

Numbers Chapters 7-8 – John Karmelich

1. If we want to do something for God, what do we specifically do? Does the bible tell us what we can do? Is there any preparation involved? When do we stop preparing for service for God and actually start serving Him? In effect, those type of questions are the focus of this lesson.
 - a) To explain further, let's talk about the last lesson. Then, I talked about how we separate ourselves for God. The issue then was not what we should do for God, but it was focused on how do we start and stop a vow of separation for Him. We learned the Hebrew word "Nazirite" means to separate one's self to be of service to Him.
 - b) This leads to a logical question: Once we separate ourselves for God's use, what is next? What does specifically God call us to do? If you want a shorter title, how about "what do I do now?" My goal here is to answer that specific question.
2. To explain that question and that answer, first I have to explain about these two chapters.
 - a) Chapter 7 is the second longest chapter in the bible after Psalm 119. This chapter talks about what the individual tribes of Israel gave in order to support the work of God.
 - b) Chapter 8 is a shorter chapter that talks about what the specific tribe of Levites (the one's called to be God's priests) were to do to serve God.
 - c) I figured a short time after reading this chapter, one is going to forget many of the details about how these Israelites served God. What is more important for the Christian is what does God want us to do in order to make a difference for Him?
3. Before I go any further, let me state that Chapter 7 is probably the most repetitive chapter in the bible. Most of this chapter effectively says Israelite tribe "x" made a donation to help the priests serve God. They gave a specific amount of gold, a specific amount of silver and gave a specific quantity of animals and food to help the priests. Then the next paragraph of this chapter says tribe "y" gave the exact same quantity of those same items. This chapter repeats that exact same story for each of the tribes of Israel, other than the "priestly tribe". Know that the text goes into great detail to repeat the exact same information that each tribe gave.
 - a) This leads to the big question: Why the repetition? Why not just say every single tribe gave this amount of gold, that amount of silver and that amount of food and animals?
 - b) Why repeat the exact same story over and over again in this chapter? The only difference in every single paragraph is the name of the tribe that made each gift and who was the leader of that tribe. OK, then John, what gives?
 - i) One reason is to show that it takes the entire community to support God's work.
 - ii) Another reason is to show that God cares about all believers. That is why the leaders of each tribe were specifically listed as well as the name of each tribe.
 - iii) One thing I have learned from studying my bible is a heavy emphasis not only on obedience but gratitude. When people make the effort to make a difference for God, that difference is noted in the bible and this chapter gives such details.
 - c) I believe that God wants all of us to do things to make a difference for Him. We may not think we are as special as our church leaders. As far as God is concerned, we are all needed to contribute to make a difference for Him. That is why the amount listed by each tribe of Israel is exactly the same. The repetition sells that point.
4. OK, what about Chapter 8? This is not about the "high priest" or his family, but the rest of the tribe that was called to serve God. Remember that all Jewish priests were from the tribe of Levi, but not all the Levites were priests. My point is simply that this chapter focuses on the jobs of the other Levities and what God specifically called them to do make a difference for Him.
5. The point for us is essentially, whatever it is God calls us to do to make a difference for Him, He expects us to follow through with that commitment. God cares what we do to serve Him and how we go about that action. With that said, let me start the text and explain better.

6. Chapter 7, Verse 1: When Moses finished setting up the tabernacle, he anointed it and consecrated it and all its furnishings. He also anointed and consecrated the altar and all its utensils.² Then the leaders of Israel, the heads of families who were the tribal leaders in charge of those who were counted, made offerings.³ They brought as their gifts before the LORD six covered carts and twelve oxen--an ox from each leader and a cart from every two. These they presented before the tabernacle.
- a) Just so you know, the great repetition of this chapter does not begin until Verse 12. Therefore, what I have to say about verses 1-11 doesn't apply to that issue.
 - b) The next thing to note is that the time frame is out of date. When one normally tells a story, it is usually in chronological order. Here in Chapter 7, we are going back in time to before all of the counting happens that covers most of the first six chapters.
 - i) So why is this chapter out of order, and chapter 8 for that matter? The answer is it fits better in understanding our purpose of serving God. To explain let me review and summarize the book of Numbers so far:
 - a) The first two chapters focused on how we live a God centered life.
 - b) The next two chapters focused on how we are called to serve Him.
 - c) The next chapter talked about focusing on God and avoiding distractions.
 - d) Chapter 6 then talked about being separated for God.
 - e) This leads well to the next topic about what we do once we are actually separated for God, which is why Chapters 7 and 8 are placed here.
 - ii) For those who care, Chapter 7 takes place at the same time that Exodus 40 takes place. In both these chapters it mentions the tabernacle structure being finished.
 - a) That leads to these verses. They say in effect, once the structure was built, Moses "anointed" it. (A ceremony to show it is ready for God's use).
 - b) Then the leaders of the tribes of Israel brought forth their gifts once the structure was built and once Moses declared, "it is now ready to be used".
