

A Gracious God and a Generous People

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 29 October 2017

Preacher: Edward Lobb

[0 : 0 0] Well, now we come to our reading from Scripture, and let's turn to the book of Numbers, chapter 7, and you'll find this on page 114, if you have our large hardback Bible, page 114.

The subject of this chapter is the tabernacle, and the offerings which the various tribes of Israel brought as the tabernacle was completed and then consecrated by Moses.

Now, you'll see chapter 7 is a long chapter, in fact, 89 verses, and I'm not going to read all 89 verses, because if you look at it, you will see that beginning at verse 12, we have the offering on the first day out of 12 days, the offering made by Nashon of the tribe of Judah.

And then if you look at the next 11 paragraphs, you'll see they're all exact repeats of that first paragraph, except for the change of name in the leader of the particular tribe.

Now, there's a reason for that, and we'll look at that a bit later, but I'm not going to read the whole thing out. I shall read verses 1 to 17, and then verses 84 to 89.

[1 : 1 9] So, Numbers chapter 7, beginning at verse 1. On the day when Moses had finished setting up the tabernacle, and had anointed and consecrated it with all its furnishings, and had anointed and consecrated the altar with all its utensils, the chiefs of Israel, heads of their fathers' houses, who were the chiefs of the tribes, who were over those who were listed, approached, and brought their offerings before the Lord, six wagons and twelve oxen, a wagon for every two of the chiefs, and for each one an ox.

They brought them before the tabernacle. Then the Lord said to Moses, Accept these from them, that they may be used in the service of the tent of meeting, and give them to the Levites, to each man according to his service.

So Moses took the wagons and the oxen, and gave them to the Levites. Two wagons and four oxen he gave to the sons of Gershon, according to their service, and four wagons and eight oxen he gave to the sons of Merari, according to their service, under the direction of Ithamar, the son of Aaron the priest.

But to the sons of Kohath he gave none, because they were charged with the service of the holy things that had to be carried on the shoulder. And the chiefs offered offerings for the dedication of the altar on the day it was anointed, and the chiefs offered their offering before the altar.

And the Lord said to Moses, They shall offer their offerings one chief each day for the dedication of the altar. So we'll just read about the first chief on the first day.

[3 : 0 5] Verse 12. He who offered his offering the first day was Nashon, the son of Aminadab, of the tribe of Judah. And his offering was one silver plate, whose weight was 130 shekels, one silver basin of 70 shekels, according to the shekel of the sanctuary, both of them full of fine flour mixed with oil for a grain offering, one golden dish of 10 shekels full of incense, one bull from the herd, one ram, one male lamb a year old for a burnt offering, one male goat for a sin offering, and for the sacrifice of peace offerings, two oxen, five rams, five male goats, and five male lambs a year old.

This was the offering of Nashon, the son of Aminadab. And so on for 11 more paragraphs. And then to verse 84, where we have a summary of the total of all the offerings.

This was the dedication offering for the altar on the day when it was anointed from the chiefs of Israel. Twelve silver plates, twelve silver basins, twelve golden dishes, each silver plate weighing 130 shekels and each basin 70.

So all the silver of the vessels, 2,400 shekels, according to the shekel of the sanctuary. The twelve golden dishes full of incense weighing 10 shekels apiece, according to the shekel of the sanctuary, all the gold of the dishes being 120 shekels.

All the cattle for the burnt offering, twelve bulls, twelve rams, twelve male lambs a year old with their grain offering, and twelve male goats for a sin offering.

[4 : 51] And all the cattle for the sacrifice of peace offerings, twenty-four bulls, the rams, sixty, the male goats, sixty, the male lambs a year old, sixty.

This was the dedication offering for the altar after it was anointed. And when Moses went into the tent of meeting to speak with the Lord, he heard the voice speaking to him from above the mercy seat that was on the ark of the testimony from between the two cherubim.

And it spoke to him. Amen. And may these words indeed speak to us this evening, the words of the Lord. Well, let's take our Bibles and open them again at Numbers chapter 7, page 114.

Now, my title for this evening is A Gracious God and a Generous People.

The Generous People theme is really developed in the first 88 verses of the chapter, and the Gracious God theme appears in verse 89.

