

## Naked Bible Podcast Transcript

Episode 307

Exodus 30-31

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### Episode Summary

Exodus 30-31 completes the Torah description of the instructions for the Tabernacle and its furnishings. In this episode of the podcast we'll talk about the altar of incense, the "horn" imagery used of the altar and elsewhere, the meaning and function of incense, and Bezalel and Oholiab, the main craftsmen picked by God for Tabernacle construction.

### Transcript

**TS:** Welcome to the Naked Bible Podcast, Episode 307: Exodus 30 and 31. I'm the layman, Trey Stricklin, and he's the scholar, Dr. Michael Heiser. Hey, Mike! What's going on?

**MH:** Well, doing pretty well. We're in the new year. I know what I'm working on now. I have my writing projects, the new school... It's pretty good. This is what I like to do (turn out content). Here I am in Florida, able to do that every day. So I couldn't really ask for anything better.

**TS:** Tell us about your FaithLife *Unseen Realm* movie. That's coming out, right?

**MH:** Yeah, the debut of that was January 6<sup>th</sup>, although I don't know how many people actually know about that. It might be fair to say that most people (other than me) would probably know the details better than I would. [laughs] I actually had to go ask. But yeah, it came out January 6<sup>th</sup>. People seemed to like it. I'm glad for the response, anyway. The response has been good. I don't know when the other one's... Before we moved, I actually filmed a couple of hours' worth for the other two books (*Angels and Demons*). I think they're going to hold that until the *Demons* book comes out. So they're working on something else that'll... I don't know that it'll look like *Unseen Realm*, because for *Unseen Realm* we had guest scholars come in and contribute to it. I think for these other ones, it'll just be me, kind of like *Aliens and Demons* was (just me). But response to *Unseen Realm* has been pretty good. So they're happy, I'm happy.

**TS:** Give us a little 10-second pitch on what the documentary covered. Is this going through your book, basically, in video format?

**MH:** Yeah, the documentary will cover the content highlights of the book. The way we did the script was that I worked with Reuben (who was the director) on the script. And we just more or less decided to assign scholars parts of the script based upon their interest or their expertise. So it's broken up pretty well in terms of who's contributing. But from start to finish, it works through the content of *Unseen Realm* at a bird's-eye level.

**TS:** So is the book still selling?

**MH:** Oh, yeah. The book is still selling.

**TS:** That's good.

**MH:** Yep. We're four years in now, and it's still selling. The last number I actually saw was the book had sold 113,000 units. But that's a couple of months old now. But yeah, it still sells. When they gave me that number, I said, "Well, that's a good start." And I meant it. I wasn't trying to be silly. But that's a good start. I believe that the book hasn't penetrated lots of places where it needs to, and Lord willing, it will.

**TS:** That has to be their highest selling book of all time. Surely.

**MH:** Oh, yeah. It's not even close. It's far and away. So everybody's happy with the content. And Lexham still wants to be my publisher going forward, even though I don't work there anymore. And I have really good reasons to want that as well. So that's going to factor into projects that I pick. But for this year, I more or less knew what I needed to be working on before I moved. And they're not so much a factor in 2020. But going forward, I expect Lexham certainly will be in the picture there.

**TS:** Hopefully they will not take as long to release your other book as they did *Demons*. [MH laughs] So if you could put that in one of your contract clauses...

**MH:** I know, right? [laughs]

**TS:** We would appreciate that. And your *Demons* book is around the corner. Remind us when that drops?

**MH:** Yeah, it's around the corner again. The end of April.

**TS:** Okay.

**MH:** There should be, like, some time bomb in the contract, like, "If you don't publish it by this date, then the contract dies," or something.

**TS:** Absolutely. So what's after that? Are you writing something now that you can talk about that's after *Demons*? Something now that you're...

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**MH:** Not sequentially. Basically, while I was with Lexham, we were trying to pick topics that made sense in the context of Unseen Realm (drill down on this or that). What I'm working on now is the third novel. And I've gone back to the (I don't know what to call it) astral prophecy thing. Which is not a really good way to characterize the book. But essentially, it's about as close to eschatology as I'll ever get. But it's bent toward the use and abuse of signs-in-the-sky language in Scripture to interpret prophecy. So I won't go through the various circumstances that told me, "Yeah, I need to go back to that." But they were pretty clear. So that's what I'm working on. I don't know that any of it... Well, I think some of it would relate to what would happen after *Unseen Realm* (like if there's an *Unseen Realm 2* or an *Unseen Realm 3*) because it's getting into sacred calendar and feast days and all that stuff. Some of it may relate, but not as directly as the others.

**TS:** Do we have a rough time frame?

**MH:** I'm hoping that both of them will be shipping by the end of 2020. That's my goal anyway.

**TS:** And speaking of what else is coming out at the end of this year, don't forget our cruise, Mike. So you can go to [NakedBibleTours.com](http://NakedBibleTours.com), and in October, we're going on... You're going to be presenting for the first time your *Unseen Realm 2* kind of material. And so you're going to want to go on the Naked Bible Cruise. [NakedBibleTours.com](http://NakedBibleTours.com) to get more information about that. We don't want to forget that, so we have to keep reminding people about that.

**MH:** Yeah, that will be Unseen Realm 2 stuff. So if you want to get that sort of content in a timely fashion (maybe before you die or something like that) [laughs], you have to sign up for the cruise. [laughs] How's that for marketing, Trey? [laughs]

**TS:** Perfect. Perfect.

**MH:** Take the cruise before you die. [laughs]

**TS:** Perfect. That's awesome. Alright, Mike. Well, I guess that's the end of the year. And this year, we still have Exodus to wrap up. We're inching closer to it. This week we have Exodus 30 and 31.

