

The Book of Exodus, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 21: The Altar of Incense and Tabernacle Service

Exodus 30:1–31:18

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

These two chapters are about access to God, and access is never a small or casual matter. What is doctrinally at stake here is the holiness of God and the appointed way of drawing near to Him. God does not let His people improvise their approach. He specifies the altar of incense, the ransom price, the basin of washing, the holy oil, and the sacred incense, and He attaches real penalties to ignoring or counterfeiting them. The lesson must help students feel the weight of God's holiness while seeing, with equal clarity, His longing to bring His people in. Above all, the teacher should keep pointing through these shadows to their substance in Christ, who is our altar, our ransom, our cleansing, and our rest (Hebrews 8–10). These ordinances were the old covenant in shadow form; they are not binding on Christians, for they are fulfilled in the Lord.

The heaviest doctrinal care in this lesson falls on the Sabbath in Exodus 31:12–17. For a church-of-Christ audience this must be handled plainly and pastorally. The Sabbath was a sign given specifically to Israel under the old covenant, not a creation ordinance laid on all mankind for all time, and it is nowhere bound on Christians in the New Testament. Colossians 2:16–17 calls the Sabbath a shadow, with the substance belonging to Christ, and Hebrews 4 shows that the rest it pictured is the rest believers enter through faith in Jesus. The New Testament church gathered to break bread and worship on the first day of the week (Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 16:2), the Lord's Day, which is not a Christian Sabbath but the day of resurrection and assembly. Teach this clearly so that no student leaves confused, burdened with a yoke God never placed on the church, or robbed of the real rest Christ offers.

Yet the aim is not merely correct doctrine; it is the spiritual formation of the student. The incense altar should awaken a hunger to pray, the ransom should deepen gratitude for the blood of Christ, the basin should stir a desire for daily cleansing, the holy oil should call for a life set apart, the Spirit-filled craftsmen should encourage every believer to serve with the gifts God supplies, and the rest of the Sabbath should draw weary souls to find their rest in Jesus. Press each truth toward the heart. The goal is students who pray more faithfully, treasure the cross more deeply, walk in holiness more carefully, and rest in Christ more fully than when they walked in.

Question 1

Student Question:

Read 30:1–10. God commands a golden altar where incense is burned before Him morning and evening, perpetually. How does the rest of Scripture connect this rising incense with the prayers of God's people, and what does this teach us about how God regards prayer?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The altar of incense was a small altar, about eighteen inches square and three feet high, overlaid with pure gold, with horns at its corners and a crown of gold around its top. It stood inside the holy place, directly before the veil that screened the most holy place where the ark sat (30:1–6). On it Aaron was to burn fragrant incense every morning and every evening, a perpetual incense before the LORD throughout their generations (30:7–8). This was the nearest furniture to the very presence of God that the daily priestly service touched.

Scripture itself draws the connection between this rising incense and prayer, so we are not reading our own ideas into the text. David prayed, Let my prayer be counted as incense before you, and the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice (Psalm 141:2). In the Revelation, the golden bowls full of incense are the prayers of the saints (Revelation 5:8), and the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, rises before God from the angel's hand (Revelation 8:3–4). When Zechariah ministered at this very altar, the whole multitude was praying outside at the hour of incense (Luke 1:10). The image is consistent and beautiful: prayer ascends to God like sweet fragrance.

Notice what this says about how God regards prayer. He does not tolerate it; He treasures it. He designed a golden altar at the heart of His house for it. Our prayers are not noise that wearies Him. They are a fragrance He delights to receive, kept rising before Him without ceasing. This should transform the way we think about even our quiet, ordinary prayers.