[6 : 16] It's not that we don't feel the presence of God before then, but that's when it really appears, verse 89. So we have to wait for that. But that final verse is very significant. Now, let me start by saying this about the tabernacle, because this is all about the tabernacle.

Let us learn to love and to honor and to understand the tabernacle. You'll know that there's a lot said in the books of Moses about the tabernacle.

We have it here in Numbers chapter 7. We've had it extensively in Numbers 2, 3, and 4, which we were looking at a few weeks ago. And it occupies a large chunk in the later parts of the book of Exodus.

And yet, many Christians don't really know what to make of it. It seems strange and remote and complicated. And it seems so very religious.

And Bible-believing Christians are very wary of religion. And with good reason. For example, if ever we find ourselves in an Orthodox church building or a Roman Catholic church building, we may well feel pretty uncomfortable at all the trimmings and trappings, the colorful robes and processions, and strange bits of equipment that we don't quite know how to christen, bells and incense and mournful chantings.

[7 : 34] And we may well think, let's get back to our simple hall, which needs no equipment except a Bible, a table for the communion, and water for baptism, and a few seats for people to sit on as well.

Now, friends, it is right that we should think like that. And yet, the tabernacle is a major component of the law of Moses. We today, post the first coming of Christ, we don't have to construct a tabernacle.

But the tabernacle of the books of Moses is very instructive for us. So let me take a moment first to describe the function of the tabernacle. And then we'll get into Numbers chapter 7 after that.

The tabernacle was a portable tent, sometimes described as the tent of meeting. So when you read tabernacle in some places and tent of meeting in other places, it's the same thing being described.

Now, this tabernacle or tent was made of linen curtains and other fabrics, such as goat skins, and it was supported by various pillars and bars. And inside the tabernacle was the Ark of the Covenant, a box which contained the Ten Commandments inscribed on stone.

[8 : 45] There was also a large altar on which sacrifices were to be offered, and there was a much smaller altar for burning incense. There was a table, there was a lampstand, and various other vessels, dishes, and plates, and so on, for various purposes.

Now, the purpose of this tabernacle was to act as a powerful visual aid for the people of Israel to help them to understand their covenant relationship to the Lord God.

So the Ten Commandments were there to remind them that their lives were to be lived under God's ethical boundaries. The altar of sacrifice was there to show them that atonement and forgiveness was available for them by means of shedding animal blood as a substitution for their own blood.

And the tabernacle itself conveyed the powerful message that God, the God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, was dwelling with them in their midst. As God says in the familiar words of the covenant, I will be their God, and they will be my people, and I will dwell with them.

So the message of the tabernacle to the people of Israel was, God is with us, God rules us by his word, God forgives us by means of sacrifice, or to put that just in three words, dwelling, ruling, and forgiving.

[10 : 12] And when it's put like that, we realize that it's not unfamiliar to Christian ears. It's really the gospel in a slightly different form. But the significance of this tabernacle is something that runs on right the way through the Bible.

When the Israelites cross the Jordan into the Promised Land in about 1400 BC, Moses has just died, you remember, and Joshua leads them across the river.

When they cross the river, the tabernacle comes with them. And then for several centuries, it lives in various places like Shiloh. But eventually, King Solomon builds the temple in Jerusalem in the heart of the city in about 950 BC.

And it's at this point that the tabernacle ceases, because its function is taken over entirely by the temple. So the tabernacle was really a mini portable temple.

But when the temple was finally built, it signified in a permanent way what the tabernacle had stood for. So the temple became the place where God's name was to be honored.

[11 : 19] The temple housed the Ark of the Covenant. The temple was the place of atonement, where the sacrifices were offered. And the temple represented the very dwelling of God in the midst of his people, Israel.

Now, what is the next stage in the historical development here? Remember the great themes. God dwelling with his people, God ruling his people with his word, and God providing atonement and forgiveness by means of the sacrifices.

Well, the next stage in all of that is Jesus. Because Jesus is God dwelling with his people. The word became flesh and literally tabernacled with us.

That's the way John puts it in his first chapter of his gospel. Emmanuel, God with us, dwelling with us. Jesus also is God ruling his people with his word.

