

Exodus Chapters 30-31 - John Karmelich

Most of us know the feeling of listening to a lecture and thinking, how much longer will this last? Most of us remember our school days of checking the clock and realizing we got say, 10 more minutes to go. If you attend church regularly you know when the preacher says, "one more thing", it means we've got another 10 to 15 minutes to go! In effect that's the situation here. For my last bunch of Exodus lessons, we've had detail after detail on building a portable tabernacle (for about 10 chapters now). I suspect we are all thinking, how much more of this is there? The good news is we're in the last two chapters of the speech God is giving Moses on how to build this. As I studied these final two chapters on this topic, a perfect title for this lesson is, "one more thing". I'll explain and hopefully draw our attention on why it is God ended this "speech" the way he does!

The first thing we read about in these chapters is the construction of a small altar (that's about 3 feet in height and 1.5 feet wide and deep). For my "metric" readers, figure about a meter high and half of that for width and depth. The first logical question is God gave Moses "chapters ago" all of the instructions on how to build the "furniture" (for the lack of a better term) of everything inside of that structure. That leads the question why is this little altar mentioned here and now? To explain, understand what it's for: To burn incense in the tabernacle. Keep in mind there was nowhere to sit there. For an altar that low, I like most people would get on our knees to work it. Incense was burned there. It gives off a nice odor in that place. The visual picture is that of prayer rising up to God. The word picture is after the whole thing was built, and after the sacrifice for sin has been paid then we can make our petitions to God. It's a good model of what our prayer life should be like. Obviously it doesn't mean God requires us to burn incense for prayer. It is just a visual picture of what our prayers are like rising up to Him. That is why this made the "one more thing" list.

As with the other things in the tabernacle, the exact dimensions are given. It was made of wood and it was covered in gold. There were also four rings near the top so it can be carried. The idea of carrying a "prayer altar" is the reminder that we are to carry God with us wherever we go so we can seek Him!

Next on the "one more thing" list is the question is who will pay for the upkeep? Animals were needed for sacrifice and oil is needed for the lamps not to mention the incense for the prayers. God said there's to be an annual tax of "half a shekel". Think of it as a silver coin. I just Googled silver prices. In U.S. dollars it's about \$10 for this annual tax. So why do the poor pay the same as the rich? Everyone who believes in God is responsible to maintain the place of worship so everyone who believes in God has to support it. I could give a lecture here on why we should support our local churches, but hopefully you get the idea.

That leads to the next thing on my "one more thing" list. The last thing to be built is a "bathtub" so the priests can wash their hands and feet. The dimensions are not stated. As someone with a size 14 foot, I hope it's big enough for me! On a practical basis, the priests had to kill animals and to put it simply, I'd describe their work as a "bloody mess". It's logical that want a place to wash up before doing all of the work God requires of them. (It supports my theory that the priests were barefoot!) It also is similar to why Jesus washed the disciples feet on the night he had the Passover dinner. The symbolism of that act is they're already clean because they believed in Jesus, but get dirty feet from walking "in the world". I mentioned this as an "afterthought" as if to say we are clean from the sacrifice but to make a difference for God we must wash up as well!

The next "one more thing" has to deal with having a nice smell. Moses was given specific instructions on how to make an oil to pour on everything associated with this structure including the priests. This is giving a unique smell to anything associated with God. Some argue this was done as all the work gave off a bad smell and this covered it. I disagree. I think it is just to show the uniqueness of this structure by having a nice scent that we only associate with God. The idea is God wants all our senses to realize we're focusing on Him. The next few lines of Exodus give the specific ingredients and amounts for the incense. I don't know if this is what was used for the prayers but again, it's the unique smell associated with the temple.

This leads to Chapter 31. I'm sure by this point Moses was thinking, "How do I do all of this?" Moses must have thought, I'm not an expert on all of this stuff, how do I make everything to God's spec's? So the last thing God says in effect is "Don't worry about that! I've already given the gifts of how to make all of this to people in the congregation". Two men were named as the leaders. One was from the tribe of Judah (the first tribe named in the surrounding of the tabernacle as they travel through the desert and a man from Dan, the last tribe of the group). So what? We need to remember is God never gives us an order that He doesn't also provide the means to carry it out! That doesn't mean it will always be easy or we know His will. It just means when we carry out what we believe He calls us to do, He also provides the means. It also shows spiritual gifts are more than what we think as God specifically says these men had God given the spiritual gifts to carry this out.

The actual final of the "one more thing" list is a reminder to not forget the Sabbath. Let me explain: I believe God is saying, "Don't be so busy building and maintaining this thing that you don't forget that I called you to rest one day out of seven. Time for a quick Christian and the Sabbath lecture: It's the only command not repeated in the New Testament. Some choose to worship God daily and obviously there are people who just go to church Sunday and don't think about Him the rest of the week. The idea of a Sabbath doesn't mean to sleep in every Sunday. It is to rest in Him and take time to seek Him one day out of seven. Obviously some devout Christians have to work on Sundays. The issue is our hearts. We should regularly take time to focus on Him. That leads back to this final paragraph here. God's saying not to be so busy doing stuff for Him that we don't take the time to rest in Him and seek Him! One of my favorite expressions is, "Don't be so busy going about the king's business that you fail to make time for the king!" That applies here!

The very last thing we read on the "mountain top" experience is God somehow gave Moses two tables with what is most likely the 10 Commandments on them. I used to wonder "Why didn't God write in a smaller font and fit it all on one stone tablet?" What I suspect is we get two copies of the same thing. I could be wrong but that's what I'm thinking.

Anyway, we got through the "one more thing" list and the bell has rung for us to leave. I hope all of us remember that God desire we focus on Him on a regular basis. These chapters are not for us to build a thing like this, but to see the word pictures of what Jesus did for us and how God expects us to respond as believers in Him. With that said, thanks for reading all of this and I hope everyone has grown in our faith in Him based on what we've studied here. No it's not the end of the book, but it's the end of Moses "solo time" with God and what He wants us to know about our worship of Him.

Bottom line, is this tabernacle was built so that "we will come to worship Him" as well as use our time to minister (pray for and help others) draw close to Him. That's why I thought that movie line fits well with how we are to "work" in places (our church, and the world) to serving Him.

If interested, there are two other links on this chapter. They are for a more detailed lesson that I wrote about 20 years ago. Of course, you're welcome to read that if you'd like. Either way, I'm grateful that you did read this! If you're new here, realize you're always welcome to e-mail me. Thanks again, John