 - c) At this point, we can actually talk about the gifts themselves that were brought by the twelve tribes of Israel. In these verses, it says the leaders from each of the twelve tribes brought a total of six carts and twelve oxen. In modern terms, it would be like saying that they brought six pickup trucks for the priests to haul this portable tabernacle around.
 - i) Notice this gift was not a requirement. They presented it out of gratitude for God rescuing them out of slavery. (Think in terms of gratitude for our salvation.)
 - ii) Also notice the tribes worked together. It wasn't like "Tribe #1" gave this cart and "Tribe #2" gave three oxen. The idea is that all the tribes worked together and the leaders brought this total of six carts and 12 oxen to pull the 12 carts.
 - iii) It is interesting to note that this was not a command. As far as we know, Moses never commanded this to be brought. The Israelites just thought, this would be a good idea and it was a practical gift to be brought. The point for you and I is we look around our church or our community and we see a need and then God calls on us to do our best to fulfill that need. That is what is happening here.
7. Verse 4: The LORD said to Moses,⁵ "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."
- a) To understand these verses, remember that God instructed Moses on how to build this portable tabernacle structure. At this point, the structure is now complete. I suspect Moses is nervous about adding anything that is associated with this structure without God's approval. Therefore, when these gifts of carts and oxen to pull the disassembled tabernacle were given, Moses sought God whether or not this gift is ok.
 - b) OK, it is time for another "why should I care speech": This effort shows that God's desire to be worshipped is a community effort. If people want to contribute to help out those in charge of say, a church service, such gifts should be accepted, as long as such gifts don't come with conditions on how God is to be worshipped.

8. Verse 6: So Moses took the carts and oxen and gave them to the Levites.⁷ He gave two carts and four oxen to the Gershonites, as their work required,⁸ and he gave four carts and eight oxen to the Merarites, as their work required. They were all under the direction of Ithamar son of Aaron, the priest.⁹ 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.
- a) Here is where Moses made an "executive decision": He decided that of the six carts (again, think "pick up trucks" in our vocabulary) that were given, four of them should go to a group called the Gershonites and two for a group called the Merarites, but none of them should go to a group called the Kohathites. OK, what is that all about?
 - i) To explain, we have to go back a few chapters to discuss how the Levites actually camp around the tabernacle. To make it brief, Aaron and his sons camped to the east, which is the only entrance to the tabernacle. When the tabernacle was to be packed up and moved, Aaron and his sons were in charge of covering up the items inside this structure, but not to move anything, so they didn't get any carts.
 - ii) The next group was the Levites who camped to the south of the tabernacle. They were supposed to carry the interior items, (i.e., the ark itself, the oil based candle stick, the sacrificial altar, the prayer altar, etc.) on their shoulders. Many of these items had sticks placed through them so they could be carried. That is why this group (the Kohathites) that didn't get any carts as they had the shoulder-burden.
 - iii) The third group of Levites camped behind the tabernacle and they were in charge of the coverings over the tabernacle. When I think of "covering" I think of prayer as in the concept of covering someone in prayer. Anyway, this group got two of the six carts to help transport the coverings.
 - iv) The fourth group of Levites camped to the north. This group did the heavy lifting as they had the boards that make up this structure. I think of this group as the one's who work with the everyday believers helping them to draw close to God. The bottom line is they got four of the six as they did the "heavy" church work.
 - b) The point here is that Moses, the civil leader of the group did not get a specific command from God on how to distribute these things, but he did the logical thing based on needs and based on what God did command as far as one group bearing the important items on our shoulders. Why should we care? This is a perfect example of making decisions in life based on His commandments. If God commands we should do this or don't do that, we then decide what is the best thing to do based on those commands.
 - i) But John, I thought Christians are under grace and we don't have to obey any of God's commands. Think of it this way: Do you believe Christians are not to steal or murder or even to commit idolatry (worship other gods)? Of course. The point is we can't please God based on our efforts. However, if we trust the Spirit of God working inside of us, then we want to please Him based on gratitude for what He has done for us and not out of obligation to earn "points" with Him.
 - ii) Therefore, like Moses, God wants us to make the best decisions possible with the information we have at hand. Moses was given these six carts and 12 oxen, and he figured out what was best to do with them without violating God's desire when it came to worshipping Him.
9. Verse 10: When the altar was anointed, the leaders brought their offerings for its dedication and presented them before the altar.¹¹ For the LORD had said to Moses, "Each day one leader is to bring his offering for the dedication of the altar."
- a) The question at this point is "what is next". The structure to worship God was completed and Moses gave the carts and oxen as described. He didn't know what to do next, so he sought God. The answer Moses got was that each leader of each of the 12 tribes of Israel (remember that there could be 12 tribes by "splitting one into two" and excluding the Levites) were to bring an offering for the dedication of this structure.

- b) The big question here is "why". From Verse 12, all the way to Verse 88 here in Chapter 7, we get, in my opinion, the most repetitive section in the entire bible. In these verses, we get a paragraph for each tribe of Israel giving the exact same gift. Some thoughts:
 - i) First of, this dedication is "God ordained". Verse 11 said that God commanded that each tribe, one day at a time, present an offering.
