

# Thoughts on Numbers Vi, Vii - Part Iii. Princely Service: Numbers Vii.

by Hudson Taylor

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*God delights in the loving offerings of His servants and encourages Christian liberality in all ages.*

**Scripture:** Matthew 5:16, Mark 12:41-44, John 3:16, Romans 12:1, 2 Corinthians 5:15, 2 Corinthians 9:7, Galatians 6:14, Philippians 2:17, Hebrews 13:16, 1 Peter 2:9

**Topics:** "Sacrifice", "Service"

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## Description

Hudson Taylor emphasizes the significance of princely service as depicted in Numbers 7, illustrating how God's blessings compel His people to give freely in service. He highlights that true offerings stem from love and gratitude, as seen in the examples of Mary and the widow who gave all they had. The lengthy account of offerings in this chapter serves to reveal God's delight in the loving gifts of His servants, showcasing that each act of giving is precious to Him. Taylor encourages believers to recognize the importance of the altar and the sacrificial nature of their offerings, urging them to live lives that reflect their love for Christ. Ultimately, he calls for a selfless commitment to service, reminding that our true value lies in our relationship with God and our willingness to serve others.

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## Transcript

### NUMBERS 7.

We learned from Numbers 6, God's requirements of those who desire to take the privileged position of separation to Himself. We found also in the conclusion of the same chapter the overflow of God's love in the rich and comprehensive blessing which so appropriately follows, and forms the connecting link between Nazarite separation and the princely service set forth in Chapter 7, one of the longest in the Bible, and one full of repetition. We now propose to consider more fully why this service of giving finds such lengthy record.

Is it not that just as separation to God issues in blessing, so does blessing from God constrain to service, and especially to the highest form of service, that which is most God-like, that of Giving? God so loved the world that He gave; Christ so loved the Church that He gave; the Holy Spirit so loves the Church that He gives; and redeemed ones, created anew in Christ Jesus unto good works, when led by the Spirit, first give themselves unto God, and the delight in such other free-will offerings as the Lord may enable them to present. This we believe is the reason why the chapter is found here, and is the true connection between

its subject-matter and that of the preceding one.

But why is it so long, so repetitious, and so tedious? The Bible is a wonderful book; it not only gives the history of the past, and guidance for the present, but in prophecy we have the history of ages yet to come, the course of events until the grand climax when God shall be all in all. Why, in a book so marvelous in its comprehensiveness, is so much space given to this record?

#### GOD'S DELIGHT IN LOVE-GIFTS.

Is it not in order to reveal the heart of God? To show His delight in the loving offerings of His servants? The record is not tedious to Him; and it becomes marvelously interesting to us, when we get the key, and are brought into sympathy with the heart of Him who finds infinite satisfaction in each gift, of each one of His children, which is the outcome of gratitude and love.

In the days of our Lord's life on earth, when the shadow of the cross was already upon Him, one only amongst all His followers, a woman, Mary, had understood and really taken in His repeated declaration of the sufferings that awaited Him; and when she came to anoint Him beforehand for the burial, and broke the precious alabaster box she had reserved for this very purpose, the thief who kept the bag had only angry words of criticism and reproach. How sweet to her wounded spirit was her Master's commendation, "She hath done what she could!" And He added, "Wheresoever this Gospel shall be preached throughout the whole world, this also that she hath done shall be spoken of for a memorial of her."

On an earlier occasion, likewise, as He sat over against the treasury, many that were rich cast in large sums of silver and of gold, but He turned from them and their gifts to draw attention to a certain poor widow who brought two mites and cast them in. She had gladdened the heart of Him who was the Creator of all wealth, and the real Owner of it all. She, said He, had given more than they all: for she of her want had given all that she had! And of her, as of Mary, it is true that in whatsoever language the Word of God is translated, in whatsoever clime it is read, the Master's commendation is made known.

There is a day coming, in which before assembled worlds He will make manifest the loving gifts and the secret service of His redeemed ones. Then we shall not weary as they are recounted and rewarded; and as we see His joy in them all, we shall better understand the length of Numbers 7.

#### FREE-WILL OFFERINGS: VERSES 1, 2.

"And it came to pass on the day that Moses had fully set up the tabernacle, and had anointed it, and sanctified it...and all the vessels thereof, ...that the princes of Israel, heads of the house of their fathers,....offered."

