

NUMBERS

Lesson 9 - Chapters 7 and 8

Numbers chapter 7 is one of the longest chapters in the Torah.....some 89 verses. And, it also one of the most repetitive chapters in all the Torah, which you'll see as we read it together. So, we'll move through this chapter pretty quickly.

As a frame of reference we know from dates given in the Torah itself that EVERYTHING that happened starting in Exodus 40, through all of the book of Leviticus and up to where we are right now in Numbers 7, all happened in a very short period of time. These events all occur in a timeframe beginning on the 1st day of the 1st month of the 2nd year after they left Egypt, and ending on the 20th day of the 2nd month of the 2nd year.....only about 50 days. In other words, these activities commenced in the 13th month after they left Egypt and concluded before the end of the following month.

We know that the building of the Tabernacle was completed on the 1st day of the 1st month of the 2nd year. We know that the ordination of the priests was completed by the 8th day of the 1st month. And we know that the census of the Israelites, and then yet another census that was only of the Levites, began on the 2nd day of the 2nd month of the 2nd year; and we know that the cloud moved, and so the camp was struck and Israel began their journey from Mt. Sinai on the 20th day of the 2nd month. Exactly where the events of Numbers chapter 7 fell within that 50-day period we can't pinpoint although there are a handful of rabbinical opinions about it that we don't need to get in to.

READ NUMBERS CHAPTER 7 all

From a 30,000-foot view what we are witnessing are some of the final preparations necessary to make the operation of the priesthood and of God's earthly dwelling place complete.

From a little narrower view what we are seeing is the leader of each of the 12 tribes of Israel bringing their offering, in turn, to the Lord. Beginning with the tribe of Judah, the headman of each tribe brought their tribe's gift to the Tabernacle.....one tribe per day, for a total of 12 days.

The first gift discussed (before we read of what each tribe brought) was a communal gift: that is, it was given to the Tabernacle as a common gift from the entire congregation of Israel's leaders. And, it consisted of 6 large wagons, or carts, each with two oxen for pulling it. These carts were to be given to the specific Levite clans that were in charge of transporting the various pieces of the Tabernacle.

The clan of Merrari was given 4 of the wagons, and the clan of Gershon received two. It was Merrari's duty to transport the heavy wooden planks that formed the load bearing structure of the Sacred Tent so they needed more carts than did Gershon, who was to move the thick curtains that formed the door into the Tent.

Verse 9 explains why the highest ranked of the clans, the clan of Kohath, did not receive ANY carts: they were to carry the most precious Ark of the Covenant; and the Ark of the Covenant was to be carried on the **shoulders** of the Levites, not laid in the back of a wagon. This regulation of the Levites carrying the Ark on their shoulders and not putting it in an oxcart was apparently (as were so many of the Laws given on Mt. Sinai) not long after ignored by Israel's leadership and it brought with it the promised consequences.

We see an incident in 1Chronicles 13 when King David called for the Ark of the Covenant to be brought to him, and a fellow named Uzzah was given the task. Let's read that incident together because there's a little more to it than meets the eye.

READ 1CHRON. 13:1-12

Now what is interesting is that we read of the Hebrews transporting the Ark in an oxcart, and not on the shoulders of Levites. Great Jewish sages have said for ages that Uzzah was killed not for one infraction, touching the Ark, but rather for two: touching the Ark AND transporting it in a cart. That is why it speaks about the Lord's anger burning so greatly. And, in fact, this whole thing was David's fault for his personal negligence in allowing such a thing to occur.

OK, back to the book of Numbers. Hidden in verse 10 is something else that is informative: it says that the tribal chieftains brought their **dedication offering** for the altar. What makes this interesting is that the Hebrew word that is used here in Number 7, the word that is usually translated "dedication offering", is Hanukkah. Yes, the same word as used for the Holiday we celebrate in the fall, Hanukkah, to recognize the rededication of the Temple to Yehoveh after having been taken over by the Syrians and made into a Temple to Zeus for a 3-year period.

