

## Prayer

Almighty God, may we always be ready for the release of Your power through the Holy Spirit. Give us a longing to see You work in our midst, and an expectation that great things will happen. Give us a heart to join with You in the Gospel work of salvation that saves souls, and may we know the joy of Your presence as we work together in this great and Godly task. Thank You, Almighty God; AMEN

## Other Prayer Suggestions

### Weekly Theme: 'Anointing'

*Pray for God's people to await the anointing of the Holy Spirit for the work He wants them to do. Pray that the Lord will remove the fear and dread people have about such things.*

### On-going prayers

- *Pray for the nation of Iran and against evil and repression*
- *Ask the Lord to help us agree about how to look after our world*
- *Give thanks to God for those you know who show God's love*

## Meditation

When life is quiet, Lord, fill my mind with what is good;  
And keep the enemy away from my thoughts and feelings.

When life is routine, Lord, give me the concentration I need  
To pay attention to the detail of what I do, and honour You with my work.

When life becomes difficult, Lord, save me from panicking;  
Help me to focus on You, and trust in Your spiritual guidance.

When life is horrendous, Lord, give me the courage to hold firmly to You;  
Drawing from Your Spirit the energy I need to get through every trouble.

When life becomes easier, Lord, may I not forget You or Your love;  
But remember Your faithfulness through good times and bad.

When life is quiet, Lord, fill my mind with what is good;  
Keep me alert, and prepare me, in faith, for all that's to come.

## Bible Study - Exodus 29:36-46

<sup>36</sup> Offer a bull as a sin offering for atonement every day, and offer a sin offering for the altar when you make atonement for it, and anoint it in order to consecrate it. <sup>37</sup> Make atonement for the altar for seven days, and consecrate it; then the altar will be most holy, and everything touching the altar must be holy.

<sup>38</sup> This is what you are to offer on the altar regularly, each day; two lambs a year old. <sup>39</sup> Offer one lamb in the morning, and offer the other lamb in the evening; <sup>40</sup> and with the first lamb offer one-tenth of a measure of fine flour mixed with one-fourth of a hin of beaten oil, and one-fourth of a hin of wine for a drink offering. <sup>41</sup> You are to offer the other lamb in the evening, and offer

*with it a grain offering and its drink offering, as in the morning, for a pleasing aroma, an offering by fire to the LORD.*

<sup>42</sup> *Throughout your future generations this is to be a regular burnt offering at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting before the LORD; this is where I will meet with you, and I will speak to you there.* <sup>43</sup> *I will meet with the Israelites there, and it will be sanctified by my glory;* <sup>44</sup> *I will consecrate the tent of meeting and the altar; I will also consecrate Aaron and his sons, to serve me as priests.* <sup>45</sup> *I will dwell among the Israelites, and I will be their God.* <sup>46</sup> *And they will know that I am the LORD their God, who brought them out of the land of Egypt so that I might dwell among them; I am the LORD their God.*

## Review

It is easy to read this passage of scripture as if it is hardly worth our attention. At first glance, the first two verses (29:36,17) describe the blessing of an altar, followed by instructions about the daily offering of sacrifices (29:38-41). The passage then concludes with God's promise to meet with His people at the 'entrance to the Tent of Meeting' (29:42-44), and a final blessing (29:45,46). We will become far more interested in what this passage has to say if we recall that most of chapter 29, (as we saw in our study yesterday) is new within Scripture. It is fresh revelation! These are God's first instructions about regular worship, for example, so it is surely worth the effort to look at the text carefully in order to find out what it has to say to us today.

Exodus 25 to 31 contains God's instructions to Moses given on Mount Sinai during forty days (24:18). To date they have included the making of the Tabernacle and the 'Holy Place' (26), the making of furniture and the altar for the Tabernacle (27) the making of vestments for the priesthood (28) and the anointing and ordination of Aaron for the priesthood (29:1-35). This whole section of Exodus reveals what God required for two things; firstly to dwell amongst His people, and secondly to receive their worship through the priesthood (under Aaron). So now that God had described these things to Moses, He went on to tell him what to do to consecrate the altar and therefore make it usable (29:36-38), what worship to offer Him every day (29:38-41), and what His presence would mean to His people (29:42-46).

