



Numbers - Chapter Twenty Eight

V Numbers 22:1-36:13 - Israel in the Plains of Moab (continues)

V.d Numbers 27:1-30:16 - Laws for the Land (Continues)

Summary of Chapter Twenty Eight

God instructs Moses to command the people in the way they are to conduct and what they are to offer for the following sacrificial ceremonies: their daily offerings, their Sabbath offerings, their monthly offerings, and their offerings for Passover and the Festival of Weeks.

V.d.iii Numbers 28:1-29:40 - Calendar of Public Sacrifices

Although Moses' days as mediator of revelation are numbered, he still is God's chosen vessel to pass on law to Israel. First among his final instructions are laws about public sacrifices, which had been first given in Exodus 23:10-19 and 34:18-26, throughout the Book of Leviticus and in Deuteronomy 16:1-17. These are the sacrifices offered in the tabernacle on a daily basis by the priests on behalf of the nation. Twice a day lambs are offered as a burnt-offering (Leviticus Chapter 1): one in the morning and another in the evening. On holy days, extra sacrifices are added. These chapters explain just what is required on which day.

To see how many sacrifices the priests would have to offer, one must add together all the offerings that are required for each reason. For example, on a Sabbath falling on the first day of a month, the priests would have to offer: two lambs (the daily offering) plus two lambs (the Sabbath offering) plus two bulls, one ram, seven lambs, and one goat (1st day of the month offering).

Most of the sacrifices were burnt-offerings, refer to Leviticus Chapter 1; but all the goats are sin-offerings, refer to Leviticus Chapter 4. In addition to the animals being sacrificed, a grain-offering of flour and oil, and a drink-offering of wine had

to be made. The size of the grain-offering and drink-offering varied with the animal being offered. Here the same quantities are prescribed as in Numbers 15:4-10: a lamb must be accompanied by about half a gallon or 1.9 litres of flour, two pints or 0.95 litres of oil, and two pints or 0.95 litres of wine. At least double quantities are needed for a bull.

These regulations make several points. First, they show the importance of the sacrificial system in Israel, refer to the comment made on Numbers 15:1-16. In the limited time before his death, Moses explains what sacrifices must be offered in public worship on behalf of the whole nation. These are over and above the private sacrifices that a layperson may want to bring for personal reasons. Second, they are a strong assurance to Joshua that the nation will indeed inherit the land and become a prosperous agricultural community, able to provide for this lavish and expensive worship. It has been calculated that, over the course of a year, these sacrifices involved a total of 113 bulls, 1,086 lambs, over a ton of flour, and 1,000 bottles of oil and wine! Finally, this list of sacrifices underlines the importance of the sabbatical principle. Every seventh day is a Sabbath and marked by a doubling of the daily sacrifice, while the seventh month is marked by a huge number of extra sacrifices, especially during the Festival of Tabernacles or Booths, which is clearly marked out as the grandest celebration of the year.

V.d.iii.1 Numbers 28:1-8 - Daily Offerings

A lamb was offered in the morning and another in the evening at twilight (v.4). This pattern of prayer in the morning and in the evening has carried on in Jewish and Christian practice throughout the centuries. A pleasing or 'soothing' aroma is a phrase that regularly describes the effect of sacrifice on God: it soothes his righteous anger against sin: <<***And when the Lord smelt the pleasing odour, the Lord said in his heart, 'I will never again curse the ground because of humankind, for the inclination of the human heart is evil from youth; nor will I ever again destroy every living creature as I have done'***>> (Genesis 8:21).

¹ The Lord spoke to Moses, saying: ² Command the Israelites, and say to them: My offering, the food for my offerings by fire, my pleasing odour, you shall take care to offer to me at its appointed time. ³ And you shall say to them, This is the offering by fire that you shall offer to the Lord: two male lambs a year old without blemish, daily, as a regular offering. ⁴ One lamb you shall offer in the morning, and the other lamb you shall offer at twilight; ⁵ also one-tenth of an ephah of choice flour for a grain-offering, mixed with one-fourth of a hin of beaten oil. ⁶ It is a regular burnt-offering, ordained at Mount Sinai for a pleasing odour, an offering by fire to the Lord. ⁷ Its drink-offering shall be one-fourth of a hin for each lamb; in the sanctuary you shall pour

out a drink-offering of strong drink to the Lord. ⁸ The other lamb you shall offer at twilight with a grain-offering and a drink-offering like the one in the morning; you shall offer it as an offering by fire, a pleasing odour to the Lord.

Numbers 28:1-8

Daily, as a regular offering. Israel was commanded to bring a male lamb to the Lord every morning and every evening. Each day began and ended with this statement of the need for atonement by sacrifice and expression of devotion to the Lord.