To me it is quite interesting that the first use of Hanukkah is to initiate the dwelling place of God into operation, here in Numbers. The second use of Hanukkah in Scripture was to re-initiate the dwelling place of God BACK into operation after the governor of Syria, Antiochus Epiphanies, had made the priesthood defunct for a few years. It makes it all the more appropriate in my book that we should make good and proper use of Hanukkah as an occasion to celebrate the birth of the one who made US.....Yeshua's followers.....to be the NEW operational dwelling place of God.

What is also interesting is that the way the word Hanukkah is used in Numbers 7 puts a little finer point on what it actually means; when we see the use of the word Hanukkah, it is really more an offering of **initiation** than it is **dedication**. The Hanukkah offering is meant to be the offering that is the catalyst.....it is the ribbon cutting ceremony.....that says "open for business". On the other hand when we see a true dedication offering, in which something is consecrated (meaning ceremonially set-apart) for God, the ritual always involves anointing with oil. We don't find an anointing of oil with the bringing of this Hanukkah offering here in Numbers, nor do we

find it in the Hanukkah ceremony initiating the use of the Temple, once again, for worshipping Yehoveh during the Maccabee Rebellion. And, of course, in initializing our walk with Yeshua, there is but an offering of ourselves, usually symbolized by Baptism, but there is NO call for a new follower to be anointed with oil in order to begin His service to Yehoveh.

So, like so much else in the N.T., we find that the entire concept and purpose and use of Hanukkah began in the O.T., and this was just brought forward into the NT in a yet higher and fuller meaning, and personified in Yeshua.

The other thing we should not overlook is that it was the tribe of Judah from whom came Christ that was the FIRST to present their Hanukkah offering. And, what we find is that the gifts that all 12 tribes will present, are exactly identical. Every tribe gave the same things, even the same amount and the same quality.

As we read for 12 consecutive passages each tribe's Hanukkah offering was: 1 Silver bowl, 1 Silver basin, each filled with Semolina flour with oil mixed in (a Minchah offering); 1 golden spoon or ladle filled with incense; one bull, one mature ram, and one yearling lamb (for an 'Olah offering); 1 male goat (for the Hata'at offering); and 2 Oxen, 5 Rams, 5 male goats, and 5 yearling lambs for the Shelamim offering. If the Hebrew names of the various types of offerings are unfamiliar to you, you need to go back and review our study of Leviticus where we explored each of these extensively.

The point is that this list is what each tribal leader presented to the Sanctuary. One tribe per day for 12 consecutive days brought this specified offering.

I see great significance in this: because just as anyone who comes to the Lord for atonement and salvation must offer the same thing.....himself.....nothing less, and nothing more..... so it is with this Hanukkah offering. The 12 tribes were not at all equal in population, authority, status or wealth but that didn't matter: the offering to the Lord had to be the same for all.

Now the Hebrew Sages say something else pretty provocative occurred here; and I'll tell you straight-up that I have no idea whether they're correct or not, but I do want to pass it on to you.

The fact is that at least ONE Sabbath had to occur within the 12-day span of Hanukkah offerings; and, mathematically, there could have been 2 Sabbaths. The Rabbis say that the offering of the chieftain of the tribe of Judah.....the 1st offering given.....was given on the 1st day of the week. On the 2nd day Issachar gave the offering, and the 3rd day it was Zevulun, and so until we get to the 7th day.....the Shabbat.....and guess which tribe gave their offering on Shabbat: Ephraim.

The honor of being first went to Judah, the honor of giving their offering on the Shabbat went to Ephraim. And it was these two tribes who eventually became the two surviving super-tribes who absorbed all the other tribes, and even formed the two Kingdoms called Ephraim and Judah, after the death of King Solomon. It is Judah and Ephraim who are also called "The Two Houses of Israel" in Ezekiel and elsewhere in the Bible.