With this in mind, it is easy to appreciate that the consecration of the Tabernacle altar was a 'one off' event, like the ordination of Aaron (29:1-35). It sounds odd to hear that a sacrifice was required to make 'atonement' for an altar, but this was because 'impure' people had made the altar from earthly things, and all vestiges of sin had to be removed from it before it could be used to present holy offerings. The consecration took seven days, just as the consecration and ordination of Aaron took seven days (29:30).

The next paragraph is extremely important. Later generations of Israelites regarded this text as none other than God's command to offer Him daily worship. The offerings were sacrifices for sin, performed daily for the people by the family of Aaron. Up to this point in Scripture God had given no general instructions about how His people should worship Him or when. Now that Moses had led Israel out of Egypt and they had met God at Sinai, they were given these precious instructions for regular future worship (29:42). Notice that worship was daily, and based on dealing with sin. All regular worship was atonement, so the special 'day of atonement' God gave His people later was a special event, and we should not think that it was the only 'atonement' provided within the sacrificial system.

In the last paragraph, God told Moses some powerful and basic truths that His people needed to know. They could meet their God at the 'entrance to the Tent of Meeting', a phrase meaning the entrance of the Tabernacle Tent (26:1f.) inside the courtyard (27:9f.),

*God, because this passage suggests that at the heart of our worship should be the little matter of dealing with our sins in His name!*

- *Pray for the renewal of the worship life of God's people, the Church. Pray that they will grow in worship through rediscovering the truths of God's Word and putting it into practice.*

## Final Prayer

Stay with us, Lord Jesus, through all the dangers and perils of this day. May we have such a firm grasp of You through faith that we do not let you down, and may we demonstrate in all we do how much we love You and give You thanks for what You have done for us. Hold on to us by the power of Your Holy Spirit, we pray; AMEN

course important, but not radically different from the things we use in everyday life. I am talking about musical instruments, chairs, the conduct of meetings, preaching, the use of equipment, and almost every part of what we do in worship and how we do it.

It seems to me that this passage suggests we have a higher view of the 'holiness' of everything we do when worshipping God, whether it be the things we do or the things we use or where we do it. We live in New Testament times when the focus of our worship must be Jesus, because He is our Saviour. However, it is surely possible to make what we do and say in worship, and the things we use, into something that is a greater reflection of His holiness and glory? People of ancient times did this by creating buildings that were far more advanced, complex and decorated than any other known structure; they are called 'cathedrals', and they stand to this day as the greatest architecture found in many countries. Buildings can be used for good or ill, as everything can, but this passage asks us to consider whether God might call us to use earthly things for His glory, and if we do this, then we need to treat them with the honour and respect we would give to Him. This is not idolatry, but allowing God to show Himself in our midst through what He has told us to do and what He has told us to use.

The challenge I have issued here is important. The world needs to see that we take our faith seriously. Christianity is not a casual religion that deals with life by trying to say 'everything is fine, God loves us, so let's be happy'. It is the only way that human sin can be dealt with by God, so that we can be reunited with Him in this life and eternally, and be fulfilled as people because we are secure in the One who made us. The One who said 'I am the Lord their God' wants to be seen in us, so that the rest of the world may know where to find truth and salvation.

## Questions *(for use in groups)*

1. What significance does an altar have for Christians today? Is the table placed at the front of the church an altar?
2. Discuss whether the church should offer daily worship, for those who feel that this is necessary?
3. How do we know that God is with us and how is this illustrated in the life of the Christian church?

## Discipleship

### Personal comment:

*Yet again, when I first began to study this passage of scripture, I found that it quickly began to say far more to me than I expected. I have read through Scripture many times, and yet, I have found find that when I have studied it, I become ashamed that I know it so little. I have not discovered the things I have written about in this study from other books. Rather, I have found that God works through a combination of what I have found in the passage and what other writers have said about the text. This has inspired me to find far more than I ever thought was there, and it can make me excited at times. None of us can wade through apparently difficult passages of the Old Testament unless God makes us excited about His Word!*

### Ideas for exploring discipleship

- *Reflect on what you do to worship God daily, weekly, or occasionally. Is the balance right, and what should it be? Indeed, ask yourself what you do to worship*

roughly the same place where the altar was positioned and sacrifices were made. Secondly, God promised to fill the Tabernacle (and later, the Temple) with His presence, to 'sanctify it by my glory' (29:43). God would therefore be seen to be with His people, the same God who had saved them and redeemed them from Egypt (29:46).