He is the very word of God. And Jesus is the one who provides the full and final and unrepeatable sacrifice for the sins of his people. Dwelling, ruling, forgiving.

[12 : 28] Jesus is the tabernacle. Jesus is the temple. Do you remember how he put it to the uncomprehending Jewish leaders in John chapter 2? He said to them, Destroy this temple, and I will raise it up in three days.

And they said to him, This temple has taken 46 years to build. How can you raise it up in three days? But, John the evangelist goes on, he was speaking about the temple of his body.

But the trail does not end there. Jesus, as we know, is now in heaven, seated at the right hand of God the Father. So where is the temple now? The answer is, it's here.

It's the church. It's the people of Jesus Christ. Paul puts it like this as he writes to the Gentiles at Ephesus who have become Christians. I'm going to quote a little bit from Ephesians 2. He says this to Gentile Christians, You are no longer strangers and aliens.

You are fellow citizens with the saints. Now just notice the building analogies that he uses now. You're fellow citizens with the saints, members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure being joined together grows into a holy temple in the Lord.

[13 : 51] In him, you Gentiles also are being built together into a dwelling place for God. In other words, the temple building in which God now dwells on earth is the church.

The Lord, in the person of the Holy Spirit, dwells in our hearts, in our fellowship, in our work, and in our shared life. The Holy Spirit comes to take up residence not only in individual hearts as we're born again, but also he lives in us as a body of believers.

It is he who gives us the energy and strength to do his work, which is the work of the gospel. So the historical line of development between Moses and today, this line that runs right the way through the Bible, is tabernacle first, then the temple, then Jesus, who is the new temple, and then the church, the temple today.

Dwelling, ruling, forgiving. So the church today is the temple where God dwells by his Holy Spirit, rules by his word, and assures us of forgiveness by means of the cross of Jesus.

Well, now let's turn now to number seven, and we'll look at its message under two headings. First, the willing service of the people, and then second, the gracious speaking of the Lord.

[15 : 14] First, then, the willing service of the people. Now, as you look at verse one, this seems to start in a rather quiet way, but actually verse one is full of excitement and a sense of urgency.

Look with me at verse one. On the day, the very day, when Moses had finished setting up the tabernacle, you can almost see the people watching this event taking place.

You can almost see the tribal leaders watching him from a distance and seeing him finish the work. What's he doing now, Yehudi? Give me the binoculars. I'll get a better view. Yes, he's got the altar.

It's all set up. Now I can see it. Yes, there are various things happening. There's a Levite bringing in. It's a ram's horn. It's full of oil, I think.

Yes, he's taking the stopper out of the horn. He's dipping his fingers into the oil. Now he's smearing his fingers all over the altar and everything else. Now he's praying.

[16 : 10] And he's, well, it's all done. He's finished. He's coming to the door. The tabernacle is ready. So verse one. On the very day when it's all done and finished, the chiefs of Israel, that is the 12 men who are appointed as leaders of the 12 tribes, in verse two, they approach Moses and they bring their offerings, verse three, before the Lord.

Now just notice that phrase. It's important. These offerings are for the Lord's use and the Lord's service. This is not just a social or community activity. It's the Lord's purpose that is being served.

And what do they bring? Well, verse three tells us. It's six wagons and 12 oxen. That is two beasts to pull each wagon.

If this were happening today, no doubt it would be six large white vans. The purpose is simply transport. So this is for the Israelites on the move when they're on the march.

It's not for a stationary camp. It's the transport to transport the tabernacle and all its bits and pieces. Verse seven tells us that two of the wagons and four of the oxen are for the use of the Gershonite Levites.

[17 : 23] Do you remember the Levites fall into three clans? The Gershonites, the Merorites, and the Kohathites. So two wagons and four oxen for the Gershonites. Then the next verse says that twice that number is for the Merorite Levites, because they had responsibility for transporting the heaviest parts of the tabernacle equipment.

Whereas the Kohathite Levites in verse nine, they have no wagons or oxen because their job was to carry the lightest weight parts of the equipment on their shoulders, as verse nine puts it.

I wonder if they felt they were drawing the short straw as they had to slog along on foot while their cousins could be up on the ox wagons driving them forward. Now verses four, five, and six form an interesting little section within the story.

