

**February 24, 2019 - Num 7:48-89 - Gifts of the Princes**  
**Torah Reading: Numbers 7:48-89 - Gifts of the Princes**  
**Psalm 96**  
**Haftarah: Judges 5:14-22, 31**

The list of the Gifts of the Princes is one of the readings for Hanukkah, since Hanukkah means "dedicated" or consecrated, and here the Tabernacle has just been dedicated.

**Numbers 7:1-2** - "And it came to pass on the day that Moses had fully set up the tabernacle, and had anointed it, and sanctified it, and all the instruments thereof, both the altar and all the vessels thereof, and had 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:"

"on the day" = "when"

This refers to the preceding seven days of consecration of Aaron and his sons, and the deaths of his sons Nadab and Abihu, which happened immediately thereafter.

Rashi - On the second [day], the red cow was burned; on the third [day], they sprinkled the first sprinkling (described in Numbers 19); and on the seventh [day], they [the Levites] were shaved. - [Sifrei 1:145]

The Torah events are not recorded strictly chronologically, so the consecration of the priests (**Exodus 29:1**), the numbering of the tribes (**Numbers 1**), the exchange of the Levites for the first-born (**Numbers 3:44-51**), and the purifying of the Levites (**Numbers 8:5**) could be placed anywhere in this timeline before the Tabernacle actually became fully functioning. Descriptions of these are scattered in Exodus, Leviticus and Numbers.

The census and the appointment of the tribal chiefs occurred after the erection of the Tabernacle.

According to Ben Gersom, this finishing of the whole Tabernacle was at the end of the seven days of consecration of Aaron and his sons (**Exodus 29:35**). Probably it came just after the deaths of Nadab and Abihu.

### **Like a Bride**

Rashi - On the day the Mishkan was erected, the Israelites were like a bride entering the nuptial canopy. - [Tanchuma Naso 20, 26, Pesikta Rabbathi 5:5, Pesikta d'Rav Kahana p. 6a, and other sources]. The vowelization of the word for "fully" or "finished" can also mean "nuptials."

"were over them that were numbered" - These were the leaders mentioned in Numbers 1:4-15 to help with the numbering of the tribes.

**Numbers 7:3** - "And they brought their offering 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."

These were not offerings commanded by the Lord, but freewill gifts. The valuable items must have been from the treasure the Egyptians gave them as they made their exodus.

- **Exodus 12:36** - "And the LORD gave the people such favor in the sight of the Egyptians that they granted their request. In this way they plundered the Egyptians."

"plundered" = *natsal* - to strip, plunder, take away

### Who were these "princes" whose Gifts are Listed?

The rabbis assumed that the "princes" were the tribal leaders referred to as the "officers" the Egyptians had appointed to ensure Pharaoh's decrees were carried out concerning making bricks without straw:

- **Exodus 5:14** - "And the officers of the children of Israel, which Pharaoh's taskmasters had set over them, were beaten, and demanded, 'Wherefore have ye not fulfilled your task in making brick both yesterday and to day, as heretofore?'"

According to the Midrash: The Egyptian taskmasters would come, count the bricks, finding them short. The taskmasters would then beat the officers....Thus the officers were beaten on account of the rest of the people, but did not nevertheless inform to the taskmasters (on those who had failed to make up the necessary tally of bricks). These officers were wont to say, "It is better for us to be beaten rather than that the rest of the people should suffer." - Bamidbar Rabbah 15,16

But later, these princes were offended because Moses had appealed the whole people to contribute to the construction of the Tabernacle, rather than making a separate and special appeal to them. They had not wanted to be lumped together with the rest of the public, and said, "Let the people bring whatever they like; what is lacking we shall provide."

But the people brought so much that there was no further need for the generosity of the princes. as it says, "And the work was sufficient for them" (**Exodus 36:7**). They had to volunteer at the last minute to provide the precious stones for the High Priests ephod and breastplate. For this reason, in describing their contribution then, the word "princes" is spelled there with one letter missing.

Now, at the completion of the Tabernacle and after its consecration, the princes hoped to make up for their previous reluctance, and immediately volunteered gifts. (Sifrei Naso 1:150)

**Numbers 7:5** - "And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Take it of them, that they

may be to do the service of the tabernacle of the congregation; and thou shalt give them unto the Levites, to every man according to his service."

The bringing of gifts took place over 12 days. There were two types of gifts - the wagons loaded with valuables, and gifts for the Brazen Altar after it was anointed - animals for sacrifice, etc.

