

## INTRODUCTION TO NUMBERS CHAPTER 7

God having set up house (as it were) in the midst of the camp of Israel, the princes of Israel here come a visiting with their presents, as tenants to their landlord, in the name of their respective tribes.

### I. They brought presents,

1. Upon the dedication of the tabernacle, for the service of that, **#Nu 7:1-9**.
2. Upon the dedication of the altar, for the use of that, **#Nu 7:10-88**. And,

II. God graciously signified his acceptance of them, **#Nu 7:89**. The two foregoing chapters were the records of additional laws which God gave to Israel, this is the history of the additional services which Israel performed to God.

Ver. 1. thru Ver. 9.

Here is the offering of the princes to the service of the tabernacle. Observe,

I. When it was; not till it was *fully set up*, **#Nu 7:1**. When all things were done both about the tabernacle itself, and the camp of Israel which surrounded it, according to the directions given, then they began their presents, probably about the eighth day of the second month. Note, Necessary observances must always take place of freewill offerings: first those, and then these.

II. Who it was that offered: *The princes of Israel, heads of the house of their fathers*, **#Nu 7:2**. Note, Those that are above others in power and dignity ought to go before others, and endeavour to go beyond them, in every thing that is good. The more any are advanced the more is expected from them, on account of the greater opportunity they have of serving God and their generation. What are wealth and authority good for, but as they enable a man to do so much the more good in the world?

III. What was offered: six waggons, with each of them a yoke of oxen to draw them, **#Nu 7:3**. Doubtless these waggons were agreeable to the rest of the furniture of the tabernacle and its appurtenances, the best of the kind, like the carriages which great princes use when they go in procession. Some think that God, by Moses, intimated to them what they should bring, or their own consideration perhaps suggested to them to make this present. Though God's wisdom had ordained all the essentials of the tabernacle, yet it seems these accidental conveniences were left to be provided by their own discretion, which was to set in order that which was wanting (**#Tit 1:5**), and these wagons were not refused, though no pattern of them was shown to Moses in the mount. Note, It must not be expected that the divine institution of ordinances should descend to all those circumstances which are determinable, and are fit to be left alterable, by human prudence, that wisdom which is profitable to direct. Observe, No sooner is the tabernacle fully set up than this provision is made for the removal of it. Note, Even when we are but just settled in the world, and think we are beginning to take root, we must be preparing for changes and removes, especially for the great change. While we are here in this world, every thing must be accommodated to a militant and movable state. When the tabernacle was framing, the princes were very generous in their offerings, for then they brought *precious stones, and stones to be set* (**#Ex 35:27**), yet now they bring more presents. Note, Those that have done good should study to abound therein yet more and more, and not be *weary of well-doing*.

IV. How the offering was disposed of, and what use was made of it: the waggons and

oxen were given to the Levites, to be used in carrying the tabernacle, both for their ease (for God would not have any of his servants overburdened with work), and for the more safe and right conveyance of the several parts of the tabernacle, which would be best kept together, and sheltered from the weather, in waggons.

1. The Gershonites, that had the light carriage, the curtains and hangings, had but two waggons, and two yoke of oxen (#Nu 7:7); when they had loaded these, they must carry the rest, if any remained, upon their shoulders.
2. The Merarites, that had the heavy carriage, and that which was most unwieldy, the boards, pillars, sockets, &c., had four waggons, and four yoke of oxen allotted them (#Nu 7:8); and yet, if they had not more waggons of their own, they would be obliged to carry a great deal upon their backs too, for the silver sockets alone weighed 100 talents, which was above four tons, and that was enough to load four wagons that were drawn but by one yoke of oxen a piece. But each socket being a talent weight, which is about a man's burden (as appears, #2Ki 5:23) probably they carried those on their backs, and put the boards and pillars into the waggons. Observe here, How God wisely and graciously ordered the most strength to those that had the most work. Each had waggons *according to their service*. Whatever burden God in his providence lays upon us, he will by his sufficient grace proportion the strength to it, #1Co 10:13.
3. The Kohathites, that had the most sacred carriage, had no wagons at all, because they were to carry their charge upon their shoulders (#Nu 7:9), with a particular care and veneration. When in David's time they carried the ark in a cart, God made them to know to their terror, by the death of Uzza, that they did not *seek him in the due order*. See #1Ch 15:13.