The six wagons and the 12 oxen stand before Moses. They've been presented. So you can picture Moses looking at the 12 chiefs and the 12 oxen and the 12 chiefs and the 12 oxen looking back at Moses.

There's a kind of, there's a moment of suspense, a sense of what's going to happen now. And then verse four tells us the Lord says to Moses, it's okay, accept them and give them to the Levites to be used in the service of the tent of meeting.

[18 : 38] So Moses accepts them. How encouraging that must have been for both Moses and the 12 chiefs to know that their gifts are now accepted by the Lord and approved by him.

The Lord is pleased with the freely given offerings of his people. He was then and he is today. So verses three to nine deal with the six wagons and the 12 oxen for the transport.

But when we reach verse 10, we take a step forward in the story. And from verse 10 through to verse 88, we have the account of the 12 chiefs bringing a further collection of offerings.

As verse 10 puts it for the dedication of the altar. And in verse 11, the Lord speaks again to Moses, giving him brief but clear directions. The Lord says to Moses verse 11, they shall offer their offerings one chief each day for the dedication of the altar.

And we then have these 12 identical paragraphs running from verse 12 to verse 83. And in each paragraph, we have a record of the gifts that each tribal leader brings forward.

[19 : 48] A silver plate, a silver basin, a gold dish for incense, and then a whole string of animals, cattle, sheep, and goats. If you count it up, you'll find it's 21 beasts from each tribe for the sacrificial offerings.

Now let's see if we can draw out some of the implications of this for ourselves. Remember this historical line of development, tabernacle, temple, Jesus, church.

The old covenant Jews were giving their gifts for the work of the tabernacle, and the church is now effectively the tabernacle. And we new covenant believers have the responsibility of providing the church with everything that it needs, so as to do its work.

Its work being the announcing of Christ and the gospel to the world. That, of course, is a great and glorious responsibility. And to be involved in it up to the neck is a joy and a huge privilege.

But we might ask Moses, Moses, dear brother, why do you give us 12 paragraphs which only vary in the name of the leader given in the first verse? Why 12?

[20 : 59] Couldn't you have just said in six verses rather than 72? Each of the tribal leaders made an offering as follows. Wouldn't that have been a more interesting chapter if you'd written it like that?

Were you trying to send us to sleep with repetition? Of course not, says Moses. I was trying to impress upon you how serious this whole great pageant was.

It took place over 12 days. It wasn't like one of your modern royal weddings that's all over in an hour and a half. Each of these 12 leaders, representing the love and devotion of his whole tribe, was stepping forward.

Those silver plates and golden dishes, made painstakingly by skillful hands, they are valuable. Those 21 animals from each tribe, they had to be bred and reared and fed for many months and then presented in prime condition.

This was a labor of love towards the Lord. Of course I'm not going to write it up as if it's the work of five minutes on a Saturday afternoon before the football results are announced. Not at all.

[22 : 05] This is a tremendous event. 12 days of solemn dedication. This is one of the great events of Old Testament history. And look at these 12 names, starting in verse 12 with Nashon, the son of Amminadab of the tribe of Judah.

Who wrote down those 12 names? Well, the answer is Moses did. And yet behind the writing hand of Moses is the hand of God.

God wrote down these names because he knew each of these 12 men and he wanted to record for posterity his approval of their labor of love. It was a labor of love to get together all these valuable gifts for the Lord's dwelling place.

And to give a parallel situation, think of a family on Christmas Day when it's opening present time. Can you imagine that? Everyone's sitting around the Christmas tree opening their presents.

And there you are once the presents have been given. There's wrapping paper scattered around the floor, isn't there? And you have your little pile of gifts. If you're a more senior person, you're sitting in one of the big armchairs and there's an arm for the armchair and you've got your little pile of gifts there.

[23 : 15] And you look at them and you enjoy it very much. A CD from your mother-in-law. Two pairs of socks from your son. A bag of homemade cookies from your daughter.

A shirt and a smart pair of trousers from your wife. With a little note attached which says, these are to make you look more urban and less agricultural. And then there might be a couple of books there and a Dundee cake and a nice pot of marmalade.

You know, the sort of thing. Now, what do you do once the present opening is done? Do you just say, thank you, thank you very much everybody. How kind you all are. No, you don't. Do you thank each person individually?

