

**CALVARY PANDAN BIBLE-
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**

DHW BIBLE CLASS

LESSON 4

THE BOOK OF NUMBERS

CHAPTER 9-10

INTRODUCTION

The pillar of cloud and fire, which symbolized the presence of God, would soon be lifted up. It would be the signal for the children of Israel to break camp and march into the Promised Land. But before that, there were a few things that had to be done.

The children of Israel needed to be reminded to keep the Passover. The LORD'S guidance and direction through the pillar of cloud and fire had to be explained. The organization of such a huge number of people demanded strict and precise order and discipline. The quickest and best means of communicating to all the tribes to break camp and assemble themselves orderly for the march forward had to be conceived.

After these were accomplished, the children of Israel broke camp and moved northwards to the wilderness of Paran.

There are many precious spiritual lessons from these two chapters. Let us look into them.

OUTLINE

A. God Reminded the Children of Israel to Keep the Passover (9:1-14).

1. The LORD commanded Moses to remind the children of Israel to

keep the feast of the Passover according to the commandments of God (1:1-4).

- The children of Israel kept the Passover according to the commandments of the LORD (1:5).
2. The keeping of the Passover by certain people who were ceremonially unclean or who were away on a journey (1:6-14).
 - a. The case of the ceremonially unclean brought before Moses (vv. 6-7).
 - b. Moses sought the will of God (v.8).
 - c. The LORD made the rule and conveyed to Moses (vv.9-12).
 - These people must keep the Passover.
 - They would keep the Passover exactly as it was kept on the appointed time.
 - d. Anyone, apart from these exceptions, who did not keep the Passover accordingly would be 'cut off.' (v.13).
 - e. The stranger who lived with them too must keep the Passover according to all its ordinances (v.14).

B. The LORD'S Guidance and Leading Through the Pillar of Cloud and Fire (9:15-23).

1. The pillar of cloud and fire was always over the Tabernacle (9:15-16).
2. The children of Israel would journey or settle at a particular place as commanded by the LORD through the pillar of cloud and fire (9:17-23).

C. The LORD Commanded the Making of Two Silver Trumpets (10:1-10).

1. The LORD commanded Moses to make two silver trumpets for calling the people together (10:1-2).
2. There were five functions for the blowing of the trumpets (10:3-10).
 - a. Gathering the people (v.3).
 - b. Gathering the princes (v.4).
 - c. Sounding the people to break camp (vv.5-7).
 - d. Sounding an alarm for war (v.9).
 - e. Blowing the trumpets during special festivals (v.10).
3. The sons of Aaron, the priests should blow the trumpets (9:8).

D. The Journey Out of Mount Sinai (10:11-36).

1. The children of Israel broke camp (10:11-13).
 - a. They journeyed and settled at Paran (v.12).
 - b. They took their journey according to the commandment of God (v.13).
2. The march formation (10:14-28).
 - a. Judah and his group (Issachar and Zebulun) led the entourage (vv.14-16).
 - b. The Gershonites and Merarites who dismantled the tabernacle followed next (v.17).
 - c. Reuben and his group (Simeon and Gad) next (vv. 18-20).
 - d. The Kohathites bearing the sanctuary next (v.21).
 - e. Ephraim and his group (Manasseh and Benjamin) next (vv.22-24).

- f. Dan and his group (Asher and Naphtali) next (vv.25-27).
- g. This was the formation of the children of Israel when they journeyed (v.28).
3. Moses entreated Hobab (10:29-32).
 - a. Moses enjoined Hobab to be their guide (v.29).
 - b. Hobab declined the suggestion (v.30).
 - c. Moses further persuaded Hobab (vv.31-32).
4. Summary of the journeying of the Israelites (10:33-36).
 - a. They travelled three days (v.33a).
 - b. The Ark of Covenant of the LORD went before them (v.33b).
 - c. The cloud of the LORD was with them (v.34).
 - d. Moses prayed each time as they set out (v.35).
 - e. Moses prayed again when they rested (v.36).

COMMENTARY

In Remembrance

The LORD reminded the children of Israel through Moses that they should keep **the Passover feast**. They must keep it at the appointed time, that is the fourteenth of the first month “at even” (the hours between sunset and dusk).¹ They must observe it according to all the rites and ceremonies of it (9:1-4). **The children of Israel obeyed** and kept the

¹ Deuteronomy 16:6 But at the place which the LORD thy God shall choose to place his name in, there thou shalt sacrifice the passover at even, at the going down of the sun, at the season that thou camest forth out of Egypt.