Ver. 10. thru Ver. 89.

We have here an account of the great solemnity of dedicating the altars, both that of burnt offerings and that of incense; they had been sanctified before, when they were anointed (#Le 8:10,11), but now they were handselled, as it were, by the princes, with their free-will offerings. They began the use of them with rich presents, great expressions of joy and gladness, and extraordinary respect to those tokens of God's presence with them. Now observe here,

I. That the princes and great men were first and forwardest in the service of God. Those that are entitled to precedence should go before in good works, and that is true honour. Here is an example to the nobility and gentry, those that are in authority and of the first rank in their country; they ought to improve their honour and power, their estate and interest, for the promoting of religion, and the service of God, in the places where they live. It is justly expected that those who have more than others should do more good than others with what they have, else they are unfaithful stewards, and will not make up their *account with joy*. Nay, great men must not only with their wealth and power assist and protect those that serve God, but they must make conscience of being devout and religious themselves, and employing themselves in the exercises of piety, which will greatly redound to the honour of God (#Ps 138:4,5), and have a good influence upon others, who will be the more easily persuaded to acts of devotion when they see them thus brought into reputation. It is certain that the greatest of men is less than the least of the ordinances of God; nor are the meanest services of religion any disparagement to those that make the greatest figure in the world.

II. The offerings they brought were very rich and valuable, so rich that some think there

was not so great a difference in estate between them and others as that they were able to bear the expense of them themselves, but that the heads of each tribe contributed to the offering which their prince brought.

1. They brought some things to remain for standing service, twelve large silver dishes, each about sixty ounces weight, as many large silver cups, or bowls, of about thirty-five ounces--the former to be used for the meat-offerings, the latter for the drink-offerings--the former for the flesh of the sacrifices, the latter for the blood. The latter was God's table (as it were), and it was fit that so great a King should be served in plate. The golden spoons being filled with incense were intended, it is probable, for the service of the golden altar, for both the altars were anointed at the same time. Note, In works of piety and charity we ought to be generous according as our ability is. He that is the best should be served with the best we have. The Israelites indeed might well afford to part with their gold and silver in abundance to the service of the sanctuary, for they needed it not to buy meat and victual their camp, being daily fed with bread from heaven; nor did they need it to buy land, or pay their army, for they were shortly to be put in possession of Canaan.

2. They brought some things to be used immediately, offerings of each sort, burnt-offerings, sin-offerings, and a great many peace-offerings (on part of which they were to feast with their friends), and the meat offerings that were to be annexed to them. Hereby they signified their thankful acceptance of, and cheerful submission to, all those laws concerning the sacrifices which God had lately by Moses delivered to them. And, though it was a time of joy and rejoicing, yet it is observable that still in the midst of their sacrifices we find a *sin-offering*. Since in our best services we are conscious to ourselves that there is a mixture of sin, it is fit that there should be even in our most joyful services a mixture of repentance. In all our approaches to God, we must by faith have an eye to Christ as the great sin-offering, and make mention of him.

3. They brought their offerings each on a separate day, in the order that they had been lately put into, so that the solemnity lasted twelve days. So God appointed (#Nu 7:11): *They shall bring their offering, each prince on his day*, and so they did. One sabbath must needs fall within the twelve days, if not two, but it should seem they did not intermit on the sabbath, for it was holy work, proper enough for a holy day. God appointed that it should thus be done on several days,

(1.) That solemnity might be prolonged, and so might be universally taken notice of by all Israel, and the remembrance of it more effectually preserved.

(2.) That an equal honour might thereby be put upon each tribe respectively; in Aaron's breast-plate each had his precious stone, so in this offering each had his day.

(3.) Thus it would be done more decently and in order; God's work should not be done confusedly, and in a hurry; take time, and we shall have done the sooner, or at least we shall have done the better.

(4.) God hereby signified how much pleased he is, and how much pleased we should be, with the exercises of piety and devotion. The repetition of them should be a continual pleasure to us, and we must not be weary of well doing. If extraordinary service be required to be done for twelve days together, we must not shrink from it, nor call it a task and a burden.

