

What can we bring to God in worship?

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[0 : 00] All right, do keep your Bibles open to Numbers 7 and 8. All right, I'm going to begin though by asking you to just chat with the person next to you that very first question that I have in the outline.

Let's say you're invited to a growth group social or small group social, you know, and everyone's required to bring a plate to share. How do you go about deciding what you're going to bring to that party?

All right, go for it. And then I'll come back in about 30 seconds. Okay.

Hopefully some of you have some fancy ideas there. But I think that there should be a general rule that you want to bring your fair share, right?

Good basis to start, maybe. And so, for example, it's not a good look if people are going to bring mains, you know, someone's going to bring an entire roast chicken, and you know, you bring a bag of lollies.

[1 : 18] Right? Or someone spent the whole afternoon baking a delicious cake, and then you rock up with a packet of Tim Tams that you bought from Coles, right?

On your way there. Now, I understand that there may be some allowances. If you're time poor, you know, you've got some assessments or exams just coming up, that's fine. Or, you know, you're a student, you know, you've got no regular income, and so, you know, you can't sort of go all out and be fancy.

But it's worth trying to be fair-minded, isn't it? That you're not thinking how little you can get away with when you come, but consider, what should I do?

What should I bring that would at least be a fair share? Okay. Well, today, in chapter 7 and 8 of Numbers, not quite a big party, but God does ask Israel to bring things to the dedication of the temple or tabernacle.

And he does make it clear exactly what they are to bring. So, no guesswork there. God says it explicitly. And here, with the dedication of the tabernacle, it's a bit like the opening ceremony, isn't it, of a significant building, like a new parliament house or something.

[2 : 35] God intends to do important business at this place with his people. And so, just as you would have ribbon-cutting ceremonies and plaque unveiling, so it is with the tabernacle.

Except it's even more elaborate, as we shall see, because it goes on for days. So, just to have a little reference by way of timing, if you look at verse 1 of chapter 7, it says that when Moses finished setting up the tabernacle, he anointed and consecrated it in all its furnishings.

He also anointed and consecrated the altar and all its utensils. Then the leaders of Israel, the heads of families, who were the tribal leaders in charge of those who were counted, made offerings.

Now, if you're wondering when this timing was, you go back to Exodus chapter 40 and verse 17 on the next slide. And it says that the tabernacle was set up on the first day of the first month in the second year.

And if you remember, in Numbers chapter 1, when the census was taken, we read that it was taken on the first day of the second month of the second year.

[3 : 44] So, actually, what we have here is one month before Numbers chapter 1. The events in Numbers are not strictly chronological.

The census in chapter 1 actually happens after the dedication here in chapter 7. So, you might think, why have they done it like that? Well, I think it's because the writer of Numbers knew that, with reference to the book of Numbers, the important thing, or the main narrative, was the conquest of Canaan, the journey there and then the conquest of Canaan.

And so, it was appropriate, therefore, to start with the census for the army, and then the order for the procession for the journey, and the role and the position of the Levites.

But now, just as they are about to commence on that journey in earnest, the writer of Numbers wants to just pause to highlight the importance of the tabernacle, and therefore, to explain that actually this tabernacle was dedicated, because the tabernacle is the symbol of God's presence, and therefore, the key to Israel's victory in Canaan.

And so, now, in verse 3, we have those instructions as to what to bring. They are to bring, as they are gifts before the Lord, six covered carts and twelve oxen, an ox for each leader and a cart for every two.

[5 : 13] These they presented before the tabernacle. The Lord then said, Accept these from them, that they may be used in the work at the tent of meeting. Give them to the Levites, as each man's work requires.

So, Moses took the carts and the oxen and gave them to the Levites, gave two carts and four oxen to the Gershonites, as their work required, and he gave four carts and eight oxen to the Merorites, as their work required.

They were all under the direction of Ithamar, son of Aaron the priest. But Moses did not give any to the Kohathites, because they were to carry on their shoulders the holy things, for which they were responsible.