 - ii) The repetition of these offerings teaches that some planning went into this giving. Since each tribe gave the exact same gift, the tribal leaders must have worked as a team to figure out what to give and what order to present it. Since each gift was a specific amount of gold and other things, the leaders had to plan all of this.
 - iii) Remember that this tabernacle structure was not built in one day. In the first year that the Israelites were out in the wilderness (that is, the first year they left Egypt), God gave instructions to Moses on how to build this thing. A collection was taken from among all the Israelites for the materials needed to build it. In effect, during the one month period (my best guess) that this tabernacle was put together, those who were not involved in building the structure (most of the Israelites) did not have a lot to do other than watch the process. I figure what else does one do while one is camped out in the middle of the wilderness, but watch this building project?
 - a) I suspect that while this tabernacle was being built, some Israelites were thinking, "What can we do for God while others are building this thing?" That is the time frame when these 12 identical gifts to God were organized.
 - b) Consider that each tribe offered a plate made of silver and another made of gold. It would take time to collect that silver and gold and melt and mold them to make these items. The exact weight of these trays is stated in these verses. Each tribe gave the exact same weight of gold and silver. My point is planning was involved in order for these gifts to be presented.
 - c) Therefore, even though the presentation of these gifts was "one per day", it took more time than that to organize them and put them together.
- c) OK John, good for the Israelites. How does any of this affect me?
 - i) First of all, it teaches us about teamwork. One thing I have learned about living the Christian life is that it is never to be a bunch of "solo efforts for God". One reason God organized the Israelites by tribes is to teach us teamwork.
 - ii) By the way, notice none of the tribes tried to out do each other. There is a natural competitive instinct that would want to say, "Well, you offered a gold plate made out of 10 shekels of gold? Well ours is going to be 20 shekels." The Israelites held back the natural human instinct to try to outdo each other and give the exact same figure per tribe. Give them credit for that and learn from that lesson.
 - iii) Notice that God commanded them to offer them one per day. In that sense, think of this as a "free will" offering. It is the idea that we are so grateful for God for what He has done for our lives, we are willing to give Him out of our abundance in order that the priests can do their job and help us draw closer to Him.
 - iv) Remember that all of these Israelites are out in the middle of the wilderness. They were not trading with other tribes. They just gave out of what they had, again out of gratitude to what God did for them.
 - v) For what it is worth, I have listed to a lot of lectures on this chapter, and I noticed a joy that most pastors have when it comes to the topic of giving. Since lectures on giving are their way of begging for funds, they like this chapter as it focuses on giving. I know that most pastors work long hours in order to make a difference for God and they are grateful for whatever financial and time support they can get from their community. These chapters are examples of such giving and the text emphasizes that fact. That reminds me that I am grateful that God provides for me and I never have to ask you for financial support for this ministry.

10. Verse 12: The one who brought his offering on the first day was Nahshon son of Amminadab of the tribe of Judah. ¹³ His offering was one silver plate weighing a hundred and thirty shekels, and one silver sprinkling bowl weighing seventy shekels, both according to the sanctuary shekel, each filled with fine flour mixed with oil as a grain offering; ¹⁴ one gold dish weighing ten shekels, filled with incense; ¹⁵ one young bull, one ram and one male lamb a year old, for a burnt offering; ¹⁶ one male goat for a sin offering; ¹⁷ 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 Nahshon son of Amminadab.
- a) We are now starting the repetitive section of this chapter. The text listed above from Verses 12 through 17 is exactly repeated for roughly the next 60 verses. As opposed to writing out that exact same text, I'm just going to cover the details of these six verses and talk about why it is repeated. Bottom line is I'm not going to make all of us go through the exact same text twelve times in this chapter. I'll talk about why it is done this way, but not actually list out the text. Hopefully, that will be a better use of all of our time.
 - b) With that speech out of my system, let's talk about why the tribe of Judah is listed first. Back in Chapter 2 of the book of Numbers, we had a description of how each of the tribes was to camp around the tabernacle. The short version is three of the twelve tribes were to camp to the east, three more to the south, three to the west and last three to the north. That layout also determined the marching order when this group was on the move.
 - c) I bring that up here, because that same order as described in Chapter 2 is the same order that these gifts were given. Know that these tribes are not listed in birth order based on when each of the founders of the 12 tribes were born. That is why my question is why did the tribe of Judah go first? Was it a "random draw of the hat?"
 - i) I believe that nothing in the bible is a coincidence and everything is there for a reason. I believe the reason Judah went first is simply because it was predicted by the father of the 12 tribes (Jacob) 400 years earlier that the Messiah would come from that tribe. See Genesis 49:8 on that point. That is why the tribe of Judah leads the procession when the tribes were on the march. It is a symbolic way of saying that the "Messiah" (i.e., Jesus) is the one that leads us to the Promised Land.
 - a) There is probably another reason why the rest of the tribes are in the order that they are in, but for the moment, I don't know what that reason is.
