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225 - The Holy Anointing Oil

1. Introduction

As the Tabernacle was setup there are several elements that come into contact with the objects consecrated for worship. These threads form a common web that integrates them and emphasizes the shared nature of their figurative representations. One of these, **The Holy Anointing Oil**, comes into contact with the physical objects and the priests and links them to the Messiah.

2. The Anointing of righteousness

In the Old Testament we're familiar with stories of the kings of Israel and their selection. Two of the most famous are Saul and David who were both anointed by Samuel the priest and judge. As David fled from Saul he respected the solemn and sacred nature of the anointing of the king and at times refused to lift his hand against Saul because he was God's anointed. The idea of anointing kings however originated long before that in the history of Israel. As God gave instructions for the Tabernacle he commanded Moses to make an oil that was reserved and used to consecrate objects, priests and later kings for service to the Lord. The oil, applied to objects and the priests at specific times, was used for the purpose of sanctification in conjunction with blood and water.

In this study we'll discuss

- a. The making of the anointing oil including its ingredients
- b. Usage of the oil and restrictions imposed, and
- c. The figurative significance of the oil

Let's take a look at each of these.

3. The holy anointing oil

As God delivers instructions to Moses concerning the Tabernacle and objects to be made, he includes directions for making an oil that will have great significance. ***“Moreover the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, Take thou also unto thee principal spices, of pure myrrh five hundred shekels, and of sweet cinnamon half so much, even two hundred and fifty shekels, and of sweet calamus two hundred and fifty shekels, And of cassia five hundred shekels, after the shekel of the sanctuary, and of oil olive an hin: And thou shalt make it an oil of holy ointment, an ointment compound after the art of the apothecary: it shall be an holy anointing oil.”*** (Ex 30.22-25). Most of the ingredients are things we're familiar with. The list includes:

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- a. Myrrh - 500 shekels
- b. Sweet cinnamon - 250 shekels
- c. Sweet calamus - 250 shekels
- d. Cassia - 500 shekels
- e. Olive oil - one hin

The units of measure given are stated in terms that would have been known to the priests and Levites at the time. God decreed that standards were to be set for these units of measure and were to be maintained. The significance of consistent measurements is contained in commands and warnings against false units expressed in the Law and prophets (**Lev 19.35, Deut 25.15, Mic 6.10**).

Different equivalent amounts are given for these measures by different authors so I won't try to give list them here. The important thing to note is that the shekel is based on the shekel of the sanctuary as the standard unit of weight for dry measure while the hin was a standard unit of volume for liquids. The weight of the dry ingredients for the mixture is 1500 shekels before being compounded with the hin of olive oil. I've listed percentages of the dry mix for each of the ingredients in this chart.

- a. Myrrh - 500 shekels - 33% of total dry mixture
- b. Sweet cinnamon - 250 shekels - 17% of total dry mixture
- c. Sweet calamus - 250 shekels - 17% of total dry mixture
- d. Cassia - 500 shekels - 33% of total dry mixture
- e. Olive oil - one hin

Myrrh is probably the most familiar of these ingredients as it was one of the gifts presented by the wise men for Jesus. Myrrh is a resin collected from certain thorny shrubs and has an aromatic quality. Myrrh was also used medicinally and was one of the spices brought by Nicodemus to prepare Jesus body in the tomb (**John 19.39**).

Two of the ingredients, cassia and sweet cinnamon are closely related. Cassia is more readily known and often referred to as cinnamon, or cinnamon bark in North America. This is harvested from the bark of an evergreen tree and while being aromatic and having a distinct flavor is not as sweet as what is known as true cinnamon, or in the case of God's instructions, sweet cinnamon. Sweet cinnamon is also from the inner side of the bark of another tree but it has a more pleasing fragrance and when ground becomes a finer powder whereas cassia retains a coarser texture when ground. True cinnamon is sweeter in flavor and has a lighter color than cassia. Cassia has a bolder flavor but both of these are aromatic and are used medicinally as spices and fragrances.

Calamus, also known as the sweet flag, is a plant that resembles irises or cattails and

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grows near water. The calamus has a strong pleasant fragrance that can be detected by breaking the leaves. The part of the plant that is used is typically the area below the stem and directly above the root structures. These can be dried and used medicinally. The fragrance of calamus is described as distinctive and very powerful.

