

Numbers and Deuteronomy

by Ron Bailey

The sermon explores the significance of Deuteronomy and Numbers, highlighting the importance of living by God's word, the nature of God as a consuming fire, and the consequences of idolatry and disobedience.

Duration: 50:22

Scripture: Numbers 6:22-26, Numbers 10:11, Deuteronomy 1:2, Deuteronomy 6:16-19

Topics: "Expositional"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker reflects on the experience of being served in a hotel and draws a parallel to the role of a priest serving the Lord. The speaker emphasizes that those who serve in the traditional sense are attentive and focused on the needs of others, without imposing their own agenda. The sermon then shifts to the theme of God's faithfulness throughout history, highlighting the opportunity for redemption and transformation that God offers to humanity. The speaker concludes by urging the audience to remember and learn from the recorded history in the Bible, particularly the significance of God's guidance and humbling experiences in the wilderness.

Transcript

Good to be with you again, and thank you for your welcome. I didn't say this morning that I wanted to pass on Margaret's love to you. She particularly wanted to be part of the church at home today.

She was a particular friend with Ruth, and Ruth's home call. There'll be a special time for the church at Reading, so please do continue to pray for her. It was a joy to be with you.

I sent a letter early on that, it's maybe just a nostalgic thing, but I really enjoy preaching with my back to a fireplace. I did this for so long in my own home, not that it's quite like your fireplace, although I'm glad to see you lay aside your weights when you come to the meeting. This morning we found ourselves on the edges of the River Jordan, looking over into the Promised Land in the Book of Deuteronomy.

And we were saying that the Book of Deuteronomy really is a very significant part of the Scripture, because it adds to the revelation of what was given in Exodus, the fruit of 40 years' reflection. So you have not just the truth that God had given, but what that had meant, how that had been understood and interpreted, and the consequence of turning their back on it for the people of Israel. And it's an amazing thing that they stand here now ready to possess the land that God had promised to them.

And one of the people I mentioned this morning that it's interesting to see that nobody knew much about was a man named Nasham. And just to show you that I'm not making it up, if you like the terms of the Book of Numbers, there's one or two things I wanted to say this morning about Nasham that I didn't, so I'll just add them now. The Book of Numbers, as I said this morning, is given that name because that's what it is.

It's the Book of Numbers. It begins with the fences of all the tribes. And everything is being got ready.

Everything is prepared. At the end of the Book of Exodus, God had given them the instructions as to the tabernacle that they would build. And then in the Book of Numbers, everything is in order for the march through to the promised land.

This is like the beginning of the Book of Numbers. And if you look, for example, at chapter 2, you'll see how God orders the camp. This is to be a constant cycle of people breaking camp, moving on to the next place and erecting their tents again as God leads them on what really is a very short journey through to the promised land.

That was the intention of it. And here in chapter 2 it says this, The Lord spoke to Moses and to Aaron, saying, Every man of the children of Israel shall pitch by his own standard to the inside of their father's house. Far off about the tabernacle of the congregation shall they pitch.

And on the east side toward the rising of the sun, that's where the entrance to the tabernacle was, on the east side toward the rising of the sun shall they of the standard of the camp of Judah pitch throughout their armies. And Nashan, the son of Amminadab, shall be captain of the children of Judah. And his post, that's his army, and those that were numbered of them were 3,414,600.

That's 74,600 men under Nashan's personal command. You'll understand that this man was a man of considerable capacity, that God trusted with this whole army of the people of Judah. And I said earlier on this morning that by this time Judah had become the prime tribe of the people of Israel, if you go through this list you'll find they had the largest standing army.

And where they are given to pitch their tent is in the place of greatest prestige. They pitched their little encampment and their tent immediately opposite the door of the tabernacle. Every day with the constant reminder of God's presence, in the fire and in the cloud, Nashan would have come to the door of his tent and seen this evidence of God with his people in the midst.

It was a privilege beyond explanation. I mean there was no tent in front of Nashan's tent. He gets a clear view every day of where God is manifest in all his presence.

This is a position of tremendous privilege and authority. Okay, let's see what happens a little bit later on. If we go a little bit farther on you'll see how they begin to get things in order and now that the tabernacle is erected they can begin the services of God.

