

Daily Bread with Brother Hwa-Chi (Not reviewed by the speaker, for personal use only)

Numbers 7:1-9

Brothers and sisters, peace be with you, this is Hwa-Chi. Thank the Lord, it's time to read the bible again. This week we will read Numbers chapter 7. This is the longest chapter in the Pentateuch. From verses 12 through 83, almost the exact same words are repeated twelve times. What is the special spiritual significance of this repetition? We will explain it in detail when we come to those verses. Today, we will read verses 1–9.

Numbers chapters 1 through 6 take place on the first day of the second month of the second year after the Israelites came out of Egypt. God spoke to Moses in the tabernacle, instructing him to organize the Israelites into an army in preparation for their journey through the wilderness. Throughout this extended section, Moses also followed God's instructions in directing Aaron, Aaron's sons, the Levites, and the twelve tribes of Israel, so that every person would know his place and responsibility. The section concludes with God's blessing upon Israel through the priests: "The LORD bless you and keep you; The LORD make His face shine upon you, And be gracious to you; The LORD lift up His countenance upon you, And give you peace."

At the beginning of chapter 7, the timeline moves back to the first day of the first month of the second year, returning to the event recorded in Exodus 40:2, the day when Moses finished constructing the tabernacle and erected it according to God's command. Chapter 7 records what the Israelites did during the twelve days from the first day to the twelfth day of the first month. Chapter 8 continues with the events of the twelfth day, when God instructed Moses to consecrate the Levites for His service. Chapter 9 records what happened on the fourteenth day of the first month—exactly one year after the Exodus—when the priests, the Levites, and the twelve tribes were all prepared, and they observed the Passover for the first time according to God's commandment.

Therefore, chronologically speaking, the events recorded in chapters 7–9 actually occurred before those in chapter 1, while chapter 10 picks up immediately after chapter 6. On the twentieth day of the second month of the second year, Israel set out and began its wilderness journey.

Once we understand the timeline, we can make an important comparison. Most of the events in chapters 7–9 originated from the Israelites' own voluntary and willing response, while chapters 1–6 consist entirely of God's commands, revealing His sovereign authority and His orderly arrangements under that sovereignty.

Perhaps Moses recorded the narrative this way to show us that God's sovereignty is not what we often imagine. We may think of God as a dictator who simply does whatever He pleases. Certainly, God has every right to deal with all that He has created, including mankind, in whatever way He chooses. Yet in His lovingkindness, He does not do so. Instead, in His foreknowledge, God reveals the good pleasure of His heart to His people, and the Israelites respond willingly to His will. Then, in His sovereign authority, God establishes the order of their encampment and the sequence of their journey.

This perfectly echoes what Paul says in Romans 8:29–30: "For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified." God first foreknows, then predestines. Following His predestination comes the process of calling, justification, sanctification, and finally glorification.

Verse 1: "Now it came to pass, when Moses had finished setting up the tabernacle, that he anointed it and consecrated it and all its furnishings, and the altar and all its utensils; so he anointed them and consecrated them."

This verse takes us back to the first day of the first month of the second year. Moses had completed every item in the tabernacle according to the pattern God had revealed to him on the mountain. On that day, following God's command, he erected the tabernacle and arranged every piece of furniture and every utensil in

its proper place. We know that every object and every utensil in the tabernacle had been crafted by human hands according to God's blueprint, and each one had been placed in position by human hands according to God's prescribed order.

After everything had been properly arranged, God instructed Moses to perform one very important act: he was to anoint the tabernacle with the holy anointing oil, thereby consecrating it. He was also to anoint every article and utensil within the tabernacle so that each would become holy. Likewise, he was to anoint the altar and all the utensils used for the sacrifices, making the altar holy. Once these things had been consecrated, only the priests serving in their office were permitted to handle them. Anyone else who carelessly touched these holy objects would immediately incur death.

The holy anointing oil is described in Exodus 30:22–25. It consisted of one hin of olive oil mixed with four spices: five hundred shekels of myrrh, two hundred and fifty shekels of sweet cinnamon, two hundred and fifty shekels of sweet cane, and five hundred shekels of cassia. Olive oil typifies the Holy Spirit. Myrrh signifies Christ's death. Cassia represents Christ's resurrection. Sweet cane signifies the effectiveness of Christ's death, while cinnamon represents the power of Christ's resurrection. The sweet cane and cinnamon are placed in the middle, each measuring half the quantity of the other spices, symbolizing the veil that separated the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place being torn in two. That veil represents the body of Christ. When the holy anointing oil was applied to the furniture and utensils, they became holy. This foreshadows the ascended and resurrected Christ pouring out the Holy Spirit, in whom are contained both the efficacy of Christ's substitutionary death and the power of His resurrection. Therefore, it is the Holy Spirit who sanctifies God's people.