So, you can see here that it is exactly the same for every tribe, identical, fair and square, even though the size of each tribe differed slightly in number.

One ox per tribe, and then one cart shared between two tribes. So, six in total, each cart being pulled by two oxen.

[6 : 14] And then, of course, these carts were allocated based on the need with transport. So, the Merorites, they get four carts, because remember, they were carrying the frames and the poles, right?

So, those are the most heavy and bulky of the items with the tabernacle. The Gershonites, they were to carry the curtains and the coverings. So, less bulky, less heavy, but they still need the carts. So, two carts for them. The Kohathites, however, get none of this, because remember, all the holy things were to be carried by hand. In fact, remember those poles that were being put between those items?

They were to be carried on the shoulder. So, these carts then were allocated as offerings from the tribes. But then, each tribe were to bring offerings for the altar itself.

And then, we start with Judah. And remember how Judah, being the fourth son, still comes first, because of the way Reuben, Simeon, and Levi had disobeyed Jacob.

[7 : 17] So, we start with Judah, and in verse 10, it says, When the altar was anointed, the leaders brought their offerings for its dedication and presented them before the altar. For the Lord had said to Moses, Each day, one leader is to bring his offering for the dedication of the altar.

The one who brought his offering on the first day was Nashon, son of Amidab, of the tribe of Judah. His offering was one silver plate weighing 130 shekels and one silver sprinkling bowl weighing 70 shekels, both according to the sanctuary shekel, each filled with finest flour mixed with olive oil as a grain offering.

One gold dish weighing 10 shekels filled with incense, one young bull, one ram, and one male lamb, a year old, for a burnt offering, one male goat for a sin offering, and two oxen, five rams, five male goats, and five male lambs, a year old, to be sacrificed as a fellowship offering.

This was the offering of Nashon, son of Amidab. Now this altar here is actually the bronze altar. It was at the entrance of the tent of meeting. It was the one on which animals were sacrificed and burnt.

But what happens then is over the next 12 days, the leader of each tribe takes it in turn to bring the same offering. And the leaders are the same as the ones that were listed in Numbers 1.

[8 : 41] And so you see then in the outline that I've itemized everything that they bring, right? Silver plate, silver bowl filled with flour, the gold dish filled with incense, and then after that, the live animals.

So for the burnt offering, a bull, ram, and goat. For the sin offering, a goat. And for the fellowship offering, two oxen, five rams, five male goats, and five male lambs.

Now again, if you look in Leviticus, all these offerings are described and explained. Each had a slightly different purpose. Now the one I want to focus on here is the last one, the fellowship offering.

Because you see there that actually there's a lot of animals that go with the fellowship offering, right? More than the others. And the reason for this is because, as the name suggests, this offering was part of a feast which the people could participate in, provided their ceremony clean.

So you need all these animals because you want to feed everyone. The other offerings, the burnt and the sin, they are actually either completely burnt, that's why it's called the burnt offering, or else reserved only for the priest to eat in the tent because they were holy.

[9 : 54] And because of that, you don't need so many animals, right? Otherwise the priest would be overeating. So in symbolic terms, what's happening here is that we're not just dedicating the tabernacle in terms of consecrating it to say that this is where God is present.

We're not just sacrificing for the sins of the people, even though that's happening. What is also happening is that a celebration is going on. They are celebrating that God is actually in relationship with Israel.

And of course, the best way to express fellowship is to eat food, right? Like our chicken and chips, eat every month. So what happens then is that these happen over the 12 days, right?

So the priests will have a really good feast, right? They get to eat every day for 12 days. The tribes only eat one of the 12 days. But over the next 12 days, one tribe at a time comes to the tabernacle with the exact same offering.

And that's all described in verses 18 to 88. All right? So we won't go through it again because it's identical. But what we'll do is jump to verse 89 because at the end of it, what happens is that we witness the blessing that flows from having God in their presence.