Remember the tabernacle wasn't a church. It wasn't like a temple. It was really more like a palace.

It was a place where God reigned in the midst of his people and his people gathered around him to serve him. And when this whole thing was erected, in chapter 7 it says this, 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 instruments thereof, both the altar and all the vessels thereof, and anointed them and sanctified them, that the princes of Israel,

heads of the house of their fathers, who were the princes of the tribes and were over them that were numbered, offered. And they brought their offerings before the Lord.

Six covered wagons and twelve oxen, a wagon for two of the princes and for each one an ox. And they brought them before the tabernacle and said unto, and the Lord spoke to Moses saying, Take it of them that they may be to do the service of the tabernacle and the congregation and I shall give them to the Levites to every man according to his service. And Moses took the wagons and the oxen and gave them to the Levites.

Two wagons and four oxen he gave to the sons of Gershon according to their service. Four wagons and eight oxen he gave to the sons of Merari according to 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.

We'll come back to that in a bit. And the princes, these are these one over each tribe, the princes offered for the dedicating of the altar in the day that it was anointed. Even the princes offered their offering before the altar.

And the Lord said to Moses they shall offer their offering each prince on his day for the dedicating of the altar. And he that offered his offering the first day was Nasha, the son of Amenadab of the tribe of Judah. And his offering was of one silver charger.

The weight thereof was 130 shekels, one silver bowl of 70 shekels according to the shekel of the sanctuary. Both of them were full of fine flour mingled with oil for a meal offering. One steward of ten shekels of gold full of incense, one young bullock, one ram, one lamb of the first year for a burnt offering, one kid of the goats for a sin offering, and for a sacrifice of peace offering, two oxen, five rams, five he-goats, five lambs of the first year.

This was the offering of Nasha, the son of Amenadab. This really represents an amazing investment of this man. This is a very, very costless sacrifice.

And this man as the one that God has appointed as the head over all the people of Judah is now taking the lead as the people serve God. You know that the name Judah means praised. And this man is the one who takes the first step in the praise of God.

He gives this amazing offering to God. He's a man of privilege, he's a man of stature, he's a man of resource, he's a man who gives himself to God. Okay? Some of you know where we went this morning, so you know the tragedy of this man.

Let's go on a little bit farther if I can find it. If you were to, you can turn the pages over with me. I'm going through chapter 8 and 9. In chapter 10, it begins to tell them of how they must journey when they move from one place to another.

And all this is very carefully regulated. Everything is in its order. It must all be done exactly in the way that God said it should be done.

And here it says in verse 11, This seems so easy to read this, but I wonder if you can capture the atmosphere of this day. They've been camped around Sinai for a year. They have put together the tabernacle.

They've created all the amazingly beautiful, intricate things that they had to do. It's all in order now. It's directed.

They've seen the Spirit of God come in His glory. They know God is with them. And now they begin their first steps from Sinai toward the Promised Land.

I was saying this morning that in one way, the law that they received at Sinai was a tenancy agreement. God said to them, keep the law and you keep the land. Break the law and you lose the land.

And now they're on the way to the land. And look how it goes on. Verse 13, This has amazing implications that we can only touch on.

We won't go through every part of this. So if you'll just come with me to Deuteronomy chapter 11. Chapter 1, sorry.

I think we can make the point and then move on from it. In Deuteronomy and chapter 1, you have this amazing verse. It all looks so good there, doesn't it? They're all packed up and ready to go.

Everything in order. All the wagons loaded. The priests bearing the ark on their shoulders.

Everybody in their order. All ready to move out at the blowing of the trumpet. Not far this journey.

These be the words, chapter 1, which Moses spoke to all Israel on this side, Jordan and the wilderness and the plain over against the Red Sea, between Paran and Tophel and Ladan and Hazaroth and Nizab. Look at this verse, verse 2. There are eleven days' journey from Horeb by the way of Mount Seir unto Kadesh Barnea. And it came to pass in the fortieth year, in the eleventh month, in the first day of the month, that Moses spoke to the children of Israel according to all that the Lord had given him in commandment unto them.