Now, Jesus is present with us because we have faith in Him and in what He has done for our redemption and salvation. We also worship Him regularly, though perhaps not through formal daily worship, and most worship reflects the fact that God alone removes our sins and makes us acceptable to Him. This passage reminds us of some of our priorities in worship, for God first revealed the principles of worship to His people here in this passage, and this is why it is important!

### **Going Deeper**

The Bible study continues with further information about the following subjects:

- How can an altar be 'atoned' for, and why was this important (29:36-37)?
- What does this passage tell us about the worship of God (29:38-41)?
- What does God's promise to be with His people mean (29:42-46)?

### **Notes on the text and translation**

**V37** *'and everything touching the altar must be holy'* Most versions of the Bible say 'everything that touches it will be holy'. However, there is no other mention in scripture of holiness being transferred, and it is perfectly correct to translate the sentence with the last verb as the grammatical 'gerundive' ('must be ...'). This changes the meaning of the sentence completely (see study).

**V40** *'and with the first lamb offer one-tenth of a measure of fine flour mixed with one-fourth of a hin of beaten oil'* The word 'offer' is not in the Hebrew, and there is no verb in the sentence at all. Because of this, most translators add the word 'offer', which is the verb from the previous sentence. Later on in the verse there is mention of a 'hin' of oil. This is an ancient measure of liquid which we believe to be roughly a gallon, so a quarter of this would be about two pints, or a litre.

**V42** *'this is where I will meet with you'* There is a nuance to the word 'meet' here, for it means 'meet as by appointment'. The Lord does not meet people casually, but as and when He requires (see study).

### **Going Deeper**

#### **How can an altar be 'atoned' for, and why was this important (29:36-37)?**

We need to bear in mind that God is different from His creation; He is holy, and all His creation has been afflicted by the Fall as described in Genesis 3. Consequently, something needs to be done to overcome this barrier to enable any person or earthly object to be used for God's purposes. We are used to reading Genesis 1 and rejoicing in the fact that everything God made is good, but we are not so used to accepting that the whole world has been affected by the 'fall from grace' reflected in the evil we can see both within creation and within people. Ancient people were far more conscious of these things and more receptive to what God had to say about it; and this reflected in our passage, and the call for the altar to be 'atoned for' (29:36).

Atonement, as we have discovered, is only possible through the death of a sacrificial offering, and God prescribed a bull for the atonement of the altar. As with all Old Testament sacrifices, the bull stood for what Christ would do one day for the sins of the world through His death on the Cross. No additional instructions are given about how to sacrifice the bull, and it is assumed that the normal instructions for a sin offering (Leviticus

1-4) would be performed. The altar was consecrated after this was done for seven successive days, and this essential part of the religious system of Israel would then be available for use as the Israelites moved on, away from Sinai.

We need to look carefully at verse 37, which most Bible versions translate as 'anything that touches the altar will become holy'. This appears to say plainly that holiness is contagious! However there is a problem with this translation, which you can follow in my notes above. In addition, it is essential for us to realise that Israel herself rejected the belief that holiness was contagious. If you read Haggai 2:10-19, this very point is forcefully made. Certainly, people are affected when they touch the holy things of God; a man named Uzzah (2 Sam 6:7f.) died when he mistakenly touched the Ark, for example. However, nothing can become holy, which means 'like God', merely by accidentally touching something holy, as most Bible versions suggest; they simply bear the consequences of encountering God, which can vary. What the text actually says is that nothing should be allowed to touch the altar unless it was consecrated and holy, having been dedicated to God, such as an animal prepared for sacrifice or the implements used in sacrificial worship that were consecrated for the purpose (30:22f.). If we understand the verse to say this, it not only makes sense, it is in accord with known Israelite belief and the Word of God elsewhere in Scripture (incidentally the same problem occurs with a similar text in Exodus 30:29).

#### ***What does this passage tell us about the worship of God (29:38-41)?***

The instructions for regular worship are extremely important, for God (29:38) commanded His people to worship Him daily, both morning and evening. Most protestant Christians might be surprised by this, because the link in their minds between Sabbath and worship is very strong (but is not strongly supported in scripture). The sacrifices offered by Israel were to be one male ram at least a year old each morning and evening, thus requiring around seven hundred rams per year. One year old rams were nearly full grown, unlike the young lambs used for the preparation of the Passover meal, so these rams were valuable animals to be given wholly to God in this way.