Whether it was the Sabbath or not, I'll leave up to you. But I can tell you that it would have been logical and customary for this to have begun on the first day of the week rather than just on a random day. And no matter how you look at, the 1st to give their Hanukkah offering was Judah (Messiah's tribe) and the 7th to give theirs was Ephraim. This was not coincidence. We're going to find Judah and Ephraim slowly and surely elevated above the other 10 tribes as the Torah, the Writings, and the Prophets that form the Old Testament proceed.

This chapter ends, appropriately, with an important piece of information: that when Moses met with God in the Tent of Meeting, it was from above the Mercy Seat.....the **Kapporet**, in Hebrew.....that is, the golden lid of the Ark of the Covenant.....and within the winged forms of the two Cherubs that were attached to the **Kapporet**, that the presence of God spoke to Moses. And, just so we fully understand: the phrase "speak with Him".....when referring to God speaking to Moses.....in Hebrew is **dibber**. And, **dibber** means a conversation..... 2 way communication as opposed to an oracle which is simply an edict pronounced by God. Although I'm sure that often God would call Moses to the Tent and simply issue an instruction, at least as often God would call Moses and there was a full-blown conversation....a dialogue....between the two of them. Moses had an honor that few other men in history had; tangible, audible conversation with the Lord God Almighty. Although we have that privilege to a degree, as Believers, in the form of prayer, I cannot say that it is the same thing. How often I have wished I could ask God a question, and get a direct audible answer.

Let me point out one other important thing that as Christians we (and I) have tended to get wrong: Moses did NOT stand before the Ark of the Covenant in the sense that he was inside the Holy of Holies. This is an understanding that has only recently become clear to me. Nowhere does the Torah explain that Moses stood within the Holy of Holies; that is an assumption (an incorrect one) that comes from a common misconception of such biblical phrases as "Moses stood before the Lord". While to us that sounds like it MUST indicate Moses' actual presence in the Holy of Holies, standing right next to the Ark of the Covenant, in fact what we have is Moses standing in the Holy Place next to the inner veil called the Parokhet and merely FACING towards the Ark. "Standing before the Lord" is a common idiomatic Hebrew expression in the Bible; we find it applied to private individuals (such as the woman suspected of adultery) and it merely means to come near to God's sanctuary, not inside of it, nor certainly not inside of the Holy of Holies.

Hebrew Sages and Rabbis have always seen Moses as standing outside the veil; its only gentile Christians who have misunderstood and pictured him as standing directly before the Ark of the Covenant. After all, despite Moses' lofty and unique position as Mediator he was still only a man. And by the way, despite the lovely song that says that we, as Believers, now stand in the Holy in Holies, that is simply theologically and Scripturally not sound. It is Jesus, the God-Man Messiah, who stands in the Holy of Holies as our High Priest and Mediator. Israel needed a Mediator and we still need a Mediator. That is why we are taught to pray to the Father in Christ's name. We, as Messiah's army of priests, indeed stand within the Holy Place, which is the lesser chamber inside the sanctuary (a great honor indeed); but we are in no way perfected enough in these corrupted bodies to stand in that Holiest Place.

We find Moses is so terribly anxious to actually see God that He asks the Lord if this might be

possible and the Lord complies to a small degree by hiding Moses in the cleft of a rock as He merely passes by. Point being that if Moses "saw" the Lord nearly daily in the Holy of Holies there would hardly be a need for him to see the Lord in yet another setting.

It could not be more clear in the Torah that NO ONE, not even the High Priest, was permitted to enter the Holy of Holies and stand before the Ark except once per year on Yom Kippur. Moses had to have a veil between He and the Lord so great was the Lord's holiness. Thus when the High Priest was permitted entry on that one special day each year, he had to carry burning incense so that the incense acted as a sort of veil that the High Priest would not die from such close proximity to the extreme holiness of Yehoveh.

Let's move on to Numbers Chapter 8.