An eleven days' journey that took forty years. Think of the implications of this. If they had gone north from where they were and had come into Kadesh Barnea and come into the Promised Land by the way that God had originally told them that they would go, who would have been leading this vast contingent of two and a half million people? The tribe of Judah.

Who would have been leading the tribe of Judah in Asher? He was the man destined to be the first one to step into the Promised Land. This man. Enormous privilege.

Enormous abilities. A man trusted by God. A man taken into astonishing experiences where he saw God and acted in God's presence.

This man who, if we'd followed it earlier on, if we'd gone through every verse, you'd have seen the time where, almost certainly as one of the elders, God took up the spirit that was on Moses and put it on the chief seventy of the elders. This man, by nature, by gift, by enabling, by privilege, by experience, enormously rich in his knowledge of God. If we went back into Numbers, we could follow the story of how they chose a representative of each tribe to go into the land to spy it out.

And almost certainly Martian as the head of Judah would have been the one who nominated Caleb. And Caleb went into the land and came back with a good witness, a good message. But the whole of the people of Israel, two and a half million of them, rejected it so thoroughly that they wanted to destroy the witnesses.

The two witnesses they wanted to destroy would come back. They took up stones. All of them took up stones, it says in Numbers.

Sadly, Achan, one of them. So Achan is this amazing example of a man who had so much privilege, blessed almost beyond imagination. A man given opportunity after opportunity.

And a man who in the end says no to the Word of God and loses everything. And this morning we spoke about Rahab and the extraordinary contrast. But you don't even need to go that far for an extraordinary contrast.

Because the man that was chosen to go in for the tribe of Judah was Caleb. And if you know the full title of Caleb you'll know that he was Caleb the son of Jephunneh, the Kenneville. Caleb was not a descendant of Judah at all.

He'd been adopted into the tribe, or maybe his father had. Probably wasn't even of the bloodline of Judah. And yet this is a man who wholly followed God with all his heart.

And forty years later, Caleb is one of the people here who stands with Moses after what should have been an eleven days journey. After forty years, Caleb and Joshua and just Moses stand there. And other than that, a whole generation has passed out.

If you compare the numbers in the book of Numbers, you'll find that they do another census at the end of the book of Numbers and you can work out what happened. In fact, there were almost as many people ready to go into the land at the end of Numbers as there were at the beginning of Numbers. Roughly 600,000 foot soldiers and all the others added to them.

But it says quite specifically that there were a different 6,000. The 6,000 who had said no had perished in the wilderness. And I said this morning, it's a solemn thing to say, but if you calculate it, it means a death every 15 minutes for 40 years.

A constant scream, unbroken, of weeping and lamenting and the sorrow and the sound of a shovel and moving on with more loss left behind you. Because these people said no to the things that God offered to them so readily. And now God is faithful, this brings them back to this place and there, they're on the opposite side of the River Jordan.

Now this too, I think, is significant because apparently, according to the Gospel, that's where John did his baptizing at one point, in Bethabara beyond Jordan. And that's where he was when Jesus was baptized. And it was into that area that Jesus was led by the Spirit to be tempted in the wilderness.

And you have an astonishing parallel developing here. Because what you have now is for 40 days, not 40 years, but for 40 days, you have the true Israel. The true representative of God who goes through the trial of the period of 40 years and then crosses the Jordan to come back and every place where his foot steps, he brings into submission.

He drives out the demons. He drives out everything. He comes and does what old Israel never did.

He fulfills everything that they had failed to fulfill. And it's no accident if you trace his reactions, his answers to Satan, you'll find that they all come from this passage in the Scripture, all from Deuteronomy. This was the passage that was on his path.

He was thinking these things through. He was reliving these events. The one who keeps these laws, the one who lives by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God, the one who bows down to the Lord and serves him alone, the one who does not tempt the Lord, that is all in 6, 7 and 8 of Deuteronomy.

Every quotation he quotes is from Deuteronomy. He's poised to go into the land, to conquer it, to bring it under subjection, to bring in what ancient Israel never brought him. God said to them, if you keep my word, it will be, he said, like the days of heaven upon earth.

But they didn't. So it wasn't. But Jesus did.

So it was. And they said, the kingdom of heaven is here. And it was.