**MH:** Yep. No Part 1. It's just Exodus 30 and 31. So yeah, we are headed toward the end. Because once we hit 35-40, it's a lot of repetition. So we may just group those chapters into one episode, kind of like we did with Ezekiel 40-48 with the Temple, even though that one was two parts (the end of the book of Ezekiel). We

may end up doing the same thing here. But for today, Exodus 30 and 31... If you read through these chapters, it's really a smattering of topics and items. There's more Tabernacle furniture, stuff about oil and incense. Then in 31, the guys who God picked to build (supervise, at least) the Tabernacle construction—so on and so forth. There's just a smattering of different things. And since we're going to get into more Tabernacle furniture, specifically the incense altar, I'm also going to loop back here in the first few minutes to the bronze altar in Exodus 27, because we had skipped that at the time to get into 28 and 29. So I'm going to pick that up and discuss the two altars together. I think it's just a convenient way to do it.

So we'll start there, with the altars. I'm going to go back and read Exodus 27:1-8. Then I'm going to read Exodus 30:1-10 about the altar of incense. So you're going to see right away that there are similarities and differences here.

**“You shall make the altar of acacia wood, five cubits long and five cubits broad. The altar shall be square, and its height shall be three cubits. <sup>2</sup>And you shall make horns for it on its four corners; its horns shall be of one piece with it, and you shall overlay it with bronze. <sup>3</sup>You shall make pots for it to receive its ashes, and shovels and basins and forks and fire pans. You shall make all its utensils of bronze. <sup>4</sup>You shall also make for it a grating, a network of bronze [MH: you see a pattern emerging here], and on the net you shall make four bronze rings at its four corners. <sup>5</sup>And you shall set it under the ledge of the altar so that the net extends halfway down the altar. <sup>6</sup>And you shall make poles for the altar, poles of acacia wood, and overlay them with bronze. <sup>7</sup>And the poles shall be put through the rings, so that the poles are on the two sides of the altar when it is carried. <sup>8</sup>You shall make it hollow, with boards. As it has been shown you on the mountain, so shall it be made.**

Now when we get to Exodus 30, we get another altar. You're going to see similarities here but also differences. The first 10 verses of Exodus 30:

**“You shall make an altar on which to burn incense; you shall make it of acacia wood [MH: just like the other one]. <sup>2</sup>A cubit shall be its length, and a cubit its breadth. It shall be square, and two cubits shall be its height. Its horns shall be of one piece with it [MH: that's also just like the other altar]. <sup>3</sup>You shall overlay it with pure gold, its top and around its sides and its horns. And you shall make a molding of gold around it. <sup>4</sup>And you shall make two golden rings for it. Under its molding on two opposite sides of it you shall make them, and they shall be holders for poles with which to carry it. <sup>5</sup>You shall make the poles of acacia wood and overlay them with gold. <sup>6</sup>And you shall put it in front of the veil that**

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**is above the ark of the testimony, in front of the mercy seat that is above the testimony, where I will meet with you. <sup>7</sup> And Aaron shall burn fragrant incense on it. Every morning when he dresses the lamps he shall burn it, <sup>8</sup> and when Aaron sets up the lamps at twilight, he shall burn it, a regular incense offering before the LORD throughout your generations. <sup>9</sup> You shall not offer unauthorized incense on it, or a burnt offering, or a grain offering, and you shall not pour a drink offering on it. <sup>10</sup> Aaron shall make atonement on its horns once a year. With the blood of the sin offering of atonement he shall make atonement for it once in the year throughout your generations. It is most holy to the LORD.”**

Now just a few quick things. We'll spend a few more minutes on it later. Notice that this atonement language at the end: “[You] shall make atonement on its horns,” and “[You] shall make atonement for *it*...” We'll discuss how that might be rendered or understood. But this is the blood from the Day of Atonement offering in Leviticus 16 that is never applied to people. It's applied to *things*. And this is one of those things. So we need to keep that in mind as we go forward. But you see some obvious differences there.

Now the bronze altar (obviously made of bronze) was the place of sacrifice, since it was located (I don't know if you caught it) *outside* the Holy Place. Think of the Tabernacle structure. You have this rectangular fence essentially surrounding it, with an opening in the front of it (one of the small sides). And then inside it, you have the Holy Place, which actually has two parts. There's a Holy Place and the Most Holy Place, where the Ark of the Covenant is. And that's the part that's covered over (enclosed with fabric or skin)—the various overlays that are described earlier in the book. So that's what we think of as “the tent” and also in some contexts the Tent of Meeting. It just depends where that phrase occurs.

So we have the bronze altar outside of the Holy Place, which is part of the reason why it's bronze. It is there for sacrifice. It's more distant from the presence of God so it's not a gold object, because the gold is reserved for the furniture items inside the Holy Place, because they're closer to the presence of God. We've talked about these gradations or zones of holiness and the precious metals of which things are made that are consistent with the proximity to God. So this is a good way to illustrate the difference there. We know really what this looked like, because (I'm going to quote Sarna here):

The altar for burnt offerings uncovered in the Judean temple at Arad in the Negev corresponds exactly to the dimensions of the altar in the Tabernacle.

