

The Book of Numbers

Lesson 4: Offerings of the Leaders; the Lamps Lit -- Numbers 7:1–8:26

It is dedication day. The tabernacle is finally finished, anointed, and consecrated, the tent where heaven has agreed to meet earth, and the air is thick with the kind of holy excitement that comes once in a generation. And here come the leaders of Israel, the heads of the tribes, the men who had stood up to be counted, walking forward with wagons and oxen and silver and gold. They are not arriving empty-handed. They have come to give.

What happens next is one of the longest, and at first glance one of the most repetitive, chapters in the Bible. Twelve leaders bring their offerings, and Moses records each one in full, the same silver platter, the same silver bowl, the same gold spoon, the same animals, twelve times over. We might be tempted to skim. But God was not bored. He had Moses write down every single gift by name, day after day, because every single gift mattered to Him. The God who notices the sparrow noticed each leader's offering and would not let it be lumped into an anonymous total.

Then the scene shifts indoors, into the holy place, and God tells Aaron to set up the lamps so they shine in front of the lampstand. In a tent with no windows, in a wilderness night, the golden lampstand burned, throwing its light across the holy place before the Lord. And the Levites are brought forward, cleansed, presented, and given wholly to God for the service of His house, a whole tribe set apart so the light could keep burning and the worship could go on.

We do not bring oxen to a tabernacle, and we are not under the Levitical system, for all of it has been fulfilled and taken up into Christ (Hebrews 8 through 10). But these chapters are not museum pieces. They ask whether you give to God cheerfully and on purpose, the way the New Testament calls us to give (2 Corinthians 9:7). They ask whether God's careful, individual notice of each gift changes how you think about your own quiet offerings. And they ask whether you, set apart in Christ, are letting your life burn as a light before the Lord (Matthew 5:14–16; Philippians 2:15). Come and see what God does with people who give themselves to Him.

Group Discussion: Why do you think God had Moses record each leader's identical offering separately and in full, twelve times over, rather than simply summarizing the total, and what does that tell us about how God receives what we give to Him?

Personal Reflection: Where in your life right now are you giving to God out of habit or pressure rather than cheerfully and on purpose, and what would need to change for your giving to come from a glad heart?

Read Numbers 7:1–8:26

Study Questions

1. In Numbers 7:1–9 the leaders bring wagons and oxen for the work of the tabernacle, and they are distributed to the Levites according to their service. What does this teach us about supporting and equipping the work of God's people in an orderly, purposeful way?
2. The leaders gave practical gifts that met real needs in God's work. What practical need in the Lord's church do you have the means to help meet, and what is keeping you from doing it?
3. In Numbers 7:10–88 each of the twelve leaders brings an identical offering, yet God has Moses record every one separately and in full. What does this careful, individual record teach us about how God notices and honors each person's gift?
4. Have you ever felt that your gift or service was too small or too ordinary to matter to God? How does God's individual notice of each identical offering speak to that feeling?
5. Numbers 7:89 tells us that when Moses went into the tent to speak with God, he heard the voice speaking to him from above the mercy seat. After all the giving, the chapter ends with God speaking. What does this teach us about the relationship between wholehearted devotion and communion with God?
6. When have you found that drawing near to give yourself to God led to a deeper sense of hearing from Him? How might your communion with God grow if you gave yourself to Him more fully?

7. In Numbers 8:1–4 Aaron sets up the lamps to give light in front of the lampstand in the holy place. As believers are called to shine as lights in the world (Matthew 5:14–16; Philippians 2:15), what does it mean for God's people to burn as lights before the Lord and before the world?
8. A lamp must be tended and fueled to keep burning. What is one practical way you can tend the light of your own walk with God so it does not grow dim?
9. In Numbers 8:5–26 the Levites are cleansed, presented before the Lord, and given wholly to Him to do the service of His house in the place of the firstborn. How is this consecration of the Levites a shadow fulfilled in Christ and in the call of every Christian to be wholly given to God (see Hebrews 8 through 10; Romans 12:1; 1 Peter 2:5, 9)?
10. Looking back over the whole passage, the leaders' glad giving, God's careful notice of each gift, the voice from the mercy seat, the lamps lit before the Lord, and the Levites wholly consecrated, name one specific way Jesus is forming you to give cheerfully and to shine as His own.

Digging Deeper

Reflect on these passages: Hebrews 8 through 10, the Levitical priesthood and tabernacle service as shadows fulfilled in Christ; 2 Corinthians 9:6–8, God loves a cheerful giver who gives as he has purposed in his heart; 1 Corinthians 16:1–2, lay by in store on the first day of the week as God has prospered you; Matthew 5:14–16, you are the light of the world, let your light shine before men; 1 Peter 2:5, 9, a holy and royal priesthood offering spiritual sacrifices through Jesus Christ

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