The kingdom of heaven is always there where people on earth are doing the will of heaven. That's what he did. And he did it perfectly.

So that's kind of overrunning our story a little bit. In fact, a lot. But let's have a look at something here in the book of Deuteronomy.

I want to draw your attention to one or two things in particular. Just almost a couple of verses, or two or three verses. And each one of them, if you wanted to, if you still preach sermons, could be made into a sermon with two or three points or something like that.

And if you don't preach sermons, there would still be a good little skeleton for a Bible study for you. This is chapter six of Deuteronomy. And each time Moses reminds them of the privilege and the responsibility that's laid upon their shoulders, he reminds them of the trust that God gave to them when he gave them his law.

And he reminds them again and again, we said this last thing, we said when we were together this morning, that again and again he focuses on this question of idolatry. And he tells them that they must not worship an image of God. One of the things that you, one of the titles that you often hear used of God in the Scriptures is the title Living God.

And of course it's in contrast to all the other gods which aren't. As to say they are dead gods, but he was the living God. And that was how the people of Israel distinguished their God from all the others.

But the interesting thing is that the word living and the word that's used for running water in the Scripture are the same. So it isn't just that God is a living God in contrast to a dead God. God is a God who is constantly on the move.

You can't capture the shape of water. You can't capture the shape of wind. You can't capture the shape of fire.

You must not fix in your mind what God is like. You must live by the word that proceeds from his mouth. You must hear what God is saying to you today.

You must see how God is revealing himself to you today. He may reveal himself to you today as the captain of the Lord's host because he wants to lead you into victory. He may reveal himself to you today as a shepherd who wants to console you and gather you into his bosom.

He may need to rebuke you. He may need to attack. However, he wants to reveal himself in different ways.

Don't get stuck with the image of what he was like the last time you saw him. Don't do it. Let God be fresh.

Let him be the running water God. The living God. The God who is always fresh.

The God who can't be tied down. Our God is a consuming fire it says here too in Deuteronomy. I always love that thing because in the days when I used to preach and I'm back to a fire, it was a gas fire.

And I often used to think, you know, a gas fire, it's just a typical twentieth century fire. It's so chemical and under control and it's behind glass and it's utterly safe. And God isn't a gas fire.

God isn't at all safe. I think there's a little quote that C.S. Lewis puts in one of his Aslan stories. Aslan isn't a tame lion, he says.

God is not a gas fire. He's not safe. You can't control him on the flip of a knob.

He's a consuming fire. And there's something of this, the awe of this, that needs to constantly break in on us. Because we're so mindful of what it's been like to come into the embrace of the God who is the Father, sometimes it's easy for us to forget that he's still the consuming fire.

He's still the God whose presence caused mountains to melt. This is who he is. So don't make an idol of him in your mind.

Don't fix it. Let him reveal himself fresh. What will you say to me today, Lord? How will you reveal yourself to me today, Lord? So it goes on here.

Let's look at these things it goes on to say. Here's one of the little rehearsals. Look at verse 16.

This is one of the verses that Jesus, I'm in chapter 6, verse 16. This is one of the verses that Jesus quoted in the wilderness. You shall not tempt the Lord your God as you tempted him in Massa.

You shall diligently keep the commandments of the Lord your God and his testimonies and the statutes which he hath commanded thee. And thou shalt do that which is right and good in the sight of the Lord, that it may be well with thee, that thou mayest go in and possess the good land which the Lord swore unto thy fathers, to cast out all thine enemies from before thee, as the Lord hath spoken. Here's a little word for you in a nutshell for you to think about.

When God brought the people of Israel out of Egypt, he did it with his own strong right arm and they didn't lift a finger to assist him. When he moved them into the promised land, they had to fight for a ranch. Interesting, isn't it? When God brings you out of your sin, out of the things that abound you, out from under that old nature, that old man, that old prince, that old king, there's not a thing you can do.

You can't raise a finger. You can't make a single contribution to that. You must allow God to do it.

For when it comes to bringing you in, you'll need to cooperate with him with all of your strength, all your power, all your being, because you'll have to fight for every inch. It'll be God who gives you the victory, but not without your cooperation, not without your energetic, what they're saying here, keep them diligently. Good old-fashioned word, that.