So we have this description in Exodus 27 of the bronze altar. Well lo and behold, one such altar was found at a different location (Arad in the Negev). That's in the

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area of land that's between the forks of Sinai. And exact dimensions... it has the horns and everything. So Sarna (to quote him again) writes this:

The horn-shaped projections at the upper corners were to be carved out of the wooden structure and then bronzed, so as to become integral parts of the altar. They were not to be made separately and then attached to it [MH: the altar]... The golden altar of incense also had horns, and Ezekiel envisages a horned altar for the rebuilt Temple. A Canaanite horned altar was found at Megiddo, and Israelite examples have been excavated at both Dan and Beer-sheba [MH: and of course Arad]... All this shows that great importance was attached to the horns, a conclusion reinforced by the ritual connected with them. They were daubed with blood from the slaughtered animal sacrifices in rites of consecration and expiation... The Megiddo altar and others prove that the horned altar was not exclusively Israelite. Its origin and significance are shrouded in mystery. The horn may have been widely regarded as a symbol of strength, power, and fertility.

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That's the end of the Sarna quote. Then he gives you some examples of the horn language. The point is we know what the bronze altar looked like. The smaller incense altar is also going to have horns. We know because of the bigger one—these examples that have been found. We know what that's going to look like. The horns were not supposed to be attached, but they're carved as part of the structure itself and then either overlaid (in the case of the one outside of the holy place) with bronze and the one inside with gold. So what's with the horns? There's really some interesting... This is language that shows up a lot in the Old Testament. And it really has a number of different contexts. Now Sarna said it. Horns are probably "widely regarded as a symbol of strength, power, and fertility." I'm just going to read you a few random passages. This is 1 Samuel 2:10.

**<sup>10</sup>The adversaries of the LORD shall be broken to pieces;  
against them he will thunder in heaven.  
The LORD will judge the ends of the earth;  
he will give strength to his king  
and exalt the horn of his anointed."**

So "his anointed" and "king" are parallel there. So "strength" and "horn" are parallel. What does that mean? Well, again, that's Sarna's point. It's kind of difficult to know. It might have something to do with power (either physically or politically), in terms of authority. It might have something to do with virility, because the kingship is going to be passed dynastically. Scholars have to sort of guess in a number of these passages. Here's 2 Samuel 22:3:

**“The LORD is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer,  
<sup>3</sup> my God, my rock, in whom I take refuge,  
 my shield, and the horn of my salvation...**

So God is the horn of David’s salvation. But what *is* that? God would be the source of deliverance—the source of power that affects the deliverance. You have to sort of, not massage it, in terms of producing (in a false sense) an interpretation. But trying to discern what would be the cause-and-effect relationship here and associate the language of the horn with that. Ezekiel 29:21:

**<sup>21</sup> “On that day I will cause a horn to spring up for the house of Israel, and I will open your lips among them. Then they will know that I am the LORD.”**

Now this is Ezekiel 29. We know the context of that. Jerusalem’s going to get judged—so on and so forth. So sometimes you get this horn language for a deliverer. Maybe a dynastic... a promise of David’s dynasty surviving. It’s kind of obscure. Amos 6:13:

**<sup>13</sup> you who rejoice in Lo-debar,  
 who say, “Have we not by our own strength  
 captured Karnaim for ourselves?”**

This Karnaim is related to (in terms of Hebrew) the term for horns. Because it’s spelled the same way. Karnaim actually means *horns*. So “Have we not by our own strength captured the place of the horns [(or something like that)] for ourselves.” This would be maybe a citadel or a city—this place that had to be conquered. It was a fortress—fortified in some way. So you get the idea. The opposite... You also get the lopping off of the horns. It’s weakness. It’s negative. So Jeremiah 48:25:

**<sup>25</sup> The horn of Moab is cut off, and his arm is broken, declares the LORD.**

Now the arm, we know, is a symbol, like Pharaoh’s arm in Exodus or the arm of the Lord. It’s a symbol of strength. Well here, “horn of Moab” and the “arm of Moab” are synonymous. So again, it might have something to do with some sort of power, in the abstract. Psalm 75:10:

**<sup>10</sup> All the horns of the wicked I will cut off,  
 but the horns of the righteous shall be lifted up.**

What does that mean? Does it mean descendants? Does it mean soldiers? Children? Again, it’s hard to determine exactly, but it has sort of a broad metaphorical semantic range that Sarna summarized by “symbol of strength,



power, and fertility.” So on and so forth. *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*, I think, is helpful here, too. This is the entry on horns.

In general, horn represents power or status in a social context. In Deuteronomy 33:17 Moses compares the tribes of Joseph to “a firstborn bull, [whose] horns are the horns of a wild ox” because Ephraim and Manasseh were large and powerful. [MH: They were large and powerful tribes. So you get this metaphor.] Therefore, “lifting up the horn” of someone means bestowing power, joy, health and prestige...

A variety of things. Psalm 92:10 is cited here:

**<sup>10</sup>But you have exalted my horn like that of the wild ox;  
you have poured over me fresh oil.**

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Conversely, “cutting off the horn” is the removal of one’s power or influence (Ps 75:10; Jer 48:25). Since God is the source of strength to those who trust in him, David declares, “The Lord is ... the horn of my salvation, my stronghold” (Ps 18:2 NIV par. 2 Sam 22:3). In Revelation 5:6 [MH: this is New Testament] the lamb has seven horns-his kingly power is perfect. [MH: Seven is the number of completeness.]

By metonymy, horn came to symbolize those who had power: political or military.