Passover precisely as God had commanded them to do (9:5). This was **the second Passover** that the children of Israel kept after they left Egypt. It was exactly one year after they kept the first Passover in Egypt (Exodus 12).

Sometimes there were **those who could not keep the Passover** because they were **ceremonially unclean** or they were away **abroad** (9:10). In such cases, the LORD commanded Moses to arrange for another keeping of the Passover feast on the fourteenth of the **second month**. All the rites and ceremonies had to be kept. This interval of one month would allow the ceremonially unclean to be cleansed before they ate the Passover, and also time for those who were abroad to return to keep the Passover.

The Passover feast was **mandatory**. Every Israelite must keep it. **Refusal to keep the Passover** other than the stated reasons (that is, ceremonially unclean or abroad on a journey) would result in being **“cut off from among his people”** (9:13). There was **no excuse** for any Israelite who was lazy, indifferent, or careless -- if he did not keep the Passover because of these excuses, he would be “cut off” from the community. The **exact nature of “cut off”** is not explained. It could mean one of these: (1) execution by the community, (2) excommunication from the community, or (3) a direct act of God.² **The punishment** was severe in view of the fact that the refusal to keep the Passover in Egypt meant certain death.

In observing the Passover, the children of Israel **looked back** to how the LORD had delivered them from death and led them out of Egypt. At the

² R. K. Harrison, *Numbers* (Chicago: The Moody Press, 1990), p. 161.

same time, the children of Israel also **looked forward** to the land God had promised to give them. The Passover was an occasion for the Israelites to **remember retrospectively** their deliverance from death and bondage in Egypt and **expect prospectively** the inheritance of the Promised Land.

The New Testament parallel of the Passover feast is the Lord's Supper. The Lord Jesus Christ instituted the Lord's Supper (or the Breaking of Bread) when He kept the Passover with His disciples in the upper room. The Lord commanded His disciples to keep the Lord's Supper in remembrance of Him. Paul's divine inspired commentary on the Lord's Supper is that “as often as ye eat of this bread, and drink of this cup, ye do show the Lord's death till he come” (1 Corinthians 11:26). Christians remember retrospectively Christ's death on the cross to deliver them from the penalty of sin, that is “the second death,³ and look prospectively towards Christ's return. Every born-again and blood-bought Christian should joyfully desire to keep the Lord's Supper, for God has done a great work for him, in him, and through him. Refusal to participate in the Lord's Supper, except for legitimate reasons, would indicate an attitude of indifference and ingratitude, and a lack of love for the Lord Jesus Christ. Just as the Passover, the Lord's Supper is a source of spiritual strength and power, comfort and encouragement when we look back at what Christ had done for us and look forward to His coming for us.

³ Revelation 20:14 And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. 15 And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire.

Guidance & Protection

The pillar of cloud and fire indicated the presence and guidance of God. At the foot of Mount Sinai, the pillar of cloud and fire hovered over the Tabernacle after it was erected, anointed and sanctified by Moses. The cloud provided the children of Israel shade from the scorching heat of the Middle East desert sun during the day, and the fire gave the children of Israel light and warmth during the cold night (9:16)!

But most importantly, the children of Israel would break camp and journey on when the pillar of cloud and fire lifted up from the Tabernacle and went before them, or stop and settle when it rested at a place. God provided them with His guidance. The children of Israel could journey without having to search for the right path or be confused. The LORD instructed them to follow the pillar of cloud and fire. They were to stay at a place a year, a month or even two days as long as the pillar of cloud and fire remained in that place. What divine provision of guidance, protection and direction for the Israelites. We recollect the pillar of cloud and fire standing between the children of Israel and the invading and charging Egyptian army led by Pharaoh.⁴ The children of Israel benefited from the pillar of cloud and fire, which symbolized the abiding presence and protection of God and His infallible guidance.

⁴ Exodus 14:19 And the angel of God, which went before the camp of Israel, removed and went behind them; and the pillar of the cloud went from before their face, and stood behind them: 20 And it came between the camp of the Egyptians and the camp of Israel; and it was a cloud and darkness to them, but it gave light by night to these: so that the one came not near the other all the night.

God does no less for Christians today. He has preserved and given us His sure Word, for His Word is a lamp unto our feet and a light unto our path as we journey through life in a troubled and turmoil world.⁵ His abiding presence is experienced through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit⁶ and the promise of Christ that He would be with us unto the end of the world.⁷ What we need to do is to follow Him.