Diligently. Not just keeping the outward pattern of them, but diligently. It goes on and says this.

Verse 20. And when thy son asks thee in time to come, saying, What mean the testimonies and the statutes and the judgments which the Lord your God hath commanded you, then you shall say unto thy son, Is there testimony? Is this yours? We were pharaohs, bondmen in Egypt. And the Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand.

And the Lord showed signs and wonders great and sawed upon Egypt and upon Pharaoh and upon all his household before our eyes. They saw this. This wasn't a theory.

This wasn't a Bible or verse that they had read. They saw this with their eyes. When God broke the strength and the power of Egypt in the crossing of the Red Sea, the Israelite mothers put their children down to the seashore the next day to see the bodies of the Egyptian army floating face down in the water.

To say to them, You will never need to fear this again. You won't need to look over your shoulder in nervous apprehension lest they're coming to get you. You won't wake startled in the night at the knock of the door in case it's some other vicious law that the pharaoh had invented.

You'll never have to fear again. You're free. And they'd seen it.

Brothers and sisters, God has to do something in our heart. He has not already done it. Where He shows you so clearly in your spirit what He has done on the cross, that you know that the power of the enemy is broken.

Not just as a theory. Not just as a Bible verse, but you know it. You know it.

You see He's done it. You know it accomplished. You know it completed.

And from that point, you can begin to move forward. So it goes on here. Before our eyes.

And verse 23, He brought us out thence that He might bring us in. It's a lovely little phrase, isn't it? He didn't just bring you out to make a trophy of you. He brought you out to bring you in.

No man can serve two masters. Else you'll love the one and hate the other, said Jesus. So because at that time Pharaoh was their master, God sent a message to Pharaoh which said let my people go that they may serve me.

Because you can't serve the two at the same place. And you can't be in the two at the same time. And you can't be in Egypt and in the promised land.

You can't be in Adam and in Christ. You can't be in the old man and in the new at the same time. You can't have the old heart and the new heart side by side.

They are mutually exclusive. He brought you out that He might bring you in. And they were never intended to live on some kind of no man's land on the edges of something.

It was supposed to be a short journey of eleven days to bring them into all of God's provision for them. And I know that God did wonderful things with them and the woman is just like God. It's just like Him.

Typical of Him. He surrounds us with love, mercy, even when we've turned our back on Him. We must not we mustn't stretch these things so that they take a lifetime to do.

I don't know whether I've said this before but it's I may have said this before. We sometimes sing choruses that are lovely choruses and they're true but we need to understand them. I like the one for example that speaks to that God melting them and moulding them and God refining them and refining our nature.

And these are wonderful choruses and there's a lot of truth in them. As long as you remember that an ancient eastern metal worker when he was working over his crucible, he didn't spend a lifetime purifying one bowl full of metal. It was an intense few hours and the work was done.

Now the work that God wants to do in your life may be an intense few hours but it certainly isn't intended to take a lifetime. So use the picture but think about the picture. Think about it.

Think about the implications of it. He brought them out that He might bring them in and whatever you were in He's brought you out so that He can bring you into what you've never been in. That's what He's done.

That's His purpose. You see He was trying to bring them into something which would be an entirely different context. You can't serve God in Egypt.

You can't serve God under that wrong king. You have to be brought out and brought into a new kingdom. You have to be translated from the power of darkness and brought into the kingdom of the Son of His love.

You need to be brought into a new context because only in the new context can you serve your new king. It's impossible to keep all the laws of God in Egypt because the other law will constantly strive against you. So God brings you out into a new place where His perfect will can be done in your life by His grace.

I'll read just the last little bit of it. He brought them out from thence and He might bring us in to give us the land which He swore to our fathers and the Lord commanded us to do all these statutes to fear the Lord our God for our good always. That's lovely, isn't it? Why did you think God gave people laws? Because He was a spoilsport? Because He didn't like people enjoying themselves? For their good always.

I think it was Thomas Watson, the old Puritan, who used to say that God has so intertwined together His glory and man's good that whatever prospers the one, prospers the other. That's worth saying again if I can. God has so intertwined together His glory and man's good that whatever prospers the one prospers the other.

