

# Numbers 28, 29

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Date: 13 January 2019

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[ 0 : 00 ] Open your Bibles to Numbers 28 and 29. So in the book of Numbers, we know that we're at the point where we're about to enter the promised land.

! But it seems as though God deliberately slows it all down.! And He makes us inch our way to the promised land, instead of getting us right there.

And that is, I think, where we find it very frustrating. Not just in reading the book, but because we want to say, well, hurry up and get us onto the promised land, Moses. Sometimes it's like that, isn't it? When you read a book and it kind of is in a slow patch.

You get so fed up with the story, you just start reading quickly or skim reading until you get to the bit where you want. And I think that happens to us, certainly with books of the Bible.

But I think it also happens to us in our dealings with God. That when we find we are only inching our way forward in our knowledge of God, and in our knowledge and our understanding of His grace, we easily become frustrated.

[ 1 : 10 ] And so I think that it does frustrate us that He is inching us towards the promised land at the end of the book of Numbers. But I think it also frustrates us that at this point we thought we were about to clamber in and kind of get into the destroying of the Canaanites.

We were in the stage of that kind of the bloody battle bit. We thought that it was about to come, the conquest is upon us, and all of a sudden we find that we are reading more.

More. More. Again. Is that what we need? We are inching our way to the promised land, and yet God gives us more law. It's usually getting discouraged by that.

We say, well that is the last thing the people of God need. And when they are inching their way towards the promised land, when they are frustrated that things are going slowly, so slowly, the last thing we need is more law.

So why does God give His law here at this particular time? Why is it that He pauses and He speaks about these sacrifices which are to be given? And so what I need to do tonight is to step back and to tell you several things before we come to apply the text to us.

[ 2 : 18 ] Because if we don't understand the background, we'll think that this is just some foreign event in the past that's to do with Israel inching itself to the promised land, and thankfully we don't have to counter all these things, the lambs and the rams and the bulls, and we don't have to slit the lambs' throat every single day, every single day, and some days more than one in the morning and one in the evening.

So there are several things that I think are more important, that are very important. First of all, this in the background, it's clearly the case that the people of God are being told about their worship, and the things that God requires of them, and things that are well-pleasing in His sight.

But I want you to see, the first thing is this, they wouldn't be able to do this until they actually reach the promised land. They're not there yet. And you might say, well, hang on a minute, last week you told us there were about two million Israelites.

Surely, there must have been enough lambs around. But notice, I don't know whether you did notice it, that the lamb is always a year old and without blemish. There must have been enough around, maybe.

Well, possibly, I doubt it. But nobody would have had that amount of flour on them. They were not an agriculturally settled people. They were still nomads, they were still wanderers, they were still travellers.

[ 3 : 37 ] No one would have the amount of oil, finely beaten oil. Nobody had the flour, nobody had the oil, in those kind of quantities. But I don't think they would have had the strong drink that the Lord wanted poured out as part of the offering.

And so here, God is making a command that the people at this point can't obey. Because this command is for when they're in the promised land.

And God promises to provide all these things for them. So our first reaction is to stand back and say, well, that's great. All God does is give us more laws.

But it's not. It's an example to you and I, how God is giving a demand, and then he will give them what they need in order to meet that demand.

And so, listen to this, God gives in his grace what he demands in his law. I'm sure and certain that I've read that somewhere.

[ 4 : 42 ] But I can't remember where. So I'm going to claim it as my own. God gives in his grace what he demands in his law. And that was a wonderful principle of the Old Testament, all the way through the Old Testament into the New.

And we can stand back and we can say, well, we're unhappy with the fact that God is so demanding, and yet miss the point that it's his whole nature, how he works in his grace, that he gives what he commands.

That it is an act of kindness and mercy. And so you see the encouragement that has been given to the Israelites as they're inching their way forward slowly. It's not simply the giving of a law, but the giving of gospel promises that will help them in that law.

And help them to keep that law for the honour and glory of God as they enter the Promised Land. So keep that in the background. God gives what he commands. Now the second principle in the background is the significance of the number seven.