And if some of those presents have come from a distance, you might make a list and put the name against the present so you can write thank you notes to people from further away. You see each present and you note the love and the care that lies behind it.

Now, isn't that why the Lord records the names of these 12 men? He's written them down in his book because he is preserving for all generations his pleasure in the loving service of these 12 men.

[24 : 25] Would you like to have your name written forever in God's book? Well, it is if you're a Christian. As Jesus once said to a group of his disciples, don't rejoice that the spirits are subject to you.

Rejoice that your names are written in heaven. If God records precisely the gifts and the dedication of these 12 men, we can be sure that he notices and remembers all the service that we offer him in the life of the church.

Remember that moment when Jesus was sitting in the temple and he was watching people as they came in and there was the big treasury chest with, I guess, a little slot at the top and they were dropping in their coins and wealthy people came in and dropped in quite a lot of money.

But then a poor widow came in. A poor widow. There was no benefit, no universal credit in those days. You had what you could earn and that was that.

And this poor woman dropped in two tiny coins into the chest and Jesus noticed and he was moved with compassion. I guess she thought she was making a very pathetic little contribution.

[25 : 37] But Jesus noticed her two little coins and he noticed the love and the devotion that lay behind them. Now this surely is why we have these 12 repeated paragraphs.

Every silver plate, every gold dish, every bleating sheep and goat and bull, all of them the fruit of hard labor and given with love and recorded by the hand of God through the hand of Moses.

Now here's another implication for us today. This chapter is commending and highlighting a culture of giving. This was all done publicly.

You can't bring 21 noisy animals to the door of the tabernacle without everybody seeing it and hearing it. These 12 leaders, by organizing their gifts, were showing an example to everybody in the 12 tribes.

Implicitly, they were saying, the Lord's work, the Lord's tabernacle, needs generous and glad support. For 12 days, these gifts kept coming. Every tribe was involved.

[26 : 42] Now a church today, any church today, develops a culture, by which I really mean a shared ethos or a way of looking at life. It is possible, I'm afraid, for a church to develop a niggardly culture.

But it's equally possible for a church to develop a culture of joyful contribution to the Lord's work. Now I'm not talking here primarily about money. Our giving of money to the Lord's work, that's important.

And rightly, it's a private affair between each Christian and the Lord. Jesus specifically warns us against making some kind of boastful public show of our financial giving.

In any case, in any congregation, some pockets are much deeper than others. Some are able to give much more than others. But we can all play our part in stimulating and developing a culture, a shared mentality of enthusiastically involving ourselves in some aspect of the church's life and work.

Now not everybody is a mover and shaker. Some are natural leaders, but the majority are natural helpers and assistants. We can all play our part.

[27 : 49] We can all, so to speak, make a gold dish or rear a lamb and bring it along. And this is true however old we are. Sometimes I've met Christians who get to a certain age and say, we must hand over things to the younger people now.

Not at all, not at all. We can continue to make a contribution at whatever age. Even if you can't jump about and move at 100 miles an hour, you can still be massively influential in developing a culture in the church of joyful contribution.

So for example, imagine that you're 103, okay? And you're still able to come. And you're sitting somewhere in the back of church at the end of the evening service with your Zimmer frame beside you.

It's the end of the service. The minister has pronounced the final prayer. Everybody gets up except you because you can't. You need a little crane, don't you, to get you up. So you sit there. You look around.

You catch the eye of a young member of the church. The crooking finger is a really good thing for a Christian to have. So you beckon over this young Christian. Fetch me a cup of tea from the Carousel, Sebastian, please.

[28 : 54] Come and talk to me. So he gets the cup of tea and he comes and sits down. And you say to him, aged 103, you say, now, son, how are you serving the Lord these days? Oh, you're involved in that activity, are you?

Good. I'm glad to hear that. What are you learning? Patience. Yeah, you need that. That's good. And let me ask, do you know yet the difference between Philippians and Colossians?

Have you got that under your belt yet? No? Well, come back in a week's time and tell me. That's your prep for the coming week. And so on and so forth.

But the elderly ones can stimulate the culture of the church by loving the younger ones and challenging them and encouraging them. And the young are blessed and fortified as they feel the loving interest that their senior friends are taking in them.