You shall offer in the morning, you shall offer at twilight. This is a reminder that it is appropriate for a Christian to begin and end each day with a statement of trust in God's atonement and expression of their devotion to him. They should be like the psalmists and seek the Lord:

- In the morning: *<<O Lord, in the morning you hear my voice; in the morning I plead my case to you, and watch>>* (Psalm 5:3), and: *<<But I, O Lord, cry out to you; in the morning my prayer comes before you>>* (Psalm 88:13).
- In the evening: *<<My soul is satisfied as with a rich feast, and my mouth praises you with joyful lips when I think of you on my bed, and meditate on you in the watches of the night>>* (Psalm 63:5-6), and: *<<Let my prayer be counted as incense before you, and the lifting up of my hands as an evening sacrifice>>* (Psalm 141:2).
- Indeed, all the time: *<<Evening and morning and at noon I utter my complaint and moan, and he will hear my voice>>* (Psalm 55:17).

V.d.iii.2 Numbers 28:9-10 - Sabbath Offerings

The extra burnt-offerings on the Sabbath mean that twice as many are offered that day as on other days of the week.

⁹ On the sabbath day: two male lambs a year old without blemish, and two-tenths of an ephah of choice flour for a grain-offering, mixed with oil, and its drink-offering — ¹⁰ this is the burnt-offering for every sabbath, in addition to the regular burnt-offering and its drink-offering.

Numbers 28:9-10

On the sabbath day: two male lambs a year old without blemish. As stated above, every Sabbath day, an additional lamb was sacrificed every morning and every evening.

V.d.iii.3 Numbers 28:11-15 - Monthly Offerings

The first of the month, indicated by the new moon, was an important festival; as many sacrifices were offered then as at Passover or Pentecost (vv.16-31). It was an occasion for family worship: <<David said to Jonathan, ‘Tomorrow is the new moon, and I should not fail to sit with the king at the meal; but let me go, so that I may hide in the field until the third evening. If your father misses me at all, then say, “David earnestly asked leave of me to run to Bethlehem his city; for there is a yearly sacrifice there for all the family”>> (1 Samuel 20:5-6), and: <<Then she called to her husband, and said, ‘Send me one of the servants and one of the donkeys, so that I may quickly go to the man of God and come back again.’ He said, ‘Why go to him today? It is neither new moon nor sabbath.’ She said, ‘It will be all right’>> (2 Kings 4:22-23). It was like the Sabbath, a day when trading stopped: <<Hear this, you that trample on the needy, and bring to ruin the poor of the land, saying, ‘When will the new moon be over so that we may sell grain; and the sabbath, so that we may offer wheat for sale? We will make the ephah small and the shekel great, and practise deceit with false balances, buying the poor for silver and the needy for a pair of sandals, and selling the sweepings of the wheat’>> (Amos 8:4-6); although in the Christian era such practices are a matter for the individual’s heart: <<So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do everything for the glory of God>> (1 Corinthians 10:31), and: <<Therefore do not let anyone condemn you in matters of food and drink or of observing festivals, new moons, or sabbaths>> (Colossians 2:16).

¹¹ At the beginnings of your months you shall offer a burnt-offering to the Lord: two young bulls, one ram, seven male lambs a year old without blemish; ¹² also three-tenths of an ephah of choice flour for a grain-offering, mixed with oil, for each bull; and two-tenths of choice flour for a grain-offering, mixed with oil, for the one ram; ¹³ and one-tenth of choice flour mixed with oil as a grain-offering for every lamb – a burnt-offering of pleasing odour, an offering by fire to the Lord. ¹⁴ Their drink-offerings shall be half a hin of wine for a bull, one-third of a hin for a ram, and one-fourth of a hin for a lamb. This is the burnt-offering of every month throughout the months of the year. ¹⁵ And there shall be one male goat for a sin-offering to the Lord; it shall be offered in addition to the regular burnt-offering and its drink-offering.

Numbers 28:11-15

At the beginnings of your months you shall offer a burnt-offering to the Lord. First Samuel 20:5a gives an example of how this offering might become part of a

monthly feast for the leaders of the nation: <<*David said to Jonathan, 'Tomorrow is the new moon, and I should not fail to sit with the king at the meal'*>>. However, it is also a good thing for the people of God to come together to celebrate in this way.

This is the burnt-offering of every month throughout the months of the year. Later in Israel's history, the New Moon festivals may have become opportunities for excess, for licentious behaviour. In the Prophets there are times when God says to his erring people: <<*Your new moons and your appointed festivals my soul hates; they have become a burden to me, I am weary of bearing them*>> (Isaiah 1:14). Isaiah 1:14 shows how these festivals became corrupted. Christians can come to the same place today, where God is tired of them going to church and offering only empty gestures.

V.d.iii.4 Numbers 28:16-25 - Offerings at Passover

Passover, which is celebrated on the fourteenth day of the first month, i.e. in late March or April, marks the start of an eight day festival to include the seven days of the Festival of Unleavened Bread. It is one of the compulsory festivals that all Jewish males are required to attend, although it often served as a whole family gathering in Jerusalem in later days: <<*Now every year his parents went to Jerusalem for the festival of the Passover. And when he was twelve years old, they went up as usual for the festival. When the festival was ended and they started to return, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but his parents did not know it*>> (Luke 2:41-43).

