

## Numbers: Following Jesus to the Promised Land. Numbers 9:15-19 John 8:12

A portion adapted from GOD'S GUIDANCE – NUMBERS 9:15-23 by David Allen <https://drdavidallen.com/gods-guidance-numbers-915-23/>

Today we continue the stories of Israel's travel to the Promised Land, but now as they are recorded in the book of **Numbers**. Sometimes reading through the Biblical events, chapter by chapter, you can lose the sense of time involved. For example, not counting Moses' 80 years for growing up, or his duels with Pharaoh, the Book of Exodus only covers the first year of Israel's journey to the Promised land. This is how that year went.



Following the plagues and that first Passover celebration it took only a 3 month walk from Egypt until the people of Israel arrived at Mt Sinai (God's mountain). They then camped around Mt Sinai while Moses verbally relayed God's commands to the people ... which they all promised to obey.

But sadly, it was only a month later, after they thought Moses had stayed too long up on the mountain getting that first set of stone tablets from God, that the people down below built and began dancing around a **golden calf**. Coming down the mountain to the spectacle of their idolatry, Moses smashed the tablets in disgust, ordered the sons of Levi to kill 3,000 of the worst offenders and then made the rest drink a mixture of water and the burnt ashes of that idol. He then went back up the mountain to plead with God to still lead these people to the Promised Land; to which God agreed only because Moses was His friend and also because of the promises God had made to their forefathers: Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.



Having averted that crisis and with the people now apparently repentant and wanting to help, Moses set them to work building the Ark of the Covenant, the Tent of the Tabernacle with all its furniture and also the priestly robes for Aaron and his sons. While they were thus being kept busy, Moses then cut and had God inscribe a second set of stone tablets. He also wrote out physical copies of both the

book of the **Covenant** containing all God's Laws along with **Leviticus** - the Handbook for the Priests. Thus, as the Book of Exodus comes to a close, it has only been one single – very busy year since their departure from Egypt, but the tabernacle is standing ready and the priests are in place for Israel's second celebration of Passover.

Chapter 9 of the book of **Numbers** then picks up their story in the first month of the second year with the people celebrating their second Passover.

Now, if you were wondering, the first 8 chapters of Numbers actually describes events following that second Passover, when Moses ordered a census of all men capable of going to war - their total number coming to 603,550; which is how this book got its name (because Moses numbered the people).

Chapter 10 (vs.11) then records that on the 20<sup>th</sup> day of the 2<sup>nd</sup> month of the 2<sup>nd</sup> year, just 14 months after they had left Egypt, as the pillar of cloud lifted up and moved away from the tabernacle, the priests sounded their silver trumpets and the nation of Israel resumed marching on to their new home.

Now we are going to get ahead of today's story, but to keep you thinking along their timeline, it only took Israel another 5 months to make it to the border of the Promised Land and to receive back from the spies, a bad report which caused them to refuse to enter the land. In His wrath, God promised that all of those who had refused to enter would now die in the wilderness, thus setting Israel up for a 38 year wander. It is the book of Numbers that records all the events during Israel's 38 years of exile in the wilderness.

Having put their years of wandering in order, now let's return to Numbers, chapter 9, which describes how God led Israel for those 40 years all the way from Egypt to the Promised Land.

Whether it was  
two days or a month,  
Whenever the cloud lifted  
from over the tent, then  
the Israelites would set out;  
Numbers 9: 22 & 17



and in the place  
where the cloud  
settled down,  
there the Israelites  
would camp.  
Numbers 9: 22 & 17



Make no mistake, though taking the appearance of a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night, it was actually "*the angel of God,*" who personally led the people of Israel all the way from Egypt to the Promised Land (Ex. 23:20-24). We don't often think of this, but not only did it guide them but, in the daytime, the pillar of cloud also provided them shade from the heat of the sun, while at night in a land that held precious little firewood, the pillar of fire provided light for the people see.

Whenever the cloud moved, the people moved and when the cloud stopped the people stopped; "*At the command of the Lord they set out, and at the command of the Lord they camped*" (Ex. 9:18).

Following that Angel of the Lord, that pillar, the people never knew how many days they would be marching or where they were next headed, their job was simply wherever it led, they would go.

While camped, they were also kept in a constant uncertainty of their next departure. Whether they stayed for just a day, a week, or for months there was no settling down, at the sound of the priest's trumpets the people had to be ready to move. Thus they learned to be totally dependent upon God not only for direction, but when to march and when to stop.

### **Why was such daily guidance necessary?**

Notice these repeated phrases, "*at the command of the Lord the Israelites set out,*" and "*at the command of the Lord they would remain in camp.*" This 40 year journey was all about learning to trust and obey. As He was also attempting with the daily manna, the quail, and the water, God was trying to teach the Israelites that they could trust Him completely not only for guidance, but for all their needs on a daily basis. A lesson we still need to keep in mind; just as Jesus taught us to pray, *give us this day, our daily bread*.

Also, the phrase that in camp, "*the Israelites would keep the charge of the Lord,*" indicates that even while resting they still had to pull guard duty – someone had to keep an eye on that pillar to see when it next began to move! As followers of Christ Jesus, we should also be so concerned to guard every word that comes to us from God and to be ready and willing to move when we see God moving.

Like the Israelites who lived out this forty year lesson, we must never forget that the manna always falls and the water always flows where the presence of God abides.

And by now you should have guessed, since **God the Father**, by His own declaration is a spirit having no form or body, then the multiple appearances of the "**Angel of the Lord**" here in Exodus and Numbers and throughout our Old Testament, was actually a **pre-incarnation appearance of God the Son – whom we eventually came to know as Jesus of Nazareth**.

So, think about this for a bit: When God walked with Adam and Eve in the Garden, it was actually Jesus. It was Jesus who closed the door of Noah's boat. It was Jesus who had lunch with Abraham, who rescued Hagar in the wilderness and wrestled one night with Jacob. It was also Jesus who personally led the people of Israel through the wilderness for 40 years until they reached their Promised Land.

Thus, though the Jewish Pharisees refused to believe Him, it was no exaggeration when Jesus told them, "*Abraham rejoiced that He would see my day... before Abraham was, I am*" (John 8:56-59).

And when Jesus told the people,



Now you know that he was speaking from previous experience.

The stories of the Exodus contain all these and several more clues pointing to the person and work of Jesus, Israel's promised and our present Messiah. He is as He was,

- Like manna in the Wilderness, Jesus is God's bread from heaven who can satisfy your hunger – for righteousness.
- And like water springing from the rock, Jesus can forever quench your thirst – for life.
- Like the pillar of fire, if you would follow, Jesus will always be there to guide your way - all the way home.
- And like the serpent Moses raised up on a poll, so also Jesus was lifted up so that you and I need only to "look and live" (Numbers 21:8, John 3:14-15).

But this last story must wait its telling for another day. The question that remains for us today as we once again come to our Lord's table, is what can we learn from Jesus' claim to be "light of the world."

In their letters to the churches, the Apostles Peter, Paul and John all bring up this image of following Jesus – the light of the world – so that we also might be transformed into children of the light, who never again have to walk in darkness.

In his letter, John wrote:

*This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that **God is light** and in him there is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with him while we are walking in darkness, we lie and do not do what is true; **but if we walk in the light as he himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.** 1 john 1:5-7*

Whether it was the children of Israel on an actual 40 year march, or the needs of our daily walk, we can still trust Jesus to safely lead us through the wilderness of this world to His and our future Heavenly home. All we have to do is follow the light.

Let's pray about this and then gratefully come to the table.