

“God’s Worth Opens our Hands, Heart and Ears”

Numbers 7

A lot has happened to bring us to this point where the Tabernacle is almost ready for use in worship. The structure of the Tabernacle was completed back in Ex. 40 with all its furnishings. Aaron and his sons were consecrated in Lev. 8-9 following what kind of sacrifices God required in Lev. 1-7. The censuses of the army and how they would camp around the Tabernacle as well as march with the Tabernacle happened in Num. 1-4. Laws about what make you unclean which prevents you temporarily from approaching the Tabernacle have been stipulated in Num. 5. And God’s desire for His people to draw near to Him with special vows (Nazarite) end with God telling the priests this is how I want you to tell and remind my people that I want to bless them and shine My face on them.

A few more things remain before the Tabernacle is ready for worship. And this is what Ch. 7 is all about. The priests need some equipment in which to carry sacrificial blood, for the daily 12 loaves of bread for the Table of Presence, for incense for the Altar of incense and equipment to carry the Tabernacle pieces as they take it down for travelling. As well, the Levites have yet to be consecrated (Num. 8).

Here in Ch. 7 we are given a very lengthy and what seems to us unnecessary repeated listing of what each tribe was to bring; repeated exactly word for word twelve times, only the tribe’s name and its leader change. We’ll explain that. What we may not appreciate it and downplay however; is the pomp and ceremony God prescribes to make an extremely big deal about the official opening of the Tabernacle. While we may think it boring and unnecessary, let’s remember God ordered this to happen in this way. Why? We’ll see why in a minute.

Some people focus on the listing of the gifts and apply this to our need to give to God in our ministries today. Sure, that’s an important part of it but there’s more going on than just giving. And what’s the reason behind giving to God, anyway. We’ll explore that too. But I believe the overall focus here is on how great God is and He is worthy of our worship. When we value God properly, our hands open up and we give Him our resources, our hearts open up in worship with Him and in fellowship with each other, all of which makes us ready to hear what God has to say to us through His Word. [Let’s pray]

This lengthy passage can be simply divided into 3 sections. Vv.1-9, 10-88 and v.89. This whole section is Moses sharing God’s words of instruction to

Prepare to Worship the True God **(7:1-9)**

The Israelites spent over 400+ years living in Egypt, a people that had a god for everything and a shrine or house of worship for all these gods. But God proved all their gods were false gods when He made a mockery of them with the ten plagues of judgment that resulted in the exodus. Egypt’s gods failed to protect the Egyptians and proved powerless (because they don’t exist) compared to the One True God.

But God too requires a place for worship. And while the place of worship is a non-descript tent – non opulent – the utensils used for worship increase in value the closer you get to God. The bronze

altar and wash basin outside the holy place, the silver pans and utensils used for handling the blood and the bread in the Holy Place and then the gold-covered table of showbread, menorah, altar of incense and ark of the covenant, all point to the closer you get to God, the higher the value of the material. The curtains were made with fine thread and the with decorative patterns. So God established these things to communicate He is worthy and to be highly valued. And the

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handling of blood is sacred and to be valued because that's how you get access to the true God.

As God instructs Moses to show his people how to prepare to worship Him we see them

Setting aside time and resources for God (vv.1-4)

God tells Moses He wants 12 days of worship with special ceremonies and sacrifices to anoint the Tabernacle and consecrate it [make holy] to the Lord. They begin with the leaders bringing carts for the Levites to carry the Tabernacle pieces and equipment while marching through the wilderness. These carts and oxen are for the work of ministry, as all our gifts are as well today. The Gershonites received two carts and four oxen [two per cart] because they are responsible for carrying the curtains. The Merarites receive the other four carts and eight oxen because they have to carry all the pieces that hold all the curtains in place. The Kohathites do not receive any carts or oxen because they have to carry all the furnishings used in the Holy Place.

The reason why these gifts come from all the twelve tribes is it reminds us that all of us must

Do our part to help worship go smoothly (vv.5-9)

All these things are given by the people before they have used them. We mentioned this in Ch. 4 when talking about the Levites that when you don't have what you need before you go in to worship, or if you're not properly prepared, then you communicate that God is not important enough for us to spend time getting ready to serve Him. In the Book of Malachi, God rebukes the apathetic attitude of the priests about their approach to worshipping God. They brought defiled sacrifices instead of examining them to see if they were proper (1:6-8). Some of them were still serving God even though they had divorced their wives without reason (2:13-14). You can't live immorally and expect God to accept our worship. He also rebuked them for not giving Him their proper financial offerings (3:7-8).