And here is the gospel hope. That incense did not make itself acceptable; it was offered by a priest. Our prayers rise to the Father because we have a great High Priest, Jesus, who ever lives to make intercession for us (Hebrews 7:25). The fragrance of our prayers is the merit of His name. This is why we pray in the name of Jesus: He is the one who carries our words to the throne and makes them sweet to God.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The altar of incense and its perpetual offering were part of the old covenant tabernacle service, a shadow fulfilled in Christ and not binding on Christians (Hebrews 9:1–12).
- Scripture authorizes the connection between incense and prayer (Psalm 141:2; Revelation 5:8; 8:3–4), so this is natural typology, not fanciful over-reading.
- God delights in the prayers of His people and designed His house to receive them; prayer is treasured, not tolerated.
- Our prayers are made acceptable only through Christ our High Priest (Hebrews 7:25), which is the meaning of praying in His name.

- The incense altar stood before the veil, the nearest daily approach to God's presence, underscoring how near prayer brings us to God.

Discussion Prompts

- Why do you think God placed the incense altar closer to His presence than almost any other piece of the daily service, and what does that say about prayer?
- How does knowing that Christ carries our prayers to the Father change the way we pray?
- What would it look like for the prayers of this congregation to rise before God like steady, unbroken incense?

Question 2

Student Question:

Read 30:7–8. The priest tended this incense every morning and every evening, day after day, so that it never ceased. What does this steady, unbroken rhythm say to you about the place prayer ought to hold in your own daily life?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The text emphasizes the rhythm. Aaron burned the incense every morning when he dressed the lamps, and again every evening when he set up the lamps, so that there was incense before the LORD continually (30:7–8). It was not a once-a-week ceremony or a special-occasion event. It was the steady heartbeat of the priestly day, morning and evening, without fail.

That rhythm preaches to us. God did not appoint occasional, when-I-feel-like-it incense. He appointed faithful, regular, morning-and-evening incense. The same pattern marks the lives of God's praying people throughout Scripture. Daniel knelt three times a day (Daniel 6:10). David said, Evening and morning and at noon I utter my complaint (Psalm 55:17). The Lord taught us to pray, and Paul urged us to pray without ceasing and to continue steadfastly in prayer (1 Thessalonians 5:17; Colossians 4:2).

Be honest about the contrast with much of modern prayer life. For many of us prayer has become a sprint before a meal, a few hurried words at bedtime, or a desperate cry only when trouble strikes. The incense altar quietly rebukes that drift. It calls us to a settled, daily, unhurried rhythm of coming to God, not because He is reluctant, but because our souls need the constant ascending of our hearts to Him.

Consider what you might recover by building such a rhythm. A morning altar to begin the day in His presence. An evening altar to lay the day down before Him. Not as a law that condemns, but as a grace that anchors. The steady incense was never a burden to the priest who loved his God; it was the privilege of his calling. So it can be for you.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God appointed prayer as a daily, steady rhythm, morning and evening, not an occasional act (30:7–8).
- Faithful saints across Scripture kept regular times of prayer (Daniel 6:10; Psalm 55:17), modeling steadfast devotion.
- Christians are called to pray without ceasing and continue steadfastly in prayer (1 Thessalonians 5:17; Colossians 4:2).
- A settled prayer rhythm is a grace that anchors the soul, not a legalistic burden to earn favor.
- Hurried, occasional prayer is a real and common spiritual drift that needs honest examination.

Discussion Prompts

- What does your own prayer rhythm actually look like in a typical week, and what does that reveal?
- What practical step could help you establish a morning or evening time of prayer?
- How can we encourage one another toward steadfast prayer without turning it into legalism?

Question 3

Student Question:

Read 30:11–16. Every person counted in the census, rich and poor alike, had to pay the same half shekel as a ransom for his life. What does this identical ransom price teach us about the worth of a human soul and the nature of the redemption every person needs?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

When the people were numbered, each man twenty years old and upward was to give a half shekel as a ransom for his life to the LORD, that there be no plague among them when they were counted (30:11–13). The striking command is in verse 15: The rich shall not give more, and the poor shall not give less, than the half shekel. The same price for every soul, regardless of standing.

