

"How God Provides"

Numbers 18:8-32

Since we are still in Numbers 18, let's remind ourselves what's been going on. The Israelites have complained off and on to Moses and Aaron about lack of food and water and sometimes questioning their leadership. This grumbling about their leadership came out of the debacle of the 12 spies incident in Num. 13-14. Although the 12 spies all agreed the land of Canaan was wonderful, 10 of the spies lacked the faith to believe they (with God) could defeat the giants who were in the land. Out of fear, they spread a deceptive report that painted the land as less than desirable.

The people rose up against Moses and Aaron for leading them "only to die" in Canaan. God intervened, settled the matter by putting to death the 10 spies who lied, and pronounced a 40-year delay into the land, during which every man of military age at the time (who believed the lies and lacked faith to go in) would gradually pass away. But the grumbling against Moses and Aaron was not over.

One unhappy camper was Korah. Korah, silently behind Moses and Aaron's back, led a rebellion to challenge Aaron for the priesthood. Aaron and Moses hit the dirt, praying for them knowing God was going to judge them. God did by opening the ground and swallowing up Korah, Dathan and Abiram and their families. Then God struck down the 250 leaders who were also opposing Aaron. Plus God sent a plague that destroyed 14, 700 others before Aaron's sons offered incense (prayer) for God to stop.

Then God proactively settled the argument once and for all by telling the 12 tribe leaders to give Moses their staffs which included Aaron's as representative of the Levites. God told Moses to put them in the Tent of Meeting overnight and that whoever's staff (a piece of dead wood) sprouted with new growth, would be the High Priest and the family that would serve God at the Tabernacle. Aaron's staff produced almond flowers, buds and almonds overnight as a sign from God that Aaron was still God's appointed mediator who will intercede for the people and whose family will serve as priests before God.

However, the reward for being chosen to be God's servants for ministry did have one caveat: the Levites would not receive any land of their own. No inheritance. Without land, how can they grow food to eat and live on? Well, God had that already figured out through the sacrificial system. God is a God of order (Paul tells us in 1 Cor. 14:33) and He had figured out a way that the priests and their families' needs will be met. "If". If what? We'll see.

What we will learn here in this very unexciting passage of Scripture concerning sacrifices and offerings and first fruits and redeeming animals, are the basic principles of how God meets our needs. Have you ever prayed for God to meet your needs? We all have. How does He usually do that? Usually through His people. And this is what we see here in the sacrificial system, as the pattern for how God provides for us.

God Provides for Our Needs Through the Obedience of His People (18:8-20)

In vv.8-20 God tells Aaron how His family and descendants are to live:

By faith believing God will work through people (vv.8-13)

God explains what offerings Aaron and his sons get; grain offerings, and portions of the sin offerings, guilt offerings and wave offerings (wave offerings were extra, voluntary offerings). They could only eat from the grain, sin and guilt offerings in the Holy Place because these were holy offerings. The freewill offerings they could distribute for their families and they could be eaten outside the Holy Place. Notice in vv.12-13 they could eat the best of the first fruits, olive oil, grain and wine. If – if the people were obeying God and bringing these offerings consistently. This is why you had to have faith. You were dependent on the people of God to obey God by not hanging on to the first evidence of their harvest. The whole concept of first fruits was, give to God your first and your best and He will provide the rest. So, the priests serve God by faith believing the people of God will live by faith in God trusting He will provide for them as they give sacrificially from their grain and animals.

In vv.14-20, God reminds the Israelites that the gift of the firstborn son, came at a price. Because God spared their firstborns at the Exodus when they believed that applying the shed blood of a lamb to their doorposts would spare them from God's judgment, God required them to pay the priests a redemption price instead of offering the firstborn male or animal to God. For both the people and the priests this reminded them to trust God to provide

With thanks for God's grace (vv.14-20)

God in His grace spared their firstborn. And God in His grace provided the priests with this money to look after other needs that didn't come through sacrifices. Notice how often the word "gift" or "give" appears; I counted 8 times. When God gives to the people, they give to God who gifts the priests. No one earned any of this, they are all gifts from God and the proper response is 'thanks God' from providing for our needs and above and beyond at times.

God said this was to be a permanent 'covenant of salt' in v.19, that this is how it will work. 'Salt' is permanent. It doesn't change. It preserves things. So God was saying, this is how things are going to work. Trust My system. Believe My ways and your needs will be met.

