



## Studies in the Book of Exodus

Text

Exodus 30:11-16 & 22-38

Topic

Moses is told to take a census, and he is given the formula for making the anointing oil and the incense

Title

*“Census & Incense-ability”*

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I’ve had people tell me in the aftermath of an operation that their surgeon was a butcher.

Maybe their surgeon was a **barber**.

Up until the 19th century barbers were generally referred to as barber-surgeons, and they were called upon to perform a wide variety of tasks. They treated and extracted teeth, branded slaves, created ritual tattoos or scars, cut out gallstones and hangnails, set fractures, gave enemas, and lanced abscesses. Many patients would go to their local barber for semi-annual bloodletting. They wore many hats.

In certain cities across the country, Public Safety Officers wear many hats. They are cross-trained to be police officers, firefighters, and EMT's all at once. I found out yesterday that the City of Visalia once experimented with Public Safety Officers.

You know who else wore many hats? Moses. We've seen him as a noble in Egypt... A vigilante... A fugitive from justice... A shepherd... A deliverer of slaves... A river guide ... A judge... A law-giver... And a General Contractor.

In our verses today, his resume takes on two additional professions:

1. In verses eleven through sixteen, the Lord appoints Moses as a **Census Taker**.
2. In verses twenty-two through thirty-eight, the Lord appoints him as a **perfumer**.

As we comment on Moses' job performance, we will also note a correlation between his two new professions and things that we are called upon to consider as those being "in Christ."

I'll organize my comments around two points: #1 Consider The Accounting You Will Give, and #2 Conduct Yourself As An Apothecary.

(I should mention why we are skipping verses one through ten, and verses seventeen through twenty-one. They describe the Altar of Incense and the Bronze Wash Basin, respectively. We looked at them already, when we discussed the seven articles that furnished the Tabernacle).

## #1 Consider The Accounting You Will Give (v11-16)

Numbers seem important to churches. I found an article titled, *How Healthy is Your Church? These 18 Numbers Will Tell You*. The top five were:

1. Number of first time guests.
2. Percentage of returning guests.
3. Percentage of guests who stick.
4. Number of first-time decisions for Christ.
5. Number of baptisms.

By number 18 I realized they were trying to sell me Church Evaluation Software.

We tend to shy away from numbers. Not just because we think them mechanical rather than spiritual. We shy away from numbers because they can be dangerous.

The census in Exodus is a case in point. God warned Moses that unless he took certain precautions, taking the census might result in Him calling down a plague upon the people.

Exo 30:11 Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying:

Exo 30:12 "When you take the census of the children of Israel for their number..."

This initial census was commissioned by God. It was His idea. Best-guess as to why was that the people would be preparing the military campaign to take the Promised Land. Men over age twenty were being identified as the army of Israel.

Why so much census-sensitivity?

- If the number was huge, it would tend to foster over-confidence.
- If the number was small, there could be a foreboding of defeat before a sword was ever unsheathed.

Either way, numbers can distort your reliance on the Lord; and they are especially dangerous if large because they foster a fleshly pride.

An anecdote is told of Thomas Aquinas that upon entering the presence of Innocent II, before whom a large sum of money was spread out, the Pope observed, “You see Thomas, the church is no longer in that Age in which she said, “Silver and gold have I none.” “True,” he replied, “And neither can she say to the lame, ‘Rise up and walk.’ ”

Exo 30:11 Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying:

Exo 30:12 "When you take the census of the children of Israel for their number, then every man shall give a ransom for himself to the LORD, when you number them, that there may be no plague among them when *you* number them.

The wrong motive for numbering would bring judgment in the form of a plague. The money acted as a “ransom,” guaranteeing protection from plagues. Paying it was an act of faith, declaring that whatever the final number, their trust was in the Lord.

We don't think that certain church metrics will incite a measles outbreak; but trusting in the arm of the flesh rather than the Holy Spirit is a terrible plague of sorts.

In the New Testament, the married couple, Ananias and Saphira found out about numbers and plagues. They lied about the size of their one-time property donation to the church and, one-by-one, God struck them dead for lying to the Holy Spirit.

Exo 30:13 This is what everyone among those who are numbered shall give: half a shekel according to the shekel of the sanctuary (a shekel *is* twenty gerahs). The half-shekel *shall be* an offering to the LORD.

Exo 30:14 Everyone included among those who are numbered, from twenty years old and above, shall give an offering to the LORD.

“You got change for a gerah?” Foreign currency always confuses me. Ten US dollars is over five-hundred Philippine pesos.