When the Lord gave the plan of the tabernacle and of the vessels, He likewise gave to the people willing hearts to offer, and skill to execute. There was no need to press them; the workers and contributors were those whose heart stirred them up, and whose spirit was made willing. The people brought more than enough for the service of the work, and Moses had to make proclamation throughout the camp to restrain them from bringing more.

Is there not a lesson to be learnt here? Let the work only be one of God's planning, and executed according to His mind, and the hearts that are in sympathy with Him will gladly respond with suitable and abundant offerings. For is not the willingness to give as much a part of His working as the skill to use that which is given? Then, in the givers and in their gifts, in the workers and in their work, the Divine heart finds

infinite complacency. "For of Him," as the great Designer, "and through Him," as the effectual Power for the carrying out of His purposes, "and to Him," as the real Object of all service, "are all things: to whom be the glory for ever. Amen."

But divine service requires not only initiating, but also maintaining worthily of God. It was not sufficient that the tabernacle and the vessels of ministry were according to the divine pattern, both as to material and workmanship, and that they were made by divinely qualified workmen; but when all was completed and fully set up, both the tabernacle and the vessels needed anointing and sanctifying; and when that was done the offerings needed to carry on the service could not but be freely poured in. In like manner in all life and work, individual or organized, only let God have His right place, and let there be the anointing of the Holy Ghost, received by faith, as well as consecration to Him, and everything will follow, as needful, for the carrying out of God's plan in the life or work.

GLADSOME ACCEPTANCE: VERSES 3-5.

"And they brought their offering before the Lord, six covered wagons, and twelve oxen;...and the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, take it of them, that they may be to do the service of the tabernacle of the congregation; and thou shalt give them unto the Levites, to every man according to his service."

It is interesting to note that the first offerings recorded were for the purpose of assisting in the moving of the tabernacle; it was not God's purpose that it should be stationary. Nor is God's work ever intended to be stationary, but always advancing.

The offerings themselves were remarkable: rude bullock-wagons, probably rough both in material and workmanship, much like those we now are familiar with in the unchanging East; they must have presented striking contrast to the beauty of the skillfully prepared vessels of ministry. We may well imagine the thought to have passed through the mind of Moses, Can such rude offerings be acceptable to the glorious God? But God Himself dispels all doubt, by saying, "Take it of them."

God is not hard to please, nor is true human love, for it is a dim reflection of His own. We do not estimate our love-gifts by their intrinsic value, but rather by the love they express. Well do we remember a little incident which occurred some twenty-four years ago, and which illustrates this truth.

My little daughter, then about five years old, came to me on the morning of my birthday with a curious little birthday gift in her hand. "Papa, I haven't bought you a birthday present," said she, "I thought you would rather have something I made myself." How my heart went out to the little darling, and how glad I was that she should think that something she could make would be more precious to me than any purchased gift! But what the curious little gift could be intended for I was quite at a loss to divine, and I engaged her in conversation, hoping she might let some clue slip that would help me to find out for what she meant it, for I feared she would be disappointed if I did not recognize it. The little pet had found a small piece of wood, and had bored a hole in it with her scissors, in which she had inserted a peg, and on the top had hung half a cockle-shell--certainly an uncommon birthday present!

At last, unable to guess what it was supposed to be, I took my dear child on my knee, and, kissing her, said "Papa is so pleased to have a birthday present of your own making; what is it my darling has made for me?" "why, don't you know, papa? I thought you would like best ship to take you to China!"

The dear child was right; probably no gift I ever received gave more pleasure, or was as carefully treasured, and as often thought of. When that dear child had become old enough to engage in missionary work in China herself, and was able to introduce me to the first two Chinese women whom she had brought to Christ, I remembered the little ship; and when the women were gone reminded her about it, and told her that the joy of finding her now used of God in the blessed work itself was a greater joy than her gift had been. She was surprised that I should remember it; but it had never passed from my memory, and the recollection of it is a pleasure still. It is not hard to please those who love us. (While preparing these sheets for the press we learn from a telegram that He whom my dear daughter had served in China since 1885, has called her (and her baby of sixteen months) from her husband, the Rev. J.J. Coulthard, and three surviving children, to the eternal home above.)