Now sidebar here. “Metonymy” is a term for the literary substitution of an attribute or object for the thing that the attribute or object represents. A modern example would be using the term “suits” for business executives. “Oh, the suits are coming over today.” You’re referring to these business executives, but you’re using this object (in this case) that’s associated with them to stand in the place of them. It’s just a way of referring to the thing referred to with some sort of attribute or adjectival way of doing it. Metonymy is the term for that. The entry goes on:

In Mesopotamian art, horns indicate deity and deified kings from Naram-Sin on. Thus in Daniel 7–8 the horns represent successions of kings or multiple branches of military power. The book of Revelation also picks up this kind of imagery: both the dragon and the first beast in Revelation 12–13 have ten horns, which Revelation 17:12 explains as ten kings. In Zechariah 1:18–21 the metaphor is taken both ways: the horns represent both the foreign powers themselves (Zech 1:18) and the condition of their strength and influence (Zech 1:21).

Since horn is a symbol of power, particularly kingly power, it is not unnatural that it represents God’s anointed one (Messiah). Psalm 148:14 and Ezekiel 29:21 possibly use “horn” as a metonym for the expected Messiah.



Psalm 148:14:

**<sup>14</sup> He has raised up a horn for his people,  
praise for all his saints,  
for the people of Israel who are near to him.  
Praise the LORD!**

This is a psalm of ascent, going back up the hill to Zion after the exile. And of course, we already read Ezekiel 29:21. This is interesting:

Horns also became a symbol for radiance... Psalm 132:17 parallels “horn” and “lamp” — “I will make a horn sprout for David; I have prepared a lamp for my anointed” (RSV). [MH: So David and the anointed are parallel. Horn and lamp are parallel.] Thus the Hebrew verb *qāran*, which may have originally been a verbal form of *qeren*, the word for horn (cf. Ps 69:31 [69:32 in Heb]), in Exodus 34:29–30 [MH: probably] means “to shine.” (This is the source of the medieval idea that Moses had horns.)

Let me read you the passage. We’ll get to Exodus 34 eventually anyway.

**<sup>29</sup> When Moses came down from Mount Sinai, with the two tablets of the testimony in his hand as he came down from the mountain, Moses did not know that the skin of his face shone because he had been talking with God. <sup>30</sup> Aaron and all the people of Israel saw Moses, and behold, the skin of his face shone, and they were afraid to come near him.**

Now if you actually look at the verb there (“shone” or “to shine”), it’s *qāran*, which is the verbal counterpart to the noun *qeren*, which means horn. So again, as the *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery* is pointing out, there was confusion of some in the Middle Ages over this verb. Because it’s pretty unusual—this form used as a verb. They didn’t know what to do with it, because they knew the noun meant horn, so, “What in the world is that?” So you’ll actually have art that has Moses bearing horns. He has horns on his head. And this is the passage it comes from. But it’s created by a linguistic confusion. Back to the entry:

The sacrificial altar, similar to other ancient Near Eastern altars, had four horns, which were projections on the four corners of the top (Ex 27:2), on which blood was smeared. The altar of incense also had four horns. The horns of an altar, whatever their original purpose, probably came to symbolize the power of that altar. Just as the cutting off of Moab’s horns was a destruction of Moab’s power, so the cutting off of the horns of the altars at Bethel symbolized the destruction of their religious or cultic power (Amos 3:14).

So Amos 3:14 says this:

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**<sup>14</sup> “that on the day I punish Israel for his transgressions,  
I will punish the altars of Bethel,  
and the horns of the altar shall be cut off  
and fall to the ground.**

So there were actually occasions when Israelites or some other people, depending on what battle or event we’re talking about here, would go in and hack off the horns of the sacrificial altars. That was a way of signifying that this altar... Basically, they’re profaning sacred space: “This altar has no more effectual power to do whatever it is you people thought was happening here at the altar. Your god has been defeated. We’re taking over his sacred space.” It’s just this idea. So even the horns on the altar were a symbol of the effectuality of what happens ritually at this place. This is why the altars have horns. It’s this symbolic, metaphorical idea of its effectiveness—its power. The reality and the ability of what’s happening here at this place is sort of visually reinforced by the horns on the altar. That’s the idea.

Now the altar of incense in Exodus 30 (we’re done with *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery* now) was made of gold, not bronze (we pointed that out earlier) because it’s in closer proximity to the presence of God. It’s in the Holy Place, “in front of the veil that is above the ark of the testimony,” (to quote Exodus 30:6). And that segues into some interesting discussion or a question, like, “What’s up with incense?” Because here you have the altar of incense, right in front of the veil, behind which is the Ark. And that actually gives you a clue as to what the incense was doing or how it was thought of, what imagery is there, what’s going on with it. It’s not just the smell, even though the smell of the incense does play a role here. It does have importance. But visually, it also has some significance. So Sarna summarizes this I think pretty nicely. He writes:

The use of incense in rites of worship was widespread and had a long history in the ancient world. It is surprising, therefore, that the instruction to build an altar for the ritual burning of incense in the Tabernacle is not included in the main pericope. [MH: That is, the main section of instructions for the Tabernacle here. We’re only getting to it in chapter 30.] A possible answer is that although incense is foretokened in 25:6, it plays no role in the installation ceremonies of the priesthood. [MH: Which just happened a couple of chapters earlier in chapter 29.] Hence, notice of its use is deferred until those directives are completed.

Let me just break in here again. So his point is that once we get a priesthood consecrated, then it makes more sense to talk about the incense as one of their duties. That’s all he’s saying here.