[11 : 13] Because what happens is that Moses is able to hear God's voice. So it says, Now, of course, the Lord had already been speaking to Moses throughout, right?

The wilderness and all that. But this is a symbolic way of saying that when God is present in the tabernacle, one of the things that will happen, one of the blessings that occurs, is that Moses will be able to speak or hear from the Lord.

Now, if you consider all the holy things in the tabernacle, you'll see that actually they're all referenced. So the Ark of the Covenant is mentioned here.

And even though it's not explicit, earlier we saw the incense in the bowl that points to the altar of incense where the incense is burnt. And then the finest flour was likely used to make the bread of presence.

And remember, there were 12 of those sitting on the bread, on the table. So the only item of furniture that is so far omitted is the lampstand. And that's why we get to it in chapter 8 now.

[12 : 29] So in verse 1, So all these holy things in the tabernacle really represent the same thing.

They represent that God is present in the tabernacle, and therefore, He's among the people. The lamps are to face forward because when the priests entered, they sort of, in that sense, figuratively, came face to face with God, with the light shining on them.

Elsewhere, we know that the lampstand is shaped like a tree with seven branches. And again, that reminds us, doesn't it, of the Garden of Eden, back in Genesis chapter 2, where the tree of life was over the seven days of creation, right?

Seven again. And where Adam and Eve then could commune with God, where God was present with them, walking with them in the garden, speaking to them face to face.

So the point here really is that when God is present, God speaks. And that's a similar thing today as Christians, right?

[14 : 00] We know that God's Spirit is with us, but He's with us so that we can hear God's voice. As we read the Bible, He teaches us and encourages us.

When we gather and we pray, God speaks to us through His Word. So really, God does not minister to us in meditative silence.

There are practices with other religions where we come and all we want to do is be silent and empty our minds. That's not how God ministers to us. When God is present, He comforts and instructs us by speaking His words to strengthen us, to give us wisdom.

So, that's the purpose then of verses 1 to 4. And now we get to verse 5. And it's at this point where you may think, okay, we've had the 12 tribes bring all their offering.

But really, one tribe is still missing, isn't it? The Levites themselves have not brought anything to the tabernacle so far. And this is where they come in.

[15 : 09] Because God has not forgotten them. But what we get to next is what the Levites are to bring. And in a word, if I could summarize, what they are to bring are themselves.

Right? The Levites are sort of like the carts and the oxen. They're like the silver plates and the golden bowls. they're brought to the tabernacle to be used by God in service.

And as I read from verse 5, I want to see if you agree with me. Alright? Just come with me. The Lord said to Moses, take the Levites from among all the Israelites and make them ceremonially clean.

To purify them, do this. Sprinkle the water of cleansing on them, then have them shave their whole bodies and wash their clothes. And so they will purify themselves. So, they're much like sacrificial animals, aren't they?

They have to be clean and without blemish when they come into the presence of the Lord. And it was the same with Aaron and his sons as well in Leviticus when they were ordained as priests.

[16 : 15] They too had to be washed and purified before they could come and present themselves to the Lord. But here, it's not just ceremonially uncleanliness because the sin of the Levites had to be dealt with as well.

And that's why in verse 8, on the next slide, we read that they are to have them take a young boe with its grain offering of the finest flour mixed with olive oil. Then you are to take a second young boe for a sin offering.

So, it's just like with the other tribes who had to bring animals, the Levites also had to bring with them animals to sacrifice for their sin. But first, Aaron is then required to bring the Levites to the front of the tent of meeting and assemble the whole Israelite community.

You are to bring the Levites before the Lord and the Israelites are to lay their hands on them. Aaron is to present the Levites before the Lord as a wave offering from the Israelites so that they may be ready to do the work of the Lord.

So, note carefully here the language. It's not that the Israelites or the Levites are presenting a wave offering to the Lord. No, the language is that they themselves are the wave offering that Aaron is presenting.