Yes, these are for the glory of God but also for your good. It's the very best. Don't think of this law that God gave to the people as being harsh and demanding and impossible.

There's a lovely verse that comes right towards the end of Deuteronomy. One of my favourites, I remember Amy Carmichael used to quote it quite frequently. It's the one where it says from His right hand there went forth a fiery law.

Yea, He loved the people. That's why from His right hand there went forth a fiery law. Because He loved the people.

And that's why God from His right hand sent forth a fiery law in the person of the Spirit. Because He loved the people. You know, I'm sure you know because you're well taught folks here at Epsom that I remember Les mentioning at the summer conference too.

That the day of Pentecost that we think about so much in terms of the coming of the Spirit for the Jewish people that is the anniversary as far as they're concerned of the giving of the law. That was the time, listen

to this I don't remember if you said this, you may have done because I wasn't always able to hear everything that was being said. But this was the day in Israel history when, just listen to this the mediator of the covenant went up to God and a cloud hid Him from their sight and He received from God the law which He then gave to be His people's position.

I don't know any better way of expressing the new covenant than that. I think that's what Jesus did. The mediator of the new covenant went up and a cloud hid Him and He received from the Father's right hand a fiery law which He came and deposited in His people, wrote it in their hearts.

It's absolutely perfect. Absolutely perfect. This is why the Bible says these things have been recorded for our admonition, our warning.

This isn't the whole history of Israel. These are the things that God has selected because they are of particular significance. And we need to give particular attention to them in that way.

Let's go on to chapter 8. All the commandments which I command thee this day you shall observe to do that ye may live and multiply and go in and possess the land which the Lord swore to your fathers. And thou shalt remember all the way which the Lord thy God led thee these forty years. Sometimes we call it the forty years wandering but sometimes we discover that what we thought were wanderings were actually God's leading.

You shall remember all the way which the Lord thy God led thee these forty years in the wilderness to humble thee and to prove thee to know what was in thine heart whether thou wouldst keep his commandments or no. And he humbled thee and suffered thee to hunger and fed thee with manner which thou knewest not, neither did thy fathers know that he might make thee know that man doth not live by bread only but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the Lord doth man live. You can see these whole sections are the sections that the Lord Jesus was clearly meditating on in his time in the wilderness.

Then there are all kinds of reminders as to the way that God had dealt with them and we won't go through the whole of it but I'll just come to one part here. This is chapter 10. When God originally called the people himself at Sinai he gave them an amazing destiny.

He said if you will keep my covenant and hear my voice, obey my voice then you will be a special people to me although all the world is mine, you will be uniquely mine. You will be to me a holy nation a kingdom of priests said God. Now forget any kind of earthly priests because they're all just imitations and attempts to portray something.

I'm talking about real priests. Real priests are mediators. They are in between people.

They are people who are in living contact with two separate entities. So they have one hand in the hand of God and they have one hand in the hand of the people and that's the way they are. That's why Jesus became a man so that he could become a priest according to the book of Hebrews.

It's express purpose. He became a man so that he could put one hand into the hand of God and one hand into the hand of the human race and be the living mediator between the two. But when God began to speak to his people and even when he spoke to Egypt and then his people he said some amazing things.

He said for example to Pharaoh which was the premier nation, the super power and took to weighing the corner of an empire this super power had a group of slaves and God speaks about the group of slaves and he says Israel is my son. My first born son. Let him go.

Now the first born son was the one who had all the rights and the privilege. He was the one who inherited after the father the one who would rule after the father, carry on the father's will and he is the king of Egypt who really is something quite special and God says that's not special the real special is these people. This is my son.

My first born son who will serve me. Let him go. And one of the things the first born son said was serve as priests for the family.

So the people of Israel in picture were to be a priestly nation. They were to be a nation in between God and the nations. They were to be the missionary nation.

They were to be the communicators. They were to be the mediators. They were to be the ones who received the word of God and dispersed it amongst the nations.

That was the plan. They were to be the light of the Gentiles. That was the plan.

That was the plan. What God did with them was then for practical reasons and for other reasons we won't go into just now. He took from the nation which the whole of which was a nation of priests in one sense and he took a group out of that nation to be representatives of the whole nation and these were a special kind of priesthood that we now know as the Aaronic priesthood.

