

EXODUS—WEEK 24

INTENDED PURPOSES



F. Michael Slay
A DEEP Study

The Fellowship of Ailbe

*The Cover Picture is Moses at Mount Sinai by Jacques de Létin (1597–1661)
on display at MuseumMusée des beaux-arts, Troyes, France*

God designs things, the bronze basin in this case. Then He designs recipes, for the anointing oil and the incense. Then He designs people, to make everything. Everything has its intended purpose, even the ransom to be paid by all the people.

Thus the LORD completes the specifications for His tabernacle.

We're pleased to provide *the DEEP* studies in PDF format at no charge. We hope you will find them helpful and encouraging as you press on in your journey toward spiritual maturity in the Lord.

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We are a spiritual fellowship patterned after the Celtic Revival. Our goal is to promote revival, renewal, and awakening, following the teaching of Scripture and the example and heritage of our forebears in the faith.

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Thank you.

Exodus 30:11–31:11 — Intended Purposes
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1 Exodus 30:11–16 (ESV)

The LORD said to Moses, “When you take the census of the people of Israel, then each shall give a ransom for his life to the LORD when you number them, that there be no plague among them when you number them. Each one who is numbered in the census shall give this: half a shekel according to the shekel of the sanctuary (the shekel is twenty gerahs), half a shekel as an offering to the LORD. Everyone who is numbered in the census, from twenty years old and upward, shall give the LORD's offering. The rich shall not give more, and the poor shall not give less, than the half shekel, when you give the LORD's offering to make atonement for your lives. You shall take the atonement money from the people of Israel and shall give it for the service of the tent of meeting, that it may bring the people of Israel to remembrance before the LORD, so as to make atonement for your lives.”

Okay, but why is the LORD threatening a plague? And why does He call this a ransom instead of a tax?

First, some background. The ransom is just for males over twenty (see Numbers 26:2).

“Take a census of all the congregation of the people of Israel, from twenty years old and upward, by their fathers' houses, all in Israel who are able to go to war.”

Only men *able to go to war* are counted. This will show that they're a formidable army. That's a problem.

And Joab gave the sum of the numbering of the people to the king: in Israel there were 800,000 valiant men who drew the sword, and the men of Judah were 500,000. But David's heart struck him after he had numbered the people. And David said to the LORD, “I have sinned greatly in what I have done. But now, O LORD, please take away the iniquity of your servant, for I have done very foolishly.” — 2 Samuel 24:9–10 (ESV)

The problem is overconfidence. The Israelites are learning to trust themselves instead of depending on God. That's why the “tax” is called a ransom and why the LORD threatens a plague on anyone who doesn't pay. It's a ransom because it's *to make atonement for your lives*.

And what's wrong with their lives? Sin. Despite the Israelites daily dependence on manna, they need to be reminded of their dependency on God. This answers another question. Why is the ransom the same for all, rich or poor?

Because everyone is sinful.

This one-size-fits-all principle sets the stage for the cross. No one is so bad that the cross can't cover his sin. No one is so good that he doesn't need it. Christianity views everyone as equals in what matters most. We're all created in the image of God, and we're all guilty of sin. This basic equality is so foundational to our civilization that we have formally declared it to be obvious.

“We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights.” — The Declaration of Independence

2 Exodus 30:17–21 (NIV)

Then the LORD said to Moses, “Make a bronze basin, with its bronze stand, for washing. Place it between the tent of meeting and the altar, and put water in it. Aaron and his sons are to wash their hands and feet with water from it. Whenever they enter the tent of meeting, they shall wash with water so that they will not die. Also, when they approach the altar to minister by presenting a food offering to the LORD, they shall wash their hands and feet so that they will not die. This is to be a lasting ordinance for Aaron and his descendants for the generations to come.”

Imagine this sign in a restaurant bathroom.

“Employees must wash their hands before returning to work—so that they will not die.”

Signs like this are common (without the death clause, of course). They sometimes include a reference to a state law. I’d love to see one with the full text above. They could include the reference, “— Exodus 30:21” at the bottom. At least it would get folks to look up the verse.

So, God’s wants His priests to wash up. You got a problem with that? If it’s a good idea for restaurants, why not the tabernacle? Sure, the capital punishment bit is extreme, but it’s His tabernacle and His rules. Is washing up really too much to ask?