It's a lovely thing on a Sunday evening to see the old ones and the young ones talking together. I suspect that in some churches, the young ones are all over there and the old ones are all over there and they're both frightened of each other.

[29 : 56] They don't quite know how to address each other. Well, it doesn't really happen in this church. I'm very glad to see it, but it's a lovely thing. At the heart of number seven, there is a great love for the Lord's people as well as for the Lord's work.

Many of us, not all, but many of us do become Christians quite early in life. And our initial interest in the Lord and faith and salvation and living the Christian life, that initial interest can keep us from developing a love for the Lord's people, for the church.

Our eyes are rightly on the Lord. And we can regard the church, the Lord's people, as being of little interest. Just a bunch of other people who meet together regularly to sing and pray and listen and then go home.

But number seven shows us the Lord looking with great interest and love at his people, at their activity, their work, their devotion, and the care with which they are furnishing the Lord's tabernacle.

Our concern then is with the people as well as the programs, with individual names as well as with the organized work. Learning to love the Lord's people and to delight in them, that's part of growing up into Christian maturity and responsibility.

[31 : 15] Well, secondly, let's turn from the willing service of the people to the gracious speaking of the Lord. And this brings us to verse 89. I know the Lord has been speaking to Moses earlier, but verse 89 is really the climax of the chapter.

It's the point to which this whole chapter is leading and heading. Now, just imagine that you've been listening to the whole chapter being read out loud.

I know I didn't do that. I wimped out of that tonight. But imagine that you've sat there and you've heard the whole chapter being read out loud. The reader has been repeating these phrases over and over 12 times.

And then you've heard the summing up section in verses 84 to 88, where all the figures of the weights and so on are added up together. And then the reader gets to verse 88, and all the cattle for the sacrifice of peace offerings, 24 bulls, the rams, 60, the male goats, 60, the male lambs a year old, 60.

This was the dedication offering for the altar after it was anointed. The offerings are now completed. The altar is prepared and anointed. And what happens next?

[32 : 27] Next, we get this glorious, glorious fulfillment. The labor of love is brought to an end. The God-appointed means by which atonement is made and sin is forgiven.

It's all been put in place. And what happens next? The Lord speaks to Moses. And just notice how the word speaks or the verb speaks is repeated three times in the verse.

When Moses went into the tent of meeting to speak with the Lord, he heard the voice speaking to him from above the mercy seat that was on the Ark of the Testimony, from between the two cherubim.

And it spoke to him. Moses went in to speak with the Lord, but the verse is not emphasizing what Moses might have said to the Lord.

It's emphasizing the astonishing fact that the Lord then spoke to Moses. Let's notice two things about this. First, the voice spoke to him, Moses.

[33 : 28] Not to all the people throughout the camp, but to Moses personally. No doubt the Lord could have provided some kind of wonderful audio speaker system to broadcast his voice throughout the whole camp so that every Israelite could hear him simultaneously.

But he doesn't. Instead, he speaks to Moses so that Moses can subsequently tell the people the Lord's instructions. It's important we grasp this.

Moses is the verbal channel through whom the Lord speaks to others. And this comes again and again throughout, not just the book of Numbers, but throughout the law of Moses. Turn back, for example, to chapter 6, verse 1.

Chapter 6, verse 1. The Lord spoke to Moses, saying, Speak to the people. Do you see? He's the channel. Or look at chapter 6, verse 22.

The Lord spoke to Moses, saying, Speak to Aaron and his sons. Or look on to chapter 8, verse 1. 8-1. Now the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, Speak to Aaron and say to him.

[34 : 36] So on and so forth. So Moses, you see throughout, he is the mouthpiece of the Lord. He is the Lord's prophet. Now there's a very interesting history to this.

No need to turn this up. But back in Exodus chapter 20, that's the chapter where the Lord gives Israel the Ten Commandments. That is a momentous and terrifying occasion.

And the people were simply overwhelmed by it. And as soon as we've had the Ten Commandments relayed to us, the account then says, When all the people saw the thunder and the flashes of lightning and the sound of the trumpet and the mountains smoking, the people were afraid and trembled.