The word ransom is the key. The census reminded Israel that every life belongs to God and that a life under sin owes a ransom. This was not a tax for services; it was an atonement price, a tangible confession that each person needed to be redeemed. And the identical price for rich and poor made an unforgettable point: in the matter of redemption, all souls stand on level ground. No one's wealth raises his worth, and no one's poverty lowers it. Every soul is precious, and every soul needs the same ransom.

This is one of the clearest shadows in the chapter, and the New Testament names its substance plainly. Christ Jesus gave Himself as a ransom for all (1 Timothy 2:6). The Son of Man came to give his life as a ransom for many (Mark 10:45). And lest we think the price was small, Peter tells

us, You were ransomed not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish (1 Peter 1:18–19). The half shekel of silver pointed forward to a price beyond all silver: the blood of the Lamb.

Let the worth of the soul and the cost of redemption sink in together. Every person you meet bears a soul that God values enough to ransom with His Son's blood. The same is true of you. You did not redeem yourself, and you could not have; the price was paid by Another. This humbles the proud and lifts up the lowly, for at the cross the ground is perfectly level.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The half-shekel ransom was an atonement price confessing that every life under sin owes a ransom (30:11–16).
- The identical price for rich and poor teaches that all souls stand on level ground before God in the matter of redemption (30:15).
- Christ gave Himself as a ransom for all, the substance of this shadow (1 Timothy 2:6; Mark 10:45).
- We are redeemed not with silver or gold but with the precious blood of Christ (1 Peter 1:18–19), a price beyond all earthly wealth.
- This was an old-covenant ordinance for Israel, not a practice bound on Christians; its meaning is fulfilled in Christ.
- The doctrine refutes any notion that human worth or salvation can be purchased or earned by status or riches.

Discussion Prompts

- Why did God require the exact same ransom price from the rich and the poor, and what does that teach us?
- How does the truth that you were ransomed by the blood of Christ change how you see your own worth and your neighbor's?
- What does the costliness of our redemption say about how seriously God regards sin?

Question 4

Student Question:

Read 30:15 again. The rich could not give more and the poor could not give less; before God's ransom they stood on perfectly level ground. Where are you tempted to think your status, wealth, or accomplishments give you a better standing before God than someone else has?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The half-shekel ransom leveled the ground completely. The rich could not buy a better standing, and the poor were not shut out for lack of means (30:15). Before the ransom that God required, every Israelite was simply a soul in need of redemption, no more and no less than his neighbor.

That truth presses directly on our hearts, because we are forever tempted to imagine that something about us earns us a higher place with God.

Think of how subtly this creeps in. We measure ourselves by our giving, our church attendance, our reputation, our morality, our usefulness, even our years in the faith, and we quietly conclude that we stand a cut above. Or we go the other way and assume our failures, our poverty, or our smallness put us at a disadvantage God will hold against us. Both errors miss the cross, where the price was the same for all because the need was the same for all.

James warns the church directly against showing partiality to the rich and dishonoring the poor (James 2:1-9), and Paul insists there is no distinction, for all have sinned and fall short, and all are justified by grace as a gift through the redemption that is in Christ (Romans 3:22-24). The half shekel was teaching this long before the cross made it blazingly clear.

So examine your heart honestly. Where do you secretly feel superior? And where do you secretly feel disqualified? Bring both to the cross, where the ground is level, where grace is the great equalizer, and where your standing rests not on what you bring but on what Christ paid.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- We are tempted to think status, wealth, morality, or tenure give us a higher standing with God than others have.
- The identical ransom exposes that error; all stand equally as souls needing redemption (30:15).
- Scripture forbids partiality in the church and declares there is no distinction, for all are justified by grace (James 2:1-9; Romans 3:22-24).
- The opposite error, feeling disqualified by failure or smallness, also misses the level ground of the cross.
- Our standing rests on what Christ paid, not on what we bring.

Discussion Prompts

- In what subtle ways do we measure our standing before God by comparing ourselves with others?
- How does the level ground of the cross confront both pride and despair?
- How can a congregation guard against showing partiality and keep grace as its great equalizer?