Order & Discipline

The LORD instructed Moses to make two silver trumpets.⁸ God also specifically told Moses how they could be used. Generally, they were to be used for calling the children of Israel to assemble together, and for the journeying of the camps (10:2). Five specific functions were given: (1) calling the people to congregate at the door of the Tabernacle, (2) blowing one trumpet summoned all the heads of the children of Israel, (3) sounding the trumpets two times separately announced the breaking of the camp to move forward,

⁵ Psalm 119:105 Thy word *is* a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.

⁶ John 16:13 Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, *that* shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come.

² Corinthians 6:16 And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in *them*; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.

⁷ Matthew 28:20 Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, *even* unto the end of the world. Amen.

⁸ The trumpet is unlike that we know today which has three valves and the tube is coiled. The trumpet used here was a single long tube that was bell shaped at one end. It gave a sharp sound. (See Ralph Gower, *The New Manners and Customs of Bible Times*, p. 305) for a diagram of it.

(4) blowing the trumpets when they were being attacked by enemies, and (5) and the days of gladness in the beginning of months, and solemn days of burnt offerings and peace offerings (10:3-10).

The blowing of the trumpets was the best means of communication for such a great number of people. It minimized confusion and chaos in the mobilization of the people -- to assemble, to warn of danger, to move on, to celebrate festivals and observances of sacrificial offerings. The children of Israel needed to be correctly instructed. They have to maintain a high level of discipline in responding appropriately and rightly to the various trumpet calls. Not every trumpet call was the same. Each of the five functions of the trumpet calls gave a distinct sound.

The Holy Scripture makes numerable references to trumpet calls. The prophet Joel speaks of the sounding of the trumpet to mark the coming of the Day of the LORD.⁹ Paul mentions the “trump of God” and “the dead in Christ shall rise first.”¹⁰ And in Revelation chapters 8 and 9, the angels blow the trumpets to announce the judgements of God upon the inhabitants of the world in the Day of the Lord.

We look earnestly forward to hear the trumpet call of God when we will all be caught up “in the air” to be with the Lord Jesus Christ. What a glorious gathering it would be in heaven! This last trump will reunite all of us. We will see our loved ones and friends who are

in the Lord and who have gone before us. And then never to be separated again. If there is a spiritual lesson to be learned from the use of the trumpets within the camp of Israel, it is order and discipline. There must be order and discipline in the church. Let all things be done decently and in order.¹¹

Move On

The LORD had finished his instructions to the children of Israel. It was time to break camp and move on to the Promised Land. And on the twentieth day of the second month of the second year, the pillar of cloud and fire was taken up from off the Tabernacle. The Israelites broke camp. The marching onwards was not haphazard or a free for all.

There was strict order and purpose. Judah and its group (Issachar and Zebulun) were at the forefront of the marching formation; followed by the Gershonites and the Merarites who were in charge of the hangings, curtains, the wooden boards and pillars of the Tabernacle. Then Reuben and its group (Simeon and Gad) followed behind the Gershonites and Merarites. After them were the Kohathites who bore the holy furniture on their shoulders. Then came Ephraim and its group (Manasseh and Benjamin), and lastly forming the rear were Dan and its group (Asher and Napthali). There was one important item -- the Ark of Covenant. The Kohathites who bore it stood at the head of the whole entourage.

As one can imagine, the scene was indeed dramatic. The flags of the

⁹ Joel 2:1 Blow ye the trumpet in Zion, and sound an alarm in my holy mountain: let all the inhabitants of the land tremble: for the day of the LORD cometh, for *it is nigh* at hand;

¹⁰ 1 Thessalonians 4:16 For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first:

¹¹ 1 Corinthians 14:40 Let all things be done decently and in order.

various tribes unfurled and held up high, the pillar of cloud and fire ahead, the Ark of the Covenant, all the people in proper marching formation, and the sounding of the trumpets to move on! The children of Israel looked ahead in hope and expectation of the Promised Land. Settling in Mount Sinai was not God's will. God had a better plan and purpose for them. They were just passing through as pilgrims and sojourners in a strange land.

The spiritual implication for us is clear. It is not God's will that our minds be set on this earth, but of things above. Like the Israelites, our life on earth is a pilgrimage. We look to the country that is not made with human hands. We look to the city made by God. While journeying on earth, the Lord leads us as He indwells us and through His Word. We do His will and purpose so that He will be glorified and honoured.