 - d) Now let's move on to the silver plates. Again, I'm not going to repeat all of this stuff for every tribe. I'm just going into detail for the first tribe so we get the idea of why this done.
 - i) First, why is silver emphasized? Historically and currently, gold has always been considered more valuable than silver. Why have these plates made out of silver? Was it just a case of silver being in greater supply? Remember that the Israelites were out in the wilderness. Maybe they just had more of it that they took when they left Egypt to begin with.
 - a) Here is something else to consider: Silver in the bible is associated with blood. This is based on Exodus 30:15, when each person was to give a silver shekel as a "ransom" for one's life. When Judas was given 30 pieces of silver for betraying Jesus, the Jewish priests would not accept the money back because they associated silver with blood. (Matthew 27:6).
 - b) My point is these silver gifts can be thought of as part of the blood sacrifice that is required to atone for sins in the bible.
 - ii) Next question: Why this specific weight? The first plate weighed 130 shekels and the second one weighed 70 shekels? Isn't 13 an unlucky number? The number 13 is associated with "incompleteness", just as "10" is associated with people. (Think of ten fingers and ten toes). This is just my speculation, but I think the specific weight represented man's inability to please God based on our efforts and the weight listed represented how "short" we fall before God.

- e) OK, no more weird "number" stuff. ☺ Let's talk about what was presented on the plates.
 - i) On the silver platters were "fine flour mixed with oil as a grain offering". Without going into a lot of detail, this is bread for the priests. It was a way of saying that the Israelites wanted the priests to draw close to God and here is some bread in order to symbolically share a meal with God while they serve him.
 - ii) Next there were gold platters with incense. Gold is associated with "deity". The purpose of the incense was it was used for the "prayer altar". The picture here is our prayers rising up to God just as one can see incense burning and rising. The idea is that prayers to our God should be a sweet smell to those offering them.
 - iii) By the way, notice the practicality of these gifts. Everything being offered here for service were things the priests could actually use as part of their required rituals.
 - iv) Finally, we get a bunch of animals. To put it simply, there were animals for a burnt offering (to show one's total commitment to God), animals for a sin offering to show that we are all sinners before God and animals for "fellowship" offering. That last one just means that once we admit God's in charge of our lives and that we are imperfect people, we can have a close relationship with Him.
 - a) I can get into more specifics about why each of these animals were picked for each of these offerings, but I figure I'm boring you enough as it is. ☺
 - v) One last thing before I talk about why any of this is relevant to our lives. I was trying to visualize how one guides a bull to the altar. Imagine how much work was actually involved not only in preparing the food and the items on the trays, but also to get the animals transported for these sacrifices.
- f) Enough of all of that. Why should we care about this stuff? We don't worship God by offering animal sacrifices or presenting food on silver trays. How is this relevant to us?
 - i) First, it is to contemplate again, how Jesus was our true sacrifice for our sins. Anytime one does not feel like one is blessed in life, consider how "expensive" God considers the price of sin and how much effort it took to compensate for our sins. The point is one does not mess around with sin.
 - ii) The next thing this text teaches us is it should be our desire to contribute to our local church group. If we benefit at all by what our church does for us or what it does for others, we too, should be willing to give a "free will" offering in order for that church to continue its work.
 - iii) A classic debate within the Christian church is whether or not we are required to tithe (give 10% of their income). I've heard good arguments on both sides of this debate. Whether or not one gives that exact amount to God, I'm not going to solve that issue. I am positive one should give cheerfully. (See 2nd Corinthians 9:6-7). One of the great joys of being a Christian is watching God bless our lives because we have trusted Him with part of our earnings. If one wants to see God work in our own lives, start by being willing to give part of one's income and watch what God gives with one hand what He takes with the other.
 - iv) In summary, the reason this chapter goes to such great detail to repeat the exact same story 12 times is to show how God is grateful how His people were willing to cheerfully give in order to support the church structure He has set up.
- g) With that said, I'm literally going to skip all the way down to Verse 89.
 - i) That is because this section is the very repetitive part of each tribe giving the exact same gift. As if these verses don't repeat these giving details enough, then verses 84 to 88 total up each of the items to give us the total amount of silver, gold and animals. My point is the text gets even more repetitive by giving us the totals.
 - ii) The point for you and me is to show that God does appreciate each and every effort made by us to support the church. He appreciates the individual efforts as well as the total group effort, both by "tribe" and all that is collected.

11. Verse 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 spoke with him.
- a) After all of this text about the individual tribes presenting the exact same gift and the last five verses of this chapter giving the grand totals of the gifts presented, the final line of the chapter simply states that God spoke to Moses from the central point of the tabernacle.
 - b) There are lots of theories as to why this verse is here. I think the best argument is just that the gifts of the rest of the tribes of Israelites were now presented to Moses. God is saying in effect, "After 60-70 verses of appreciation that My people are seeking Me, here is what I now want the Israelites to do next".