Question 5

Student Question:

Read 30:17-21. The priests had to wash their hands and feet at the bronze basin before serving, or they would die. What does this requirement teach us about the necessity of being cleansed before we can approach and serve a holy God?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Between the altar of sacrifice and the tabernacle door God placed a bronze basin filled with water (30:17–18). Aaron and his sons were to wash their hands and feet at it whenever they went into the tent of meeting or came near the altar to minister, and the command carries a sharp warning: that they die not (30:19–21). To approach God's service with unwashed hands and feet was to court death. Cleansing was not optional; it was the condition of drawing near.

The lesson is the necessity of cleansing before we can approach and serve a holy God. The priests had already been consecrated, yet still they had to wash, again and again, because the holiness of God's service demanded clean hands and clean feet. Holiness is not careless about defilement. To serve the holy God, one must be made clean.

The New Testament tells us that the cleansing we need has been given to us in Christ. He saved us by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit (Titus 3:5). Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her, that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word (Ephesians 5:26). We are invited to draw near with a true heart, our hearts sprinkled clean and our bodies washed with pure water (Hebrews 10:22). The principle the basin taught, no cleansing, no approach, is gloriously answered in the cleansing we have in the Lord.

We should draw this principle carefully and not force more than the text allows. The basin was a shadow of the cleansing God provides, met now in Christ. We must not read the specifics of New Testament baptism back into the laver, as though Israel's priests were being baptized; the old covenant stood before Christ. But the great truth stands firm and clear: a holy God must be approached by cleansed people, and that cleansing is found in Jesus.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Cleansing was the required condition of priestly approach and service, on pain of death (30:17–21).
- God's holiness is not careless about defilement; to serve Him one must be made clean.
- The cleansing we need is given in Christ (Titus 3:5; Ephesians 5:26; Hebrews 10:22).
- Do not anachronistically read New Testament baptism into the laver; the old covenant stood before Christ. Draw the principle of needed cleansing met in Him.
- The basin was a shadow fulfilled in the Lord, not a practice bound on Christians today.

Discussion Prompts

- Why did God attach so severe a warning to the priests' washing, and what does that reveal about His holiness?
- How does the cleansing we have in Christ answer the principle the bronze basin taught?
- Why is it important to draw the truth of needed cleansing without forcing the details of the laver to mean more than they do?

Question 6

Student Question:

Read 30:19–21 again. The priests needed daily washing even after they had been consecrated for service. In what ongoing ways do you sense the Lord calling you to let Him cleanse you as you walk with Him day by day?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

It is worth noticing that the priests needed to wash repeatedly, not once. Even after their initial consecration, every time they came to minister they washed again (30:19–21). The basin stood ready for daily, ongoing cleansing because the work of serving God was daily and ongoing. Their feet picked up the dust of the courtyard; their hands handled the work of the altar; and so they returned again and again to the water.

This pictures a tender truth about the Christian walk. Though we have been cleansed once for all in Christ, made His own and forgiven, we still walk through a dusty world and still need ongoing cleansing as we go. John writes that if we walk in the light, the blood of Jesus cleanses us from all sin, and if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us and cleanse us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:7–9). The cleansing of our justification is settled; the cleansing of our daily walk continues.

So the question presses gently on each of us. Where has the dust of the world settled on you? What attitudes, words, or compromises has the week left on your hands and feet? The Lord is not waiting to condemn you but inviting you to the water, calling you to bring those things to Him in honest confession and let Him make you clean again before you serve.

This is not a return to the old basin, nor a denial that we are washed in Christ. It is the ordinary, healthy rhythm of a believer who keeps short accounts with God, who lets the Lord search and cleanse him day by day, so that his service and his fellowship stay unhindered and sweet.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The priests washed repeatedly, picturing the believer's need for ongoing cleansing as we walk through a dusty world (30:19–21).
- We are cleansed once for all in Christ, yet still confess and are cleansed daily (1 John 1:7–9).
- Keeping short accounts with God through honest confession keeps fellowship and service unhindered.
- This is the healthy rhythm of sanctification, not a return to the old laver or a denial that we are washed in Christ.
- The Lord invites, rather than merely condemns, when He calls us back to be cleansed.