To see an example of how this worked, we can look at an example of how it failed when the people disobeyed God. In Neh. 13, he returns to Israel a second time after all the work he did the first time. Rebuilding walls and restoring biblical practices. Yet when he returns he sees the Levites not working at the temple because the people weren't providing sacrifices. So they had to go to the fields to work to eat.

Neh. 13:10 I also learned that the portions assigned to the Levites had not been given to them, and that all the Levites and singers responsible for the service had gone back to their own fields. ¹¹ So I rebuked the officials and asked them, "Why is the house of God neglected?" Then I called them together and stationed them at their posts. ¹² All Judah brought the tithes of grain, new wine and oil into the storerooms. ¹³ I put Shelemiah the priest, Zadok the scribe, and a Levite named Pedaiah in charge of the storerooms and made Hanan son of Zaccur, the son of Mattaniah, their assistant, because these men were considered trustworthy. They were made responsible for distributing the supplies to their brothers.

The book of Malachi is essentially God's rebuke to the priests (also around the time of Nehemiah or shortly after) who weren't doing their work properly: sacrificing wounded animals and divorcing their wives. Also, the people were not bringing in their tithes and offerings. Disobedience creates a domino effect where God's people's needs are not provided for. That's what I meant by God's system works well "if" His people are walking in obedience to Him.

Here in Num. 18:0-32 God instructs the Levites, who assist Aaron and his sons, the priests. They can help prepare the sacrifices and offerings but they can't enter the Holy Place nor do they receive portions of the sacrifices (except for the peace offerings which everyone can share together). But God has that figured out too; they receive the tithes and offerings from the people, so that their needs are met. However, their needs will only be met when God's people are walking right with Him.

Our Openness to Give to God is Directly Connected to Our Identity in God (18:20-24)

God reminds Aaron (v.20) and also tells the Levites in vv.21-24, that they will receive no land as an inheritance. To Aaron God directly says,

You will have no inheritance in their land, nor will you have any share among them; I am your share and your inheritance among the Israelites.

The priesthood is totally reliant on God to provide through God's people; sacrifices and redemption money. As were the Levites, who were totally reliant on the tithes that the people gave to the Lord.

²¹ *"I give to the Levites all the tithes in Israel as their inheritance in return for the work they do while serving at the Tent of Meeting.*

And even more clearly, Moses said this in

Deut. 10:8 At that time the Lord set apart the tribe of Levi to carry the ark of the covenant of the Lord, to stand before the Lord to minister and to pronounce blessings in his name, as they still do today. ⁹ That is why the Levites have no share or inheritance among their brothers; the Lord is their inheritance, as the Lord your God told them.)

Offerings and tithes are temporal things everyone needs to survive. But God says something very important to Aaron, that relates to all God's people *"I am your share and your inheritance among the Israelites.*

When we have a healthy understanding of who we are in God – His child, co-heir with Jesus – we realize the earthly needs we have are not our focus. God is. When we start worrying about our needs, we need to stop and remember whose we are. We are a child of God. He is our Father. Jesus said of God, using a human illustration to drive home this point:

Luke 7:11 "Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead? ¹² Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? ¹³ If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!

The Holy Spirit is called the Spirit of God and the Spirit of Christ. When we accept Christ as our Saviour, God's presence comes to dwell in us. Paul says in Eph. 1:14, He is the seal of our salvation,

who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession—to the praise of his glory.

When we place our faith in God through Jesus, we get God Himself.

God is our greatest inheritance (vv.20-21a)

When we confess our sins and recognize we don't have God in our life, that we are totally on our own, that's scary. We need saving, so we accept Jesus as our Saviour and God comes into our life. He then promises to meet our needs and when we die, we get to be fully in God's presence where we'll never have to worry about a thing anymore. When he answers our prayers and meets our needs now, it's a reminder of our future waiting for us. God is our portion.

Since He's our inheritance, He'll use us to meet each other's needs. The Israelites were required to give certain tithes to God at different times in the year. This provided for the Levites who were totally dependent on God for their needs, as God moved the people's hearts to give. The wise Levite did not complain about this but rather understood that

Serving God is a privilege (vv.21b-24)

²¹ "I give to the Levites all the tithes in Israel as their inheritance in return for the work they do while serving at the Tent of Meeting. ²² From now on the Israelites must not go near the Tent of Meeting, or they will bear the consequences of their sin and will die. ²³ It is the Levites who are to do the work at the Tent of Meeting and bear the responsibility for offenses against it. This is a lasting ordinance for the generations to come. They will receive no inheritance among the Israelites. ²⁴ Instead, I give to the Levites as their inheritance the tithes that the Israelites present as an offering to the Lord. That is why I said concerning them: 'They will have no inheritance among the Israelites.'"