The priesthood that comes from Levi down into the person of Aaron and into his family. And one of the things that God reminded them about as they stood poised to go into their promised land was this amazing thing here in chapter 10 and he's reminding them about the way that God separated the tribe of Levi. Separate, that's the Bible word for sanctify to separate something for a unique purpose.

Verse 8. At that time the God separated the tribe of Levi and here's a three point sermon for you. To bear the ark of the covenant of the Lord to stand before the Lord to minister unto him and to bless in his name unto this day. This priestly people and these people who were the representatives who showed even more clearly what the purpose were their first function apparently was to carry the ark of the covenant.

Now I've not got time to go into all of this but the ark of the covenant was a continuing representation of God's presence and rule amongst his people. This was the mobile throne of God in the midst of his people. This is where he reigned.

Where God was with victory, everything was fine. That's what they thought later on. They tried to use the ark as a weapon of war and discovered that God doesn't always work in the way that people think and you can't always keep him trapped up in little boxes.

Although theologians think they can at times. But this thing here, God says about the priests and all born again men and women are potentially priests. I say potentially because you've got to function as one.

You've got to give yourself to this that God gives to you. It doesn't just mean functioning in a meeting it means being a priest in every part of your life. Being a priest in your relationship with your wife or your husband, being a priest in representing God to the people that you work with, to the people that you live

next door to.

You're to be a priest. You are the mediator. You are the one who will communicate the will and nature of God.

You are the ones who are to bear the ark of the covenant. One of the things that Paul says when he writes to the Corinthians is he speaks about bearing the image of Jesus Christ. And this to me is one of the tremendous thrills of the New Covenant.

That God by His Spirit equips you and me to be image bearers of Jesus Christ. He makes it possible for ordinary men and women like you and me to carry in our flesh in our ordinary everyday lives the person the presence, the quality, the character of Jesus so that there is that Jesus is in every place. He's in your office.

He's in your school. He's in your garden. He's in your bedroom.

He's every place. This is your privilege. Your privilege is not just to go to heaven when you die.

Not just to get into the land which you know flows with milk and honey and has enormous grapes. But part of the purpose is in fact the purpose is that in that place you will carry that that represents God's presence. Do you remember how you can think of all the implications of this? How when David finally you know it took a long long time for the people of Israel to bring the land into submission.

Hundreds of years. In fact it wasn't finally completed until David took Jerusalem. And that's what kind of 400 years after this.

So it took them a long time to finally subdue the land. And when it was finally subdued and the whole land was under his authority David's immediate reaction was we've got to get the ark at the centre of the nation. This is it.

We've got to get the rule of God from the capital. From Jerusalem the Lord of God must spread out. Everything is ready now.

You can come Lord. Come Lord into your resting place as they cried when they finally built the temple. All part of the same pattern.

Wherever you are you are to be an image bearer of Jesus Christ. And the consequence of his presence in you is to reach out and touch everybody that you touch. And this is your privilege.

You are one of those who bear the ark of the covenant of the Lord. Now how about this one? And to stand before the Lord. To minister unto him.

When you think about someone being a minister what do you think about? Do you think about somebody who does all the preaching or does all the visiting or that kind of thing? Primarily as a minister is someone who serves God. He is at God's beck and call. He's one of those who in the song in the song we sometimes sing stands come ye servants of the Lord who stand by night in the house of the Lord.

Lift up your hands. I think it was Laird's read this morning about the eyes of a servant being to his master. They're waiting on him.

I'm going through a very interesting part of my life at the moment. I'm kind of living my life backwards while everybody else is coming to the point of early time. I just started work and it's quite an interesting experience.

And currently I'm working on Jersey for a bank and you know banks have lots of money. Not a lot of mine but they have lots of other people's money. They put you in these kind of really plush hotels.

It's really hard you know. I walk along the beach to the office in the morning. But in some of these hotels, the service is really amazing.

I'm thinking of one hotel now and the people who are doing the waiting on they're watching you from a distance. They're not intruding upon you. But as soon as you finish with something it goes.