**Numbers 7:12** - "And he that offered his offering the first day was Nahshon the son of Amminadab, of the tribe of Judah"

One additional note on this prince of the tribe of Judah, an ancestor Jesus' geneology:

Nachshon ben Amminadab is remembered as the first to go down into the Red Sea. According to the traditional telling, Moses directed the Israelites to step into the sea, but they were unwilling to do so until Nachshon sprang forward and plunged into the water. He struggled under the waves and was near to drowning. As the water washed over him, the LORD instructed Moses to lift his staff and stretch out his hand so that the water might split. Nachshon then led the Israelites to safety on the other side.

In that sense, he was a type of Christ. The word "Prince" (*nasi*) is twice translated in the Greek (LXX) version of the Bible with the Greek word *archegos*: forerunner, leader, trailblazer, captain, pioneer, prince, head.

See <https://eudoranachand.wordpress.com/2012/12/12/the-story-of-nachshon-ben-amminadab/>

### **Gematria of the Number of Offerings**

Rashi and the rabbis were fascinated by the gematria or the mystical meaning of the letters/numbers of the Hebrew alphabet. Each Hebrew letter also stood for a particular number.

They considered the tribe of Issachar to be especially [well] versed in the Torah, as it says, "And of the sons of Issachar, those who had understanding of the times" (**I Chronicles 12:32**).

So, they interpret the numbers mentioned in the list of Issachar's gifts to represent hidden spiritual references to God's dealings with humanity and with Israel throughout history:

For instance -

**Numbers 7:19** - "He brought his offering of one silver bowl weighing one hundred and thirty [shekels], one silver sprinkling basin [weighing] seventy shekels according to the holy shekel, both filled with fine flour mixed with olive oil for a meal offering."

"One silver bowl" = a gematria of 930 corresponding to the years of Adam, the first man (Gen. 5:5)

"weighing one hundred and thirty shekels": Alluding to the fact that when he [Adam] began to raise a family to maintain the existence of the world, he was one hundred and thirty years old, as it says, "Adam lived one hundred and thirty years, and he begot..." (**Genesis 5:3**).

Also, a Midrash taught that the length of the Tabernacle courtyard reported in **Exodus 27:18** at 100 cubits added to the length of the Tabernacle — 30 cubits — to total 130 cubits.

"one silver sprinkling basin": The gematria of these [three words] is five hundred and twenty, alluding to Noah, who began raising a family at the age of five hundred, and alluding to the twenty years before his children were born in which the decree of the [Great] Flood was enacted. "His days shall be one hundred and twenty years" (**Genesis 6:3**).

"seventy shekels": Corresponding to the seventy nations who emanated from his [Noah's] sons.

**Numbers 7:20** - One spoon [weighing] ten [shekels] of gold filled with incense.

"One spoon": Corresponding to the Torah, which was given by the hand of the Holy One, blessed is He. ["spoon" in Hebrew also means "hand."]

"ten gold [shekels]": Corresponding to the Ten Commandments.

"filled with incense": a gematria of 613, corresponds to the six hundred and thirteen commandments - provided that you convert the "kaph" into a "daleth" in accordance with the cipher known as ק"ד"ג"ב"א [in which the first and last letters of the alphabet are interchangeable, the second and the second-to-last letters, etc.

**Numbers 7:21** - "One young bull, one ram and one lamb in its first year for a burnt offering."

"One young bull": Corresponding to Abraham, of whom it says, "He took a young bull" (**Genesis 18:7**).

"one ram": Corresponding to Isaac [of whom it says,] "and took the ram [and offered it up as a burnt offering instead of his son]..." (**Genesis 22:13**).

"one lamb": Corresponding to Jacob, [about whom it says,] "Jacob separated the lambs" (**Genesis 30:40**).

**Numbers 7:22** - "One young he goat for a sin offering."

"One young he-goat": to atone for the sale of Joseph, about which it says, "and they slaughtered a kid" (**Genesis 37:31**).

**Numbers 7:23** - "And for the peace offering: two oxen, five rams, five he goats, five lambs in their first year; this was the offering of Nethanel the son of Zu'ar."

"two oxen": Corresponding to Moses and Aaron, who established peace between Israel and their Father in heaven.

"Rams...he-goats...lambs": Three types, corresponding to Priests, Levites and Israelites, and corresponding to the Torah, the Prophets and the Holy Writings. The three fives [in this verse] correspond to the five books of the Pentateuch, to the five commandments inscribed on the first tablet, and the five commandments inscribed on the second one.

The total offerings noted in **Numbers 7:88** - "the rams sixty, the he goats sixty, the lambs of the first year sixty" - stand for the 60 cities of the region of Argob that Deuteronomy 3:4 reports the Israelites conquered.