As to the reason for omitting the incense offering from those rituals [MH: the consecration rituals themselves], the symbolism that attached to it made it inappropriate to the occasion. There are grounds for believing [MH: here's the part I wanted to catch your attention with] that the cloud of aromatic incense in the Tabernacle and later in the Temple was perceived to be emblematic or a reminder of God's invisible, active Presence, just as was the cloud that accompanied the Israelites at the Exodus from Egypt and in the course of the wanderings in the wilderness, as noted in the Comment to [Exodus] 13:21. The ritual for the Day of Atonement requires that the High Priest "shall put the incense on the fire before the Lord so that the cloud from the incense screens the cover that is over" the Ark (Lev. 16:13). It is explained that God appears "in the cloud over the cover" (Lev. 16:2).

So if you go back to Leviticus 16, you have this description of the incense cloud that is over the Ark ("screens the cover that is over" the Ark), but in the same chapter, you have this note that God appears "in the cloud." What cloud? We kind of would think it's the cloud that had been leading them in the wilderness. But Sarna's point is that in context, it's actually the cloud that forms when they're burning the incense. That's where the Lord is going to appear because the Ark is right behind that veil. It's a visual, emblematic display of God's presence. Back to Sarna:

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Thus, the cloud of incense screens the High Priest from the Divine Presence even as it serves as a constant reminder of It. The cloud of glory is said to descend on the Tabernacle and to suffuse it only after the structure is entirely completed and only at the end of the seven days of ceremony. That phenomenon expresses divine satisfaction and acceptance of the shrine and signifies its divine legitimation as the house of worship. Hence, it would have been premature to produce the cloud of incense at the installation of the priesthood...

So Sarna's point is that they have to do this stuff first. They have to consecrate the priest first—consecrate the house. And then when God accepts it, the actual glory cloud descends as a symbol of acceptance. And then afterwards, you can mimic or mime the glory cloud through the cloud of the altar at the altar of incense, when you burn the incense. Then it makes sense to do that, because God has previously (after the sanctification ceremony) accepted what was done in building the Tabernacle and all the furnishings and everything else. So that's Sarna's commentary as to why we get the description here and what it very likely means. Back to Sarna:

Maimonides (1135-1204 -- a Jewish philosopher, theologian, and physician) maintains that the use of incense was originally instituted to ameliorate and sweeten the stench of the burning flesh of the sacrifices. While this may be so

[MH: I'm sure it had that impact], there is no doubt that it became an independent ritual in its own right, with its own significance and mystique.

He throws in Maimonides (and I threw it in) because you probably have heard this. "Well, the incense was about, just so that the place doesn't stink", either the offal of an offering getting disposed of properly or the burning of the flesh, or whatever. Okay, it probably had that effect. Whether that was really its role or not is doubtful. And I would say again (especially because of what Leviticus 16 says) that it associates the Presence, not only with the glory cloud descending, but the Lord will appear in the cloud, right there at the veil at the altar of incense. So I think it's more significant that the altar of incense was there to recreate the visual memory of God's presence and cloud in the wilderness. That was more of its role. I think there's still something else, as well, to this that we'll get to in a moment here.

One other thing. This is a source that's accessible on the web. This is a Mormon journal. So with that caveat, it's *Studia Antiqua*. But this is a very interesting article. It's by James Carroll and Elizabeth Siler, "Let My Prayer Be Set Before Thee: The Burning of Incense in the Temple Cult of Ancient Israel." And if you're listening for the first time, "cult" refers to a ritual system, not like Jim Jones or something. So this is an article actually on the practice of burning incense in ancient Israel. And part of the article says this:

The offering of sacrifice and the burning of incense are the two most attested forms of worship in the ancient Near East... Incense was used in secular settings to combat normal, everyday odors... [MH: So they're like, "Yep, generally, you can say that."] From its more practical uses, incense gained abstract significance once it entered the temple cults. For example...

The authors here are quoting another source (Kjeld P. Nielsen) who wrote a book called *Incense in Ancient Israel*, in 1986. Once it entered the temple cults, it just took on a more abstract significance. So:

For example... to the Egyptians incense had a purifying power, cleansing the air both literally and ritually.

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So it not only smelled better, but it was also a ritually significant difference. What I'm getting to here is that incense also played a role in marking out sacred space. In other words, because they're burning incense in sacred space, that space will smell different than any other space. So you could go throughout your day and you're smelling the normal smells of life, but when you smell *this* (the incense), you know that you are *near* or perhaps *on* or *at* a sacred spot. That was one of its roles. In Egyptology, this is quite clear in terms of Egyptian religion. But what they're going to do is they're going to bring it over into other parts of the world,

including the Bible, and say, “Basically, we’ve got the same kind of thing working here.” Back to the article:

The Egyptians also considered the smoke of the incense as a stairway connecting the earthly abode with that of the heavenly. [MH: Marking out sacred space.] Thus, to the Egyptian, incense provided both a means of ascent and communication. The use of incense was also common throughout the Arabian Peninsula. Although there are no ritual texts from Arabia to explain the details of their use of incense, several altars have been found in Arabia with the names of various aromata inscribed upon them.

Let me just break in here. What they mean there is there are actually going to be inscriptions of the terms for what the incense was made of actually inscribed on the altars. Back to the article:

Furthermore, incense was commonly imported from Arabia into Egypt, Mesopotamia, and Palestine. Incense was also common in ancient Canaan. The biblical text is replete with descriptions of the use of incense by the Canaanites and the Israelites who were swayed by Canaanite religious practices. The Bible describes the burning of incense by the Canaanites both upon sacred “high places” and in sacred “groves.” ... Although we have the names of the substances preserved in our records...