NUMBERS CHAPTER 8

Chapter 8 is going to deal with two things: the practical operation of the Menorah, that great golden 7 branched lamp-stand that stood on the southern wall of the Holy Place, what was the first (and lesser) compartment as one entered the Tent of Meeting. And this chapter is going to deal with the consecration and initiation into service of the Levites. Let's be clear: when I say Levites I am NOT referring to the Priests. By now the tribe of Levi has been divided into distinct two groups: the Priests (who all come from Aaron's clan), and the Levites, who represent the remainder of the Levite clans. The Levites were in essence the blue-collar workers who reported to the Priests.

READ NUMBERS CHAPTER 8 all

The Altar of Burnt Offering and the Menorah had to be serviced twice per day by the priests. And the common element between both of these was that a fire had to be continually burning. But let's be clear: the Menorah was ONLY lit during hours of darkness.....it did **not** burn 24 hours a day. The Altar also did **not** have a flaming fire burning 24 hours a day; after the day's worth of sacrifices ended, the coals were banked so that there would be hot coals remaining to kindle the following morning's fire.

An interesting instruction here is that the light of the Menorah was to face forward. First, recall that the Menorah was a lamp stand that held 7 oil lamps....it didn't use candles. What is the purpose of speaking about making the light face forward? Well apparently the shape of the oil lamps allowed the light to be directed more towards one direction than another. The importance of the light going forward was so it would shine upon the Table of Shewbread on the opposite wall of the Tent. The Menorah was symbolic of the light, the OWR, of God. The Table of Shewbread with its 12 loaves of bread symbolizing the 12 tribes of Israel was to operate only under God's light and presence.

Verse 5 begins to recall that the Levites were separated from the other tribes of Israel; they had replaced the status and purpose of the firstborn of Israel. This is something that we must drill into our minds so that we can understand all that will happen in the Bible from this point forward, especially as it concerns prophecy. The Levites were no longer a normal part of Israel.

They were no longer counted as among the other Israelites. The earlier census of the Levites (as apart from the census of the other Israelites) was to demonstrate this important God-principle. Certainly the Levites remained racial Hebrews; and they operated to the welfare of Israel; but they would no longer call themselves Israelites, nor would God consider them as such.

What we see happening here is that the Levites are to be cleansed.....purified..... to initiate their service as a set-apart group of Hebrews assigned the duty of serving God by means of serving God's priesthood. Notice that it is Moses that is directed to perform this ritual and not a priest. Once the priests are consecrated Moses won't be performing any more of these rituals.

And as is standard for purification rituals it is WATER that is used. I don't mean to parse words but this is NOT the same thing as happened in the ordination of the priests. As I mentioned in an earlier lesson, a dedication or consecration-to-God ritual always involved being anointed with oil. This ritual upon the Levites was merely to cleanse and purify them sufficiently to operate around and near the Sanctuary area. However Levites were NOT permitted inside any of the sacred areas and they were NOT permitted to conduct any of the sacred rituals, so they did not have to be granted the highest level of holiness as was bestowed upon the Priests.

The water of purification used on the Levites was the same kind of water used to purify a person who had touched a dead body: it was that water that was mixed with the ashes of the Red Heifer, which means a Red Heifer ceremony had to have already occurred. So, this is NOT the same thing as "holy" water. Last lesson we discussed that when the term "holy water" is used, it is actually synonymous with "living water" (*mayim chayim* in Hebrew). Living water is water from a running spring, or a spring fed pond, or a river. Holy water generally indicates that the living water has been put into the giant copper laver that resided in the Tabernacle courtyard; it was what the priests drew from to wash their hands and feet before, during and after rituals. Holy water then was only one of the two required ingredients of this special "water of purification", the other being the ashes of the Red Heifer.

In verse 7, one of the requirements is that they must have a razor gone over their body. Now this instruction is widely misunderstood. First, remember this only applies to males.....for only male Levites could be in service to God. Second a razor is just a term that means a sharp object used to cut hair. They are not SHAVING per se, they are cutting. Shaving as we think of it today (which means to remove hair to the point that only the skin beneath it shows) was not part of Hebrew society. Third, the call to take a razor to their whole body is a euphemism that simply means they are to cut the hair of their heads because the hair of the head sits atop the whole body like a crown or a covering.