Those were illustrations of people not taking the proper time to get ready to worship God or thinking their sins don't affect their worship or that their resources aren't needed for those doing the work of the ministry to help everyone and anyone to worship God properly. We do these things when we fail to value God properly. God wants Israel to make a big deal of worshipping the true God by taking the time and resources to show God is worthy of all our praise.

And then from vv.10-88 we have the daily detailed list of the leader (by name, same name listed in Ch.1) of what tribe (all in the same order as Ch.1) bringing the exact same gifts, each tribe per day, twelves days in a row. And then a summary of their total gifts in vv. 84-88. Why do we read all this repeated detail? As a reminder that

**We Are to Give to God our Best Because He is a Gracious
God (7:10-88)**

Perhaps you're wondering, 'I thought these guys were slaves for hundreds of years. Where did they get all this loot?' Because it was loot and they had permission from God to take this loot. When God first called Moses and explained to him His plan to get them out of Egypt, He told Moses in Ex. 3:20

²⁰ So I will stretch out my hand and strike the Egyptians with all the wonders that I will perform among them. After that, he will let you go. ²¹ "And I will make the Egyptians favorably disposed toward this people, so that when you leave you will not go empty-handed. ²² Every woman is to ask her neighbor and any woman living in her house for articles of silver and gold and for clothing, which you will put on your sons and daughters. And so you will plunder the Egyptians."

And then in Ex. 12 when the exodus happened we read,

³³ The Egyptians urged the people to hurry and leave the country. "For otherwise," they said, "we will all die!" ³⁴ So the people took their dough before the yeast was added, and carried it on their shoulders in kneading troughs wrapped in clothing. ³⁵ The Israelites did as Moses instructed and asked the Egyptians for articles of silver and gold and for clothing. ³⁶ The Lord had made the Egyptians favorably disposed toward the people, and they gave them what they asked for; so they plundered the Egyptians.

But see, that's just a reminder

Our gifts are first God's gifts to us

Everything we have comes from God. He gave us the intellect and physical gifts to do the work that we've done to earn a living. But He also gave us the spiritual gifts we use to serve and worship Him. Everything is first His. We just share what never belonged to us in the first place or use the gifts He's given us for others, not ourselves. God even arranges that we can take nothing with us when we die but we can serve others and God with what we leave behind. And spiritually speaking, we can continue to serve others long after we go to heaven by the impact we made on them through the time we invested in their lives. From Him and to Him and through him are all things, To God be the glory (Rom. 11:36).

And that's the main point of all these gifts being brought to God at the Tabernacle for the priests and Levites. All these gifts and all our gifts

Bless all of us (vv.10-88)

All these gifts benefit the entire community. In what way?

They unite the community

Why do we have to read the same details of each tribe bringing the exact same gifts? Because each tribe brought the exact same gifts. No one brought more. No one brought less. They all did the same thing together. When we read Israel's history, the 12 tribes did not always get along. Any family with multiple siblings will have scuffles. Eleven tribes almost wiped out the tribe of Benjamin in the Book of Judges! But not here. Everyone's offerings were the same, which united them, around what? Around God. When we have the same God and are in a right relationship with God, we're united and get along because we're not living for ourselves but for the God who we owe everything too. When we share our gifts with one another in unity through faith in God

We also equip ourselves

God told Moses they were almost ready to start making sacrifices at the Tabernacle so they could have their sins forgiven and stay close to God and each other. All these gifts equipped the priests to do their ministries so that the people could receive the ministry. The silver plates were probably for the bread of the presence that the priests received and were able to eat. The bowls probably were to carry the shed blood that the priests would sprinkle on the horns of the altar and on the curtain entrance as a sign that a sacrifice was made in your place. The dishes were used to carry the grain offerings which were burnt on top of the animals usually. The gold pan or cup of incense was sprinkled on the altar of incense, a unique smell that told you God heard your prayers.

