

Living for Giving  
Numbers 7:1-17

**Slide 1**

This morning we're going to talk about giving. If that's a touchy subject with you, I'm sorry, but that's just what's next.

We don't talk about giving every week, but if you just happened to be here this week, you might want to consider the idea that what's being said could be something God wants you to hear.

Today, we're in the 7<sup>th</sup> chapter of Numbers and the Israelites still haven't started their journey! They're still preparing!

What you may not realize is the Israelites' journey to the promised land parallels OUR journey to our promised land... heaven.

We've left the bondage of Egypt, our sinful lifestyles, and we're on our way but we're not there yet! We're still in the preparation stage, but that's okay since preparation is the most important part of any journey.

Think about it. We want to get married, or we want to get our education out of the way, or we want to get our first house, etc.

So, we jump right in, buy everything on credit, sleep with our future mate, go from High School to a job... but I want to warn you. Don't do it!

Proper preparation prevents pathetically poor performance! In chapter 7, the Israelites were almost ready to go but there were still a few things that needed to be done. Mainly, getting the tabernacle ready for transport.

Remember, one unique thing about their trip was that God was going with them. He'd be present with them during the entire journey.

But, because He was holy and they weren't, contact with Him was instant death. So, precautions had to be made so that God could be with them, without killing them in the process.

*Numbers 7:1-17, "When Moses finished setting up the tabernacle, he anointed and consecrated it and 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. 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. The LORD said to Moses, "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 oxen and gave them to the Levites. He gave two carts and four oxen to the Gershonites, as their work required, 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. 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. 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."*

We really don't need to read any further, because from here on out it's a repetitious description of the same gifts over and over given by different leaders of different tribe.

As a result, it takes Moses 89 verses to describe the gifts that they brought to the Lord.

What's interesting is that every tribe brought exactly the same gifts. Not because they lacked imagination, but because they understood the nature and the function of the tabernacle.

So, why does Moses repeat it over and over and over? Is the bible TRYING to put us to sleep? No.

Moses wants us to see and understand the overwhelming love that's being poured out towards God by each of the tribes.

Also notice, as they presented their gifts before God, they didn't have some preacher goading them to give what they didn't have or want to give.

They weren't made to feel guilty. Nobody was twisting their arm. They gave out of a genuine and heartfelt love for their God.

This 7<sup>th</sup> chapter of Numbers tells us two things:

- What the people gave to the Lord, and
- The attitude with which they gave.

So, let's take a closer look at just WHAT the people gave to God.

## **Slide 2**

Do you have anyone in your family who seems to have everything a person could possibly buy, or they're just so picky you're afraid to buy them anything but a gift card!

Well, if you think they're tough, try getting something for God! What do you give a God who owns everything?

I mean, how do you give something special to someone who owns the universe? A 'tie' just doesn't seem to cut it! Thankfully, the Lord made it easy on them.

Since he was getting ready to move into his new house, the Tabernacle, they brought Him housewarming gifts! That's essentially what they were!

Think about it, the best housewarming gifts are given to us by people who know us well enough to know what we need.

Therefore, I want you to see two principles of giving that these people modeled for us to follow. The first principle is to give towards the ETERNAL needs of the world.

In verse 3, we see that the first set of gifts they brought were 6 wagons and 12 oxen. Why? Well, the people knew that the tabernacle was a mobile sanctuary.

In other words, wherever they went, they were to take the tabernacle with them.

Remember, the tabernacle was more than just a tent, it contained some pretty heavy stuff. So, the carts and oxen were meant to make the Levites job a little easier.

The Merarite clan of the Levites was in charge of the heavy frames, posts and bases of the tabernacle, so they got 4 wagons.

The Gershonites were in charge of the curtains in the tabernacle, so they were given 2 wagons.

But the Kohathites didn't get any wagons. Why? Because they were responsible for the Ark of the Covenant and God told them specifically that it had to be "hand carried."

Again, it's important to remember that God didn't TELL the people to bring these wagons and oxen. They recognized the need and they filled it. That's the way we should give.