The Levites are also to wash their clothing. Now, let's be clear: in addition to all this, they are to fully bathe in water, as that is standard purification procedure in every case.

It is interesting that the sectarian argument among Christians about baptism is whether sprinkling is acceptable, or to be baptized as full immersion is necessary. The argument generally stems from these verses for we read that the Levites are to be "sprinkled". Again: the sprinkling is only the standard procedure for applying the water of purification, which is water

mixed with ashes of the Red Heifer. It is not intended to take the place of immersion in a river or a Mikvah.....ritual bathing....which is but immersion in living water with no ashes in it.

Sprinkling only happens when a person is being purified from a severely unclean state, usually brought about by touching a dead body. Ritual bathing, on the other hand, is ALWAYS the final step in the being brought back to a clean state from ANY kind or state of uncleanness. But immersion is also about restoration and renewal, which being sprinkled with the water and ashes concoction is not. In other words, the argument between sprinkling and immersion is utterly groundless, because from a Scriptural standpoint they are two entirely different procedures for two entirely different purposes.

Next after two bulls are offered on behalf of the entire community of Levites, verse 10 tells us that the Israelites were to lay hands on the Levites. And this was to be done "before the Lord". As we discussed earlier in this lesson, "before the Lord" simply means it's to take place in front of (or near) the Tabernacle, the dwelling place of the Lord, not inside of the Tent itself and certainly not inside the Holy of Holies chamber.

Obviously 2 million or so Israelites didn't lay hands on the Levites; it was the elders, the lay leaders from each tribe that laid hands on the Levites. Why did the Israelites do this? This is the typical act that indicates a substitutionary sacrifice. The Levites were being offered to God as a substitution.....in place of.....all Israelite firstborns. Rather than all Israel....or more accurately, the FIRSTBORNS of Israel.....being in direct service to God they were replaced with the Levites. This laying on of hands indicated both that the Levites were the sacrifice for the redemption of the Israelite firstborns AND it was a transfer of responsibility from the 12 tribes to this set apart tribe of Levi.

The Hebrew word that is being applied to this laying on of hands and substitution function of the Levites is **kippur**. In its broadest sense **kippur** means "atonement". The form of the word **kippur** as used in these passages adds the preposition '**al**'; thus the best translation of '**al kippur**' into the way modern English is used is "on behalf of". Just as the bulls are the **kippur** (the atonement) on behalf of the Levites, so are the Levites the **kippur** (the atonement) on behalf of the Israelites. Yet we can only take that analogy so far because certainly the Levites are not going to become an altar sacrifice, are they?

Thus since in the strictest since God does not ask for or tolerate actual human sacrifice, verse 12 has the Levites turning around and laying THEIR hands upon the heads of the two bulls (again, not every Levite, but probably just the heads of the clans). So, now, the Levites have taken the sacrificial responsibility laid upon them by all Israel, and transferred that to the bulls that will be slaughtered and burned.

This means that while the biblical sense of the word **kippur** partially means "atonement", that is not ALL that it means. **Kippur** also carries with it the sense of payment or ransom, which is expressed the word **kapparah**, which is an offshoot of **kippur**.

As with most of Christendom, many years ago when I ventured into the Old Testament and ran across things like this is just sort of rolled my eyes as such primitive behaviors. I feel quite

differently about it now, of course. We can scoff all we want at this procedure where the Israelites make the Levites their substitute/payment/atonement, and then the Levites make the bulls their substitute/payment/atonement.....but we really ought to be thankful. For this is a picture and demonstration of God's justice system at work. It was this precise system.....based on substitution, payment, and atonement..... that made Yeshua LEGALLY able to be everything that was needed to satisfy God as concerned our sin and iniquity before Him.

We'll continue chapter 8 next week.