The last ingredient is olive oil. There isn't a description of the olive oil to be used but it's logical to conclude that this is fine olive oil such as was used in the lampstand. This would be consistent with the requirements for quality and purity based on its usage.

4. Usage & restrictions

God names specific objects and individuals the oil is to be used for. God states, "***And thou shalt anoint the tabernacle of the congregation therewith, and the ark of the testimony, And the table and all his vessels, and the candlestick and his vessels, and the altar of incense, And the altar of burnt offering with all his vessels, and the laver and his foot. And thou shalt sanctify them, that they may be most holy: whatsoever toucheth them shall be holy.***" (Ex 30.26-29). As the Tabernacle is setup the structure and all of the objects are to be anointed with the holy anointing oil. Note that once this is done, each of the structures and objects will be holy and anyone who touches them will be holy as well. This isn't the transfer of any spiritual energy present in the objects that are consecrated. This is the Lord's statement that he will recognize and sanctify those who have access to them. This has a very serious side to it as we consider the meaning of this statement.

The Tabernacle, the altar of burnt offering and laver weren't open to just anyone. The priests and Levites authorized to minister before the Lord were the only individuals who could enter the presence of these objects and make contact with them. This restriction is easily seen in the death of Uzzah (2 Sam 6.3-8) and the intrusion of king Uzziah who tried to offer incense in the temple (2 Chron 26.16-21). While there was a holy nature to these areas and objects, there were also clear boundaries and restrictions on who could access and handle them. For that reason the holy anointing oil is a powerful and significant figure.

The persons who were to be made holy with the oil were the priests who were consecrated to perform their duties and offer sacrifices to God. The Lord told Moses, "***And thou shalt anoint Aaron and his sons, and consecrate them, that they may minister unto me in the priest's office.***" (Ex 30.30). The text details the procedures to be followed when consecrating priests.

"And Aaron and his sons thou shalt bring unto the door of the tabernacle of the congregation, and shalt wash them with water. And thou shalt take the garments, and put upon Aaron the coat, and the robe of the ephod, and the ephod, and the breastplate, and gird him with the curious girdle of the ephod: And thou shalt put the mitre upon his head, and

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put the holy crown upon the mitre. Then shalt thou take the anointing oil, and pour it upon his head, and anoint him.” (Ex 29.4-7). There are additional procedures for the consecration of the priests but these focus on Aaron, the first high priest and the point at which the Holy Anointing Oil is used. Examining the text we find that Aaron’s sons were also washed in water, clothed in priestly garments, consecrated with blood and anointed with the holy anointing oil (Ex 40.14-15).

We’ll discuss the garments of the priests in another lesson but there’s a significant connection between them and the holy anointing oil. “*And the holy garments of Aaron shall be his sons' after him, to be anointed therein, and to be consecrated in them.*” (Ex 29.29). This indicates that the objects, including the priests garments, anointed with the holy anointing oil were sanctified for service to God and remained holy. In these procedures we see that the holy anointing oil had a specific makeup, was used to consecrate the Tabernacle and physical objects used in worship and the priests.

There were also restrictions God put in place concerning the holy anointing oil. God states, “*And thou shalt speak unto the children of Israel, saying, This shall be an holy anointing oil unto me throughout your generations. Upon man's flesh shall it not be poured, neither shall ye make any other like it, after the composition of it: it is holy, and it shall be holy unto you. Whosoever compoundeth any like it, or whosoever putteth any of it upon a stranger, shall even be cut off from his people.*” (Ex 30.31-33). If we think about the nature of the holy anointing oil it was obviously an aromatic fragrance with a distinctive character. The oil had a pleasant scent which may have led some to want to create a copy of it for themselves. Let’s review these restrictions.

First, it wasn’t to be poured on “*man’s flesh*”. If we take that at face value we might be confused about the consecration of the priests. In a way I believe that this is a statement from God that no one who had access to the holy anointing oil should use it as we might use perfume or cologne today. That indicates that the holy anointing oil was reserved for the most solemn and sacred uses and wasn’t to be reduced to a common personal fragrance. The fact that the oil was used to consecrate the priests indicates that it would be poured on the body. David refers to the anointing of Aaron as he speaks of unity. “*Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity! It is like the precious ointment upon the head, that ran down upon the beard, even Aaron's beard: that went down to the skirts of his garments...*” (Psm 133.1-3). There are two things we can determine from this passage. One is that the oil was used on the body of the priest, in this case Aaron, and two, it was used in a sufficient amount that it ran down over his beard and garments which were being consecrated as well.