For example, Exodus 30:20-38. I’m not going to read all of that in this episode. But there you get a list of the names from which the incense was made.

...the actual knowledge of what these ingredients are has been lost [MH: at least largely lost]. Many different—and often contradictory—hypotheses have been set forth as to the identity of the ingredients of the cultic incense. Unfortunately, there has been very little research comparing the strengths and weakness of the various hypotheses.

This would actually be (for those of you prospective graduate students out there) a decent dissertation topic, because I’m betting that the ingredients of Israelite incense were different (at least a little bit)—discernibly different—than what the Canaanites were doing, or anybody else. Because it would mark a particular sacred space. So the ingredients were actually important. And we’ve already mentioned, both in other episodes and in this one real briefly, that you couldn’t burn unauthorized incense on the altar of incense in the holy place. One of the reasons is the distinctiveness of it. “We’re not doing what the pagans do.” Even down to their incense—the way it smells, what they use in it, their brand (so to speak)—even that needs to be different. There’s authorized and then there’s unauthorized. It reinforces the same points.

But the simpler point is here that particular incense was only allowed to be burned on the altar of incense. Exodus 30:9 says that. “You shall not offer unauthorized incense on it, or a burnt offering or grain offering, and you shall not pour a drink offering on it.” It’s used for one thing. It’s used for burning incense and one kind of incense, that which has been selected and sanctified. So they’re doing this to mark sacred space as distinct from common space and also to mark *this* sacred space as distinct from *other* spaces held sacred by those who worship other gods. So when you were near this and you smelled it, this is not an ordinary location. When you smelled it, you knew you were on or near holy ground. That was a big part of what was going on here. It’s not just a deodorizer. Like Maimonides was saying, and I’m sure some of you have heard. Yeah, it had that effect, for sure. But it really has two fundamental purposes: marking off sacred space and then to mimic the cloud in which the presence of God is (that visual reminder to the priests). So let’s move on to Exodus 30:11-16. This is the census tax. This is kind of an odd little passage here. It says:

**<sup>11</sup> The LORD said to Moses, <sup>12</sup>“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. <sup>13</sup> 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. <sup>14</sup> Everyone who is numbered in the census, from twenty years old and upward, shall give the LORD's offering. <sup>15</sup> 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. <sup>16</sup> You shall take the atonement money from the people of Israel and shall give it for the service of the tent of meeting [MH: that’s the tented structure], that it may bring the people of Israel to remembrance before the LORD, so as to make atonement for your lives.”**

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This is a one-time collection for the construction and maintenance of the Tabernacle, which kind of explains why these verses are found *here*. Because we’re getting on the tail end of constructing the thing. Basically, we’re leading up to the point where God’s going to mark off the men who are going to do the construction. So the census-tax pericope is right here. Verses 12 and 16 (that we just heard) make it clear that this is not only a contribution to the construction and maintenance of the Tabernacle, but there’s also another aspect to consider. I’m going to quote Carpenter here in his Exodus commentary. He writes:

For some reason each Israelite who is enrolled in this census must pay atonement money [MH: the Hebrew term is *kopher* (כֹּפֶר)] for his life. The ordinance recalls the redemption of the firstborn [MH: that was way back in Exodus 13] and thus

would have reminded the people of Yahweh's ownership of and redemption of the nation... The atonement money is for expiation or propitiation, or simply money given to prevent the wrath of Yahweh because someone did not contribute his fair share of support for the construction and service of the tabernacle (v. 16). Even in the latter case expiation or propitiation could be part of the picture, for the payment of the money averts the wrath of God from those enrolled. It prevents rather than removes their guilt or Yahweh's wrath... The rich are not required to give more, nor is the poor man allowed to give less as a contribution offering, for it is Yahweh who freely gives atonement. He seeks no monetary gain but demonstrates *who he is*. Each Israelite shares equally in the construction and care of the tabernacle (v. 16), and no one Israelite is of more value than another. The rich cannot obtain a greater share of Yahweh's presence with their riches; the poor are not excluded because they have only the minimum.

Now my two cents' worth here as follows... The people are contributing to this system. They're contributing to this structural object that will be integral and indispensable to this system of ritual, that will protect them from harm that might result from violating sacred space or touching something that has been dedicated to the Lord's exclusive use by means of the priesthood. So in that sense, the payment acts as an exchange to circumvent that rather unfortunate circumstance. So I would understand the "atone" language in that light. "Because the Tabernacle's going to be built and you people will have a means to worship the Lord... We're building this thing. You're going to have a means to worship the Lord, who saved your lives from Egypt, and you ought to be grateful for that. But as well, when we do this—when we build this thing—you won't blunder by defiling sacred space intentionally or... The whole system is going to help you approach the Lord (and all that sort of stuff) so that you don't forfeit your lives by violating God's presence. You're essentially paying not only for the institution or the object (the Tabernacle) but you're also in some sense paying homage to the Lord, who will remember his covenant with you—remember that you are his people. And this is also done for your protection, so that you don't do something that violates his sanctity to elicit his wrath." There's a certain logic to it, that if you think of them as contributing to the whole ritual system, the whole cult (to use that academic terminology) associated with the Tabernacle, then we can get (I think) a better sense of why they're doing this. It's not just for construction and maintenance. It goes a little bit beyond that, in terms of having those 20 years old and upward, each and every person, contribute something, and the same thing. The rich don't get any more protection here. Everybody contributes the same thing, both to build the thing, to maintain it, to pay homage to the Lord, and also you're paying for the system or the means of worship and self-protection. [laughs] So it makes sense on terms like that, if we can think of it like that. The next section is the bronze basin. This is Exodus 30:17-21. I'll just read that briefly.