[17 : 34] They're brought by the Israelites, presented to Aaron, and then to be offered, presented by Aaron to the Lord. Now, the Israelites also have to lay hands on them and that's similar to what they do with animals, don't they?

Because by laying off on the hands, what they're indicating is that the Levites are representing them as a whole, taking their place in this work that they're about to do.

Now, then the Levites themselves lay hands in verse 12, this time on the heads of the bulls, using one for a sin offering to the Lord and the other for a burnt offering to make atonement for the Levites.

And this is to signify that the bulls are taking the place of the Levites and being sacrificed to atone for their sin. And all of this is then performed so that the Levites are purified, right there at the end, set apart to do the work of the Lord, to serve the Lord.

So we have in verse 15, after you have purified the Levites and presented them as a wave offering, they are to come to do their work at the tenth of the meeting.

[18 : 44] They are the Israelites who are to be given holy to me. I have taken them as my own in place of the firstborn, the first male offspring from every Israelite woman.

And if you recall, back in chapter 3, the whole idea of the redemption of the firstborn, the Levites being used to redeem all the firstborn of Israel was explained.

This here is repeated again in verses 17 and 18. But then, what happens in verse 19 is that even though the Levites now belong to the Lord, the Lord now gives them back to Aaron and his sons as a gift.

Right? So, verse 19, from among all the Israelites I have given the Levites as gifts to Aaron and his sons. For what purpose? To do the work at the tenth of meeting on behalf of the Israelites and to make atonement for them so that no plague will strike the Israelites when they go near the sanctuary.

So, really, what's happening is that God is giving back the Levites who belong to him not so that they can do what they like but so that they can now on Israel's behalf support the priest in the work

of the tabernacle.

[20 : 05] So, in other words, the work of the tabernacle is something that all of Israel is responsible for but they can't do it because they're not purified and so the Levites have to do it on their behalf and the Lord has set them apart to do this work.

And so, what we have here in chapters 7 and 8 is a picture that says the Levites are simultaneously Israel's offering to God remember how they were presented to God but also then God's gift back to Israel.

And in both of these chapters what we see is how important the tabernacle is and because of this the importance of noting that it was dedicated and the Levites themselves were set apart to do the work at the tabernacle.

So, that's essentially chapters 7 and 8. There are some verses at the end there verse 23 to 26 which because of time I won't go into there are possibly too many questions there to explain but for the curious you can come and talk to me about it afterwards.

But you might be thinking this is all really so interesting isn't it? Yes? Great historical information but what's the cash value for me?

[21 : 25] Right? What's the point? You may wonder. Really good question. Now there are many angles we can consider but I want to reflect on just one today and that is the title of our sermon and that is what do these two chapters teach us as Christians about what we are to bring to God in worship?

So we know the answer for Israel we know the answer for the Levites but what about us? What does it say about what we have to bring to God in worship?

Well if you've been following along in Leviticus and Numbers you'll realize hopefully that as Christians the tabernacle and the sacrifices are no longer relevant right?

I don't see anyone bringing any bowls or golden bowls or silver plates although if you want to bring those that would be good we can sell them and get some money but none of you are doing that right?

And that's because we all know that it's now been replaced correct? And replaced by? Answer? Jesus.

[22 : 33] Yes. Come on be courageous say Jesus. You know it's Jesus. Yes. So as the writer of Hebrews says Christ has replaced the earthly tabernacle right?

Verse 1. Now the first covenant had regulations for worship and also an earthly sanctuary. A tabernacle was set up in its first room with a lampstand and a table with its consecrated bread. This was called the holy place. We saw some of that today. But then in verse 1 of chapter 10 these things were only a shadow of the things to come right?

The law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming not the realities themselves. For this reason it can never by the same sacrifices repeated endlessly year after year make perfect those who draw near to worship.