Exo 30:15 The rich shall not give more and the poor shall not give less than half a shekel, when *you* give an offering to the LORD, to make atonement for yourselves.

This “atonement” was not to cover sin. Blood was required for that. No, this was a prescribed amount of money to symbolize that each individual was being counted without any regard to how rich or how poor they were. In other words, it was not about establishing might or power - it was a humble counting devoid of ulterior motives.

Exo 30:16 And you shall take the atonement money of the children of Israel, and shall appoint it for the service of the tabernacle of meeting, that it may be a memorial for the children of Israel before the LORD, to make atonement for yourselves.”

This initial collection of the half-shekel would later be used to justify the annual collection of a Temple tax - for sure during the Second Temple, and at some point in the First.

Back in January of 2017, the Sanhedrin in Israel reinstated the Temple tax. It is voluntary, but significant in light of the Bible predicting the building of a Third Temple that will be standing in the future seven-year Great Tribulation.

Moses was told to count the Israelites prior to them entering the Promised Land. In the New Testament, there are a few nods to numbers of saved individuals:

- On the Day of Pentecost, we're told 3000 were added to their number. It appears that number included men, women and kids.
- Later in Acts 4:4, we are told about five thousand believers, and it is clear that they are counting men only, so the number of people was likely greater.

Someday there will be a final number, then the Lord will return to resurrect the dead in Christ, and rapture living believers. The number is referred to as "the fullness of the Gentiles," which we take to be a reference to the last member of the church being saved prior to our removal (Romans 11:25).

While the Lord adds to the church, we should look ahead to a different kind of counting - an **accounting** of our works, to be given to the Lord when we see Him face-to-face:

2Co 5:9 Therefore we make it our aim, whether present or absent, to be well pleasing to Him.

2Co 5:10 For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things *done* in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.

1Co 3:12 Now if anyone builds on this foundation *with* gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw,

1Co 3:13 each one's work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is.

1Co 3:14 If anyone's work which he has built on *it* endures, he will receive a reward.

1Co 3:15 If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.

It's not a judgment regarding your salvation; it's regarding your works while saved. Rather than go into a long exhortation, let's just take to heart Paul's counsel when he said, "make it [your] aim to be well pleasing to [the Lord]."

Do that and the "gold, silver, precious stones" works will follow.

## #2 Conduct Yourself As An Apothecary (v22-38)

Certain professions or hobbies have rather odd names:

- A philatelist is a person interested in, and probably a collector of, postage stamps.
- A spelunker is a person who explores caves.
- An *esculerie* is a dishwasher - usually in one of those fancy Top Chef sort of restaurants.

The “perfumer” mentioned in our verses is also known as an *apothecary*.

Exo 30:22 Moreover the LORD spoke to Moses, saying:

Exo 30:23 "Also take for yourself quality spices - five hundred *shekels* of liquid myrrh, half as much sweet-smelling cinnamon (two hundred and fifty *shekels*), two hundred and fifty *shekels* of sweet-smelling cane,

Exo 30:24 five hundred *shekels* of cassia, according to the shekel of the sanctuary, and a hin of olive oil.

Exo 30:25 And you shall make from these a holy anointing oil, an ointment compounded according to the art of the perfumer. It shall be a holy anointing oil.

Anointing, or you might say “pouring,” oil on a person was both an *ordinary* and an *official* practice among the Israelites. There are several references to it in the Bible, as an expected refreshment to guests, for example.

As an official practice, it was a rite of inauguration into the offices of Prophets, Priests, and Kings.

Certain objects were anointed with oil to signify they had been set apart for a particular religious purpose and were not for ordinary use.

Moses receives the ingredients and, we suppose, the formula for the anointing oil that was to be used in the Tabernacle.

Exo 30:26 With it you shall anoint the tabernacle of meeting and the ark of the Testimony;

Exo 30:27 the table and all its utensils, the lampstand and its utensils, and the altar of incense;



Exo 30:28 the altar of burnt offering with all its utensils, and the laver and its base.

Exo 30:29 You shall consecrate them, that they may be most holy; whatever touches them must be holy.

Quick story: In our first year as a church, we hosted a New Year's Eve dinner. We rented another church's Fellowship Hall. We wanted to serve communion, but we didn't have any trays or supplies. We asked if we could borrow the trays and supplies of the church we were renting. The answer was "No," because (we were informed) only the elders of that church were allowed to touch the trays.

