

People on the Move: The Book of Numbers
Worship and Dedication

Lesson #3 for October 17, 2009

Scriptures: Exodus 25:22; Numbers 7; 8; Zechariah 4:1-6,11-14; Revelation 4:2,5; 11:4.

1. This lesson focuses on the final dedication of the tabernacle, the altar of burnt offering which was in the courtyard, the Menorah or seven-branched lampstand which was in the Holy Place, and the Levite tribe as priests prior to the regular use of the tabernacle for celebration of the first Passover after the exodus from Egypt. This took place just before the beginning of their travels from Mount Sinai to the borders of the land of Canaan.

They had spent a year at the foot of Mount Sinai receiving the Ten Commandments, building the tabernacle, receiving a lot of instruction from God, and getting organized. Now they believed that when their march started, it would be no more than two weeks until they would enter the land of Canaan.

2. The altar of burnt offering had been dedicated earlier by Aaron, (Exodus 29:36,37) and Moses had already gone through a week-long process of dedicating Aaron and his sons. (Exodus 29:1-35; 40:12-17) Yet, Numbers 7 describes an additional dedication ceremony. At the earlier dedication, the other tribes of Israel had not taken any direct part in the ceremony. At this ceremony, the people themselves brought offerings to dedicate the altar of burnt offering and the Levites and to set them apart for their holy work. Each tribe brought one bull, one ram, and one 1-year-old lamb as a burnt offering; one goat as a sin offering; and two bulls, five goats, and five lambs as a fellowship offering. A full day was taken with each tribe for the dedicatory process. (Numbers 7:10-88) This ceremony was in recognition that the tribe of Levi had been chosen as the priestly tribe.
3. In connection with the dedication of the Levites, the tribes also gave oxen and wagons for helping to carry the different parts of the tabernacle while they were on their journey. (Numbers 7:2-9) Two wagons and four oxen were given to the Gershonites; four wagons and eight oxen were given to the Merarites. However, no oxen and no wagons were given to the Kohathites. The Gershonites and the Merarites were given wagons and oxen because they were responsible for transporting the heavier parts of the sanctuary. The Kohathites were expected to carry the more "holy" parts of the furniture on their shoulders. (Numbers 7:9) It is important to understand these directions in light of what happened to Uzzah—a Kohathite. (2 Samuel 6)
4. While the high priest was expected to enter the Most Holy Place of the sanctuary only once a year on the Day of Atonement as part of the cleansing of the sanctuary, (Leviticus 16) Moses apparently entered the Most Holy Place on a regular basis and spoke to the Lord, and the Lord spoke back to him in an audible voice. (Numbers 7:89) Was Moses the only one who heard God's voice?
5. What are we supposed to learn from all those ceremonies? God had specifically said that the tabernacle or tent was to be built and located in the center of the encampment to represent the fact that God wanted to dwell among them. (Exodus 25:22) How did they feel about God being so close? (Exodus 20:19) Why did God take so much time for these ceremonies? Did any of the people become impatient? Did this slow, deliberate process give the people more of a chance to think about the whole process?
6. At the same time, those additional ceremonies make it very clear that ordinary people were never allowed to approach too close to God. If they did, God's wrath would destroy them. (Numbers 8:19) Even members of the high priest's family who approached God in a careless way were destroyed right in the Holy Place. (See Leviticus 10:1-11)
7. What are we supposed to learn from this message from God which suggested, "I want to be among you but don't come too close"? (Numbers 7:89; 8:19; 2 Samuel 6:2) In the New Testament, we are told to come near to God in the Most Holy Place. Is that safe? (Hebrews 4:14-16; 10:19-25) The children of Israel had become accustomed to seeing "gods" that had to be dusted off and carried around! This God, by contrast, was very much alive! God's challenge, especially all through the Old Testament, was to get people to be quiet and respectful enough to listen to His instruction without

scaring them to death! Perhaps the best brief example of this challenge is found in Judges 2 & 3. When God helped them and blessed them, they were doing pretty well. Then they turned away from God, and He then let them reap the consequences of their own foolishness; and when they did, they ran back to God and repented and God took them back and helped them again.