And they said to Moses, You speak to us and we will listen. But do not let God speak to us lest we die. You speak to us, Moses. We can cope with that.

You're a flesh and blood human being like us. But not God. To hear his voice directly would be death for us. And God graciously accepts their request.

[35 : 39] And a couple of verses later in Exodus 20, we read this. And the Lord said to Moses, Thus you shall say to the people of Israel. And that's the point in Old Testament history where the role of Moses as God's prophet and mouthpiece is established.

And this role of Moses as the prophet shapes the whole of the rest of the Old Testament. So when later prophets arise, much later, whether speaking prophets like Elijah and Elisha or writing prophets like Isaiah and Jeremiah and Amos, their task is to take the words of Moses and to reapply them to their own generation centuries later.

The later prophets don't bring a new word. It's the old word. It's the word of Moses, which shapes and determines what they say. Now, it's freshly expressed in different language.

It's restated. It's the old message in new clothes. But it's the old message. Moses is the primary prophet. He is the source of all prophecy.

And the other prophets are shaped by him. So when we read here at the end of number seven, that the voice of the Lord spoke to Moses, we're hearing something which is going to re-echo down the corridors of history all the way down to the book of Malachi.

[37 : 03] And it doesn't even stop there because the instruction of Moses only finds its final expression in the person of Jesus and its final reproduction in the teaching of the apostles.

The words that the Lord spoke to Moses are the foundation of the whole Bible. And then secondly, verse 89 teaches us the basis on which we today are able to hear God speaking to us.

Just look at the middle of the verse there. The voice spoke to Moses from above the mercy seat that was on the ark of the testimony. Now the mercy seat was the place in the tabernacle which assured the Israelites that God's anger against their sin was propitiated through the appointed sacrifices.

The mercy seat assured them that God looked at them with mercy. And it was on the ark of the testimony, the box that contained the Ten Commandments. So here in just this one verse, we have the tent of meeting, which speaks of God dwelling.

We have the Ten Commandments, which speak of God ruling. And we have the mercy seat, which speaks of God forgiving. And it's only on this basis that we today are able to hear God speaking to us.

[38 : 25] So let's think of these three elements again. First, God dwelling by his spirit in the church, which is the contemporary tabernacle. If we're not born again, if we're not yet born again and filled with the indwelling spirit, we're not able to hear God speaking to us.

Our hearts are still hard. We're deaf to his voice until his new life within us opens our ears and enables our hearts to want him. And then secondly, God is ruling us by the Ten Commandments and by all his words throughout the Bible.

Wherever the Bible is loved, taught, honored, preached, studied, delighted in, rejoiced in and obeyed, wherever that happens, God speaks to us with such force that our lives are turned upside down and our thinking is fundamentally restructured.

To take the Bible seriously is to hear the voice of God. And then thirdly, God forgives us at the mercy seat, the final expression of which is the cross of Christ.

So wherever a church marginalizes the cross by suggesting that sin is no real problem because we're all basically nice people or perhaps teaches that Jesus went to the cross as an example of how to suffer injustice bravely rather than as the Passover lamb sacrificed to atone for our wicked rebellion against God.

[39 : 55] Where the cross is downplayed or minimized or reduced, we will never really understand the gospel because we will have lost sight of the wrath of God and the reality of hell from which we need to be rescued.

But where the Lord dwells with us by his spirit and rules us by his words and forgives us through the death of his son, we can approach him with reverent joy and we can be sure that he will speak to us and we will then hear him and we shall respond with joyful obedience.

Let's bow our heads and we'll pray.

We thank you again, our dear Heavenly Father, for the wonderful mercy that you have displayed to us.

We have not deserved it at all, but you have been so kind to us and we thank you that you come to dwell in our hearts individually as we repent and trust our Lord Jesus, that you dwell here in our fellowship in the very heart of the church and enable us to do the work of announcing the Savior.

[41 : 23] We thank you that you rule us and that your rule is gracious and lovely and delightful because it gives us the boundaries of our life and teaches us how to walk with joy.

And we thank you for the forgiveness, the complete forgiveness of our sins and the total cleansing of our consciences that has been brought to us by the blood of Christ.

Thank you so much. Keep us, dear Heavenly Father, in this faith and help us to share it with others. And we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.