Dear brothers and sisters, we should treasure the indwelling Holy Spirit. He is the One who leads us into sanctification unto God. Just as 1 John 2:27 says: " But the anointing which you have received from Him abides in you, and you do not need that anyone teach you; but as the same anointing teaches you concerning all things, and is true, and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you will abide in Him." The

anointing of the Holy Spirit is able to teach us in all things and help us abide in the Lord.

Verse 2: "Then the leaders of Israel, the heads of their fathers' houses, who were the leaders of the tribes and over those who were numbered, made an offering."

On that very day—the first day of the first month—the leaders of the twelve tribes of Israel, who were the heads of their respective tribes, came to present their offerings. The Bible does not explicitly tell us how these twelve tribal leaders came into their positions. In the verses that follow, we will see exactly who these twelve men were. However, before this day, God had neither appointed nor designated them. Therefore, it is likely that these leaders arose naturally. Within each tribe, there was probably a particularly godly and holy man who was deeply respected and loved by the people, and he naturally became the leader of that tribe.

When these twelve leaders saw that the tabernacle had been erected, that the cloud covered the tabernacle, and that the glory of the Lord filled it, their hearts were moved. They willingly and voluntarily came before the tabernacle to present their offerings.

Verse 3: "And they brought their offering before the LORD, six covered carts and twelve oxen, a cart for every two of the leaders, and for each one an ox; and they presented them before the tabernacle."

When these twelve leaders beheld the glory of God, they voluntarily brought their offerings before the Lord. The Hebrew word translated "offering" is qorban. If transliterated directly, it is Corban, a word that English translations generally render as offering. It refers to a voluntary gift presented to God. Originally, this was something beautiful. However, by the time of Jesus, the scribes and Pharisees had distorted God's Word by using Corban as an excuse to avoid the responsibility of caring for their parents. Therefore, Jesus rebuked them in Mark 7:11–13: "But you say, 'If a man says to his father or mother, "Whatever profit you might have received from me is Corban"—(that is, a gift to God), then you no longer let him do anything

for his father or his mother, making the word of God of no effect through your tradition which you have handed down. And many such things you do."

Here we see that something good can become something evil when it falls into the hands of those who merely keep regulations without understanding God's heart. These twelve leaders willingly presented six covered carts and twelve oxen. The Bible specifically notes that each leader contributed one ox, while every two leaders jointly contributed one cart. It is likely that these twelve leaders discussed the matter together. They were all God-fearing men who actively led their tribes in the construction of the tabernacle. During the previous eight and a half months, they had watched Moses lead the people in crafting one beautiful and exquisite article after another according to the pattern God had revealed on the mountain. These articles were numerous and quite heavy. Moreover, the tabernacle had to be dismantled and set up repeatedly whenever the pillar of cloud or the pillar of fire signaled the people to journey or to camp. The tabernacle would need to be transported over long distances until Israel entered the Promised Land. Therefore, they concluded that the most appropriate offering would be oxen and carts to help transport all the furnishings of the tabernacle.

Although the Bible does not explicitly say so, I believe it was God who placed this burden in the hearts of these twelve leaders. They truly understood God's heart and voluntarily presented the twelve oxen and six covered carts before the tabernacle. This was a beautiful act. They recognized the needs of God's house and willingly gave to meet those needs.

The same kind of beautiful testimony is still repeated in the church today. Whether it is a general need within the church or the need of an individual believer that comes before your eyes, God has placed that need before you. If you are sensitive to God's heart and willingly give to meet that need—whether through financial support, material gifts, or the offering of your own time and abilities—such offerings are pleasing and acceptable to God.

Verses 4–5: "Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 'Accept these from them, that they may be used in doing the work of the tabernacle of meeting; and you shall give them to the Levites, to every man according to his service.'"

These twelve leaders saw a need and voluntarily presented their Corban before God. The Lord then told Moses to receive these gifts for the service of the tabernacle and to entrust them to the Levites. God certainly understood the intentions of these twelve leaders. Yet He did not tell Moses exactly how to distribute the gifts. He simply instructed Moses to receive the twelve oxen and six carts, to use them for the service of the tabernacle, and to give them to the Levites.

The six carts and twelve oxen carry spiritual significance. The number six is the number of man. The six carts, contributed by the people, signify that God carries forward the work of the tabernacle through the offerings of His people. Each cart was drawn by two oxen. The number two represents testimony and partnership. Altogether there were twelve oxen. The number twelve signifies completeness, indicating that all Israel participated in this work. Working together two by two, according to the principle of testimony, they shared the responsibility of moving the tabernacle forward through the wilderness.

In today's terms, this means that for the church to move forward, the participation of all the saints is needed. Through the principles of giving and mutual cooperation, as we bear witness to Christ, the church can shine as a light in the wilderness of this world.