Seeking the Help of Man

The conversation between Moses and Hobab is an interesting episode. Hobab is the son of Moses' father-in-law. In other words, Hobab was Moses brother-in-law. Moses enjoined him to go with the children of Israel which would do him good for the LORD had great plans for Israel. But Hobab rejected Moses' suggestion. He wanted to return to his own land and family. Moses tried to persuade him further as he knew the land well and could be their guide. Moses also encouraged him by saying that he would benefit from whatever the LORD blessed Israel with. We do not know whether Hobab changed his mind and went with Moses.

Some criticized Moses for his lack of faith in the LORD for Moses had said to Hobab that "thou mayest be to us instead of eyes" (10:31). However one should not be hasty in condemning

Moses. Moses' track record since the LORD called him has been exemplary. Many a time he had sought the LORD and trusted him implicitly. It was unlike Moses not to trust and depend on the LORD. This writer thinks that Moses was thinking of the well being of Hobab. Moses had already mentioned that the LORD would do good to Israel and by remaining with the children of Israel, it would also mean good for Hobab. When Hobab refused, Moses tried to persuade him. Moses' mention that he knew the wilderness well and could be their guide was a fact. He was not distrusting God. Moses' remark that Hobab knew the land well was an attempt to persuade him to change his mind rather than having no faith in God. In God's dealings with His people, He did not discount the use of secondary means. God does not always work directly. He has often used people and other things to achieve His plan and purpose.

Moses' Prayer

When they set out, Moses prayed. He called the LORD to protect them from their enemies that they might have a safe and prosperous journey. And when they were settled in the place God had picked for them, Moses again prayed that the LORD would be with them.

What a wonderful and beautiful prayer. Pray the same prayer for anyone going on a journey.

SUMMARY

These two chapters contain many spiritual lessons. The fact that the LORD reminded Israel to keep the Passover indicates that we are a forgetful people. When things go well, we take them for granted and soon forget the benefits and blessings received from God. Let us always remember God's goodness and

grace towards us, and keep the Lord's Supper always.

We should be encouraged to know that whatever God has promised, He will deliver. God never break His Word. His plan and purpose for Israel must be accomplished. He will help His children to reach the destination God is interested in our well being and in our walk with Him. He will provide the guidance, the direction, and the protection we need as we obey and do His will.

There must be order and discipline in life. Many today live disorderly and without proper discipline. As a result their lives are a series of troubles, tensions, and tragedy.

These are so unnecessary. God has provided the best and most effective guide for His children to be progressive and prosperous in life. So in everything let us present our petitions to Him for He cares for us. AMEN

DAILY READINGS & DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Daily Readings

Monday: Numbers 9:1-14; 1 Corinthians 11:23-31.

Tuesday: Numbers 9:15-23; Psalm 105:1-45.

Wednesday: Numbers 10:1-10; Joel 2:1-2; 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17; 1 Corinthians 15:52.

Thursday: Numbers 10:11-28; John 16:13; Psalm 48:14.

Friday: Numbers 10:29-36; 1 Peter 2:9-12.

Discussion Questions

1. What was the appointed time when the Israelites were commanded to keep the Passover? How often a year did they have to keep the Passover?

2. How many times had the children of Israel kept the Passover before this one?

3. In what way was the Passover both retrospective and prospective?

4. In what way is the Lord's Supper similar to the Passover?

5. Who only could participate in the "make-up" Passover?

6. Why do you think a delay of a month is given to them to keep the Passover?

7. What happened to an Israelite who refused to keep the Passover?

8. What did the pillar of cloud and fire mean to the children of Israel? What spiritual lessons can we learn from the symbol of the pillar?

9. In what ways were the two trumpets useful?

10. On what day did the children of Israel break camp and depart from Mount Sinai?

11. Can you sketch a simple diagram to show the formation of the children of Israel on the march?

12. Do you think that Moses showed a lack of faith in God when he tried to persuade Hobab to go with them?

13. What is the essence of Moses prayer in 10:35-36?

14. What spiritual lesson(s) are there in these two chapters?

Chapter 9

Chapter 10

LIFE IN THE WORD

I. Like the Passover, Christians ought to be reminded that it is important to keep the Lord's Supper.

II. The pillar of cloud and fire is a symbol of God's presence, guidance, and protection for us today as we travel along life's journey until the day when God calls us.

III. God is teaching us discipline and order in Chapter 10 – the blowing of the trumpets and the marching formation of Israelites.

IV. Moses' prayer teaches us how to pray when we go on a journey.