

## Reformation Fellowship Notes • September 2, 2018

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### Handout #4

### Numbers 7 & 8

#### I. Introduction

- A. The Israelites are still at Mount Sinai.
  - 1. They are getting organized and ready to go.
    - a) Israelites are organized militarily.
    - b) Priest and Levites know what they have to do to fulfill their roles.
    - c) God has explained more fully some of his laws.
- B. This next section describes additional festivities related to the consecration of the Tabernacle.
  - 1. Gifts to the Tabernacle and priests
  - 2. Purification of the Levites

#### II. Numbers 7:1-11

- A. Numbers 7:1 refers to the time when Moses finished.
  - 1. Is this establishing the time for all the events in chapters 7 and 8?
    - a) If so, an enormous amount happened at that time.
      - (1) And neither account makes any reference to the events described in the other account.

“ . . . there was an interval of at the most forty days between the anointing of the tabernacle, which commenced after the first day of the first month, (cf. Ex. xl. 16 and Lev. viii. 10), and lasted eight days, and the departure from Sinai, on the twentieth day of the second month (chapt. x. 11), and from this we have to deduct six days for the Passover, which took place before their departure (chapt. ix. 1sq.); and it was within this period that the laws and ordinances from Lev. xi. to Num. vi. had to be published, and the dedicatory offerings to be presented. Now, as the presentation itself was distributed, according to vers. 11 sqq., over twelve or thirteen days, we may very well assume that it did not entirely precede the publication of the laws referred to but was carried on in part contemporaneously with it. The presentation of the dedicatory gifts of one tribe-prince might possibly occupy only a few hours of the day appointed for the purpose; and the rest of the day, therefore, might very conveniently be made use of by Moses for publishing the laws. In this case the short space of a month and a few days would be amply sufficient for everything that took place. (Keil, p. 43)

- 2. If this is correct, the presentations began right after the Tabernacle had been dedicated.
  - a) The Tabernacle dedication lasted 8 days.
    - (1) The book of Leviticus describes the consecration of the Tabernacle and the consecration of the priests.

- b) The laws were published.
    - (1) Laws given on Sinai and laws recorded in Leviticus
  - c) The presentations of gifts lasted 12 days.
    - (1) Keil suggests that this could have coincided with the publication of the Laws.
  - d) Consecration of the Levites
  - e) Passover lasted 7 days.
- B. The leader of each tribe brought gifts to the Tabernacle.
1. These were the same leaders who oversaw the census.
  2. Each leader brought an ox (12 oxen).
  3. Every two leaders brought a wagon (6 wagons).
    - a) These were probably 4-wheeled wagons, covered.
  4. These were given to the Levites for their service.
    - a) Two wagons were given to Gershon for the transportation of the curtains.
    - b) Four wagons were given to Merari for the transportation of the structural elements.
    - c) No wagons were given to Kohath.
      - (1) These Levites were required to carry the furniture of the Tabernacle on poles and not use a cart.
  5. Each presented his gifts before the altar.
    - a) Milgrom insists this is an “initiation offering” rather than a “dedication offering.”
  6. Remember that just a few months earlier they had given generously of what they had for the construction of the Tabernacle.

### III. Numbers 7:12-88

#### A. Very repetitive and long passage

“This passage is one of the most repetitive and, consequently, one of the most ignored passages in the OT.” (Ashley, p. 161)

#### B. Adjusting our thinking

1. We saw a section towards the end of Exodus that repeated much of what had been said just a few chapters earlier.
  - a) I argued that it was highlighting the fact that they did every single thing they were told to do.
    - (1) It was celebratory.
  - b) This one is also repetitive for a purpose.
2. This passage makes the presentations parade-like.
  - a) It feels like a pageant.
  - b) It is kind of like a military parade.
    - (1) The point of a military parade is to impress with power.
    - (2) So there is a lot of everything.

3. This passage is intended to impress the reader with massive and widespread support for the Tabernacle and the priests (including Levites).
- C. Comments on the gifts
1. Animals were sacrificed the day they were brought.
  2. A presentation was made on the Sabbath.
    - a) Rabbis say that an exception was made.
  3. The word “leader” was not used with respect to the leader of Judah.
- D. There is a summation of what was given.