 - c) Let me try this another way: Why doesn't God speak to us more often? Why doesn't He reach out to you and me verbally? Part of the answer is He gave us His word to study so therefore, there is less need to speak verbally to all of us. Another answer is the fact that God is often still waiting for us to complete what He has already called us to do, which is to be supportive of our local church, community, and people around us. In other words, God doesn't often give us instructions on what to do next, because He is still waiting for us to complete what He has already asked us to do.
 - i) Finally, the reason God doesn't speak to us verbally like He did to Moses is that it is His right to speak to whoever He wants to, when He wants too. I believe that the reason He does not speak to us verbally is to prevent jealousy. It would be like thinking, "God spoke verbally to him or her twice yesterday and I never got to hear from Him at all". In order for it to be an even playing field we each have the opportunity to seek Him and serve Him with our time and it is His business how He communicates to each of us.
 - d) With that speech out of my system, we can now move on to the next chapter, which gives the specifics of what God did say to Moses here. Remember the chapter breaks were not added until many centuries after the text was written.
12. Chapter 8 Verse 1: The LORD said to Moses, ²"Speak to Aaron and say to him, 'When you set up the seven lamps, they are to light the area in front of the lampstand.'"³ Aaron did so; he set up the lamps so that they faced forward on the lampstand, just as the LORD commanded Moses.
- ⁴This is how the lampstand was made: It was made of hammered gold — from its base to its blossoms. The lampstand was made exactly like the pattern the LORD had shown Moses.
- a) The focus here moves from the practical gifts that were given from all of the Israelites for use within this tabernacle structure to the light source within the structure itself.
 - b) To explain further, it would help to give us a quick reminder of what this lampstand is, and what is its purpose. To start, remember that this tabernacle has a covered area that is surrounded by an open courtyard. The whole structure was designed to be portable so that the Israelites could take it wherever they went. The Israelites all camped around this structure as to show that God is the center of our lives.
 - c) With that stated, within this covered area was an oil based lampstand. It had a single base with seven lamps coming from this base. There are sections in the book of Exodus that talk about why this was to be built. So why repeat this information here? Another question is why didn't God speak directly to Aaron to do this, and not through Moses? In fact there are other passages in Exodus and Leviticus where God spoke to Aaron directly.
 - i) Let's start with why God spoke through Moses here. Think of Moses as the civil leader (the "president") of the group and Aaron as the spiritual leader.
 - ii) To understand that question, one has to read this in context of the chapter. Here, God is instructing the Levites (Aaron is the head one) what is their role for the actual worship service. The purpose of the Israelites leaving Egypt was for them to worship God. Here we get into the actual "how to do it" chapter.

- d) To explain further, let me back up a little. In effect the main purpose of the Old Testament is to show that God has separated specific people from the rest of the world in order to worship God as God. The same way He has called you and me to worship Him, so He has called this specific group of Israelites, faults and all. So far in the book of Numbers, the focus has been on how to get organized. The last chapter essentially said, now that everybody is organized, God's people presented gifts to those in charge of worshipping Him in order to help those in charge do their job. Chapter 7 is effectively a big message to us to encourage us to help those God has designated to be in charge of worshipping Him.
 - i) All of this leads to Chapter 8. This chapter now says, now that everybody is where they should be and the gifts have been presented, let the people who were chosen by God (think of those called to serve Him) actually start the process.
 - ii) That is why God spoke to Moses. God called Moses to lead the Israelites of that generation into a close relationship with Him. That is why Moses is to instruct Aaron on how the worship is actually to be done. It is not that God cannot talk to Aaron directly. It is God's way of saying, I have picked Moses to be the leader of that generation and everyone else has to accept that fact.
 - e) With that stated, why the focus on this lamp stand? Think of the purpose of a lamp: to bring light to the situation. This is God's way of saying, let me "bring light" to how it is that those I have called to serve me, should actually serve me.
 - i) The purpose for you and me is not to memorize the details of this ritual. It is to realize that God has called each of us to serve Him and use whatever talents, gifts, resources and time we have to make a difference for Him. Just as God called these specific Israelites to make a difference for Him, God wants to present light into our lives as to how He wants us to serve Him.
 - f) As I read these verses again, it appears like the lamps are separate from the single golden lamp stand itself. If one has ever worked with a lamp stand, one would get the idea of what is being set up here. The top of each candlestick had these seven separate oil based light sources. They had to be prepared and constantly worked to keep it going.
 - i) I believe the point for you and I is that God called the leaders of our church to be in charge of "lighting the way" for us to see how we are to serve Him. Just as the head priest is in charge of a worship service, so God gives that head priest the job of shedding "God's light" through His word to all of those who are part of that worship service.
13. Verse 5: The LORD said to Moses: ⁶“Take the Levites from among the other Israelites and make them ceremonially clean. ⁷To purify them, do this: Sprinkle the water of cleansing on them; then have them shave their whole bodies and wash their clothes, and so purify themselves. ⁸Have them take a young bull with its grain offering of fine flour mixed with oil; then you are to take a second young bull for a sin offering. ⁹Bring the Levites to the front of the Tent of Meeting and assemble the whole Israelite community. ¹⁰You are to bring the Levites before the LORD, and the Israelites are to lay their hands on them. ¹¹Aaron 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.