Discussion Prompts

- Why do believers who are washed in Christ still need ongoing, daily cleansing?
- What does it look like in practice to keep short accounts with God?
- How does seeing the Lord as inviting rather than only condemning change the way we confess sin?

Question 7

Student Question:

Read 30:22–38. The anointing oil and the incense were holy, set apart for God alone, and no one was to imitate them or use them for common purposes on pain of being cut off. What does this teach us about how God regards the things He has made holy, and about the danger of cheapening or counterfeiting them?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

God gave Moses a recipe for a holy anointing oil, a precise blend of myrrh, cinnamon, fragrant cane, cassia, and olive oil (30:22–25), and a recipe for a holy incense, an equal blend of sweet spices with pure frankincense (30:34–35). With the oil the tabernacle and its furniture and the priests were anointed and made holy, set apart for God (30:26–30). Then came the solemn restriction: this oil was not to be poured on ordinary people or made like it for common use, and the incense was not to be copied for personal enjoyment. Whoever made any like them to use as perfume would be cut off from his people (30:32–33, 37–38).

The point is the holiness of what God sets apart. These blends were not magical; they were marked. By God's word they belonged wholly to Him, and to treat them as common, to imitate them for ordinary pleasure, was to profane what God had made holy. The severe penalty, being cut off, shows how seriously God regards the line between the holy and the common.

This theme runs all through Scripture. God says, You shall be holy, for I am holy (1 Peter 1:16). He is jealous over what is His. Nadab and Abihu offered unauthorized fire and died (Leviticus 10:1–2); the men of Beth-shemesh and Uzzah learned that the holy things of God are not to be handled carelessly (1 Samuel 6:19; 2 Samuel 6:6–7). The God who sets things apart for Himself does not allow them to be cheapened, counterfeited, or dragged down to common use.

For us the warning translates into reverence. We may be tempted to counterfeit holy things, to imitate godliness for our own ends, to use the name of God, the worship of God, even the work of God, as a fragrance for our own reputation or comfort. The sacred incense says no. What belongs to God is to be kept holy, undiluted, uncounterfeited, and treated as the precious, set-apart thing it is.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The anointing oil and incense were set apart wholly to God by His word and were not to be imitated or used commonly (30:22–38).

- The penalty of being cut off shows how seriously God regards the line between the holy and the common.
- God is jealous over what is His; the holy is not to be cheapened, counterfeited, or treated carelessly (1 Peter 1:16; Leviticus 10:1-2).
- These were old-covenant ordinances for the tabernacle, fulfilled in Christ and not bound on Christians.
- The abiding principle is reverence: what belongs to God must be kept holy and never bent to common or selfish use.

Discussion Prompts

- Why did God forbid anyone to copy the holy oil and incense, even for innocent enjoyment?
- What does it mean for us to treat the things of God as holy rather than common in our own day?
- Where do we see people counterfeit or cheapen holy things, and how do we guard against it?

Question 8

Student Question:

Read 30:37-38. God said the sacred incense must never be made to enjoy its fragrance for yourself. Where in your life are you tempted to take something meant to be wholly God's and bend it instead toward your own comfort, reputation, or pleasure?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

God was especially pointed about the incense: You shall not make any for yourselves; it shall be for you holy to the LORD. Whoever makes any like it to use as perfume shall be cut off (30:37-38). The forbidden thing was taking what was meant wholly for God and bending it to personal enjoyment, wearing the holy fragrance as one's own perfume. The sin was not making incense; it was making God's incense serve self.

That temptation did not die with the old covenant. It is one of the most subtle dangers in the religious life. We can take things meant to be wholly God's and quietly turn them toward our own comfort, reputation, or pleasure. Prayer can become a performance to be admired. Service can become a way to be needed and praised. Bible knowledge can become a trophy. Even worship can drift into something we attend for what we get out of it rather than what we give to God.