But there’s an interesting aspect to this that’s easy to miss. It’s not really capital punishment. It doesn’t say, “shall be put to death.” It just says “die.” All life is from God. His taking away life isn’t killing; it’s ceasing giving.

It’s like dying of natural causes.

This “God as the sustainer of life” perspective is relevant in many ways. For example, we pray a lot for healing. There’s nothing wrong with that; God is the great healer.

But I wonder if we’re coming at this the wrong way. We think of God fixing us like the way we think of a surgeon fixing us.

But a surgeon isn’t the original life giver. He/she is just an outside agent. Conversely, God doesn’t “fix.” He restores. He creates. He blesses. He’s not external to the situation; He’s the creator, owner, and Lord of everything.

None of this necessarily changes the wording of our prayers. We normally plead for a particular outcome; we don’t tell God how He should do it. This concept just changes how we view God’s relationship to the thing we want to see fixed.

The difference is that we’re asking God to change His “pride and joy.” You belong to Him. He doesn’t care about you the way a surgeon cares about you.

His love goes much deeper than that.

3 Exodus 30:22–33 (ESV)

The LORD said to Moses, “Take the finest spices: of liquid myrrh 500 shekels, and of sweet-smelling cinnamon half as much, that is, 250, and 250 of aromatic cane, and 500 of cassia, according to the shekel of the sanctuary, and a hin of olive oil. And you shall make of these a sacred anointing oil blended as by the perfumer; it shall be a holy anointing oil. With it you shall anoint the tent of meeting and the ark of the testimony, and the table and all its utensils, and the lampstand and its utensils, and the altar of incense, and the altar of burnt offering with all its utensils and the basin and its stand. You shall consecrate them, that they may be most holy. Whatever touches them will become holy. You shall anoint Aaron and his sons, and consecrate them, that they may serve me as priests. And you shall say to the people of Israel, ‘This shall be my holy anointing oil throughout your generations. It shall not be poured on the body of an ordinary person, and you shall make no other like it in composition. It is holy, and it shall be holy to you. Whoever compounds any like it or whoever puts any of it on an outsider shall be cut off from his people.’”

The copyright on this recipe for anointing oil is so strong that anyone who alters or missuses it *shall be cut off from his people*. That’s similar to excommunication, except that there’s a sense of being removed from the family tree.

Such a severe consequence for such a seemingly minor infraction may seem unfair. Yet there are many things in life where the penalties for breaking a rule are disproportionately severe.

“Don’t run out in the street in front of cars.” “If you see a snake with a rattle on its tail, don’t play with it.” Are the consequences for violating these rules unfair?

Of course not. Life is full of easy ways to kill yourself. The “punishment” in those cases doesn’t seem to fit the “crime.” Yet, no one complains that this is unfair. It just is.

The rule about the oil would be unfair if God didn’t warn people about what to avoid, or didn’t explain what the consequences would be. This passage is that warning; God is making the rules and the consequences perfectly clear. While avoiding all sin is beyond our skill set, some of God’s commands are easy to obey.

This is like the classic doctor’s office skit:

Patient (stretching his arm behind his back), “*Doc, it hurts when I do this.*”

Doctor, “*Then don’t do that.*”

This is why children’s education is so important. There are many things in life, and in Christianity, that are simple. Yet without proper instruction, no one could figure these things out on their own.

Children need teachers. Their teachers need your prayers.

Their task is to teach them the essential (yet often obvious to adults) rules for how to live.

4 Exodus 30:34–38 (ESV)

The LORD said to Moses, “Take sweet spices, stacte, and onycha, and galbanum, sweet spices with pure frankincense (of each shall there be an equal part), and make an incense blended as by the perfumer, seasoned with salt, pure and holy. You shall beat some of it very small, and put part of it before the testimony in the tent of meeting where I shall meet with you. It shall be most holy for you. And the incense that you shall make according to its composition, you shall not make for yourselves. It shall be for you holy to the LORD. Whoever makes any like it to use as perfume shall be cut off from his people.”

Just as we saw with the anointing oil, anyone who uses this incense recipe for a common purpose *shall be cut off from his people*. Intriguingly, these passages don’t say who will do the cutting off. Are the Israelites instructed to cut someone off if they catch them doing this, or is this saying that God will cut them off?

