

# Numbers 7:1-9

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*The tabernacle's construction is finished. Moses anoints the altar and the furnishings. Carts and oxen are set aside for the transport of the tabernacle.*

The events of chapters 7 – 9 began *on the day that Moses had finished setting up the tabernacle* (v. 1). The construction of the tabernacle is documented in Exodus 40:17 – 33. This was around one month earlier than the events in chapters 1 – 6, which occurred in the “second month” (Numbers 1:1). Thus, the events recorded in Numbers 1 – 6 occurred after the material covered in chapters 7–9.

The reason for this arrangement has been the subject of much discussion. The best explanation could be that the content of Numbers 1 – 6 is a continuation of the type of material which is in the book of Leviticus. To place the content of chapters 7 – 9 before chapters 1 – 6 would interrupt the logical flow begun in Leviticus. So, it was placed logically rather than chronologically.

This says that *Moses had finished*, even though Exodus 36:1 says that “Bezalel and Oholiab and every skillful person” did the actual construction. Notwithstanding, the work is attributed to Moses, as it was he who was responsible to see that the work was done.

After the tabernacle was erected, Moses *anointed it and consecrated it*. This was described in Leviticus 8:11. This made the tabernacle a special place where the LORD would reside among His people.

Following this, *all its furnishings and the altar and all its utensils he anointed them and consecrated them also*. Thus, the implements used in worshipping the LORD were set aside for that specific purpose. The *anointing* was a ceremonial placing of oil, as described in Leviticus:

“Moses then took the anointing oil and anointed the tabernacle and all that was in it, and consecrated them.”  
(Leviticus 8:10)

Oil was also used to anoint people for special service, including priests (Exodus 29:7) and kings (1 Samuel 10:1).

In this first section, *the leaders of Israel, the heads of their fathers' households, made an offering* (v. 2). The word for “leaders” (Hebrew “nasii”) comes from the verb meaning “to lift up.” It could be translated “one who was elevated.” These were men who were “lifted up” into a place of leadership over an entire tribe. In fact, *they were the leaders of the tribes; they were the ones who were over the numbered men*. This is a reference to the ones chosen to be leaders in Numbers 1:16ff.

The leaders of the tribes *brought their offering before the Lord* (v. 3), and it consisted of *six covered carts and twelve oxen, which was a cart for every two of the leaders and an ox for each one; they presented them before the tabernacle*. The word for “carts” (Heb. “agalah”) is used only here and Isaiah 66:20. Its actual meaning is uncertain, but it has been thought to refer to a type of covered wagon. This would be appropriate in light of the precious cargo they would be carrying when it was relocated—the tabernacle and its furnishings.

In response to this offering, *the Lord spoke to Moses* (v. 4) concerning what to do with these items. He told Moses to *accept these things from them, that they may be used in the service of the tent of meeting* (v. 5). Specifically, they were to be given *to the Levites, to each man according to his service* (v. 5). *Each man*, as can be seen in the following verses, referred to the families of the sons of Levi (Exodus 6:16). Each family had been assigned to transport certain items of the tabernacle when the Israelites moved from one place to another (see Numbers 4).

Responding to the LORD’s command, *Moses took the carts and the oxen and gave them to the Levites* (v. 6). Moses distributed the offering as follows:

- *Two carts and four oxen he gave to the sons of Gershon* (v. 7), which were needed *according to their service*. Their “work in the tent of meeting” is described in Numbers 4:22 – 28.
- *Four carts and eight oxen he gave to the sons of Merari* (v. 8). The greater number of carts and oxen was appropriate because of the number and bulkiness of the items (the pillars and the sockets of the tabernacle) they were given transport (see Numbers 4:29 – 33). So, they were assigned to Merari *according to their service*. And all of this would be *under the direction of Ithamar the son of Aaron the priest* (Numbers 4:28).

Interestingly, *he did not give any to the sons of Kohath because theirs was the service of the holy objects, which they carried on the shoulder* (v. 9). The Kohathites, to which Moses and Aaron belonged, were commanded to carry the holiest items. This was described in detail in Numbers 4:2 – 15.

To sum up, these offerings were designed to enable the Levites to transport the tabernacle and all its furnishings when traveling through the wilderness to the Promised Land.

## **Biblical Text**

**<sup>1</sup> Now on the day that Moses had finished setting up the tabernacle, he anointed it and consecrated it with all its furnishings and the altar and all its utensils; he anointed them and consecrated them also. <sup>2</sup> Then the leaders of Israel, the heads of their fathers’ households, made an offering (they were the leaders of the tribes; they were the ones who were over the numbered men). <sup>3</sup> When they brought their offering before the Lord, six covered carts and twelve oxen, a cart for every two of the leaders and an ox for each one, then they presented them before the tabernacle. <sup>4</sup> Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, <sup>5</sup> “Accept *these things* from them, that they may be used in the service of the tent of meeting, and you shall give them to the Levites, *to each man according to his service.*” <sup>6</sup> So Moses took the carts and the oxen and gave them to the Levites. <sup>7</sup> Two carts and four oxen he gave**

to the sons of Gershon, according to their service,<sup>8</sup> and four carts 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.<sup>9</sup> But he did not give *any* to the sons of Kohath because theirs *was* the service of the holy *objects*, *which* they carried on the shoulder.