God wants our love; "My son, give Me thine heart." He wants our sympathy; He wants the gifts and offerings that are prompted by love. Shall He look to us in vain? Our David still thirsts, not for the waters of the well of Bethlehem, but for the souls for which He died. Shall He not have them? He specially needs willing, skillful young men, ready to break through the enemy's camp to deliver the captives of the mighty one. Who that can will go? Who that cannot go at present will help others to go?

ACCORDING TO HIS SERVICE: Verses 5-9.

"Thou shalt give them unto the Levites, to every man according to his service. And Moses took the wagons and the oxen, and gave them unto the Levites. Two wagons and four oxen he gave unto the sons of Gershon, according to their service, and four wagons and eight oxen he gave unto the sons of Merari, according unto their service, under the hand of Ithamar the son of Aaron the priest. But unto the sons of Kohath he gave none; because the service of the sanctuary belonging unto them was that they should bear upon their shoulders."

The princes brought their offering to the Lord, and the Lord accepted it. Having accepted it Himself it was His to give to whom He would; and He chose to give it to the Levites, for they in a special manner were His, and devoted to His service.

The tribe of Levi was in one sense the poorest in Israel. In dividing the land among the tribes, no territory was allotted to them. They will have territory by-and-by, when the Lord comes (see Ezekiel 48: 12-14), but never have they had any yet. Cities to dwell in, and suburbs, were given them here and there, in all the tribes of Israel, but of earthly portion that was all.

And yet they were the richest tribe in Israel, for the Lord Himself was their inheritance. When one of the other tribes was taken into captivity, he had to leave his inheritance behind; but the godly Levite was as rich in Babylon as in Palestine: death itself could not rob him of his portion. Happy indeed are they who share the Levite's lot! When the Lord Jesus comes again, those, surely, who have stored most in heaven, and have least to leave behind on earth, will render their account with the greatest joy.

"To every man according to his service." The Lord did not say, divide it equally among the families of Levi. There were six wagons, and three families of Levites; but four wagons were given to Merari, two to Gershon, "but unto the sons of Kohath he gave none." At first sight this division appears unfair; but it was and still is the Lord's plan to give "to every man according to his service." It fell to the lot of Merari to carry the heaviest materials of the tabernacle; the boards, the bars, and the pillars with their heavy sockets of solid silver, (Weighing more than one cwt. each: the hundred sockets therefore alone weighing over five tons of pure silver.) and all the instruments; the pillars of the court, likewise, with their brazen sockets and

pins, and their cords, these formed Merari's weighty burden.

The duty of Gershon was to convey the curtains, hangings, coverings and cords of the tabernacle, and the hangings of the court; for this service, two wagons were as sufficient help as the four were for Merari.

But what of Kohath? His burdens were not light: the ark, with its covering the mercy-seat, and the cherubim of gold overshadowing it, the table and the candlestick, the altars and the vessels of the sanctuary, and all their coverings, these were entrusted to his sons. Heavy they were indeed, but no help had they, "because the service of the sanctuary belonging unto them was that they should bear upon their shoulders."

Sometimes the children of God are tempted to murmur when their service seems heavy and but little help is forthcoming: they may perhaps compare their lot with that of others for whom larger provision has been made. But God makes no mistakes; according to their service He divides the help, and those who are called to the holiest service are those who can have least assistance. Such are privileged to carry upon their own shoulders sacred burdens that may not be shared with less privileged ones. There was One Who trod the winepress alone, and of the people there was none with Him; and one who was very like to his Master tells us, "At my first answer no man stood with me, but all men forsook me...Notwithstanding the Lord stood with me, and strengthened me; that by me the preaching might be fully known, and that all the Gentiles might hear." Those who would be near the Master in the glory must here drink the cup of sorrow with Him and be baptized with His baptism.

The burden-bearing of the Levites was not to last for ever; once in the Promised Land that service ceased. Nor will our opportunity of burden-bearing be for long; the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior will soon summons the watchful and waiting ones to meet Him in the air. A million a month in China are dying without God; now we may seek to win them; now we may suffer to win them. May none of us lose the opportunity of self-denial and service while it lasts!

"A little while"--He'll come again!

Let us the precious hours redeem;

Our greatest grief to give Him pain,

Our joy to serve and follow Him.

Watching and ready may we be,

As those who long their Lord to see.

'A little while'--'twill soon be past!

Why should we shun the shame and cross?

Oh! Let us in His footsteps haste,

Counting for Him all else but loss.

Oh! How will recompense His smile

The sufferings of this 'little while.'"

