

NOTES ON THE BOOK OF NUMBERS

* * * ISRAEL'S WILDERNESS WANDERINGS * * *

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Soli Deo Gloria!

OVERVIEW OF NUMBERS. The Book of Numbers is the historical record of the nation of Israel's wilderness wanderings. Following the LORD's establishment of the Mosaic covenant with the nation of Israel at Mt. Sinai, Moses led the Israelites to the border of Canaan at Kadesh-barnea with the intention of giving them the land which He had promised to Abraham (Gen15:13-21). Although the goodness of the land of Canaan was all that the LORD had promised (Num13:27), the Israelites refused to enter and possess it for fear of the giants (Num13:33). This act of unbelief resulted in God's judgment of the nation, condemning them to wander in the wilderness for 40 years in order for that rebellious generation to die (Num15:26-35).

CHAPTER 9

SPECIAL INSTRUCTIONS CONCERNING PASSOVER

Special exceptions regarding the time of celebrating the Passover are given, which are recorded as being observed in the days of King Hezekiah (cf. 2Chron30:1-3).

- [1] The setting is 1 year after the Exodus from Egypt, "in the first month of the second year" (i.e., the month Nisan). Although the revelation of God at Mt. Sinai has already occurred, the nation of Israel is still camped at Sinai. Time is being reckoned according to the new calendar established at the Passover in Egypt (cf. Exod12:2).
- [2] The original instructions regarding Passover are reviewed.
- [3] Passover is to be observed on "the fourteenth day of the first month" (i.e., **Nisan 14**). It is a one day feast, and being tied to a specific date on the calendar, it can fall on any day of the week.
- [4] Israel "should keep the Passover", although it is not one of the three required feasts per se (cf. Deut16:16).
- [5] This was the first keeping of "the passover" since their departure from Egypt.
- [6] On this occasion, there were "certain men who were defiled by the dead body of a man". Being ceremonially unclean, they were not permitted to celebrate the Passover.
- [7] Being ceremonially unclean, they were not allowed to enter the Tabernacle to "offer and offering" on the day of Passover. Apparently their uncleanness was not caused by any fault of theirs, so they appealed to Moses as to why they should be "kept back".

Note, if there were 2 million Israelites at Sinai, and essentially all of them died during the next 40 years, that would have meant that on average over 100 Israelites died per day while in the wilderness.

- [8] Rather than render his own judgment, Moses sought the LORD concerning the matter.
- [9] As a prophet, Moses was unique in that the LORD spoke to him "face to face" (cf. Exod33:11; Deut34:10).
- [10] The LORD introduces special instructions concerning "the passover" for: 1) uncleanness "by reason of a dead body", and 2) "be in a journey afar off". Relative to the second exception, since the required Feast of Weeks (Deut16:16) began the day after Passover (Lev23:5-6), this suggests the exception *might* apply to any of the feasts (cf. v11).
- [11] In such circumstances (v10), the LORD permitted the Passover to be kept on the "fourteenth day of the second month". Though the "month" changed, the "day" did not; thus, a Passover celebrated in the second month still occurred at the time of the full moon. Such an observation is recorded in the days of King Hezekiah (2Chron30:1-3). No such occurrence for any feast other than Passover is recorded in Scripture.
- [12] Other than the date of the observance, none of the other specifications regarding the celebration were changed (Cp., Exod12:46). Note that the prohibition against breaking a bone of the Passover lamb is reiterated. This is profoundly important. The word of God is both living (i.e., the Lord Jesus Christ; cf. Jn1:1,14; Rev19:13) and written (i.e., the scriptures). Since "the scriptures cannot be broken" (Jn10:35), neither could a bone of the body of Jesus Christ be "broken".
- [13] Barring such legitimate exceptions (v10), the requirement was to keep the Passover "in its appointed season"; failure to do so was "sin". The judgment of the Law for such a failure was for the man to "be cut off from among his people" (i.e., excommunication from the nation of Israel).
- [14] Note, "if a stranger" denotes that Gentiles living among the Israelites are not required to keep the Passover (Cp., Ps147:19-20). However, if they choose to do so, they must follow the same "ordinance" and "manner" as the Jews.

THE PRESENCE OF THE LORD IN THE CAMP OF ISRAEL

The fiery cloud represented a physical and supernatural manifestation of the presence of the LORD among the Israelites. It was not only a symbol of the divine presence, but it provided guidance to the nation of Israel for its entire 40 years in the wilderness (cf. Exod40:38). Though the nation was under the judgment of God for its rebellion at Kadesh-barnea, the LORD had not forsaken them; He was still present with them (Cp., Josh1:9).

- [15] The presence of the LORD was manifested by a "cloud" during the day and "fire" at night, and it was centered upon the "tabernacle" (Cp., Exod40:34-38).
- [16] "So it was always" indicates that the presence of the LORD never left the Israelites for their entire time in the wilderness. Note, "I am with you always" was also the promise made to the apostles of Christ after His resurrection (Matt28:20).
- [17] The presence of the LORD literally led/guided the Israelites in the wilderness. Analogously, believers today are led by the Spirit (Cp., Rom8:14). Note, God does not drive men like cattle; rather, He is a Shepherd who leads His sheep (Cp., Ps23; Jn10:1-3).
- [18] It was imperative that the LORD lead Israel in the wilderness, since sustaining the very large nation in a desert required supernatural guidance.
- [20] The Israelites did not move continually while in the wilderness. They often "encamped" at one location for an extended period of time.
- [21] When it was time for the camp of Israel to move, the "cloud was taken up" from the Tabernacle, either "by day or by night", and the Israelites followed the leading of the "cloud" (or fire at night; Cp., Exod13:21-22).
- [22] Apparently, there were times during their 40-year wilderness wanderings in which the Israelites remained camped at a particular location for as much as "a year".
- [23] Note that the mediator between the "LORD" and the Israelites was "Moses", a type of the Lord Jesus Christ (cf. Deut18:15; Jn1:17).