Same church - only some years later we were in their Sanctuary performing a wedding. On their stage were an American flag and the Christian flag. Nothing wrong with that - but not great as a background for your wedding photos. The wedding coordinator at the church told the photographer only the elders could move the flags.

I figured I was equivalent to an elder and moved them.

Then there was the time I put on a robe we found while rehearsing for a wedding at the Episcopal Church.

Obviously we think that treating objects with that kind of anointing is not really a New Testament practice. The Tabernacle and its priests and paraphernalia were anointed, true; but today, **we** are the Temple of the Holy Spirit, *not* our building or any of its furnishings.

Exo 30:30 And you shall anoint Aaron and his sons, and consecrate them, that *they* may minister to Me as priests.

I pointed out last time that this anointing involved pouring over their heads a large quantity of this oil - enough to run through Aaron's beard and onto his beautiful garments.

I joked about the paltry amount of oil normally used today to anoint someone. If you're going to cite the Old Testament for doing something, then do it the way it was done. Pour oil - don't just think "a little dab'll do ya."

Exo 30:31 "And you shall speak to the children of Israel, saying: 'This shall be a holy anointing oil to Me throughout your generations.

Exo 30:32 It shall not be poured on man's flesh; nor shall you make *any other* like it, according to its composition. It *is* holy, *and* it shall be holy to you.

That phrase, "man's flesh," always reminds me of that scene in *The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers* where one of the Orc's talks about eating "man flesh." Here it means anyone who is not a priest.

Exo 30:33 Whoever compounds *any* like it, or whoever puts *any* of it on an outsider, shall be cut off from his people.' "

You couldn't go on Etsy or eBay and buy the oil "as used in the Tabernacle." It was exclusive.

The apothecaries among the Israelites were not to duplicate and distribute this oil under penalty of banishment.

Exo 30:34 And the LORD said to Moses: "Take sweet spices, stacte and onycha and galbanum, and pure frankincense with *these* sweet spices; there shall be equal amounts of each.

Exo 30:35 You shall make of these an incense, a compound according to the art of the perfumer, salted, pure, *and* holy.

Exo 30:36 And you shall beat *some* of it very fine, and put some of it before the Testimony in the tabernacle of meeting where I will meet with you. It shall be most holy to you.

The priests were charged with burning the correct incense in the way prescribed.

Exo 30:37 But *as for* the incense which you shall make, you shall not make any for yourselves, according to its composition. It shall be to you holy for the LORD.

Exo 30:38 Whoever makes *any* like it, to smell it, he shall be cut off from his people."

Same disclaimer as with the oil. Don't mess around with a copycat.

You've probably noticed that we are not burning incense; nor are we pouring oil over your heads upon arrival. I've already indicated that we - our bodies, and our collective 'body' - are the Temple of God on the earth.

With regard to anointing, we first take note that Jesus was anointed. It was not by oil, but by the Holy Spirit.

In the Old Testament a Deliverer is promised under the title of Messiah, which translates to Anointed One (Psalm 2:2, Daniel 9:25&26). The nature of his anointing is described to be spiritual, with the Holy Spirit. In Isaiah 61:1, we read,

Isa 61:1 "The **Spirit** of the Lord GOD is upon Me, Because the LORD has **anointed** Me To preach good tidings to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, To proclaim liberty to the captives, And the opening of the prison to those who are bound;

Jesus applied Isaiah 61 to Himself. He was the anointed one.

Being "in Christ," as believers, we, too, experience this spiritual anointing:

2Co 1:21 Now He who establishes us with you in Christ and has **anointed** us is God,

1Jn 2:27 But the **anointing** which you have received from Him abides in you, and you do not need that anyone teach you; but as the same **anointing** teaches you concerning all things, and is true, and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you will abide in Him.

After Jesus left the earth, He gave us the gift of the Holy Spirit. It is in that sense that all Christians are anointed.

Nonetheless we often refer to the anointing of the Holy Spirit as if it were an add-on that certain more spiritual Christians have. We use the term "Spirit-filled Christian" to describe them.

Commenting on that, noted Pentecostal scholar Gordon Fee writes,

For [the first Christians], it was not merely a matter of getting saved, forgiven, prepared for Heaven. It was above all else to receive the Spirit, to walk... with power. They simply would not have understood our Pentecostal terminology - "Spirit-filled

Christian." That would be like saying "Scandinavian Swede." They simply did not think of Christian initiation as a two-stage process. For them, to be Christian meant to have the Spirit, to be a "Spirit person." To be "spiritual," therefore, did not mean to be some kind of special Christian, a Christian elitist. For them, to be spiritual meant to be a Christian - not over against a nominal (or carnal) Christian, but over against a non-Christian, one who does not have the Spirit.