## THE DEDICATORY OFFERINGS: VERSE 10, 11.

"And the princes offered for dedicating of the altar in the day that it was anointed....And the Lord said unto Moses, They shall offer their offering, each prince on his day, for the dedicating of the altar."

The offerings recorded in the early verses of this chapter were given in connection with the setting up of the Tabernacle, and had reference to its transportation. But the offerings now to be considered had reference to the altar, and the sacrifices to be offered thereon. Their number, their character, and their value are full of significance; and the space accorded to their record by God shows the Divine estimation of the altar, and of those gifts which pertain to sacrifice to Him.

The altar points us to our incarnate Saviour, the Christ of God, and reminds us that without shedding of blood there is no remission of sin. The altar sanctified the gift; the fire on the altar first came down from heaven; all fire that did not come from the altar was strange fire, and could only bring death to the offerer when used in worship, as in the case of Nadab and Abihu.

Do we not need to remember this in the present day, when false teachers deny the atoning character of the death of Christ, and vainly imagine that God can be served with the unhallowed fires of fleshly activity?

## THE DISPLAY OF THE GIFTS.

The twelve princes, the representatives of the Israel of God, brought their offerings before the altar, and would have left them there: they were all exactly alike, and the gifts might have been speedily accepted, and briefly recorded, if recorded at all. But the Lord said unto Moses, They shall offer their offering, each prince on his day; or, literally, one prince a day, a sentence which is expressed twice in the Original, showing God's regard for order and method in all things which concern His service, and that He graciously receives and remembers the offerings of each of His faithful. Accordingly all the offerings of each of the princes are here registered by the Holy Spirit in God's Book, as an encouragement to Christian liberality in all ages" (Wordsworth).

Does it not seem as though the Divine delight in the offering of His servants was so great that He would have His people also to dwell upon them for twelve consecutive days? And not only does He spread them over twelve days, but He spreads them over seventy-seven long verses in this long chapter; first in minute detail, according as much space to the gifts of the last offerer as to those of the first, and then totaling up the aggregate amount, as though He would say, "Behold the love-gifts of my people! How many and how precious the offerings of each, and how great the value of the whole! Note, too, the persons of the offerers, and that all their gifts were for the dedication of the altar, and show their appreciation of the need for, and the blessed privilege of sacrifice!"

As we mentioned in our introductory chapter, it was through this account, read in a time of great spiritual need, that our mind was opened as never before to see God's great heart of love. We seemed to be reminded of the delight often taken by bride and bridegroom in spreading out for inspection the love-gifts of their friends, that as many as possible may share their gratification in them. Several may have sent similar gifts; but each is set out to the best possible advantage, with the name of the giver attached. And while the intrinsic value of each is not lost sight of, it is the loving thought of which it is the expression that is most prized.

Again, we were reminded of the way in which, in our frequent absence from home and children, wifely letters have cheered and interested us, depicting with motherly tenderness the gifts the children had brought her on her birthday, or other occasion, with a fullness of detail that showed alike the pleasure of the writer and her consciousness of the enjoyment with which the account would be read. Does not the full detail of this chapter reveal, in like manner, the love and tenderness of Him whose Book it is, toward each offerer; and bring out what we may reverently call the mother-side of God's character, Who has condescended to say, "As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you"?

THE PERSON OF THE OFFERER. Verses 12-17.

"And he that offered his offering the first day was Nahshon the son of Amminadab, of the tribe of Judah."  
Etc.

As we read of the offerings of the twelve princes, we note that, valuable as they manifestly are, the offerer whose love prompted the gifts, is made more prominent in the inspired record. The person of each offerer is brought before us, both as an individual, and in his relationship to the tribe of which he is the representative, before any enumeration is made of his gifts; and when the enumeration has been fully given, we are again reminded of the offerer himself. Could the Divine love and satisfaction be more expressively brought out?

With this thought in view, let us read between the lines of the Record:

And he that offered his offering, for a glad free-will offering it was, on the first day was Nahshon, Nahshon the son of Amminadab, Nahshon the prince of the tribe of Judah; and his offering was one charger, a silver charger, and a weighty one; the weight thereof was a hundred and thirty shekels: one bowl, also of silver, of seventy shekels weight; not the light shekels of commerce, but the weighty shekels of the Sanctuary. Nor were these vessels empty; both of them were full, full of flour, fine flour and mingled with oil, destined for a meat-offering.