Jesus warned sharply against exactly this when He rebuked those who prayed and gave and fasted to be seen by others, taking the holy things of God and using them as a fragrance for their own glory (Matthew 6:1-18). They had their reward, He said, because they had bent the sacred toward self. The Lord calls us instead to do these holy things unto Him, in secret if need be, for His eyes and His glory.

So search yourself. Is there a holy thing in your life, a ministry, a gift, a discipline, a reputation for godliness, that has slowly become about you? The remedy is not to abandon it but to give it back to God, to let it be holy to the LORD again, offered for His sake and not for your own fragrance.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The forbidden act was bending what was wholly God's toward personal enjoyment (30:37–38).
- Religious people are tempted to turn prayer, service, knowledge, and worship into vehicles for self.
- Jesus rebuked doing holy things to be seen by others, which forfeits the reward (Matthew 6:1–18).
- The remedy is to give the holy thing back to God, offered for His glory rather than our own.
- This is a matter of the heart's motive, which God sees even when others do not.

Discussion Prompts

- How can holy things like prayer, service, or worship quietly become about ourselves?
- What did Jesus mean when He said the religious show-offs had already received their reward?
- What would it look like to give back to God something good that has slowly become about you?

Question 9

Student Question:

Read 31:12–17 with Hebrews 4:1–11 and Colossians 2:16–17. God gave Israel the Sabbath as a sign of His covenant with them under the old law. Why is the Sabbath not bound on Christians today, on what day does the New Testament church gather to worship, and what is the true rest the Sabbath was always pointing toward?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

We come to the heaviest matter in the lesson, and it must be handled plainly. In Exodus 31:12–17 God commands Israel to keep the Sabbath as a sign between Him and them throughout their generations, a sign that He is the LORD who sanctifies them, with severe penalties for breaking it. The crucial words are sign and between me and the people of Israel. The Sabbath was a covenant sign given specifically to Israel under the old law. It was not laid on all nations, and the New Testament never binds it on the church. For a member of the Lord's church this clarity matters greatly, because many sincere people have been burdened with a yoke God never placed on Christians.

The New Testament settles the question. Paul writes, Let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath. These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ (Colossians 2:16–17). The Sabbath was a shadow; Christ is the substance. When the law was nailed to the cross (Colossians 2:14), the Sabbath sign passed away with the covenant it sealed. To keep it now as binding law is to cling to the shadow after the substance has come.

Where, then, does the New Testament church gather? On the first day of the week. The disciples came together to break bread on the first day of the week (Acts 20:7), and Paul directed the churches to set aside their giving on the first day of every week (1 Corinthians 16:2). This is the Lord's Day, the day of His resurrection, the day the church assembles to worship. But notice carefully: the first day is not a Christian Sabbath. The New Testament never transfers Sabbath law to Sunday or commands Sunday rest as law. It simply shows the church worshiping on the day its risen Lord conquered death.

And what was the Sabbath always pointing toward? Rest, the deep rest of the soul that only God can give. Hebrews 4 takes up the Sabbath rest and shows its true substance: There remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God, for whoever has entered God's rest has also rested from his works as God did from his (Hebrews 4:9–10). The rest the weekly Sabbath foreshadowed is found in Christ, who calls, Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest (Matthew 11:28). We do not keep a day to find that rest; we come to a Person.

So teach this passage with both clarity and tenderness. Clarity, so that no one is bound where God has set free or confused about the Lord's Day. Tenderness, because the point is not merely to win an argument but to lead weary souls past the shadow to the substance, into the genuine, lasting rest that is theirs in Jesus Christ.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The Sabbath was a covenant sign given specifically to Israel under the old law, not bound on all nations (31:12–17).
- The New Testament never binds the Sabbath on Christians; it is a shadow whose substance belongs to Christ (Colossians 2:16–17).
- The law, including the Sabbath sign, was nailed to the cross and passed away with the old covenant (Colossians 2:14; Hebrews 8–10).
- The New Testament church gathers to worship on the first day of the week, the Lord's Day (Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 16:2).
- The first day is not a Christian Sabbath; the New Testament does not transfer Sabbath law to Sunday or command Sunday rest as law.
- The Sabbath rest pointed forward to the rest believers enter in Christ (Hebrews 4:9–10; Matthew 11:28).
- Teach this plainly and pastorally, freeing the burdened and leading them to the rest found in Jesus.