- a) At this point in the text, God is still speaking to Moses, but the conversation is shifting from Aaron's job of arranging the lampstand, to preparing the rest of the Levites for the service of helping Aaron out. To explain, remember that the tabernacle itself contained more than just the lampstand. The purpose of the first four verses was in effect to say, "Let me God, shed some light on how those in charge of the service shall worship Me and how those who assist the head person also worship me". Since Aaron was the top priest, God focused on Him first in the first four verses. Now the focus is on preparing everyone who is part of the priestly tribe called to be part of the worship service.
 - b) So why should I care about all of these details? It is to give us ideas on how we are to prepare ourselves to actually worship God and what He requires of us to worship Him.

- c) If you recall, Chapter 4 of the book of Numbers was all about the duties that were to be performed by the Levites (priestly tribe). This chapter and in particular this section of the chapter now says, now that you all know what you have to do, it is time to dedicate all of these people so they can serve God. This section is a public ritual so that all of the Israelites can now see how this particular tribe is to begin their service for God.
 - i) OK good for them. How does that affect me? Think of this section as saying when we are called to serve God in whatever capacity we are called to serve Him, these rituals in effect show how we are to begin serving Him. But if I take on a project for God, don't I just start? Do I need these specific rituals? The answer is not that we have to do this exact ritual to serve Him. It is to understand that just as God separated these specific people for service, so we should understand how we are separated for His service and how that works.
 - ii) With that said, let me explain some of the details of this ritual and hopefully we can all see how it applies to our own lives.
- d) The first part of the ceremony takes about sprinkling water on them. Remember this is a group of over ten thousand men. I picture this group of men standing still. Then Moses goes around with a bucket of water sprinkling it on them as he walks through and around them. It is saying in effect, "You have been called to be separated for God's use, may you be clean of your sins and trust in God's guidance for one's life."
 - i) A lot of Christian churches will baptize by sprinkling water on someone and not completely dunking them in water. While I'm not here to resolve that classical debate on how to be baptized, I just want everyone to know that the text in this chapter is used as the basis as why some believers are "sprinkled" and not dunked.
 - ii) The point is there is a large group being dedicated here for service and it was more practical out in the wilderness to sprinkle all of them versus trying to find a place and source of water to have them all bathe.
- e) The next part of the ceremony involves cutting off their hair. Scholars debate about how that actually happened. Some say it is like the Nazirite vow where they shave clean and that includes the entire body. Others say they just cut their hair short. However it was done, the point is the cutting of the hairs shows everyone they looked different and they were prepared for service.
 - i) Like I stated in the last lesson, this does not mean we have to shave clean in order to be used by God. It just means that when we are being used for God, it should be noticeable to those around us that we are "different" from the world around us. Just as the other Israelites would be able to recognize these Levites because they were now clean shaven, so people should tell by our actions that we are making a difference for God based on the commitment we have made for Him.
- f) Now that these Levites were physically ready, it is time to come back to the barbeque pit. The text talks about animal sacrifices and food sacrifices being made. Since this is a large group being dedicated, know that it was not one animal per person. More likely, it was one bull per "point" being offered on behalf of the whole group.
 - i) The idea for those Levites to consider was that they are now dedicating their lives to serving God. One bull was slaughtered and sacrificed in order to show one is now completely dedicated to serving Him. Another bull was sacrificed in order to show that each of them that are still "sinful" in God's eyes. The idea is that these men would watch this ritual or be aware of the ritual and think, "OK, that innocent animal is being slaughtered on my behalf. The God who created the universe is accepting these animals instead of actually taking my life in order to serve Him."
 - ii) Again, this does not mean we have to slaughter animals to serve God. It is for us to realize that God Himself died in our place so we can fully serve Him and He does take away our sins so we can make that difference for Him.

- g) As part of the ceremony, the Levites were all to place their hands on this sacrifice. Given the large number of Levites, I visualize this as a group "hand laying ceremony" where people in the middle lay hands on those in front, and it keeps working their way back. That way all of the Levites grasp the idea that the animals are about to be slaughtered on their behalf. The idea is for it to sink in that these animals are being offered instead of them so that they can be of service to God.
 - i) A lot of churches have dedication ceremonies when someone is committed to a project for God or someone is working in or for that church in some capacity. Personally, I don't have any problems with dedication ceremonies. It helps that person being dedicated to realize the commitment they are making. It also helps those in the congregation recognize the role this person or group is making.
 - ii) My point is we don't have to buy a bull to dedicate someone. However, taking the time to have dedication ceremonies is a good thing as it shows publicly what is expected of that person or group. I'm also not saying one has to go through a dedication ceremony to do a project for God, just that it is a good thing.