8. Read Numbers 8:6-26. Notice that the Levites were to be dedicated to God to serve from the age of 25 years and up. Why do Numbers 4:3,23,30,35,43,47; and 1 Chronicles 23:3, say they are to serve from age 30? 1 Chronicles 23:24,27; Ezra 3:8 and 2 Chronicles 31:17 say they are to serve from age 20. Is that a contradiction in Scripture? We are not sure why in the days of David the age was lowered to 20. Some believe that they served an initial apprenticeship.
9. From our perspective the 12-day elaborate ceremony for dedicating the Levites could be thought of as excessive and wasteful. The Levites themselves are described as a “wave offering” or dedication offering to the Lord. (Numbers 8:11) The wave offerings were a type of peace offering to express gratitude, goodwill, even brotherhood. What might this teach us about the substitutionary aspects of the plan of salvation? Do we have anyone fulfilling that role in our day? Are our Bible teachers, Sabbath School teachers, and pastors serving in a substitutionary role? Were the Levites thus doing something for the children of Israel that the people could not do for themselves?
10. If you had been one of the Levites going through those ceremonies and “being wholly given” to God to “make an atonement for the children of Israel,” how would you have felt? What is all this supposed to teach us today? What does it say to us about the idea of substitution? (Romans 5:11; Hebrews 9:25-28) In what way did the Levites protect the children of Israel from God’s “anger” and “the plague”? (Numbers 1:53; 8:19; 16:46)

The word for *atonement* is the word for *covering*. It should remind us that Adam and Eve first needed a covering when they sinned. God provided that covering made from animal skins. It was to cover their shame and nakedness. Were the Levites supposed to provide some kind of “buffer zone” between God and the people? The whole purpose seems to have been to develop a relationship with God. Did it work?

11. It is clear from a number of passages in Scripture (Genesis 48:8,9,13,14,17-20; Numbers 27:18-23; Matthew 19:13-15; Acts 13:1-3) that the “laying on of hands” as a means of dedicating someone to God’s service has special meaning. Should it still have special meaning in our day? Some church groups have suggested that this kind of ordination makes a person capable of serving in the place of Christ? Is that what is intended?
12. What are we supposed to learn from Romans 12:1 which says that every Christian is supposed to be a “living sacrifice”? Is that the Christian equivalent of the dedication of the Levites in Numbers 7? All of the offerings in the Old Testament were dead offerings.
13. Review what you know about the worship practices of the Egyptians and others that the children of Israel were familiar with in their day. Contrast these solemn ceremonies of the Israelites with the “dancing-drunk-and-naked” ceremonies of the fertility-cult religions.
14. One sort of trivia question comes to mind as we see all the sacrifices being made. In addition to the approximately two million people that apparently traveled through the wilderness on the way to Canaan, how many animals were there? What did those animals eat? Where did all the olive oil and wine come from that were used in the ceremonies? Were they supplied miraculously for the children of Israel as was the manna and the water? Surely, there was no opportunity for the children of Israel to purchase those things from other more settled nations or tribes around them.
15. The children of Israel had just gone through a year-long process of receiving God’s instructions from Mount Sinai, of giving offerings and building the tent/tabernacle for worship, and then seeing God’s holy presence descend upon that tabernacle in fire and cloud. God had told them that He wanted to dwell among them, and Moses apparently spoke to God on a regular basis in the Most Holy Place. (Exodus 25:22; Numbers 7:89) At the time of the giving of the Ten Commandments, the children of Israel were terrified by God’s manifestation of power. (Exodus 20:19,20) When the tabernacle was completed, God’s presence had entered into it with such glory that not even Moses himself could go inside. (Exodus 40:34,35) Having seen, heard, and participated in all these events, what do you

think the children of Israel—those former slaves from Egypt—thought about God? What did God want them to think? (Exodus 12:12)

What would people say today if God's presence appeared at the front of one of our churches on Sabbath morning? What would the public media say?

If all of those ceremonies were intended to teach the children of Israel something, why didn't God establish a series of schools instead of a tent where most of the ceremonies took place out of the sight of the people? Were these ceremonies to teach them that important things were going on in heaven, also out of sight? Clearly, God intended for teaching to take place. See Deuteronomy 6:6-9.

16. Why doesn't God on occasion speak to His modern church in some of those ways? Wouldn't that tend to produce greater reverence? Who would demand equal time?
17. Do we have any way of "hearing" the "voice" of God in our day? We believe that God is everywhere present or omnipresent. (Psalm 139) In what ways can we hear God speaking to us in our day? Do nature and the Scriptures "speak" to us about God?
18. After the tabernacle was set up and the Levites and the altar of burnt offering were dedicated, it was time to begin using the tabernacle for regular, daily services. With curtains surrounding the Holy Place on every side, it could become fairly dark inside. Thus, God provided for a continual burning light inside. It was known as the Menorah or seven-branched lampstand. It was a kind of stylized almond branch. (Exodus 25:31-40) It was produced from pure beaten gold. (Leviticus 24:4) The lamps were to be continuously supplied with an adequate quantity of olive oil. What did the oil in the lampstand represent?
19. Look at some other passages in Scripture that might help us in our understanding of the role and function of the olive trees, the oil, and the lampstand. (Zechariah 4:1-6, 11-14; Revelation 4:2,5; 11:4) According to these verses and many passages from the spirit of prophecy, the oil was to represent the Holy Spirit. In our day how are we to receive the oil of the Holy Spirit? In commenting on Zechariah's prophecy, Ellen White wrote:

The two witnesses represent the Scriptures of the Old and the New Testament. Both are important testimonies to the origin and perpetuity of the law of God. Both are witnesses also to the plan of salvation. The types, sacrifices, and prophecies of the Old Testament point forward to a Saviour to come. The Gospels and Epistles of the New Testament tell of a Saviour who has come in the exact manner foretold by type and prophecy. (*Great Controversy* 267.1)

The Word itself must be as represented, the golden oil, emptied from the two olive trees that stand by the Lord of the whole earth. **This is the baptism by the Holy Spirit with fire.** (*Manuscript 109*, 1897; *4BC* 1180.1; *16MR* 297.1)

The whole heavenly treasure awaits our demand and reception; and as we receive the blessing, we in our turn are to impart it. Thus it is that the holy lamps are fed, and the church becomes a light bearer in the world. (*Review and Herald*, March 2, 1897; *COL* 408; *TM* 510.1)

To us is committed the arduous, but happy, glorious work of revealing Christ to those who are in darkness. . . .for all this the outpouring of the Spirit is essential. (*TM* 511.3; *Review and Herald* March 2, 1897, par. 13; *Ye Shall Receive Power* 304.3)

The capacity for receiving the holy oil from the two olive trees which empty themselves, is by the receiver emptying that holy oil out of himself in word and in action to supply the necessities of other souls. Work, precious, satisfying work—to be constantly receiving and constantly imparting! The capacity for receiving is only kept up by imparting. (*Notebook Leaflets #12*, pp. 3,4; *4BC* 1180.2; cf. *6T* 117.1)

When the mind, instead of being centered upon self, is occupied in seeking to enrich poverty-stricken souls, the treasure of God's love—the golden oil from the two olive trees—is poured into the heart. Those who impart to others

of the riches of the grace of Heaven will be themselves enriched. (*Gospel Herald*, January 1, 1901, par. 15)

The lamps are to impress upon the church the necessity of eternal vigilance as the price of safety. Devotion, watching, and prayer are not for a moment to be neglected. (*Review and Herald*, March 27, 1894, par. 8)

The anointed ones standing by the Lord of the whole earth, have the position once given to Satan as covering cherub. By the holy beings surrounding his throne, the Lord keeps up a constant communication with the inhabitants of the earth. The golden oil represents the grace with which God keeps the lamps of believers supplied, that they shall not flicker and go out. Were it not that this holy oil is poured from heaven in the messages of God's Spirit, the agencies of evil would have entire control over men. (*Review and Herald*, July 20, 1897, par. 6; cf. *Review and Herald*, September 14, 1897, par. 6)

Lucifer's job was to correctly represent God to the angels. Is that now the role of the Scriptures?

A loving, lovable Christian is the most powerful argument in favor of the truth. Have your heart saturated with the holy oil that is emptied from the two olive trees. (21MR 25.6)

20. From those words we conclude that the Holy Spirit is longing to impart Himself to each one of us through angel messengers and a careful study of the Holy Scriptures. But we will not be able to receive this power of the latter rain until we are prepared to impart what we have received to others. Are we doing the necessary preparation?
21. Clearly, the tabernacle or tent was intended to teach the children of Israel the nearness and holiness of God. Some have seen the plan of salvation in the symbolism of that tabernacle in the wilderness. Near the entrance to the courtyard, stood the altar of burnt offering representing substitution and justification. Just beyond it was a washbasin representing sanctification or cleansing from sin. Beyond that, the Holy Place represented the daily continuous fellowship that God wanted with His people. In it where the light of God's word, the bread of His presence, and the altar of incense representing our prayers that can ascend to Him at any time. Finally, there was the Most Holy Place where Moses, representing us, held face-to-face communion with God. (Numbers 7;89; Deuteronomy 34:10) That was as close as possible to the communication that Adam and Eve had with God in the Garden of Eden.
22. Clearly, the forms of worship used by God in dealing with those "recent slaves" from Egypt are very different from the forms we use today. What can we learn from their experience? Are there ways in which we could improve our forms of worship? Numbers 7 & 8 suggest that setting up forms of worship is a very deliberate, holy, serious process. Are we far too casual in our approach today? Have we lost the sense of God's presence? Would Satan be particularly happy to have us lose the sense of God's presence?

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Last Modified: September 11, 2009

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