Discussion Prompts

- What is the significance of the Sabbath being called a sign between God and Israel, and why does that matter for whether it binds Christians?
- How do Colossians 2:16–17 and Hebrews 4 help us see the Sabbath as a shadow fulfilled in Christ?
- Why does the church worship on the first day of the week, and why is it important to say the Lord's Day is not a Christian Sabbath?

Question 10

Student Question:

Read 31:1–11 and 31:18. God filled Bezalel and Oholiab with His Spirit and skill to build His dwelling, and He wrote His law on tablets of stone. Looking back across this whole passage, name one specific way you sense Jesus forming you, whether in your praying, your cleansing, your service, or your rest in Him.

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The chapter closes the section on a hopeful note. God named Bezalel of the tribe of Judah and filled him with the Spirit of God, with ability and intelligence, with knowledge and all craftsmanship, and gave him Oholiab as his helper, putting skill into all the able men, to make everything God had commanded for the tabernacle (31:1–11). Then, after the Sabbath command, God gave Moses the two tablets of the testimony, tablets of stone written with the finger of God (31:18). God equips people for the work He calls them to, and God Himself wrote His law.

Two truths shine here as we look back across the whole passage. First, God equips. He did not leave the building of His dwelling to chance or to raw human talent; He filled Bezalel and Oholiab with His Spirit and skill for the task. This is a beautiful picture of how God still supplies His people for the service He calls them to. Each of us has received a gift, and we are to use it to serve one another as good stewards of God's varied grace, so that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ (1 Peter 4:10–11; Ephesians 4:11–12). We need not claim the miraculous sign-gifts that authenticated the apostles to affirm that God still equips ordinary believers, through providence and grace, to build up His house, the church.

Second, God wrote His law on tablets of stone (31:18), and that detail invites one final, glorious contrast. Under the old covenant, the law was written on stone, outside the person. Under the new covenant, God writes His law on the heart. I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts (Jeremiah 31:33). You are a letter from Christ, Paul says, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts (2 Corinthians 3:3–6). The stone pointed to something better.

So as we close, let the whole passage form us. The incense calls us to pray. The ransom assures us we are redeemed by the blood of Christ. The basin reminds us we are cleansed in Him. The holy oil calls us to a set-apart life. The Spirit-filled craftsmen invite us to serve with the gifts God supplies. And the rest of the Sabbath draws us to find our rest in Jesus, who now writes His law not on cold stone but on the living tablets of our hearts. This is the heart of true formation: not a law imposed from without, but a Lord at work within.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God equips His people with skill and ability for the service He calls them to (31:1–11).
- Every believer has received a gift to serve others as a steward of God's grace, that God may be glorified through Christ (1 Peter 4:10–11; Ephesians 4:11–12).
- Affirming that God equips ordinary believers does not require claiming the miraculous sign-gifts that authenticated the apostles.
- The law was written on tablets of stone, outside the person, under the old covenant (31:18).
- Under the new covenant God writes His law on the heart (Jeremiah 31:33; 2 Corinthians 3:3–6), an inward, better work.
- The whole passage forms us toward prayer, gratitude for redemption, cleansing, holiness, service, and rest in Christ.
- True spiritual formation is a Lord at work within, not merely a law imposed from without.

Discussion Prompts

- How does God's equipping of Bezalel and Oholiab encourage us about serving in the church today?
- What is the difference between a law written on stone and a law written on the heart, and why does it matter?
- Looking back across this whole passage, name one specific way you sense Jesus forming you right now.