Did you notice that, children? That number seven keeps coming up all the time. And seven in the Bible is a symbolic number. In God's way of working, the number seven, symbolises everything done perfectly.

[ 5 : 52 ] Everything done without flaw. It's in the principle of creation, isn't it? That when God reaches the seventh day, everything has been done, and everything has been done perfectly, and it is good, and it is to be enjoyed the seventh day.

And in that sense, it's a very rich number that points us to the completion of all things, the perfection of things. And so consequently in creation, there is this orderliness, and then there is the day of rest.

A day of fellowship with God. And of enjoying the fellowship of the Lord. And several times, the number seven appears throughout these laws as significant. First of all, it appears that he does draw attention to and remind them that on the Sabbath day, they're to have extra sacrifices.

Two more lambs. Every day there are two lambs, but on the Sabbath day, you would add another two, so it's four. And they're going to be sacrificed on that particular day. So he's reminding them, isn't he, of the nature of trusting in God and resting in God.

Resting in God's good work and all that God has done. And then of course, when we come to the monthly and the annual sacrifice, the numbers of lambs being sacrificed goes up from two to seven.

[ 7 : 07 ] When you get to the number seven, to the pinnacle of the Feast of Booths and tabernacles, it is doubled to become fourteen. So that everything is working along this principle of the number seven.

And it's highlighted by the pinnacle of annual worship, which comes in the seventh month. So over and over, you can't further see it. You're drawn to the fact that there's number seven.

And that is to point out to you, this is the way that God says things are perfect. And things will be perfect in terms of fellowship with him. So he points to a weekly Sabbath.

This is what I want you to do, to have fellowship with me. But then as these annual feasts come up, particularly in the seventh month in terms of the Lamb, this is what you need.

You need atonement. You need Christ, the Passover Lamb. You need to have the Lamb of God slain before the foundation of the world. You need atonement and redemption. And the number seven is pointing towards that in their feasts and in their festivals to show them that God has provided deliverance and atonement and redemption.

[ 8 : 16 ] All those wonderful things that mean rest. Justification by faith, not justification by works. And all these things, I think, are in the principle of the number seven that points to God's perfect work and God taking delight in it and providing for you and I to have communion with him.

That's principle number two that I think is in the background. And so the third thing I want us to bear in mind is that these two chapters were specifically geared to an understanding of the priests. They

were not the people's sacrifices.

They were not the sacrifices of a man or woman who was guilty of sin and whose conscience was accusing him or her to bring a sacrifice. They were a daily, weekly, monthly, annual duty of the priests.

For the priests, this was the way that they were to lead the people. This was the way that they were to demonstrate what the grace of God was all about. They represented the people to God and they represented God to the people.

And all of this was intended to teach them the nature of communion with God and fellowship with God and friendship with God. And you realise that this was written for the priests that they would be able to do their work to ensure that there was a proper communion with God between themselves and God and between the people of God.

[ 9 : 39 ] And so with that in mind let me try and apply the text to our lives. First of all, I think what the Lord is teaching us with Christ having fulfilled all of these Old Testament laws and sacrifice, what the Lord is teaching you and I in Numbers 28 and 29 is the joy of rhythm in worship.

The joy of rhythm in worship. And you might want to say at last, at last Paul is going to argue for the church year and the church calendar that there are particular things that we should do each year. Easter. It's quite clear that in the Old Testament it is commanded that we should have Easter. No. No it's not. I mean Christmas.

No that's not commanded in the Old Testament but it is commanded in the New Testament isn't it? No. And we should have annual feasts. No.

They're not commanded in the Bible. But there are clearly statements here that teach us the joy of having a regular rhythm of worship. Now if you look at it it's far more, far less radical than it sounds.

[ 10 : 57 ] It starts in a very basic sense. Did you notice? Every day. Every day is to have a rhythm of worship. Morning, evening. And then he moves to the weekly Sabbath and there are things which aren't to happen monthly.

It's a lunar calendar. As far as I can see they're following the new moon every time the lunar calendar. A new month they have a feast and they mark it. And then he moves to those annual occasions and there are three of them highlighted in the passage.