But it's one thing to just drop some money in the offering plate or write a check; it's another to look around at the needs of the church and, without being asked, meet it! You must be careful.

Giving some wagons to the Koathites might sound like a good idea, but if they actually tried to use them, they would have been killed on the spot!

You might think it'd be a great idea to make a life size statue of the pastor and put it on a pedestal in front of the church but that's a bad idea.

You need to bring your gifts to the people God has placed in spiritual oversight of the church and allow them to use their spiritual maturity and knowledge of the real needs of the church to distribute it!

We also have to make sure that the "needs" to which we're giving have eternity in mind. The wagons, used to move the tabernacle around, should remind us that the place of worship is temporary and mobile.

1 Peter 2:11, tells us that we are "*strangers and aliens in this world.*" It's not saying that we're little green men, it's just that being an "ALIEN" means we don't belong here in this world.

This isn't our HOME country! So don't put your roots down too deep because we haven't arrived at the promised land!

Regardless if a church building has been here for years, it's still temporary!

That's why we need to be careful that we don't spend all our time, effort and finances investing in building something that's temporary.

The only thing that's going to last forever are the people to whom we minister. THAT'S where we need to keep our focus.

Yes, the physical needs of the church are important, but we still need to GIVE with an eye on eternity.

### **Slide 3**

The second principle is to give towards the MINISTRY needs of the church.

Starting in verse 12, we read that each of the 12 tribal leaders brought utensils and supplies for the different offerings that were to be given to the Lord.

They brought grain for the grain offering, incense for the incense offering, and animals for the sin offerings.

They knew that the tabernacle wasn't just a pretty tent, it was a place where sacrifices were offered to God to pay for their sins.

The grain offerings were given as a way of showing submission to God. The fellowship offerings were ceremonial meals eaten in the Lord's presence symbolizing the enjoyment of fellowship with God.

Now, since part of each of these sacrifices were given to the priests, it provided a way to fund the full-time ministry they provided for the people.

I don't know if you've noticed or not, but we don't require you to bring a goat or a cow to church with you on Sunday mornings.

Our plates aren't big enough and there are zoning laws against slaughtering animals in church! But in the same way, our giving allows us to carry on ministries.

It gives us the privilege of meeting together and praising God with our voices, of hearing God speak to us.

Of celebrating the Lord's Supper, of lifting up our prayers just like the incense ascended before God in the tabernacle.

This chapter shows us that ALL 12 tribes played a part in providing the resources so that together they could worship and fellowship with God.

All of God's people came together to fund the tabernacle and those who served in it. Everyone had an equal part to play.

The larger tribes didn't give more, and the smaller tribes didn't give less. Each tribe gave exactly the same amount, because they all shared in the ministry.

They gave generously, not because Moses twisted their arm, or God threatened to wipe them out if they didn't, no, they gave willingly, out of love for God.

As a result, the tabernacle functioned exactly as it was intended to function, with no unmet needs. That's what the point of verse 89 is meant to communicate.

Numbers 7:89, *“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 covenant law. In this way the LORD spoke to him.”*

#### **Slide 4**

God is giving us a pattern for our giving! We don't call this building a tabernacle today, we call it a church.

It's not a coincidence that this chapter comes after Numbers 6:22-27; the words of blessing that the priests gave to God's people.

Numbers 6:22-27, *“The LORD said to Moses, “Tell Aaron and his sons, ‘This is how you are to bless the Israelites. Say to them: “The LORD bless you and keep you; the LORD make his face shine on you and be gracious to you; the LORD turn his face toward you and give you*

*peace.” So they will put my name on the Israelites, and I will bless them.”*

The Israelites didn't give to God so that they could get His blessing. He gave them His blessing BEFORE they gave their gifts. God blessed His people first and THEN they gave.

In other words, we love because God first loved US! God doesn't need our money! He owns the cattle on a thousand hills, and He can direct the hearts of people the way He wants.