The second thing we can learn from these restrictions is that no one was to reproduce the holy anointing oil for their own purposes. The Law was to be read and taught to the people so these instructions wouldn’t be secret. Although the fragrance might appeal to the people and they

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may have wanted it for themselves, they were not permitted to do this. As we're well aware of in our time, whenever something appeals to someone and they want it bad enough, they will do whatever it takes to get it. The ingredients may have been readily available but having access to the necessary ingredients wasn't to be a temptation to make their own.

The third restriction was a consequence or deterrent to individuals who attempted to violate God's directives. If someone made any fragrant oil using these elements in an effort to copy the holy anointing oil, they would be cut off from the people. When the Hebrews were cut off from their people they no longer had access to the sacrifices and therefore retained their sin. They wouldn't receive blessings from God, be able to eat the Passover or engage in any spiritual activity. God no longer recognized them as one of his people which is something the Hebrews feared.

The final part of this last restriction is that the holy anointing oil, or copies of it weren't to be applied to foreigners, referred to as strangers in the King James Version. God selected his people based on his promise to Abraham. He brought them out of Egypt and dedicated them to the purpose of preparing the world for the coming of the Messiah. That was a holy and spiritual legacy reserved only for those who had a covenant relationship with God. A study of the Law reveals that there were provisions made for foreigners to live in the land and even participate in some things but they didn't have the status of the descendants of Abraham. A status reserved only for them. When that was violated the individual committing the violation would be removed from recognition by God and lose access to forgiveness and the Lord's blessings.

Some of these restrictions and consequences might not make any sense to us until we examine them closely. The power of the holy anointing oil lies in the connections it has with the unfolding of God's plan to save all mankind through the coming of the Messiah.

5. Figurative significance of the oil

There are at least two elements that have a pervasive presence and application in the process of consecration and sanctification in the Tabernacle and for the priests. One of these is blood and the other is the holy anointing oil. We've discussed the role of water and as we reflect on its presence and application we see a focused application in sanctification, but not everything was washed in water. The priests had to wash their hands and feet and the sacrifices were washed in water as part of the process of offering them. Incense was present in the Holy Place and was to be taken into the Most Holy Place on the day of Atonement but it too was limited in use and application. Only blood and the holy anointing oil came into contact with every single structure, object and priest. That point is significant as it directs us toward the Messiah. We know that Jesus was the Messiah and we understand the name Christ is a title meaning the anointed one, or literally, the one who is smeared with oil. With that in mind we can understand how the Tabernacle, the objects used in worship and the priests are connected with the Messiah.

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The Tabernacle itself was to be anointed with the Holy Anointing Oil (**Ex 30.26**). The Tabernacle was the focal point of God's presence with the people and represented his guidance and authority. Christ was to be called Immanuel, which meant God with us (**Matt 1.23**) representing the fact that the Messiah had come to call mankind back to God. Christ represents the presence and blessings of God and is the only path to the Father. Christ told his disciples "***I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.***" (**John 14.6**). The way to reach God is through Christ. This was represented by the physical Tabernacle under the Mosaic Law foreshadowing a time when the spiritual Tabernacle of God would be available to all who seek the Lord.

The Ark of the covenant was also anointed with the Holy Anointing Oil (**Ex 30.26**). The Ark was the location of the Mercy Seat where God manifested his presence on the day of atonement and set the sins of the people aside for a year. The Ark itself was the container of the Law given to Moses representing the authority of God. A pot of manna was later placed in the Ark as a reminder of how God fed the people as well as the rod of Aaron that budded representing the delegation of authority through the priesthood of Aaron. John identifies Christ as the word of God (**John 1.1**) and emphasizes how the word was made flesh to dwell among men (**John 1.14**). Christ came into the world to deliver the message of salvation and reconciliation with God. He is the central point at which one is saved through faith and obedience. The Mercy Seat atop the Ark was the focal point of God's mercy and Christ today represents the focal point of God's mercy that has been extended to all who will accept it (**John 3.16**). Christ, like the Ark was the one chosen or anointed by God for this reason.