### **The Mystery of the Missing Vowels**

In the extant manuscripts, the vowel points in the Hebrew text are omitted, excepting in the names of persons that offer. These may be left out for brevity's sake, and quicker dispatch, and without any detriment, since they may be easily supplied from the first instance. They may be omitted on purpose. Why? So that these accounts might be the more taken notice of as a very wonderful thing, that their presents and offerings should be exactly alike; since the vowels being wanting, the naked letters may the more strike the eye. - Gills Exposition

Like the numbering of Israel earlier, in which each one was named and recognized, so it was with the gifts of these princes, even though each gift was the same.

The "sameness" of their gifts points to the "same Spirit" - breath flowing in and around the missing vowel points, giving life to the gifts. The mentioning of each prince points to the importance of each individual member of Israel and the different spiritual qualities that went into the giving.

It reminds us, in a reverse kind of way, of Paul's insistence that each member of the body, and the gifts they bring and the offices they occupy, is essential, and none are more important than another.

- **1 Corinthians 12:4** - "Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit."

### **New Testament Parallels**

Jesus' ministry is bracketed by conspicuous incidents of gift-giving.

The first is from the Wise Men, bringing gifts to the newborn baby Jesus.

- **Matthew 2:11** - "...And when they had opened their treasures, they presented gifts to Him: gold, frankincense, and myrrh."

Besides the frequently noted spiritual meaning of these gifts regarding Jesus' death, kingship etc. The "treasures" phrase points back to the gifts of the Princes.

The second is at Pentecost, where spiritual gifts are bestowed, but also soon after when believers sold land and brought it to the apostles.

If the Israelites were "like a bride entering the nuptial canopy" after the Tabernacle was consecrated, then that is also a picture of the Bride of Christ.

"...on the day that Moses had fully set up the tabernacle" - **Numbers 7:1**

"And when the day of Pentecost was fully come..." - **Acts 2:1**

The consecration of the Tabernacle was capped off when fire came down from heaven and consumed the sacrifice on the altar (Leviticus 9:24). Fire also came down at Pentecost, consuming the "living sacrifices":

- **Acts 2:2-3** - "And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them."

Among the first things to take place after Pentecost, was the bringing of gifts:

- **Acts 4:34-35** - "Neither was there any among them that lacked: for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold, And laid them down at the apostles' feet: and distribution was made unto every man according as he had need."

This corresponds to the gifts brought by the princes of Israel after the consecration of the Tabernacle.

Note that in neither the case of the Tabernacle or the new church in Jerusalem, was there a command or even a request for these gifts.

The rabbis note that Moses refused to accept the gifts of the princes until God spoke to him specifically to receive them.

## **Parallel Judgments**

The fate of Nadab and Abihu is mirrored in the deaths of Ananias and Sapphira, who offered their own brand of "strange fire."

Nadab and Abihu were bringing incense out of their celebratory mood of thanksgiving after the miraculous fire from heaven. But it was not according to holiness - the fire did not originate from that heavenly fire that came down to kindle the altar. They kindled their own fire.

Ananias and Sapphira sold land and gave the funds to the church, but lied about it. They kept back some of it, but claimed they were donating the whole price for heir land.

God's judgment seems over the top to us for these seemingly small offenses. They were offering something, after all. But the link between these two incidents is "holiness."

God insisted that "I will be sanctified in them that come nigh me, and before all the people I will be glorified" (**Leviticus 10:3**)

Nadab and Abihu approached with self. They elevated their own ideas of worship above what God had commanded, approaching without the blood - which points to the blood of Jesus and his sacrifice.

Ananias and Sapphira approached with a lie - "false swearing" was a serious trespass under the Law. There was no compelling reason they should have done this.

As Peter said:

- **Acts 5:4** - "Whiles it remained, was it not thine own? and after it was sold, was it not in thine own power? Why hast thou conceived this thing in thine heart? Thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God."

They had a warped, human view of God. Like the servant who buried his talent in Jesus' parable:

- **Matthew 25:24** - "Master, I knew that you are a hard man, reaping where you have not sown, and gathering where you have not scattered seed..."

As it is recounted many times in the Old Testament, people who lose faith say, "The LORD seeth us not; the LORD hath forsaken the earth..." (**Ezekiel 8:12**)

But God does see. God's judgment in these two cases really reflects His mercy in protecting His new spiritual project from corruption and thus to protect all of Israel. Both of these incidents posed existential threats on a spiritual level. He is serious about watching over His people.

We each have gifts to bring - some were plundered from our Egyptian past and transformed into the work of the ministry by the Holy Spirit. Don't be reluctant to jump

out there with open heart.

- **Psalm 110:3** - “Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power...”