45:00

**<sup>17</sup> The LORD said to Moses, <sup>18</sup> “You shall also make a basin of bronze, with its stand of bronze, for washing. You shall put it between the tent of meeting and the altar, and you shall put water in it, <sup>19</sup> with which Aaron and his sons shall wash their hands and their feet. <sup>20</sup> When they go into the tent of meeting [MH: This is the Holy Place.], or when they come near the altar to minister, to burn a food offering to the LORD, they shall wash with water, so that they may not die. [MH: Well that would be good.] <sup>21</sup> They shall wash their hands and their feet, so that they may not die. [MH: It’s repeated. So it might be important if it’s repeated.] It shall be a statute forever to them, even to him and to his offspring throughout their generations.”**

Now Sarna summarizes the point or the object this way. He says:

This vessel was not included in the earlier instructions for several reasons: (1) The use to which it was put was not an act of divine worship but was preparatory to it. (2) It was not needed for the installation ceremony because that required immersion of the entire body, whereas the laver was solely for washing the hands and feet. (3) It was not fashioned with materials provided by the public donations but from the bronze mirrors of the women who served at the entrance of the Tabernacle. (See Exod 38:8).

For practical reasons, the laver was placed between the entrance of the Tabernacle and the altar of sacrifice, so that the priest entered the sanctuary in a state of ritual purity and bodily cleanliness. Its importance may be weighed by its inclusion among the vessels that were consecrated by being anointed with oil (v. 28). [MH: In verse 28, we find that it’s anointed with oil.]

The dimensions of the laver are not given... [According to v. 20] the washing is an indispensable requirement; its neglect renders the priest’s service invalid.

It also puts him in harm’s way as well. So the bronze basin is kind of self-explanatory. If you remember back when we talked about the plagues, some of the plagues affected the Egyptian priests (gave them lice, for instance) so that it was a common idea that you had to be (in terms of your bodily self) whole (you couldn’t have a physical defect). You had to be clean. You had to be disease-free. Of course, in their case, you had to be lice-free. In other words, you had to be whole and complete and clean to do ministry to a deity (in the sense of the Egyptian priests). It’s the same idea here. They had to wear a certain thing. We talked about the priests’ garments in the previous episode. And you had to be clean here. This is the purpose of the basin. So it’s kind of self-explanatory. There’s no real theological or mystical idea, other than the notion of cleanliness. You’re not (to use this metaphorically) defiled (or dirtied up) by the world. You

don't have the dirt of common space on you when you go into the Holy Place, when you enter sacred space. It's just that conceptual idea.

Exodus 31... Let's get there because Exodus 30:22 to the end there at 28 is just the ingredients for the incense. You get into Exodus 31 and you get the personnel. Let me just read the first few verses here:

**The LORD said to Moses, <sup>2</sup>“See, I have called by name Bezalel the son of Uri, son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah, <sup>3</sup> and I have filled him with the Spirit of God, with ability and intelligence, with knowledge and all craftsmanship, <sup>4</sup> to devise artistic designs, to work in gold, silver, and bronze, <sup>5</sup> in cutting stones for setting, and in carving wood, to work in every craft. <sup>6</sup> 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: <sup>7</sup> 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...**

He goes through a whole list of the things that have been described earlier. “This is what they're supposed to do.” So God picks these men out. Now the one thing I want to note here in relation to this section is verse 3:

**I have filled him with the Spirit of God...**

So Spirit of God is the *ruach elohim*. This is the same term that we find in Genesis 1:2 to describe the Spirit of God hovering over the face of the deep. So Sarna and others... I believe this is from Sarna. He points out this: It is possible to argue that this phrase refers to “an excellent spirit” or “divine spirit.” Something like that. I'm just summarizing and paraphrasing the content here. So it's possible to say it refers to that. *Ruach elohim* doesn't mean The Spirit of God. That's possible. It could just mean an excellent spirit or even a divine spirit, like to point out that they have divine help in some way. But given its use in context, though, it most likely refers to God's Spirit. Because if you look at Exodus 28:3,

**You shall speak to all the skillful whom I have filled with a spirit of skill, that they may make Aaron's garments to consecrate him for my priesthood.**

So this whole idea of skillfulness, spirit of skill... “Spirit of skill” there is the *ruach hochmah*. So since that terminology is used there, but the *ruach elohim* is used here in Exodus 31, I think chances are good that we actually mean the Spirit of God here, or else they (the writer) would have used the earlier terminology to convey that concept. They were just good at their jobs and they had God's help. The Spirit of God likewise gives both Joseph and Daniel wisdom to perform their

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functions (Genesis 41:38; Daniel 4:8). It's hard to argue away from God's personal activity and interest in what's going on here, is the point.

So I think the phraseology can be used to make a good argument that they were empowered by *The Spirit of God*, and that this isn't just a generic reference to skillfulness or some abstract divine help. Now, I'll admit that passages like Genesis 41:38,

**Pharaoh said to his servants [he's talking about Joseph after Joseph interprets his dream], "Can we find a man like this in who is the Spirit of God?"**

And then Daniel 4:8,

**Daniel came in before me—he who was named Belteshazzar after the name of my god, and in whom is the spirit of the holy gods—and I told him the dream...**

Now I'll admit both of those instances are in the mouths of pagans. One is a pharaoh; the other one's Nebuchadnezzar. I get that. But you actually don't really need those sorts of parallels. If you look at Exodus 28:3 (this is where the divine enablement idea is most clear), there's no useful reason or clear way to distinguish all that stuff in such a way where we rule out that this is the Holy Spirit. So that's my take on Exodus 31:3. I think it is describing the Holy Spirit, specifically, directly enabling these men to do their job.