The Table of Shewbread was anointed with the Holy Anointing Oil (**Ex 30.27**). The bread, also known as the bread of the presence, represented the face of God with his people. Christ was the presence of God with mankind when he was on the Earth and continues as the high priest of the faith at the right hand of God today. The Lord's supper, instituted by Christ on the night of his betrayal, utilized unleavened bread to represent the body that was created to be offered on the cross as the final sacrifice for sin. Christ continues to bring us into the presence of God as his children forming the connection we see with the bread of the presence.

The Lampstand, providing light in the Holy Place, reminds us of the guidance provided by God in his presence and was anointed with the Holy Anointing Oil (**Ex 30.27**). Christ is identified as the "***light of the world***" (**John 1.4-5**). Christ brought the initial revelation of the Gospel to the world and through him the message was recorded and preserved for all time. The writer of Hebrews explains the significance of Christ's presence and guidance. "***For Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true; but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us...***" (**Heb 9.24**). Christ has shown us the path to the Father and eternal life just as the Lampstand illuminated the Holy Place before the Vail in the Tabernacle on the way to the Most Holy Place.

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The Altar of Incense was also anointed with the Holy Anointing Oil (**Ex 30.27**). As we've seen in the discussion of the incense there's a figurative connection with the incense and the presence of God on the day of atonement. We also saw a connection with the prayers of the faithful and explored these figures. We see that the prayers of the faithful rose like incense before the Lord (**Psm 141.1-2**). Figuratively incense accompanied the prayers of the saints in the book of Revelation (**Rev 8.3-4**). Christ told his disciples that when they prayed to the Father in his name that God would hear their prayers (**John 16.22-26**).

The altar of burnt offering was also consecrated with the Holy Anointing Oil (**Ex 30.28**). This was the place where sacrifices were made in compliance with God's commands. Christ is the ultimate sacrifice for the sin of the world as a body was created to be offered (**Heb 10.4-5**). Christ was the only acceptable sacrifice that could remove sin completely. He was set apart by God himself for this purpose and just as the altar was consecrated and made holy so was Christ, the anointed of God.

The Laver was anointed with the Holy Anointing Oil (**Ex 30.28**). This was a point at which water was contained for the cleansing of the priests before they entered the Tabernacle or offered sacrifices on the altar of burnt offering. Aaron and his sons were to do this so they didn't die (**Ex 30.19-21**) showing the significance of this. In the New Testament we see a connection between Christ's blood and water. Christ stated that in order to enter the kingdom one must be born again of the water and the spirit (**John 3.5**). Christ commanded baptism for those who believed (**Matt 28.18-20, Mk 16.15-16**) which we see carried out on the day of Pentecost as the first Gospel sermon is preached (**Acts 2.38**). Paul stated that when one is baptized they put on Christ (**Gal 3.27**) and compared being baptized to a figurative burial in which we are united with Christ in his death and resurrection (**Rom 6.2-4**). Just as the priests were to wash before being able to enter the presence of God, believers must be washed in water as a demonstration of a "*good conscience*" before God (**1 Pet 3.21**).

The priests were consecrated with the Holy Anointing Oil (**Ex 30.30**) so they could minister to God in his presence. Christ is identified as the high priest of the faith (**Heb 8.1**) and is the anointed of God. Through Christ we become the children of God and are therefore sanctified through his blood. Paul states, "*Now he which stablisheth us with you in Christ, and hath anointed us, is God; Who hath also sealed us, and given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts.*" (**2 Cor 1.21-22**). As we obey in faith and continue in the same we are sanctified through Christ, our high priest, the anointed one of God.

The Holy Anointing Oil was sacred, reserved and restricted. It was used to consecrate the most holy objects in the Tabernacle including the structure itself. The anointing of these things forms a figurative link with Christ who is the sum of all these things to bring us to the Lord and gives us hope for eternal life with him.

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6. Next

From the beginning of time God has clothed his children. Under the Law those who served as priests and ministers in the Tabernacle would have to be clothed in a way authorized by the Lord. In the next lesson we'll examine **The Priestly Garments** and explore their connection with Christ and believers today.