#### IV. Numbers 7:89-8:4

- A. After the Tabernacle is consecrated, God spoke to Moses from the ark of the covenant.
1. God, through Moses, instructed Aaron to light the menorah.
- B. Three things of note:
1. Aaron, representing the priesthood, lighted the menorah.
    - a) So the priests play some role that is associated with illumination.
  2. He was to direct the light forward.
    - a) This is stated twice, which suggests that this is the point of the passage.
      - (1) It lights the holy place,
        - (a) especially the table of show bread and altar of incense.
  3. How it was constructed is briefly recounted.
    - a) It was made just the way God had commanded.
    - b) It was made from one piece of gold.
    - c) It was hammered, not poured into a mold.

A. What does this passage mean?

1. Commentators make various proposals.

“The whole menorah might be said to symbolize God’s perfect presence and life illuminating his sanctuary and, through Moses, his people.” (Ashley, p. 166)

2. I find these symbols hard to work with.
  - a) The most difficult issue: do the symbols mean just one thing?
    - (1) Do they have one narrowly defined meaning that is consistently used?
    - (2) Do they have a complex of associated meanings?
    - (3) Do they have several different meanings?
3. Imagine yourself in the Tabernacle.
  - a) Without the menorah lit, it would be pretty dark even in the day,
    - (1) Floor is sand.
    - (2) Ceiling is several layers of fabric and hides (no light could penetrate).
    - (3) Walls on north and south are covered with gold.
      - (a) They will reflect any light that comes in.

- (4) Curtain to the west (veil of the holy of holies) provides no light but might reflect a little.
- (5) Curtain to the east is the only place where some light might come in.
  - (a) Depends on the thickness of the fabric
- b) When the menorah is lit,
  - (1) Light reflects off north and south walls.
  - (2) Menorah is standing against north wall.
  - (3) Lamps are positioned to throw light to the south.
    - (a) This would light up the table of showbread and the incense table.
- 4. What does this mean?
  - a) Priests represent those people who embody God's presence in this world (God's people).
  - b) Table of showbread represents God's provision for men.
  - c) Altar of incense represents the prayers of men.
  - d) God's people illuminate the reality that God is the source of all provision for man and is responsive to man's needs.
    - (1) The generous gifts of the people of Israel were therefore entirely fitting and justified.

## V. Numbers 8:5-13

### A. This section describes the consecration of the Levites.

- 1. Levites cleansed
  - a) Sprinkle with water
  - b) Shave whole body
  - c) Wash clothes
- 2. Gather offerings and Levites
  - a) Bull, grain offering, flour, oil
  - b) Bull for sin offering
  - c) Take Levites to Tabernacle
- 3. Assemble congregation
- 4. Moses offers bulls; sin and burnt.
  - a) Sons of Israel (elders) place hands on Levites.
  - b) Levites place hands on heads of bulls.
  - c) Offer one bull-sin offering.
  - d) Offer second bull-burnt offering.
  - e) Make atonement for the Levites.
  - f) Levites presented as a wave offering.
    - (1) Mentioned twice (This is important.)

### B. Comparing the consecration of Levites with the consecration of priests

- 1. Described in Leviticus 8
- 2. Basic elements of both ceremonies

- a) Gather necessary offerings.
  - b) Go to Tabernacle.
  - c) Gather assembly of the people.
  - d) Wash priests and clothes.
  - e) Offer sin offering.
  - f) Offer burnt offering.
3. Differences
- a) Moses alone conducted the ceremony for the priests; Aaron plays a role in ceremony for the Levites.
  - b) Priests were anointed with oil; Levites were not.
  - c) Levites shaved their bodies; priests did not.
    - (1) Like a leper who has been cleansed (Lev. 14:8)
  - d) Elders lay hands on Levites, just as Levites laid hands on sacrifice.
    - (1) The elders of Israel do not lay their hands on the priests.
    - (2) Levites can have blemishes.
  - e) Levites were offered as a wave offering.