The worship required more than rams. God was to be given other forms of food, with representative offerings of fine flour and oil, together with considerable quantities of wine (a 'hin' was about a gallon) for a drink offering. Again, the quantities involved were quite large, certainly more than would be required for a substantial family feast, for example. Some people think that the offering of these gifts of food can be likened to the pagan practice of 'feeding' the gods. However, the food was not prepared fully for eating, as pagans did; it was mixed and presented raw and then burned on the altar before God, making a good smell of food, described as a 'pleasing aroma' (29:41).

The main challenge of this passage is the requirement for daily worship. Over the years, many Christians have worshipped morning and evening, including religious orders such as monks and nuns. In addition, some church people would be interested to know that their leaders worship daily on their behalf (as do many Catholics and Anglicans, for example). We should not think that an obligation to worship God daily instead of weekly is merely a summons back to the Old Testament past, as some might suggest. God calls us all to make a real sacrifice of our time for worship, and most Christians feel that an hour a week is hardly adequate for the Lord of All. This is an important issue that needs to be raised today..

Perpetual sacrifice, day and night, became the standard practice of the Temple in Jerusalem; the building that eventually took on the function of the Tabernacle as the meeting place of God with His people. Jewish people viewed the interruption of this with horror, as did Daniel (8:11), centuries later, and this practice only ceased within Israel when the Temple was destroyed in 70AD, a date etched into the memory of the Jewish people.

#### ***What does God's promise to be with His people mean (29:42-46)?***

The last paragraph of this text is about God's promise to meet His people in the Tabernacle (later, the Temple), which is called here the 'Tent of Meeting' in honour of its function. It was not that God would never meet His people in other ways; to say this would be to misrepresent God and His people Israel. God did not stop guiding His people by being present in a cloud during the day and a fire at night (40:38) just because He had a Tabernacle to dwell in, and He did not stop one form of revelation in order to reveal Himself exclusively in some other way. God consecrated the altar and the Tabernacle so that He would be available to His people in the place where they worshipped Him, forever. We can glory in this promise even today, for Christians readily say that the Lord is with them all the time, but He is especially present during worship. Neither this aspect of worship nor the nature of God has changed since the days of the Exodus!

Our passage says that God sanctifies the Tabernacle because of His desire to meet His people there (29:43), and He said that He would come on the Tabernacle with His 'glory', the same abiding presence of God that met Moses on the top of Sinai (24:15f.). Of course, this passage is Moses' description of what God said He would do, so the record of God's doing this is to be found in chapter 40; 'Moses was not able to enter the Tent of Meeting ... because the glory of the Lord filled the Tabernacle.' (40:35). The whole book of Exodus concludes with the completion of the instructions given to Moses on Sinai.

The last two verses of this passage are an important reminder of what God was doing (29:45,46). He wanted to be with His people, and this desire on the part of God is the reason why He went to elaborate lengths to ensure that sin was atoned for. It was done, not merely to satisfy His own need to be kept holy, but to make sure that His inherent holiness did not destroy the sinful people who worshipped Him and the objects they used for this worship. Now that the barriers between ourselves and God have been removed by Jesus, the worship of Christians should always respect the holiness of God, but honour the central role of Christ in making it possible for us to come as sinners before the throne of grace. Much of the New Testament, especially the letters of Paul, Peter and John, speak about the glories and the privileges of our access to God through Jesus, and how we may use this privilege without presuming that we can do what we want before God (see Romans 3, for example).

God had already revealed Himself to Abraham (Gen. 15:7) and Moses (Ex. 3:14) as having the name 'I am'; that great and holy name of God written in Hebrew as JHWH (and pronounced with reverence as 'the Lord'). At the end of this text, God promised that He would be with His people with a solemn promise made like an oath upon His own name; 'they will know that I am the Lord their God ... so that I might dwell among them, I am the Lord their God' (29:46). This oath of God was sustained throughout the trials of Israel in coming years, but because of Israel's sin, He was only able to fulfil it through Jesus His Son, the Messiah. So although God led the people out of Egypt in order to save them, He has made a pathway through Jesus Christ whereby all who believe in Him may be led out of the slavery of sin and death, and into the liberty of salvation. This is why we worship the Lord our God!

### **Application**

At the very least, this passage asks Christians to think carefully about what dedication means, and about whether the things we use for the worship of God should be treated with dignity and care, for the simple reason that they are used for worship. The Old Testament contains many instruction to the people of Israel about ensuring the holiness of what they do in worship, but the New Testament does not. This means that many Christians assume that 'turning up for worship' is sufficient in itself, and that the things said and done are of