Now part of the reason I also say that is because the Old Testament theology of the Holy Spirit (I don't want to go down this rabbit trail too far, because it could be a whole episode)... But generally speaking, you don't have permanent or even sustained indwelling language of the Holy Spirit in people (in believers) in the Old Testament. What you get is phrases like the Holy Spirit "coming upon," "enabling," "resting upon," "rushing upon." This kind of language. You get the Holy Spirit doing that with individual people specifically for a service or a task. You get it with judges. You get it with kings. You get it with prophets. There's no sweeping, all-encompassing statements. In other words, there has to be something new about the New Covenant. In the New Covenant, you get that language, where the Spirit of God is coming upon all believers. It's more all-encompassing. It's more sweeping. It's spoken of in ways that are supposed to be enduring. But you don't really get that in the Old Testament.

So I think this is part of that matrix of ideas—that theology of the Holy Spirit. I think we have Exodus 31 here just being part of that way that the Spirit of God functioned (administered) in the Old Testament.

Lastly here, we have the observance of the Sabbath (Exodus 31:12-18). So this shouldn't be any surprise, especially given earlier episodes of the podcast where we talked about the relationship between the Sabbath elements and the

Tabernacle instructions. We've already talked about how, when you read through the Tabernacle instructions, you get this inclusion of Sabbath elements from Genesis. We've seen how that's a literary and a theological device to connect the Tabernacle to the Creator and creation. So the fact that when we're all done with all this (all the instructions, all the people who are going to work on it, all the tasks are laid out) that we observe the Sabbath. That would make sense. And we've actually hit this earlier in previous episodes, when we talked about this pattern. So Sarna adds (and we'll conclude with this):

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The concluding—and, appropriately, the seventh—literary unit within the pericope of the instructions for the Tabernacle is devoted to the observance of the law of the Sabbath. Correspondingly, the resumption of the Tabernacle narrative in chapter 35 commences with [MH: begins with] the Sabbath law. This structural pattern is intended to make an emphatic statement about the hierarchy of values that informs the Torah: The Tabernacle enshrines the concept of the holiness of space; the Sabbath embodies the concept of the holiness of time. The latter takes precedence over the former, and the work of the Tabernacle must yield each week to the Sabbath rest.

So it's subordinate—even the Tabernacle and the sacred space on earth are subordinate to the pattern that the Creator laid out, is Sarna's point. We've talked about this patterning of Sabbath and Tabernacle and where the Sabbath instructions get inserted and how that frames the whole narrative account, the set of instructions. Right here we are. This is how the seventh literary unit concludes, with the Sabbath. So the pattern is consistent. We've talked about that before. It shouldn't be a surprise.

Now what it does, though, interestingly enough... What's the next chapter? Chapter 32 is the golden calf. [laughs] It's where all of this is violated. It's all violated. So that is intentional, as well. The reader would have no doubt been humming along here... Tabernacle instructions, Creator, creation, order out of chaos, "Oh, this is wonderful! We've been delivered from Egypt!" And then we hit the golden calf. Its placement is also intended to jar the reader. But we'll talk about that on the next episode, when we continue with Exodus.

**TS:** Alright, Mike. Sounds good. Getting there. Almost there. Don't forget, we're going to be taking questions specifically about Exodus. So I've been gathering up a bunch of questions about Exodus. So if you have any questions specifically targeting anything that we've covered over Exodus, send them to me at [TreyStricklin@gmail.com](mailto:TreyStricklin@gmail.com), and then we'll have a Q&A, maybe one or two episodes.

**MH:** Yep, send 'em in.

**TS:** And then after that, we have some interviews and we're going to start something new. And again, Mike, I think at the time of this airing, it's exactly our fifth-year anniversary. So again, happy anniversary!

**MH:** Do you really know that? Do you really know the date?

**TS:** Yeah, it's like, January.

**MH:** [laughs] That's amazing.

**TS:** It's January... I want to say 20<sup>th</sup> or something. I'm not quite sure. I mean, we could look it up, the date when I posted the first podcast.

**MH:** Yeah, you should look it up. Because I can do simple math, but as far as the date, man [laughs], you got me there. [laughs]

**TS:** Yeah, January 21<sup>st</sup> is when I started posting stuff. So yeah, happy anniversary! I hope you got me a diamond ring, or...

**MH:** Happy anniversary. [laughs]

**TS:** Diamond earrings...

**MH:** Yeah, gold watch or something like that, yeah.

**TS:** Hey, for our tenth one, if we're still alive, we need to do something like that, get watches or something.

**MH:** I'll get you, like, a gold fidget spinner or something like that. How's that? [laughter]

**TS:** I've got a black and red one right here. Can you hear it? [MH laughs] Can you hear it spinning?

**MH:** Now I can.

**TS:** Well, I got you a gift too, so the next time I see you in person, I need to give you a gift. I did get you something. And it's a serious gift. You'll like it. It's a worthy gift. So next time I see you, I'll give you a gift for our 300<sup>th</sup> episode.

**MH:** Alright. We'll have to put some thought into that. [laughter]

**TS:** Alright, sounds good, Mike. Well, we're looking forward to next week. And I just want to thank everybody else for listening to the Naked Bible Podcast! God Bless.

