shone through Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration!

### *Food for thought / discussion / prayer*

1) If, like me, you have found this week's reading difficult, because we are so unused to the detail contained in God's revelation to Moses, were you able to learn anything from it? The impression it leaves indelibly with me is the awesomeness of the God of Israel, and that, to approach Him, only one way was acceptable, the way which He had clearly shown on the mountain. There is nothing casual or familiar about this. The Priests cut corners on pain of death. Every detail had to be known and observed with meticulous care. If the people were to share in the holiness of God, only He knew how they could do that. He would graciously reveal the means to them through Moses, even though He knew that they would betray Him. The call on the life of every believer today is holiness (2 Timothy 1 v.9). Is it any less painstaking for us than it was for the children of Israel?

2) The rapidity with which the people disobeyed the foundational Commandments of God is breathtaking. Paul refers to this in 1 Corinthians 10 v.'s 6&7, and then says that these things were written as warnings for us, "on whom the fulfilment of the ages has come". Can anyone share how we are "warned" by this week's passage, either individually, or as a fellowship?

3) The other outstanding aspect of this week's reading, contained in ch.'s 32 and 33, is the intercession of Moses. Intercession is simply to plead for another, as opposed to praying for oneself, which is usually described as petition, or supplication. Intercession is totally selfless, where the latter two forms of prayer need not be. Intercession is made when the one offering the prayer is so close to the heart of God that He prays to the Lord that which is on His heart, even though God seems now determined to carry out judgment. Scripture describes the effect as God "relenting" (32 v.14), but He is simply waiting for an intercessor, one to "stand in the gap" (Ezekiel 22 v.30), to plead before Him in order to extend His mercy. In the Ezekiel passage, there was no-one. An intercessor must know the word of God applicable to the person(s) he is praying for, because he is "reminding" God what that word is, and relying on His faithfulness in order to see the word performed. The word is living and active (Hebrews 4 v.12), as is the One who inspired its writing, and He will vindicate those who stand on it. P.T.L!

**Next week's passage:** Exodus 34 - 40