When Dallas Theological Seminary was just getting started, they were having financial problems.

There was a group of men gathered in the President's office praying about how they needed money to keep the seminary going.

The board members were praying real 'pious' kinds of prayers that we Christians are sometimes good at praying.

After a few moments of this, Harry Ironside, the President of the Seminary prayed a simple, down to earth prayer.

He said, *"Lord, You own the cattle on a thousand hills, now sell some, and send us the money!"*

The amazing thing is, that outside the boardroom, a cattle rancher was sitting with the receptionist.

He had shown up at that precise moment of prayer to inform Dr. Ironside that he had several railroad cars of cattle, and he wanted to sell them and give the money to the seminary!

As soon as Dr. Ironside prayed that abrupt, nearly sacrilegious prayer, the receptionist stepped in and said, *"The Lord just sold the cows!"*

Listen, God doesn't NEED your check or mine to get done what He wants done. God doesn't depend on any man. We depend on Him!

God is independent of anyone, no matter how important you think you are! But, He DOES want to include us in on the blessing!

He wants to use us, but if we don't want to be used, or if we're going to 'cop' an attitude, He'll find somebody else!

Later in Israel's history, when they refused to be a witness to the world of His power and majesty, He turned to the Gentiles! We've got this idea that God is 'begging' us to give.

It's like the man who called a church and asked if he could speak to the *"Head Hog at the Trough."* The secretary said, *"Who?"* The man replied, *"I want to speak to the Head Hog at the Trough!"*

The secretary said, *"Sir, if you mean our pastor, you will have to treat him with more respect and ask for 'the reverend' or 'the pastor.' But certainly you cannot refer to him as the Head Hog at the Trough!"*

The man responded, *"Well, I have \$10,000 I was thinking about donating to the building fund."* The secretary exclaimed, *"Oh my, hold the line, I think the BIG PIG just walked through the door!"*

Sometimes we get the idea that the church is desperate and if we don't give the church will die! That's not it at all! The truth is, it's God's church and God's work done in God's way will never lack God's supply!

We just have to make sure we're doing God's work God's way. But that's not all! When it comes to supporting His church, God is saying, *"I want to bless you in some amazing ways, who wants in on it?"*

If you refuse, and selfishly say, *"I'm going to hold on to what I have. All I've got is all I've got, and I need every bit."* God says, *"Okay, I'll find somebody else!"*

I believe God placed Grace Fellowship here and that somehow, someday, God is going to supply.

You can either be in on the blessing, or you can watch from sidelines and miss out on the miracle. In other words, you can either be an obstacle, or a blessing to what God's doing.

This is why I don't try to guilt people into giving. Biblical giving doesn't flow out of a sense of guilt or even to win God's favor, it flows out of love.

Paul tells us in II Corinthians 9:7, *"God loves a cheerful giver."* "Guilt-driven" givers are never cheerful givers!

You have to try and squeeze every last penny out of them, and they act like it's their last penny!

## **Slide 5**

### Conclusion

Now, although God owns the cattle on a thousand hills, He doesn't choose to oversee them all by Himself.

He's not the "Great Cowboy" in the sky! Instead, the cattle He owns are given into the care and stewardship of His people.

God didn't need the gifts that the tribes gave Him; He could easily have made them. He didn't promise them any special favors either, but regardless they lined up to give.

Why? They realized that they could afford to be generous because they remembered where they got all their riches in the first place!

God gave it to them when they plundered the Egyptians on their way out of Egypt! They were simply giving back a small part to God what He had given them!

See that's the way God works. He blesses His people and then He reminds them that everything they have they got from Him in the first place, which prompts us to give back!

God's grace gets a hold of our hearts and makes us cheerful givers of our time, our talents, and our treasure.

So how do you give? Cheerfully? Sparingly? Or grumbly? God loves a cheerful giver because a cheerful giver loves God! God has been so good to us, and all we have, we received from Him.

He's the great rancher, and He could do it all Himself if He wanted but He wants to give us a chance to be a part of what He's doing in this world!