One spoon was the next gift, yet more precious, a spoon of solid gold, of no less than ten shekels weight. It, too, was full, full of incense.

Next, were brought one young bullock, one ram, and one lamb of the first year, all for a burnt-offering. Any one of these might have been offered; Nahshon, however, brought them all, and all to be wholly consumed on the altar, for the enjoyment and satisfaction of God alone.

But Nahshon was a sinner and the tribe he represented were sinful men; a sin-offering therefore was not neglected; and in the order of enumeration this is next mentioned, though, as we have said before, it was offered first, one kid of the goats for a sin-offering.

And, lastly, a princely offering for a sacrifice of peace-offerings; two oxen, five rams, five he-goats, five lambs of the first year, sacrifices on which God feasted, as it were, together with His people, and in which the sacrificing priest, the offerer and all his friends had their full share.

And this, all this, was the offering of Nahshon, Nahshon the son of Amminadab.

Twelve times is all this detail repeated, a most emphatic evidence that God never wearies in noting the service of each one of His people. But even this is not all. In the 84th and following verses of this long chapter we read:

"This was the dedication of the altar, in the day when it was anointed, by the princes of Israel: twelve chargers of silver, twelve silver bowls, twelve spoons of gold. Each charger of silver weighing a hundred and thirty shekels, each bowl seventy: all the silver vessels weighted two thousand and four hundred shekels, after the shekel of the Sanctuary. The golden spoons were twelve, full of incense, weighing twelve shekels a piece, after the shekel of the Sanctuary; all the gold of the spoons was a hundred and twenty shekels.

"All the oxen for the burnt-offering were twelve bullocks, the rams twelve, the lambs of the first year twelve, with their meat-offering; and the kids of the goats for sin-offering twelve. And all the oxen for the sacrifice of the peace-offerings were twenty and four bullocks, the rams sixty, the he-goats sixty, the lambs of the first year sixty.

"This", all this, "was the dedication of the altar, after that it was anointed."

#### THE IMPORTANCE OF THE ALTAR.

In this glad summing up of the great aggregate value of the offerings, we not only get a further view of the Divine complacency in the love-gifts of His people, and in the persons of the offerers, but the object of the offerings is also brought into special prominence. As the list of each prince's offerings was preceded and followed by reference to the person of the offer, so the list of totals is preceded and followed by the thought, This was the dedication of the altar in the day when it was anointed.

The importance of the brazen altar can scarcely be exaggerated. The Tabernacle contained many precious things, each typifying most important truths concerning our Lord and His ministry; the ark on which rested the Shekinah, which enshrined the tables of the law, and was covered by the mercy-seat, the table of shew-bread, the candlestick of gold, and the golden altar were all most precious; but, apart from the brazen altar, there was no access to them for guilty man; without shedding of blood there is no remission of sin. Hence the recognition by the princes of the importance of the altar; and hence the Divine emphasis placed upon those gifts, an emphasis wholly without parallel in the sacred Records. To the godly Israelite the brazen altar typified that which was fulfilled at the Cross, and well may we exclaim: "God forbid that I should glory, save in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Galatians 6:14).

Looking back over the two chapters on which we have been dwelling we see in them a marvelous revelation of Divine love, even in Mosaic times. First, an unrestricted invitation to draw near to God; woman or man, of any tribe, whosoever will, may come and be wholly separated unto the Lord, but only in God's way. We learn, too, that in such consecration there is no merit on which man may rest, or in which he may boast; we are at best unprofitable servants, accepted only in the Beloved, complete only in Him. Yet such consecration gives joy to God, and opens the way to wonderful revelations of blessing; blessing which when enjoyed constrains to service, to gift, to recognition of the preciousness of the Altar, of the Cross, a service in which God Himself finds delight, and on which He never wearies to dwell.

May God make our meditations very practical; and may we "thus judge, that if One died for all, then were all dead; and that He died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him which died for them and rose again," or, as we may better read it, "unto Him which died and rose again for them."

Are we really thus living? God knows: eternity will show: what answer does conscience give now? What conclusions do our brothers, sisters, children, friends draw from our lives? Our true self-denial, self

emptying, and giving for Christ's cause practically show our real estimate of the value of the Cross of Christ, our real love for the Christ who was crucified for us.

THE END.

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