¹⁶ On the fourteenth day of the first month there shall be a passover-offering to the Lord. ¹⁷ And on the fifteenth day of this month is a festival; for seven days shall unleavened bread be eaten. ¹⁸ On the first day there shall be a holy convocation. You shall not work at your occupations. ¹⁹ You shall offer an offering by fire, a burnt-offering to the Lord: two young bulls, one ram, and seven male lambs a year old; see that they are without blemish. ²⁰ Their grain-offering shall be of choice flour mixed with oil: three-tenths of an ephah shall you offer for a bull, and two-tenths for a ram; ²¹ one-tenth shall you offer for each of the seven lambs; ²² also one male goat for a sin-offering, to make atonement for you. ²³ You shall offer these in addition to the burnt-offering of the morning, which belongs to the regular burnt-offering. ²⁴ In the same way you shall offer daily, for seven days, the food of an offering by fire, a pleasing odour to the Lord; it shall be offered in addition to the regular burnt-offering and its drink-offering.

²⁵ And on the seventh day you shall have a holy convocation; you shall not work at your occupations.

Numbers 28:16-25

On the fourteenth day of the first month there shall be a passover-offering to the Lord. In addition to the lamb each household was to offer to God, the priests were also required to bring these offerings to God at the time of Passover on behalf of the entire nation.

Unleavened bread, that is, bread made without leaven or yeast as required by the ordinance recorded in Exodus 12:15-20.

Yeast cells produce substances called enzymes. So when the yeast is added to bread dough, one enzyme goes to work on the flour, changing the starch in it into sugar. Another enzyme then takes over and changes the sugar into alcohol and carbon dioxide, so that the CO₂ spreads through the dough in the form of bubbles. The dough is then placed in a dark, warm place for the fermentation to take place before going into an oven. As the dough bakes into bread, the heat causes the alcohol to evaporate and the bubbles to break. This leaves the tiny air pockets in the final bread or cake, making it light and fluffy.

Since yeast was not available in manufactured form in the 1st Century but existed only as single cells floating in the air, then women used to produce the same effect with what they called leaven by taking a piece of old dough, leaving it in the sun to go mouldy, attracting yeast from the air. This was called leaven and was then mixed with a new larger batch of dough.

The original mixture can be created by mixing flour, salt, sugar and a source of starch such as potato water, and letting yeast cells in the air supply the enzymes!

Although this was very familiar to people in Jesus' day, the actual process was quite mystical and the exponential growth it produced seemed to be a miracle from God, providing an abundance of food from a limited resource.

That yeast is alien to flour and is introduced artificially, and originally without people knowing what was being added, also represents the Kingdom and what happens to a believer when they first accept Jesus as their saviour and the Holy Spirit enters to do his work, for like the yeast to the flour, the Holy Spirit is not native to man but permeates the entire being once he has been allowed to enter the heart, just as the yeast has to be kneaded into the dough. Much of the work occurs during the secretive fermentation process. Due to a small amount of faith, the Spirit is allowed into a person and grows into an abundance of goodness.

A holy convocation is probably a gathering for worship.

You shall not work at your occupations is literally ‘work of labour.’ This seems to be a milder ban than the rule for the Sabbath and the Day of Atonement, when absolutely no work was permitted; refer to Leviticus 23:3 and 23:28, and Numbers 29:7.

The sacrifices of vv.19-24 are to be offered on each of the seven days of unleavened bread.

V.d.iii.5 Numbers 28:26-31 - Offerings at the Festival of Weeks

This took place seven weeks or actually fifty days after Passover, hence the title Pentecost. It coincided with the grain festival in Israel, so it is called the day of the first fruits; refer to also Leviticus 23:15-22. This ordinance (Numbers 28:1-29:40) requires one more bull and one less ram than the Leviticus instructions, making it like the first of the month and the Festival of Unleavened Bread.

²⁶ On the day of the first fruits, when you offer a grain-offering of new grain to the Lord at your festival of weeks, you shall have a holy convocation; you shall not work at your occupations. ²⁷ You shall offer a burnt-offering, a pleasing odour to the Lord: two young bulls, one ram, seven male lambs a year old. ²⁸ Their grain-offering shall be of choice flour mixed with oil, three-tenths of an ephah for each bull, two-tenths for one ram, ²⁹ one-tenth for each of the seven lambs; ³⁰ with one male goat, to make atonement for you. ³¹ In addition to the regular burnt-offering with its grain-offering, you shall offer them and their drink-offering. They shall be without blemish.

Numbers 28:26-31

With one male goat, to make atonement for you. The primary meaning of the Festival of Weeks or Pentecost was not atonement, but thanksgiving for the harvest. Yet every festival of Israel was to carry with it the idea of atonement. In just the same way, a Christian’s own life should be lived in constant awareness of the atonement made for them.