There is the Passover and the Unleavened Bread which is the first month. There's the Feast of Pentecost that's 50 days later. And then the seventh month there's the three great events that happen during the seventh month.

The first is marked as special that first day and then the tenth day is the Day of Atonement and then the 15th the 21st is the Feast of Tabernacles where people kind of camp out.

They set up a little booth outside their house and they camp in the back garden and they spend a week living in their tents on their roofs. And all the emphasis is on that particular feast in those two chapters.

[ 12 : 02 ] In these two chapters. Now what does that suggest? Does that say that the New Testament needs to have a daily weekly monthly and annual services?

Now I don't think it means that. Because many of these things were fulfilled in Christ. Christ has abolished them. So we don't celebrate them. We don't celebrate Passover.

We don't celebrate Pentecost. We don't celebrate a Day of Atonement. We don't celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles. The Week of Tabernacles.

It's not up to us to substitute a New Testament thing into it because there were Old Testament things. So we have to see this isn't an argument that you should have a calendar a liturgy of Christian events.

What does it teach us then? I think it teaches us two things. I think it teaches us this that all of life is meant to be worship. That every day has its worship and we are to rejoice in the gifts of God's grace to us when he gives us a weekly salad.

[ 13 : 11 ] We are to take hold of that and to enjoy it. The people of God were being told and taught something very important before they arrived in the Promised Land and began all the kind of agricultural patterns of life.

These feasts and these patterns all corresponded to an agricultural timing of events. But they were being told you're not celebrating harvest, you're not simply celebrating a new moon, you're not simply celebrating this agricultural time or that agricultural time, you are celebrating the grace that God has given you in the way that he has worked for you and pardoned your sin and that is

something to celebrate every day.

And there ought to be these rhythms of worship because every day ought to be a God-centered day. And all of life ought to be a God-saturated life.

They were not simply celebrating harvest, not simply celebrating summer and you get a week off, they were celebrating God's grace and they had these rhythms. And we need to learn that, not in terms of a church calendar, but daily, weekly, annually.

And that all of life is to be lived in the presence of God and for the glory of God. I think that's one thing. I think the second thing that God is teaching us here is the sacrifice of praise every day.

[14:33] Now, children, do you notice a lamb was killed in the morning and one in the evening? So let's do some maths, right? And let's not make it a leap here. But let's say there's 365 days in a year.

So a lamb in the morning and a lamb in the evening. So we've got 730 lambs. That's right. 730 lambs a year.

Slaughtered every day. Every day. And the priest gets up. Sweet. Swoosh with the knife. Every evening. Takes a lamb. Lamb slaughtered.

Lamb slaughtered. Lamb slaughtered. Lamb, lamb, lamb, lamb, lamb. On the Sabbath day, you did it two extra times. So we've got four lambs that are killed on the Sabbath day.

52 weeks in a year. 52 Sabbaths. Let's just take the two. So that is 104 added to our 730. So we're on 834 lambs.

[15:35] That's the basic adding up. 834 lambs killed every year. Lamb, lamb, lamb, lamb. Lamb. Get the rhythm? Every first day of the month, there were 7 lambs slaughtered.

Okay, so if the first day of the month was a Sabbath, that means there were 9. But there were also the two that you do every day, so there were 11. So on the first day of the month, you have this extra 12 months.

That is 7 times 7. That's 49. So you add 49 to 834. And now we're on a total of 883 lambs per year.

Then you go to the annual festival and you increase this number. So the Feast of Unleavened Bread, you kill 7 lambs. The Feast of Pentecost, you kill 7 lambs. On the first day of the 7 month, you kill 7 lambs. On the Day of Atonement, you kill 7 lambs.

And then when we get to the Feast of Tabernacles, we go off the chart of the lamb killing. Every day for a week, you kill 14 lambs. And then on the 8th day, you go back to 7. But remember, we're still killing the two lambs every day that we do every day.

[16:43] And if there's a Sabbath, you kill two more as well. And so do you get the picture? I worked out the total number of year old lambs. And my maths isn't great, is it? But I'm pretty certain that 1,051 lambs were killed every year.