You know you kind of, you take your last spoon of cornflakes and you put the spoon down and it's gone. And then you go and get whatever it is, your scrambled egg or your bacon or something and as soon as you got it it's gone. And it really is amazing.

And what these people are doing is they're waiting on you in this traditional sense. Their eyes are on you. They're watching, they're waiting to see what you want.

They haven't got their own agenda. They're not trying to persuade me to eat something I don't want to eat or do something I don't want to do. They're serving me.

Now this is one of the privileges of a priest. He serves the Lord. He waits on the Lord.

This is kind of old fashioned, almost religious language isn't it? Waiting on God. But when we talk about our prayer meeting, waiting on God means just that. It means being attentive to Him.

It doesn't mean kind of going into a coma or something like that so that people have gone on for two hours before you wake up. And it doesn't mean absolute silence. It means really being absolutely attentive.

You're on tip toe of attention as you're looking to God. And you're waiting. And you're ready to move as He moves.

These are our privileges, brethren. And how about this one? And to bless in His name unto this day. Let me turn you back to Numbers and I'll show you the blessings that only the priests were allowed to use.

It's Numbers chapter 6. Numbers chapter 6. I'm going to take the personal names out of this and put their roles in just so that you can see what we're reading about here. Verse 22. Alright? And the Lord spoke to the mediator of the covenant, saying speak to the high priest and to those who have his life in them.

Can you see what I'm doing? I'd better go back to what it actually says, but you can see what I'm doing. As well as this being literal truth, this is also picture language. This is God showing us something.

Moses was the in-between man. He was the mediator. Now Jesus is our mediator.

Jesus is also our high priest. So here what took two men is actually done in one man in Jesus Christ. But the priests were at this time the direct descendants of Aaron.

An extraordinary power. And I don't want you to get carried away with the words of this as though it's some magical formula, because it isn't. Although it's used as though it is in lots of church services, probably.

They're finished and gone home by now. All sensible people are finished and gone home by now. And here it is.

Chapter six. The Lord spoke to Moses saying, speak to Aaron and his sons saying, this is the way you shall bless the children of Israel. Saying to them, the Lord bless thee and keep thee.

The Lord make his face shine upon thee and be gracious unto thee. The Lord lift up his countenance upon thee and give thee peace. And then in verse 25 it says this, and they shall put my name upon the children of Israel and I will bless them.

This is the priests who pronounce the blessing but with this guarantee that if they say the blessing God will impart the blessing. If they testify to the blessing, God will make sure that the people who have been blessed get blessed. I will bless them.

This is God speaking now. God says, if you do this in cooperation, in alignment with my will, if you do this thing that I have told you to do, and you bless people, I will bless them. That's amazing, isn't it? It's God actually backing up my word as long as my word is the word that he's given me to say.

I will bless them. What does blessing mean? I'm not quite sure. I know you could say it means enriching and empowering.

I guess it means you're asking God to make continual perfect provision for that person in any possible situation. That you're asking God to give of himself so that their ability to cope, to survive, whatever it is isn't just their own natural strength or strength of character, but is part of the continual flowing of God's provision. Do you know, brothers and sisters, if you are in right relationship with the High Priest, if you have the life of the High Priest within you, you have the power to bless the person next to you.

Now I'm not going to take you through any pantomime, but you have the power to bless the person next to you. You really do. Next time you say God bless you, believe it.

Next time you say to somebody the Lord bless you, believe what you're saying. God says, if you say this in accordance with my word, I will bless them. If you put my name on them, if you, what does that mean? If you bring them under my authority, if you put the banner of who I am over them, if you bring them under my rule, speak my word to them, bless them and I'll bless them, says God.

And all this to a people who had said no to God the first time around. And yet that is the wonder of God. He comes again and again and gives us the opportunity to be what He wanted us to be.

I suppose that's the story of the whole Bible, isn't it? That is make man in our image and our likeness. And then hundreds of years of wreckage and failure. And then God coming in the person of Jesus.

Giving Himself, bringing His Spirit to do exactly what He said He would do at the first. To remake men and women in His own likeness and in His own image. It's almost as though the bit that happens in the middle is just a blip.

God can cope with all that, just as long as we come to Him and let Him be God to us. Let's pray. Let's pray.

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