## **VI. Numbers 8:14-19**

- A. This is a short passage restating who the Levites are and why they are.
- 1. They are a group of people separated out from the rest of the Israelites.
    - a) They are designated for the service of God and his Tabernacle.
  - 2. God has taken the Levites in the place of the first-born of Israel.
  - 3. God has a right to the first-born because he could have killed them along with all the rest of the first-born in Egypt.
    - a) It remakes a point made in Numbers 3:12-13.
    - b) This appears to be the main point of this section.

## **VII. Numbers 8:20-22**

- A. Statement of completion
- 1. All that was commanded was done just as it was told to do.
  - 2. It marks the completion an important task.

## **VIII. Numbers 8:23-26**

- A. Retirement for Levites
- 1. Some tasks that the Levites performed were physically taxing.
  - 2. They could be excused from regular duties at the age of fifty.
    - a) They could help out with tasks if they wanted.
  - 3. A problem with the numbers

- a) Here it says that Levites begin duty at age 25.
  - b) During the census of Levites, it said that duty began at 30 (Numbers 4:30).
  - c) I Chronicles 23:24 mentions that David lowered the age of service from 30 to 20 because the temple required more workers (Wenham, p. 110).
  - d) I don't know how these should be reconciled.
4. I don't know why this section is here.

## IX. Conclusions

### A. Who are the Levites?

- 1. What do these differences tell us about the Levites?
  - a) Levites are less holy than priests.
    - (1) In ceremonies, priests were sanctified but Levites were purified.

“The most obvious point of contrast, visible in several separate matters, is that, while the Levites are brought into the sphere of the ritually clean (tahor), the priest are brought into the sphere of the holy (qados). Thus, while the Levites are purified (tihar, Num. 8:7), the priests are sanctified (qiddes, e.g., Lev. 8:12). (Ashley, p. 169)

- (2) There is a clear hierarchy established.
  - (a) Most holy—high priest
  - (b) Next—priests
  - (c) Levites
  - (d) Lay Israelite
  - (e) Unclean Israelite
- 2. There are some peculiar features of the Levite ceremony that are important.
  - a) They are treated like they have a heightened degree of uncleanness.
    - (1) They must shave their bodies like one recovered from leprosy.
  - b) They are treated like an animal sacrifice.

“*Kippur* as a function of the Levites is clarified by the context of their purification ritual. After they are purified, they undergo two cultic rites: The Israelites lean their hands upon the Levities’ heads (8:10), and Aaron dedicates them to the Lord by means of the elevation ceremony (8:11; cf. vv. 13,15,21). These two rites are everywhere else reserved for animal offerings and are never used with humans. (Milgrom, p. 369)

- (1) Placing hands on the head of an animal sacrifice is standard procedure.
  - (a) But it is only done with animals and Levites.
- (2) They are raised up as a wave offering.
  - (a) This is not otherwise done with people.
- c) However, they are not put to death.
  - (1) But they do live as servants to the priests and to God.
  - (2) They are living sacrifices.
- d) It can be said of both priests and Levites that they make atonement for the people.
  - (1) But the priests do it by sacrificing animals.
  - (2) The Levites do it by being the sacrifice.

“Thus the Levites, unlike the priests, do not perform *kippur*; rather *kippur* is performed with them. (Milgrom, p. 369)

3. How do we put this all together?
  - a) Milgrom thinks that the Levites become the guardians of the Tabernacle. And if they allow anyone who should not approach the Tabernacle, they take the penalty for the encroachment on themselves (they die) and thereby save the nation as a whole from judgment.

“Therefore, the probability is that all texts that construe *kippur* with *ketsef/negef* have *kofer* in mind: innocent life ransomed by the guilty parties or their representatives. And our text, 8:19, would then imply that the Levites are ransom for Israel, a lightning rod to attract God’s wrath upon themselves whenever an Israelite has encroached upon the sancta. (Milgrom, p. 371)

- b) I think this is unlikely.
    - (1) This does not take into account many details.
4. I do not yet know how to put this together.
  - a) I am convinced that it is significant.
    - (1) I have been trying to figure out why the Levites are so prominent in this section of Numbers and nowhere else in the Bible.
  - b) I am also convinced that the details of the rite all have symbolic significance.
    - (1) The rite tells a story.
  - c) But I don’t yet know what that story is.
    - (1) I hope that this will become clearer as we progress through the book.