The burnt offering was the worship offering; you give your all to God. The sin offering was the general-we-are-sinners-and-God-is-holy offering, recognizing our need for God. By equipping the priests with the tools for worship and sacrifice, they also equipped the worshipper to have the knowledge of how you stayed close to God. But I left out the final offering, the fellowship or peace offering was always the last offering and notice there were more of them than any other offering. Why?

Because the worshippers were able to eat this with each other. It was meant to

Encourage everyone

Because it brought you together as a community symbolizing you were walking with God. And every tribe did this together to celebrate their unity and joy together as God's redeemed people walking in faith with Him and at peace with each other. And each day all the other tribes celebrated that a different tribe was also walking with God, serving God and enjoying God. And you could rejoice in that together.

Seventy-eight verses later we come to the reason for all this: v.89,

⁸⁹ When Moses entered the Tent of Meeting to speak with the Lord, he heard the voice speaking to him from between the two cherubim above the atonement cover on the ark of the Testimony. And he [God] spoke with him [Moses].

When we've prepared ourselves to worship God (making time for worship and setting aside resources for God) and when we give those resources for God's ministry because He's been so gracious to us which unites us, equips us and encourages us), it all

Makes Us Ready to Listen to God's Trustworthy Words **(7:89)**

Moses is now able to go into God's presence. God's presence, we are told, was above the mercy seat. Called the mercy seat because through the shed blood of an animal that died in your place, God in His mercy has given you access into His presence. When we're right with God, we are ready to hear what He says and do what He says because everything God tells us to do is fully trustworthy.

When we gather together on Sundays we follow this process. We worship through singing, giving (in resources or in service) before we hear from the Word. We pray before we sing to prepare our hearts to worship. When we arrive we're not always ready to worship. Especially if it's been a busy morning and we got going late or there was a problem at home and you're flustered. Or you're worried about an issue or a person and you arrive heavy-hearted; it takes a bit for us to feel ready to enter the presence of God and put us in a position to be open to hearing what God is saying to us

(through the worship and prayer and the Word). Even though we may not feel ready to worship, just singing that first song puts you in a better frame of mind and as you read the words and sing to God, we often find our spirits lifting and being encouraged. And then we share prayer requests, our hearts are softened due to the concerns of those around us and thankful for the non-struggles that we don't have right now. And it draws us closer to each other and some of you reach out to those later who asked for prayer. All these things prepare us to hear from God so we'll walk closer with God.

I can prove that to you. Pay attention to the volume of our singing. We always sing the final song with more enthusiasm than we do the first song. Don't we? Why? Because in our worship and fellowship and prayer, God's been softening our hard hearts, or focusing our distracted brains or freeing us from our anxiousness so that we are listening more closely and our hearts are open to hear from God.

This on-the-surface unexciting chapter illustrates for us how God works through united worship and service. Moses did not go into God's presence until all this was completed. Twelve days of worship and preparation made possible through the shedding of blood, so he could hear what God had to say. And whatever God says is fully trustworthy and we can obey Him even if we don't always understand why.

Maybe one of the most skipped words in this chapter is the first word in v.89, "When" or some translations 'now'. Now that he could enter God's presence after this worship he was ready to speak to God and ready to hear from God. How often do we just presume that when we open our bibles or go to pray or attend a bible study or sing that first song, we assume we are ready to talk with God or that God is ready to talk with us? We can learn a lot about preparing to meet with God personally as well as corporately so that we are ready to talk with God and open to what He has to say to us.

Father, thank You for this chapter. 77 out of 89 of these verses are repetitive and seem at first, unnecessary. But if we were part of one of these tribes and saw our tribe mentioned, waiting on our turn to give our gifts to you and enjoying fellowship with You and each other, we would be encouraged. I pray that we were encouraged this morning to give more thought to how we approach You. Do we pray at all before we come and meet together? Do we leave services and bible studies and visits with Your people feeling like nothing was gained simply because we came unprepared, distracted or unexpected? James 4 tells us 'we don't have because we don't ask' or 'we ask with wrong motives.'

Father, may these repetitive verses remind us of our own need to come prepared to hear from You in worship, prayer, serving, fellowship and the Word and pray expecting that we will hear from You. We come into your presence through the blood of Your Son Jesus, a new and living way, confessing known sin, ready to sing Your praises, open to pray to You and hear from You, so that we would be united and serve Your purposes to one another and to our communities. May people see we spent time in Your presence.

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If you have any comments or questions about this message please contact us at olivet@rideau.net