Instead once Jesus has come he has made perfect ones for all those who are being made holy. So it's Jesus that has replaced the tabernacle.

[23 : 31] And so what does that mean for us now then? Does it mean therefore that we don't need to bring anything to the Lord in worship because Jesus has done it? Well the answer is both yes and no.

Yes we bring nothing but no because what we're to bring now is everything. So we bring nothing because only Jesus can provide what's required for our purification for our forgiveness of sins. He is the perfect sacrifice for sin. his blood shed on the cross. And so many of you will know the hymn Rock of Ages right? And one of the lines says nothing in my hand I bring only to the cross I cling right?

And so we can bring nothing of value except our faith in him that is our clinging to the cross. And you know sometimes as Christians even we live as though we we can right?

Maybe not the bulls or the bowls but we think maybe that our good deeds or our achievements or our integrity our godly character is something that we can bring to God as though that will make us right before God.

[24 : 55] But actually the Bible says that the wages of sin is death right? so actually you can you can pay you can bring something but you bring all of yourself to die that's the only thing that could pay for your sin but thankfully because of Jesus we don't have to do that right?

Jesus has done it for us all we need to do is put our faith in him but in response in response to the fact that God has given us back our life that we were meant to pay for our sin like the Levites we're then called to offer ourselves fully to God in worship in other words we bring everything all of ourselves to God in worship to him that's why in Romans chapter 12 verse 1 and 2 it says therefore I urge you brothers and sisters in view of God's mercy that is God's mercy shown to you in the death of Jesus free gift given to you to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice holy and pleasing to God this is your true and proper worship do not conform yourself to the pattern of this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is his good pleasing and perfect will so in a sense we're now like the Levites aren't we we offer ourselves fully to the Lord we don't bring an offering we are the offering and it's not an offering for the forgiveness of sins but it's an offering in a sense that we offer all of ourselves as a worship to the Lord as a proper response of the fact that we say you are our God bodies mind and soul all that we have and that's why in the New Testament we have the idea don't we that we are all priesthood we're all the priesthood of all believers aren't we it's not that we're priesthood that we're bringing sacrifices to the Lord no we're priesthood in the sense that we're set apart like the Levites are to offer ourselves as a living sacrifice to do God's will and again here we're often willing aren't we to offer God parts of ourselves right a bit of our time a bit of our money a bit of our effort but all of our time money and effort that is what God seeks as our true and proper worship to live wholeheartedly for him each and every moment in worship to him now of course the work now is no longer the work of the tabernacle because Jesus has done that work isn't it instead part of that work now is to proclaim what he's done or to use the language of the text today it is to do the work of proclaiming the work of the tabernacle because that is what Jesus has done or as Jesus says to the apostles in Acts it is to be his witnesses in Jerusalem Judea Samaria and to the ends of the earth our work now is not the work of the tabernacle but to proclaim that Jesus has done the work of the tabernacle and therefore call people to respond through faith and repentance now it's true that God does raise some people to do this on a full time basis like pastors or missionaries or people at CU and things like that but the work is not reserved for just people like us it's actually the work of the church as a whole we all have the joy and privilege of getting involved to play our part in this work whether it's to pray to support to give to invite to share to encourage to care to proclaim and of course to be witnesses in the sense of living out the gospel wherever God calls us to be so it's not about giving all the money to mission or spending all our time at work at church but rather to see that everything we do whether it's at home or at work everything we do with what we have our money but also our time and resources how are all of these things being set apart to do what is pleasing to God what is his perfect will because that is to offer our bodies as living sacrifices holy and acceptable to him let's pray father what can we bring to you that we can say will save us nothing except through repentance and faith and clinging to the cross of Jesus thank you for what he has done for us and yet at the same time having saved us you now call us to offer our lives to you so that you may use us for the work of the kingdom in whatever way you choose please teach us give us a great longing to want to serve you help us to please you to seek your will and to glorify the name of Jesus in his name we pray amen