(5.) The priests and Levites, having this occasion to offer the same sacrifices, and those

some of every sort, every day, for so many days together, would have their hands well set in, and would be well versed in the laws concerning them.

(6.) The peace-offerings were all to be eaten the same day they were offered, and two oxen, five rams, five he-goats, and five lambs, were enough for one day's festival; had there been more, especially if all had been brought on one day, there might have been danger of excess. The virtue of temperance must not be left, under pretence of the religion of feasting.

4. All their offerings were exactly the same, without any variation, though it is probable that neither the princes nor the tribes were all alike rich; but thus it was intimated that all the tribes of Israel had an equal share in the altar, and an equal interest in the sacrifices that were offered upon it. Though one tribe was posted more honourably in the camp than another, yet they and their services were all alike acceptable to God. Nor must we have faith of our Lord Jesus Christ *with respect to persons*, #Jas 2:1.

5. Nahshon, the prince of the tribe of Judah, offered first, because God had given that tribe the first post of honour in the camp; and the rest of the tribes acquiesced, and offered in the same order in which God had appointed them to encamp. Judah, of which tribe Christ came, first, and then the rest; thus, in the dedication of souls to God, every man is presented in his own order, *Christ the first-fruits*, #1Co 15:23. Some observe that Nahshon is the only one that is not expressly called a prince (#Nu 7:12), which the Jews give this account of: he is not called a prince, that he might not be puffed up because he offered first; and all the others are called princes because they (though some of them of the elder house) submitted, and offered after him. Or, because the title of prince of Judah did more properly belong to Christ, for *unto him shall the gathering of the people be*.

6. Though the offerings were all the same, yet the account of them is repeated at large for each tribe, in the same words. We are sure there are no vain repetitions in scripture; what then shall we make of these repetitions? Might it not have served to say of this noble jury that the same offering which their foreman brought each on his day brought likewise? No, God would have it specified for each tribe: and why so?

(1.) It was for the encouragement of these princes, and of their respective tribes, that each of their offerings being recorded at large no slight might seem to be put upon them; for rich and poor meet together before God.

(2.) It was for the encouragement of all generous acts of piety and charity, by letting us know that what is so given is lent to the Lord, and he carefully records it, with every one's name prefixed to his gift, because what is so given he will pay again, and even a *cup of cold water* shall have its *reward*. He is not unrighteous, to forget either the cost or the *labour of love*, #Heb 6:10. We find Christ taking particular notice of what was cast into the treasury, #Mr 12:41. Though what is offered be but little, though it be a contribution to the charity of others, yet if it be according to our ability it shall be recorded, that it may be recompensed in the resurrection of the just.

7. The sum total is added at the foot of the account (#Nu 7:84-88), to show how much God was pleased with the mention of his freewill-offerings, and what a great deal they amounted to in the whole, when every prince brought in his quota! How greatly would the sanctuary of God be enriched and beautified if all would in their places do their part towards it, by exemplary purity and devotion, extensive charity, and universal usefulness!

8. God signified his gracious acceptance of these presents that were brought him, by speaking familiarly to Moses, as a man speaks to his friend, from off the mercy seat (#Nu 7:89 12:8); and in speaking to him he did in effect speak to all Israel, showing them this token for good, #Ps 103:7. Note: By this we may know that God hears and accepts our prayers if he gives us grace to hear and receive his word, for thus our communion with him is maintained and kept up. I know not why we may not suppose that upon each of the days on which these offerings were brought (probably while the priests and offerers were feasting upon the peace offerings) Moses was in the tabernacle, receiving some of those laws and orders which we have already met with in this and the foregoing book. And here the excellent bishop Patrick observes that God's speaking to Moses thus by an audible articulate voice, as if he had been clothed with a holy body, might be looked upon as an earnest of the incarnation of the Son of God in the fulness of time, when the Word should be made flesh, and speak in the language of the sons of men. For, however *God at sundry times and in divers manners spoke unto the fathers, he has in these last days spoken unto us by his Son*. And that he who now spoke to Moses, as the *shechinah* or divine Majesty, from between the cherubim, was the eternal Word, the second person in the Trinity, was the pious conjecture of many of the ancients; for all God's communion with man is by his Son, by whom he made the world, and rules the church, and who *is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever*.