When God gave this command to Moses, Moses understood that God intended to entrust the responsibility of transporting the tabernacle to the Levites. Let me emphasize the chronological order once again. These events took place on the first day of the first month of the second year. At that time, the Israelites had not yet been organized into their military camps, nor had the Levites been assigned their specific duties. Yet Moses seemed to understand that God intended the Levites to be responsible for dismantling and transporting the tabernacle, and he knew how the resources should be distributed. Moses truly was a faithful servant in God's house because he understood God's heart.

Verses 6–8: "So Moses took the carts and the oxen and gave them to the Levites. Two carts and four oxen he gave to the sons of Gershon, according to their service; and four carts and eight oxen he gave to the sons of Merari, according to their service, under the authority of Ithamar the son of Aaron the priest."

Moses accepted the twelve oxen and six carts that the twelve leaders had presented and gave them to the Levites, entirely according to God's command. The passage then tells us that Moses gave two carts and four oxen to the descendants of Gershon—that is, two oxen to pull each cart. I am not certain whether Moses already knew at that time that the Gershonites would be responsible for transporting the coverings of the tabernacle, the curtains, and the hangings surrounding the court. These items were bulky and difficult to carry by hand, so two covered carts were needed.

Likewise, I am not certain whether Moses already knew that the descendants of Merari would be responsible for transporting all the structural components of the tabernacle, which were numerous and very heavy. Therefore, they required four carts and eight oxen. Both the Gershonites and the Merarites were placed under the supervision of Ithamar.

The duties of the Gershonites and the Merarites are recorded in Numbers chapters 3 and 4, events that took place after the first day of the second month. I tend to believe that because Moses continually lived in fellowship with God, he had already received some measure of understanding from the Lord regarding these details. Thus, when God instructed him to accept the oxen and carts offered by the twelve leaders, Moses already knew how they should be distributed.

Dear brothers and sisters, do you enjoy such a beautiful understanding with the Lord? When God begins to act, do you immediately recognize His will? Or do you often have to run into a wall before realizing that God intended for you to take another path?

The greatest reason Moses became such an outstanding leader and remained faithful in all God's house was that he continually maintained intimate fellowship with God. God delighted to reveal the good pleasure of His heart to Moses, so Moses understood what God intended to do. What a beautiful relationship that was.

Verse 9: "But to the sons of Kohath he gave none, because theirs was the service of the holy things, which they carried on their shoulders."

From a human perspective, the Levites consisted of three major clans. With six covered carts and twelve oxen, it might seem fair to give each clan two carts and four oxen. This reflects mankind's tendency to distribute resources according to what appears outwardly fair, without considering the differing responsibilities and assignments entrusted to each group.

Perhaps for this very reason, churches sometimes practice an equality that simply divides everything evenly. But God's wisdom is far greater than human wisdom. God knew that each clan had different responsibilities to bear, and Moses understood God's heart. Therefore, he made the most appropriate distribution. The descendants of Kohath received neither carts nor oxen because the items they carried were the most holy objects, which had to be borne on the shoulders of men rather than transported by carts.

In 2 Samuel 6, David sought to bring the ark of God from the house of Abinadab to Jerusalem. 2 Samuel 6:6–7 records: "And when they came to Nachon's threshing floor, Uzzah put out his hand to the ark of God and took hold of it, for the oxen stumbled. Then the anger of the LORD was aroused against Uzzah, and God struck him there for his error; and he died there by the ark of God." Although Uzzah acted with good intentions when he reached out to steady the ark, God struck him dead. The transportation of these most holy objects had to be carried out entirely according to God's prescribed way.

In Numbers chapter 4, we have already seen how carefully God instructed the Kohathites that they were never to touch these most holy things. The priests first had to wrap them and insert the carrying poles before the Kohathites could come and bear them. Every most holy object in the tabernacle had to be carried by men.

The same principle applies to ministry in the church today. There are three kinds of service. There is service related to the body, represented by the Merarites. Their work involved much physical labor, so they could use four carts. Likewise, today we

may use various tools and equipment to make physical service more efficient and to lighten the burden of those who serve. There is service related to the soul, represented by the Gershonites. They could also use two ox carts. According to the principle of bearing witness, they may make use of various forms of modern knowledge to help build up and perfect people's souls. However, there is also service related to the spirit, represented by the descendants of Kohath. This kind of ministry must be borne entirely by the servant himself. It cannot be delegated to or replaced by tools or other means. May all the ministries in the church today follow the principles God has revealed. Then our service will be acceptable to Him.

Let us pray together: Lord, we thank You. Help us to see that for the testimony of the church to move forward through the wilderness of this world, there must be those who recognize the needs and willingly give of themselves. There must also be those like Moses, who fully understand Your heart and wisely distribute the resources that have been offered. Within the church there are many kinds of ministry: labor related to the body, the perfecting of the soul, and worship that is related to the spirit. Lord, help us to recognize the particular ministry You have entrusted to each of us, and enable us to fulfill our service in the church according to the principles revealed in Your Word. Bless the church in which I serve. We pray in the holy name of our Lord Jesus Christ.