This is what Korah missed. He did not appreciate God's grace in his life that already set him apart from his fellow Israelites as the few who get to serve God as their work. Nor was it to be taken lightly because one of their main responsibilities was protecting the people from harm. They guarded the Tent of Meeting so no one unauthorized would come near it and suffer the consequences. So it was very important. And God met their needs through the gifts of the people who were required to bring 1/10th of their income and at times parts of their crops.

The tithe was never meant to be a legalistic demand from God. The tithe existed before the Law – Abraham gave Melchizedek a tithe from the spoils of war in Gen. 14 as an offering to God. But the tithe is not commanded in the NT yet it still stands as a base principle. I think tithing is a target that we should work toward if we don't or feel we can't. But I also think we shouldn't stop and use it as a minimum so we can keep more for ourselves.

And our offerings and gifts help provide for our needs as a body. For the salary of those who minister full or part-time and missionaries, but also to provide a safe, warm (or cool) place to serve God in worship. To reach our community and world through the gospel. To provide resources for teaching and growing in the Lord. Food for fellowship, etc. Our gifts to God always results in spiritual benefits for ourselves and the world.

Now, in vv.25-32 we see that the Levites weren't exempt from giving either. Everyone has to give based on what they receive.

²⁵ The Lord said to Moses, ²⁶ "Speak to the Levites and say to them: 'When you receive from the Israelites the tithe I give you as your inheritance, you must present a tenth of that tithe as the Lord's offering. ²⁷ Your offering will be reckoned to you as grain from the threshing floor or juice from the winepress. ²⁸ In this way you also will present an offering to the Lord from all the tithes you receive from the Israelites. From these tithes you must

give the Lord's portion to Aaron the priest. ²⁹ You must present as the Lord's portion the best and holiest part of everything given to you.'

What's the point God was making?

God Expects Leaders to Model Generosity **(18:25-32)**

Notice Moses tells the Levites how to give, not Aaron. Since their gifts go to Aaron and his family, God avoids it sounding self-serving if Aaron gave the instructions. And since the Levites don't have produce to offer, they are to give as if the tithe they receive was. So, set aside the tithe right away from the gifts received, dedicating it to God first before using it for yourself. They are to treat whatever income they receive as holy, as belonging to God.

³⁰ "Say to the Levites: 'When you present the best part, it will be reckoned to you as the product of the threshing floor or the winepress. ³¹ You and your households may eat the rest of it anywhere, for it is your wages for your work at the Tent of Meeting. ³² By presenting the best part of it you will not be guilty in this matter; then you will not defile the holy offerings of the Israelites, and you will not die.' "

With their income they can now buy their own wine and grain but they were to treat it as if it were the first fruits. They were to take their income seriously because they received it based on the obedience of God's people who are giving their tithes to God.

How do we apply this in our own life? First, remember everything you have comes because of God. He made you with the skills and intellect by which you earn a living and so put food on your table and a place to live. Thank God each day for His gracious gifts to you. Teach that to your children that everything indirectly comes from God. Treat what God has given you as holy; as His, which you get to serve Him with.

Second, be generous with God's blessing in your life. Even if we don't have a lot, share what you can. Pay attention to the needs around you. Bless others in quiet ways not to bring attention to yourself but as a ministry to the Lord. Lead by example so that your children understand these things too.

And third, remember that when we fail to do our part to give, it breaks down the cycle of the way God works for us and through us. Doesn't mean God is limited by our disobedience; He'll still figure it out. But when we fail to give as we should, we miss out on the blessings of being like God and Jesus, gracious givers.

God sent His first and best – His Only Begotten Son – to die for sins so that we could have life (John 3:16). God gave us the gift of faith so we could be saved (Eph. 2:8-9). God gave us His very presence, the Holy Spirit who seals us and guarantees our presence in God now and forever (Eph. 1:13-14). So if we're to grow in Christ let's be generous with our time and resources and we'll also benefit from God's gifts through others so we can all mature in Christ.

^{2 Cor. 9:6} Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. ⁷ Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. ⁸ And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work.

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If you have any questions or comments about this message please
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