I haven't counted up the other animals. I've not added up the amount of flour. And I've not counted up the amount of oil. I just find it shocking, don't you, that 1,051 lambs were being killed every day. And we reach every year, sorry. And we reach a pinnacle in the Feast of the Tabernacles. And so it occurs to me that in John's Gospel, when somebody says, behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world, that is far more significant than I ever realised.

Because every day a lamb was killed. And every feast and every Sabbath and the first day of the month. And everywhere you look with regards to their public worship, there are lambs being slaughtered.

There's blood everywhere. And it occurred to me that the sacrifice of praise is always pointing to the sacrificial lamb. It is the heart of their rhythm of worship. The sacrifice of the lamb.

[18:00] And the sacrifice of Christ on the cross is the very heart of where the Old Testament is moving towards. Now let's add to that a little more thought.

When you recognise that the emphasis is on the number seven and there's this attention drawn to seven by doubling of the number on the Sabbath day. And there's this emphasis on the number seven by the doubling of it at the Feast of Tabernacles.

You realise that God is not just pointing them to the Sabbath day as a day of rest. And he's not simply saying listen, Sabbath is good for you. It's nice for the day off that we should keep Sabbath special. The emphasis is that you really need someone else to work on your behalf in order that you can know that Sabbath rest and that communion with God.

You don't have communion with God without the death of the lamb. There is no communion with God. And so he emphasises that by the number seven and the timing of certain sacrifices.

sacrifices. And in the number of certain sacrifices.

And so remember the people of God they are about to enter the rest that God is promising them. And God is teaching them don't think of this as a kind of hotel that you're going to stay in for about a week's holiday.

[ 19 : 16 ] This is a spiritual place and a spiritual truth. That when you enter into this land you want to think what does it mean to rest from your works and trust in the Lord Jesus Christ. And eventually the chapter becomes extremely specific because it emphasises the annual feast the feast of the Passover and the feast of the Atonement and the feast of Tabernacles and then the Exodus.

And all these feasts in the Old Testament were pointing forward weren't they to the great day of redemption. But there are rhythms of worship because all of life is to be lived in the presence of God.

And the sacrifice of praise only begins as we look to Jesus as we grab hold of the Lord Jesus by faith. And that brings us to the third and final thing very briefly. Because Numbers 28 and 29 make very clear how we absolutely need a priest.

And the passage is written for the priest. And from the point of view of the priest and they're the ones to keep the numbers. They're the ones to work out what is going on. In a certain sense Numbers 28 and 29 are an Excel spreadsheet written down.

They read a little bit like that don't they? All these particular feasts they are instructions for priests because the people cannot have communion with God without the priest doing its work.

[ 20 : 38 ] The other phrase that occurred again and again is this is that there will be a sweet smelling aroma. And there can't be any sweet smelling aroma rising up to God unless the priest does his work.

And the priest must leave people in daily worship. And the priest must leave the people in weekly worship. And the priest must leave the people in all its spiritual work. That is to be done in order for them to have that pleasing aroma in the sight of God.

There is no fellowship without the priest doing his work. And so we come don't we to the glorious anticipation that is building up throughout the Old Testament until the Lord Jesus Christ. that Christ would not only be the sacrifice he will not only be the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world but he is the priest who does his work for us.

And it's a reminder that you and I tonight cannot have friendship and fellowship with God without Jesus. There is no pardon without Jesus. There is no communion without Jesus.

[ 21 : 41 ] There is no communion without the Lamb slain before the foundation of the world. And I wonder whether that is one of the key verses in the whole of the Bible as to how you and I understand the Bible.

That Jesus is spoken of as the Lamb in the book of Revelation who was slain before the foundation of the world. In other words the cross is not simply just sending a shadow back as you read the Old Testament in the light of the new but it was always the mind of God.

So once he starts speaking this was his mind that Jesus is the Lamb that was slain before the foundation of the world. So when you read of the Old Testament Lamb as being slain this was the mind of the author Jesus.

It is intended always to show you Christ and to exalt Christ and to teach us to trust Christ because he is the Lamb. And so we thank God tonight that he gives what he commands because that is the nature of God.

Let's pray.