 - h) Before I move on, I forgot to mention the grain and oil offering. Besides the animals to be sacrificed there was also bread grain being offered with oil. As I stated in the lesson, this is a way of saying, "We believe we are fully dedicated to serving God, we believe God has forgiven us of our sins, and now we can enjoy getting close to Him." That is why the food is being offered. Think of it symbolically as sharing a meal with God. Obviously one can not actually share a meal with God, so this act is a way of symbolically drawing close to Him once we accept His payment for sins on our behalf.
 - i) Remember I said this whole ritual is about how we dedicate ourselves to serving God? Even for us today, it is not about sacrificing bulls and food, or even going through formal rituals. These are not bad things. It is about realizing that if we want to make a difference for God in this world, we have to do it on His terms, not on our terms. His terms is in effect, we have to be fully dedicated to serving Him, we have to seek Him for the forgiveness of sins and then and only then can we have the benefit of drawing close to Him by making a difference for Him.
 - ii) With that thought out of my system, I'm ready for the next set of verses.
14. Verse 12: "After the Levites lay their hands on the heads of the bulls, use the one for a sin offering to the LORD and the other for a burnt offering, to make atonement for the Levites. ¹³Have the Levites stand in front of Aaron and his sons and then present them as a wave offering to the LORD. ¹⁴In this way you are to set the Levites apart from the other Israelites, and the Levites will be mine.
- a) Here we get more details about this ritual about the dedication of the Levites. After the entire tribe (over 20,000, see Numbers 3:43) raised their hands toward this animal sacrifice or laid hands on the person in front of them, the head priest Aaron, sacrificed these two animals. When the tabernacle is fully set up, there is a high wall that prevents anyone from looking inside this structure. I don't think this large group was inside the complex. Most likely, after the laying of the hands part of the ceremony, Aaron took the animals inside the structure and sacrificed them on the "barbeque pit".
 - b) OK John, I can tell its time again for one of your "why should I care speeches": ☺ This large group has been separated for God's use. They should consider that these animals were being offered in their place. A year prior to this ceremony, all of these people saw the parting of the Red Sea. There was also a large rebellion amongst them and God struck dead a large number of Israelites to make the point that we don't mess around with Him. (See Exodus 32:35.) The point for us is simply that if we do separate ourselves for God's use we too should take that commitment seriously. That is why the first bull that was sacrificed symbolizes our total committed to Him. The second bull sacrificed shows our complete dependence upon Him for the forgiveness of our sins.

- c) Verse 13 then goes on to do the "wave" offering. This is when a part of the animal was literally waved before the central item in this tabernacle structure in order to show one's identification with these animals. One thing I pondered is how did all of these Levites actually witness this event? Were the walls not up? Did the high priest go outside of the tabernacle structure to report that the animals were already cut up and part of them are being waved before God? We don't know. All we do know is that all of these people who were dedicated for God's service were aware of the details of this ceremony.
 - d) Verse 14 mentions again that this specific group of Israelites were separated from the rest of the tribes for the purpose of serving God. To understand why that is, we have to go back again to the final plague on Egypt when God struck down the first born of all of the Egyptians. God made this declaration that all the "first born are His". Instead of literally requiring all of the firstborn children of Israel, the tribe of Levi was taken in their place.
 - i) So why does God want the first born? Does that mean if I have children, I literally have to give my firstborn son or daughter over to service for God? Of course not. Just as God took one specific tribe Of Israelites instead of all firstborn children, so today, He does call specific individuals into the full time ministry.
 - ii) OK John, this would be interesting if I lived in Israel thousands of years ago. How does it apply to us? The answer is to consider whether or not we are separated for His use. I'm not just talking about those in the professional ministry. This is about all of us who have been saved because we trust in Jesus complete payment for our sins. The classic question here is what are we doing with that commitment? If we say we trust in Jesus for our sins, then what?
 - iii) For many years, I have said I have never been impressed with someone who says they believe in Jesus for their salvation. However, I am always impressed with those who do something about commitment. That is what these Levites represent: Those of us who say we believe in Jesus and want to separate ourselves for that commitment. That is why there is this big ceremony just to show that we are fully dedicated to Him and trust Him for the forgiveness of our sins.
15. 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 Tent of Meeting. ¹⁶ They are the Israelites who are to be given wholly to me. I have taken them as my own in place of the firstborn, the first male offspring from every Israelite woman. ¹⁷ Every firstborn male in Israel, whether man or animal, is mine. When I struck down all the firstborn in Egypt, I set them apart for myself. ¹⁸ And I have taken the Levites in place of all the firstborn sons in Israel. ¹⁹ Of all the Israelites, I have given the Levites as gifts to Aaron and his sons to do the work at the Tent 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."
- a) Now that they and hopefully us have committed themselves to serving God, then what? The answer for those Israelites are in this paragraph. The answer for you and me has been modeled in the service of the Levites. How we go about actually doing those items of service is based on what needs are there in our church or community and what gifts God has given us to use. To explain further, a quick reminder of what these guys do:
 - i) Some of them assist in packing and organizing what is inside the structure. Think of that ministry as those assist those who are called in the full time ministry.