It’s God. There are many prohibitions where the offender is *cut off from his people* (Israel). In some cases, the LORD specifically says that He’ll be the one doing it.

“I myself will set my face against that man and will cut him off from among his people, because he has given one of his children to Molech, to make my sanctuary unclean and to profane my holy name. And if the people of the land do at all close their eyes to that man when he gives one of his children to Molech, and do not put him to death, then I will set my face against that man and against his clan and will cut them off from among their people, him and all who follow him in whoring after Molech.

If a person turns to mediums and necromancers, whoring after them, I will set my face against that person and will cut him off from among his people.” — Leviticus 20:3–6 (ESV)

In many of these other cases, it would be difficult to prove that someone committed a violation. In this passage, no rules for judging these cases are given. It appears that getting cut off is a judgment of God.

That’s worse. It means expulsion from the covenant and from His blessing.

Praise God that He transcends rules like these through grace. One of the prime ways the modern church models this is through prison ministry. Always pray for those ministries. They need them more than most.

And don’t forget to pray for the prisoners too. Some are very serious believers. Others are very serious unbelievers. They range from the most encouraging to the least.

But if God can turn Saul into Paul, salvation has no limits. Ask the LORD to work in their hearts. Ask God to help us minister to them effectively, and, most importantly, to minister in a way that glorifies Him.

That’s just a start. Consider getting educated about prison ministries in your area—educated enough that you give the Holy Spirit the opportunity to call you in this direction.

That call doesn’t have to happen—it didn’t with me—but you’ll know enough to pray detailed prayers.

5 Exodus 31:1–11 (ESV)

The LORD said to Moses, “See, I have called by name Bezalel the son of Uri, son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah, and I have filled him with the Spirit of God, with ability and intelligence, with knowledge and all craftsmanship, to devise artistic designs, to work in gold, silver, and bronze, in cutting stones for setting, and in carving wood, to work in every craft. And behold, I have appointed with him Oholiab, the son of Ahisamach, of the tribe of Dan. And I have given to all able men ability, that they may make all that I have commanded you: the tent of meeting, and the ark of the testimony, and the mercy seat that is on it, and all the furnishings of the tent, the table and its utensils, and the pure lampstand with all its utensils, and the altar of incense, and the altar of burnt offering with all its utensils, and the basin and its stand, and the finely worked garments, the holy garments for Aaron the priest and the garments of his sons, for their service as priests, and the anointing oil and the fragrant incense for the Holy Place. According to all that I have commanded you, they shall do.”

This is a new twist. Instead of just telling people what to do, God gives gifts to people so that they can do it themselves. This is a magnificent foretaste of the spiritual gifts He gives to us.

But there’s an implication here that every Christian should think hard about. If God has specifically given Bezalel and Oholiab the ability *to devise artistic designs*, then what’s going to happen if they pray to Him and say, “O LORD, please tell us what this piece is supposed to look like.”?

His answer should be something like, “I gave you the skills. You decide.”

This is an important category of answered prayer—one we often don’t think about.

For example, consider prayers for guidance that are “yes/no” questions. There can be three answers: “yes,” “no,” and “You need to decide this on your own.” God may want you to face a tough decision without Him bailing you out. (Note: asking for a confirming sign for a tentative decision is different.)

And the stark truth is that His plan may include you making the wrong decision so that you can learn and grow. The process of sanctification can be brutal, especially when big progress is on the menu.

So, when you pray for guidance, consider allowing for all three possibilities. For example, you usually shouldn’t flip a coin so that heads means you do something, and tails you don’t. That leaves out the third possibility and forces a yes or no answer. Would you really expect God to honor that?

Do not test the LORD your God, as you did at Massah. — Deuteronomy 6:16 (NIV)

Of course, you may not be able to put this into practice today; prayers for guidance only happen when you’re facing a big decision. But when the time arrives, think about how to pray properly and respectfully.

Prayers can be manipulative.

Questions for reflection or discussion

1. In what ways does our society fall short of treating everyone equally?
2. When thinking of Jesus as Lord, what does “Lord” mean?
3. What “rules of life” seem most unfair?
4. Would you hire an ex con?
5. When has God helped you make a decision?