Fee goes on to argue, "that nowhere does the New Testament say, "Get saved, and then be filled with the Spirit." To them, getting saved... meant especially to be filled with the Spirit. That all believers in Christ are Spirit-filled is the presupposition of the New Testament writers. Thus the imperative is, "Keep on being full of the Holy Spirit" (Ephesians 5:18).

Why do some believers seem Spirit-filled while others do not? It's largely because the church, in its subsequent history, moved away from emphasizing the Spirit's empowerment.

One final quote from Gordon Fee: "The result was the unfortunate omission of this valid, biblical dimension of Christian life from the life of most Christians in the subsequent history of the church."

We see this today. Most of the guys teaching God's Word on the radio (the non-Calvary guys, that is) are what we would call cessationists. They proclaim that the supernatural gifts of the Spirit have ceased, along with the miraculous, because we now have the completed canon of the Bible. They thus downplay the role of the Spirit in the Christian life.

In a bit of sarcasm, some say that these cessationists believe in God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Bible.

What often happens is a person who is in that cessationist tradition comes, either through study or circumstances, to long for the empowering of the Spirit, and when they receive it by faith, it seems as if it is a “second blessing.” Their subsequent experience is valid, but the norm is to understand the Spirit’s empowering from day one.

The apostle Paul’s exhortation to “go on being filled with the Spirit” assumes it is normal to begin the Christian life empowered and gifted. In another place he asks, “having begun in the Spirit, are you now made perfect by the flesh?” (Galatians 3:3). In other words, the norm is to be empowered by the Spirit, but it is all too common to begin to rely more on the flesh.

Don’t talk your way out of being filled with the Spirit on account of your favorite Bible teacher telling you there’s no such thing anymore, or that it is simply a matter of reading your Bible more. Read your Bible more **and** discover the dynamic power available to you via the indwelling Spirit.

What about the incense? One clear parallel with us would be the apostle Paul’s teaching that our very lives give off a heavenly aroma.

2Co 2:15 For we are to God the fragrance of Christ among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing.

2Co 2:16 To the one *we are* the aroma of death *leading* to death, and to the other the aroma of life *leading* to life. And who *is* sufficient for these things?

The imagery isn’t from the incense in the Tabernacle; it’s from Rome.

If a commander won a complete victory over the enemy on foreign soil, and if he killed at least 5000 enemy soldiers and gained new territory for the Emperor, then that commander was entitled to a Roman Triumph. The processional would include the commander riding in a golden chariot, surrounded by his officers. The parade would also include a display of the spoils of battle, as well as the captive enemy soldiers.

The Roman priests would also be in the parade, carrying burning incense to pay tribute to the victorious army.

The procession would follow a special route through the city and would end at the Circus Maximus where the helpless captives would entertain the people by fighting wild beasts.

Jesus Christ, your great Commander, came to foreign soil (this earth) and completely defeated the enemy (Satan). Instead of killing 5000, as we've said, He gave life for more than 5000 to be saved. Jesus Christ claimed the spoils - lost souls who had been in bondage to sin and Satan.

As I mentioned, the priests followed the victorious general and burned incense. The fragrance of that incense diffused throughout the crowds. If you were a citizen of Rome, the fragrance was a sweet fragrance of victory. But if you were a prisoner, it was the awful aroma of your coming death.

Your testimony of Jesus, and your sharing of the Gospel, "diffuses the fragrance of His knowledge in every place." Wherever Christians go with the fragrance of Jesus, some receive the Lord and are saved, while some reject the Lord and remain lost in their sins:

- To those who reject the Lord, the Gospel is an aroma that should warn them of their second death – their eternal separation from God in their sins.
- To those who receive the Lord, the Gospel is an aroma that fills them with new life as it provides the forgiveness of sins and eternal life.

Among the many hats you wear, you are an apothecary who will one day give your accounting to the Lord.

Stick to the original formula of being continuously Spirit-filled. If that seems foreign to you, meditate on these words of Jesus - spoken to believers already in Christ:

Luk 11:9 "So I say to you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.

Luk 11:10 For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened.

Luk 11:11 If a son asks for bread from any father among you, will he give him a stone? Or if *he asks* for a fish, will he give him a serpent instead of a fish?

Luk 11:12 Or if he asks for an egg, will he offer him a scorpion?

Luk 11:13 If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will *your* heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!"