 - ii) Some of them are in charge of the coverings. Think of that ministry as those who cover in prayer those who are literally working to make a difference for God.
 - iii) The third group is in charge of caring for the structure itself. This is literally the heavy lifting in times of moving. For us, it is the one's who do the "heavy lifting" in the Christian world: Those who help bring new people to church. It is those who do things to make a difference for God in our community. In summary, it is the one's who do the "big work". However, this cannot be done without the prayer support of others and the actual ministry work within our "structure".

- b) With that speech out of my system, I can now quickly talk about these verses. They simply say that now that the dedication ceremony is over, they can all do the work that they have been called to do. My description of the purpose of the work, both in the literal sense and the symbolic sense, is about our commitment to serving Him.
 - c) The text then goes on to remind them that God took them (the tribe of Levites) instead of all of the literal firstborn men amongst the Israelites. Why is that emphasized so much?
 - i) It is for all the Israelites to realize that while anyone can trust in God for their salvation, there are some who were specifically called into service. God literally spared the firstborn children of all the Israelites to remind all of them that the cost of being a disciple of God is never free. It is that reminder that if we do believe in the God of the Bible, that means we are fully dedicated to serving Him.
 - ii) This reminds me what I say to new readers of this bible study: it is free to read. However, that is a misleading statement. While my lessons are free, the cost to serve God is about giving Him all we have. That does not mean we have to give every dollar we earn to our local church. It does mean that if we are committed to serving Him, we are committed and take that commitment seriously.
 - d) Speaking of taking things seriously, the text makes the statement that God has spared a plague on the Israelites if anyone violates this principal. In other words, if any Israelite other than someone from the tribe of Levi wanted to be a priest, it was a death sentence.
 - i) This is God using the "carrot and the stick" approach. The "carrot" represents the joy of drawing close to God the joy we receive by serving Him. The "stick" for them is the reminder that the plagues they saw in Egypt can also be upon the Israelites themselves if they fail to be obedient. The "stick" for us is when one tries to turn from their lives after committing it to God and watching what happens. It never ceases to amaze me to watch parts of my life go downhill when I do turn from God and sin in some aspect of my life.
16. Verse 20: Moses, Aaron and the whole Israelite community did with the Levites just as the LORD commanded Moses. ²¹ The Levites purified themselves and washed their clothes. Then Aaron presented them as a wave offering before the LORD and made atonement for them to purify them. ²² After that, the Levites came to do their work at the Tent of Meeting under the supervision of Aaron and his sons. They did with the Levites just as the LORD commanded Moses.
- a) John's loose translation: Everyone did as they were told. One thing one notices from studying the bible is the heavy emphasis on obedience. It is almost as if God is saying, "I am so happy that My people are making a difference for Me with their lives, let me brag for a few verses how they are being obedient." By the way, that does not mean that God needs things in order to be happy. The point is our lives become filled with far more joy when we are obedient then when we ignore Him with our lives. I could give more details about how these Levites did as they were told, but I suspect by now you get the idea.
17. Verse 23: The LORD said to Moses, ²⁴ "This applies to the Levites: Men twenty-five years old or more shall come to take part in the work at the Tent of Meeting, ²⁵ but at the age of fifty, they must retire from their regular service and work no longer. ²⁶ They may assist their brothers in performing their duties at the Tent of Meeting, but they themselves must not do the work. This, then, is how you are to assign the responsibilities of the Levites."
- a) The final question of this chapter is in effect, "how long does one have to do this?" When can we stop being of service to God and just kick back in life? For these Israelites called to be in the professional ministry, the text specifies starting at 25 and ending at 50. A few chapters back, it said they start at 30. That means from 25 to 30 is when they were trained.
 - b) At age 50 they don't truly retire. They help younger people in the ministry. The message to older Christians is when we get around that age, we are not as physically strong as we used to be and we should be helpful to raise younger believers in God.

18. At this point, let me quickly summarize what God wants us to remember from this lesson: If you don't remember any of the other details, just remember that God desires that each of us draw close to Him and use our lives to make a difference for Him. I get the impression that there is nothing God appreciates more than when we make that difference. How we do that is up to us as individuals. How the Levites work around the tabernacle is a model of ways that we can make a difference for God in this world.
- a) But what about all of those dedication paragraphs in Chapter 7? The point back there is in effect the same. Those gifts were given by those who don't feel called to be in the full time ministry, but still want to use their lives to make a difference for Him. Those other tribes brought practical gifts that could be used in the ministry work.
 - b) In summary, this whole lesson is about different ways that we can make a difference for God in our lives. If we are not doing the physical work ourselves, we should at the least offer support through giving of one's resources and one's time and through prayer support. If one gets that, one gets the purpose of this lesson.
19. Heavenly Father, help us to use our lives in order to make a difference for You. Help us to be supportive of those in the full time ministry and others who are making a difference for You. Help us to use the most valuable asset we have our time, to use in ways that make a difference for all of eternity. Help us to use the resources You have blessed us with to also make that difference for You in this world. To keep it simple, help us make a difference for You. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen.