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## *Part One*

# PREPARATION FOR THE JOURNEY

(1:1–10:10)

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*Part One*PREPARATION FOR THE  
JOURNEY

(1:1—10:10)

## I. ORDER AND ORGANIZATION (1:1—4:49)

THE FIRST PROMINENT TRUTH about the ways of God revealed in the Book of Numbers is His order and planning. This is vividly demonstrated in the Genesis account of the creation of the universe. Here in Numbers it is manifested in His leading a great host of people (at least two million) on a journey through strange lands.

*A. Order of Inventory (1:1-54)*

At this point in the history of the Israelites everything pointed to a goal not yet attained, the occupation of the land of Canaan. This was not the goal of a dreamer, but the goal promised by the God who already had done marvelous miracles in behalf of His very own people. He had formed them into a nation as He had promised Abraham: "I will make of thee a great nation" (Gen. 12:2). He had delivered them from the utmost in human bondage in Egypt. He had also encouraged them as to the reality of occupying Canaan by making prior specific provision for the kind of life and worship which would be theirs. The Book of Leviticus is filled with such provision and direction, e.g., "When ye come into the land

which I give you, then shall the land keep a sabbath unto Jehovah" (Lev. 25:2).

Advance day was now imminent for Israel. It was the first day of the second month, in the "second year after they were come out of the land of Egypt" (1:1). The logistic problems of a mass march of more than half a million fighting men, besides the women and children, were of fantastic proportions, exceeded only by the infinite resources of such a leader and sustainer as Jehovah Himself.

The first order of the day in terms of preparation for the journey was that of personnel inventory: "Take ye the sum" (1:2). Moses and Aaron, with the help of princes or heads of each tribe (1:4-16), assembled all the congregation and numbered by tribes every male, twenty years old and upward, able to go forth to war (1:3).

Before even listing the numbers of each tribe, Moses as writer of Numbers was inspired to insert early in the record the fact of his utter obedience to the commandment of God. Moses did not raise doubts about the ultimate outcome of the journey, utter murmurings about the laborious task of census-taking, or push the job over to someone else. The record says, "As Jehovah commanded Moses, so he numbered them in the wilderness of Sinai" (1:19). If Jehovah's initiative is the first outstanding truth in the opening chapters of Numbers, Moses' obedience is the second.

The count of the men of war begins at 1:20. When all the records were in, this was the count by tribes (apparently recorded in terms of round numbers, rounded off to units of one hundred, except the tribe of Gad): Reuben, 46,500; Simeon, 59,300; Gad, 45,650; Judah, 74,600; Issachar, 54,400; Zebulun, 57,400; Ephraim, 40,500; Manas-

seh, 32,200; Benjamin, 35,400; Dan, 62,700; Asher, 41,500; Naphtali, 53,400. The grand total was 603,550 fighting men (1:46).

“But the Levites after the tribe of their fathers were not numbered among them” (1:47), since their task along the way would not be to battle the enemy hosts, but to take care of the tabernacle and its belongings, and to minister in its services (1:50-53). In the eyes of God, work, war, and worship were a trio, each part of which was indispensable to the successful completion of the journey to Canaan. Even if the success of a battle depended on hosts of men, it would never call away a Levite from his duties connected with the people’s *worship*. If the favor of God depended on worship and communion, then *work* and *war*, in their place and time and by commandment of God, were indispensables to the sanctity of the people. What the people of Israel needed to see so desperately was that the General who was planning the strategy *knew what He was doing*, and that to disobey *His* orders was to bring doom.

“Take ye the sum” (1:2). The numbering of the men of war before the journey started was in effect a representative measure of the number of the total people of God. This people of God, recently delivered from the bondage of Egypt, brought into Sinaitic covenant relationship, and now anticipating entrance shortly into the promised land of rest, symbolize some interesting spiritual lessons for the Christian today:

(1) Each child of God in the large Body of Christ is an individual soul, known by his heavenly Father (for a total number is the sum of *individual* parts).

(2) Victorious Christian living (the life of rest in God) is possible only for those already redeemed from the

bondage of sin. (Those numbered in anticipation of the march to Canaan had been delivered from Egypt's bondage.)

(3) The attainment of spiritual rest comes by spiritual warfare and by the prevailing might of God. (The numbering anticipated and served the logistic purposes for the battles to come.)

(4) Being a Christian is not a guarantee of automatic victorious living.

This latter truth reflects one of the most sobering facts of the history of Numbers, namely, that of all those counted in this early census of Numbers, only two actually were to enter the land. "All that were numbered of you . . . shall not come into the land . . . save Caleb the son of Jephunneh, and Joshua the son of Nun" (14:29, 30). The writer to the Hebrews reminds us that the people did not enter the land because of unbelief and disobedience.

### ***B. Order of Encampment (2:1-34)***

A mass of people, unordered, invites confusion and riot. Jesus honored order when He prepared to feed over five thousand people at one time. He commanded them to "sit down by companies upon the green grass. And they sat down in ranks, by hundreds, and by fifties" (Mark 6:39, 40). How much more the need for order and efficiency with over two million Israelites in the wilderness!

Chapter 2 records the details of the positioning of the tribes while they were encamped and while they were on the march. For *encampment*, the locations were identified by the directions east, south, west and north, with the tabernacle in the very center: "Over against the tent

of meeting shall they encamp round about" (2:2). The order for *marching* was identified by the sequence as listed in the account.

1. At the Head of the March, the East Campers (2:3-9)  
"They shall set forth first" (2:9).
  - a. The camp of Judah
  - b. Next, the tribe of Issachar
  - c. Followed by the tribe of Zebulun
  - d. At this point (10:17) the Gershonites and Merarites followed, carrying their burden of the tabernacle structure, so as to have this ready when the Kohathites would arrive with the sacred things (10:21).
2. Followed by the Second Rank, the South Campers (2:10-16)
  - a. The camp of Reuben
  - b. Next, the tribe of Simeon
  - c. Followed by the tribe of Gad
3. Next, the Camp of Levites (2:17)  
They were responsible for everything of the camp and tabernacle except that which was carried earlier by the Gershonites and Merarites. As in encampment, so in march, the Levites were to be centrally located.
4. The First of the Rear Divisions, the West Campers (2:18-24)
  - a. The camp of Ephraim
  - b. Next, the tribe of Manasseh
  - c. Followed by the tribe of Benjamin

5. The Hindmost Marchers, the North Campers (2: 25-31)
  - a. The camp of Dan
  - b. Next, the tribe of Asher
  - c. Lastly, the tribe of Naphtali

Chapter 2 closes with a note concerning the obedience of the children of Israel to the directions of God: "According to all that Jehovah commanded Moses, so they encamped by their standards, and so they set forward, every one by their families . . ." (v. 34).

By finding their designated places and keeping to them, the families of the Israelites were taught some vital lessons preparatory to marching and going to war. They were taught to keep their places, whether in camp or on the move; to recognize their dependency on others for protection on all sides; to keep their eyes on the standards, and to heed the voices of their leaders. They were also taught that both camping and marching were in the divine purposes. The journey to Canaan would involve marching, and it would involve camping. Never would the Israelites reach Canaan if they did not keep moving forward; the demands of moving forward would be hard and long, hence the need of mustering renewed strength at camping time.

Perhaps the most important lesson God was teaching the Israelites in the directions for camping and marching was that He, Jehovah, their Covenant Maker and Covenant Fulfiler, must be central in their lives. The tabernacle was not arbitrarily placed in the center of the camp. It was placed there by divine design to be the crossroads of all daily activity, to be the major focus of attention, to be a continual reminder of the Person who



dwelt in the midst of the people and Who was rightfully commanding worship and loyalty.

### *C. Order of Ministry (3:1—4:49)*

If the success of the journey to Canaan depended on obedient hearts of the Israelites, then a vital part of the journey's preparation involved caring for those things which would encourage and cultivate true worship and spiritual growth. Chapters 3 and 4 record some of God's directions for this preparation. The contents of the two chapters may be summarized:

1. The Priests, Sons of Aaron (3:1-4)
2. The Levites
  - a. Their general service (3:5-10)
  - b. Their divine Ordainer (3:11-13)
  - c. Their number (one month old and upward) and duties (3:14-39)
  - d. Their substitutionary position (3:40-51)
3. Duties of Sons of Levi Amplified; Number of Males, Ages 30-50
  - a. Kohath: charge (4:1-20); number: 2,750 (4:34-37)
  - b. Gershon: charge (4:21-28); number: 2,630 (4:38-41)
  - c. Merari: charge (4:29-33); number: 3,200 (4:42-45)
4. Summary of Census of Levites, Ages 30-50: 8,580 (4:46-49)

Priests and Levites were two different classes of ministers. The Levites ministered to the priests (3:6) mainly in the outward elements of the worship services, while

the priests performed the ceremonial exercises of the worship itself. In this segment of chapters 3 and 4 only the first four verses refer to the priests exclusively, while the remainder deals with the Levites.

The first note struck by the author is a somber one indeed. Having identified the four sons of Aaron by name—Nadab, Abihu, Eleazar, and Ithamar—and having emphasized that they were “consecrated to minister” (3:3), the author reached back to an event of the past and recovered it—hideous as it was—to impress upon the reader an inviolable truth concerning sin and service: without exception, *sin destroys service*. Nadab and Abihu died at the hands of Jehovah for doing that which the Lord commanded them not to do. They offered strange fire before Jehovah (see Lev. 10:1 ff.). It was a sin of disobedience and presumption. Three important truths stand out in this prologue to the main contents of chapters 3 and 4:

(1) No sins are left unjudged.

(2) Not even God’s servants are exempt from judgment. These were sons “consecrated to minister,” and when they died, the number of Aaron’s sons was reduced by half!

(3) Generations of tomorrow are affected by service today. “And they had no children” (3:4). No sons to pick up the lost strands! God alone knows the full extent of the loss to the generations that followed.

The next three paragraphs are introduced by the phrase, “And Jehovah spake unto Moses” (3:5, 11, 14). Moses was publicly to assign the Levites to Aaron and his sons, to do the service of the tabernacle (3:5-10). Jehovah emphatically declared that the Levites were really His: “The Levites shall be mine . . . mine they

shall be" (3:11-13). Then Moses was commanded to number the Levites, every male from one month old and upward (3:14 ff.). In chapter 4 another census was taken, that of all male Levites from thirty to fifty years old. The latter was the census of all *active* Levites serving in their charges. Just as the other Israelites were numbered for war, so the Levites were numbered for their service in worship.

Jehovah revealed a very close relationship between His sovereign appointment of the Levites to service and His sovereign redemption of the Israelites from bondage (3:40-51). That relationship may be seen from the following:

(1) The number of all first-born sons who had been born between the time of the exodus and the census, thirteen months later, was 22,273 (3:43).<sup>1</sup>

(2) The number of all male Levites one month old and upward, was 22,000 (3:39).

(3) Jehovah made a one-for-one substitution for each of the 22,000. "I have taken the Levites from among the children of Israel instead of [in the place of] all the first-born that opened the womb among the children of Israel" (3:12). For the 273 difference, an equivalence of redemption money was paid to the priests (3:46-51).

This transaction illustrates an important truth concerning the relationship of service to salvation. *Sovereign ap-*

<sup>1</sup>The total number of firstborn sons in a total population of at least two million must have been many times the number 22,273. The 22,273 of 3:43 is a correct number; the problem arises because the extra details and stipulations regarding the numbering are not given in the text. See discussion of Keil and Delitzsch on this problem, and the reasons for deriving the number 22,273 from only the thirteen-month period (*op. cit.*, pp. 8-15). Also see Robert Jamieson, A. R. Fausset, and David Brown, *A Commentary*, Vol. I (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1948), pp. 519-20, for other possible explanations.

*pointment to service is based on sovereign deliverance from bondage.*

Now in further detail the duties of the families of Levites are elaborated. The sons of Kohath were to have charge of the primary objects of the tabernacle, such as the ark, table, candlestick, and altar (4:4-15; 3:27-32). The Gershonites' service involved taking care of the large and heavy tabernacle and tent, the curtains, coverings, screens and hangings thereof (4:21-28; 3:25, 26). The sons of Merari were to have charge of the smaller auxiliary things, such as boards, bars, pillars, sockets, and pins (4:29-33; 3:33-37).

The Lord knew the details of the objects used in the worship service, and He provided for their care by the ministry of the Levites. They must have been impressed by the meticulous care which He wanted them to exercise in His work. They must have learned the lesson that each service is as important as the next. For instance, what would be the point of the coverings and enclosures (Gershonites' responsibility) without the contents, such as ark or laver (Kohathites' responsibility)? Or how could there be a tabernacle without the boards and bars (Merarites' responsibility)?

The numbers of those Levites who qualified by age (thirty to fifty) to serve in the tent of meeting were large: Kohathites, 2,750; Gershonites, 2,630; and Merarites, 3,200 (4:34-49). We are not told every detail of their duties, but the wilderness environment most certainly created a multitude of tasks. And for this work there was a multitude of workers. The Lord was not short of workers in *that* day!

In the concluding verses of chapter 4 a vital association is made, that of "service" with "burden"—"every one

according to his service, and according to his burden" (4:49). The Levites were to serve faithfully in days of encampment, and they were also to be willing to carry the burdens whenever on the march. To serve and carry burdens—this is the task of the bondsman of the Lord.

## II. CLEANSING, CONSECRATION, AND FINAL INSTRUCTIONS (5:1—10:10)

The first four chapters record the directions which Jehovah gave Moses regarding preparation for the journey as related especially to the community of the camp as a whole. In chapter 1 the instruction was, "Count the warriors of the camp"; in chapter 2, "Arrange the tribes in the camp"; and in chapters 3 and 4, "Take care of the tabernacle of the camp."

Now the directions were aimed more at individuals within the camp.

### A. *Put Out the Unclean* (5:1-4)

God had placed the tabernacle in the center of the camp, to emphasize that the life of the Israelites centered about Him. Now He stated this fact very explicitly and clearly, and applied it to the life of the camp:

The fact: I dwell "in the midst" of your camp (5:3).

The application: "Put out of the camp every leper," and so forth (5:2).

When the Holy One settles down to dwell, uncleanness and sin cannot find a home there. There is no room for joint occupancy. If God is *in the midst*, uncleanness must be put out.

Three cases of uncleanness are cited: the leper, the one with a running issue, and the one defiled by the dead.

Apart from any hygienic reasons, the directions for such purging reflect the ways of God in speaking to the Israelites. They thought in terms of the concrete and the visible, and so God continually used the visible, the tangible, and the audible to make clear His message. Here was a threefold reminder that God did not want habitual sinners in the camp:

The leper was a picture of the awfulness and ugliness of sin.

The running issue was a reminder of sin unhealed and taking its toll.

Defilement by a dead body was a reminder of the ultimate result of sin, eternal death.

“And the children of Israel did so, and put them out without the camp” (5:4). This was another instance of the Israelites’ obedience to Jehovah *before* they began to move on the journey.

### ***B. Judge the Guilty (5:5-31)***

Having taught the Israelites in a symbolical manner that He and sin cannot dwell together, God now legislated what must be done when actual sin occurred in the camp, or when sin was suspected. The kinds of sin that might be committed were legion. God cited adultery as one example.

First, the Lord stated the truths applicable to any kind of sin (5:5-10): (1) every sin becomes part of God’s record: “When . . . any sin”; (2) sin is basically “trespass against Jehovah”; (3) for sin there is guilt: “That soul shall be guilty”; (4) restored fellowship with God comes by confession and recompense (vv. 7-10). The timeless, universal truths about sin are clearly recognizable in these four statements.

The remainder of the chapter deals with the case of a man suspecting his wife of adultery, whether she actually committed the sin or not (5:11-31). She was not taken in such an act, hence no one could witness against her. What was the solution? If she was innocent, how could the husband's suspicion be dispelled? If she was guilty, who could justly declare her so? The procedure which Jehovah directed here made prominent this basic truth concerning all sin: *God knows, and God judges.*

The man was to bring his wife to the priest (5:15), who would then "set the woman *before Jehovah*" (5:18). She was to drink the priest's "water of bitterness" (5:18). If she was innocent of the husband's charge, the water would not harm her (5:19). If she had been defiled with another man, then the water would cause her body to swell and her thigh to fall away, and she would be a curse among her people (5:27).

Many sins would be committed by the Israelites on their journey to Canaan, and many innocent persons would be suspected of sins not committed. There would have to be a firm and clear understanding on the part of the leaders and the people how to insure the workings of God's justice. From the directions by Jehovah for this one example of adultery, the Israelites were clearly taught: (1) sins committed in the body are basically sins of the heart; (2) only God knows the heart; (3) only God can and will give fair judgment. How wonderful a society whose supreme court is God Himself!

### C. *Separate Yourself* (6:1-27)

The Lord had just spoken (chap. 5) of a situation when any Israelite sinned and broke fellowship with God. Now—and what a contrast—He spoke of a situation when

any Israelite desired to come into closer fellowship with Him and voluntarily assumed the obligations of a vow.

God is not to be known as One who seeks only to expose and judge sin. He also looks for a man who wants to do His will and live for Him. When an Israelite sinned, God would be there to condemn and judge. But when one believed and obeyed God, God would be there to bless and reward. No better illustration of this is to be found in the book of Numbers than in God's judgment in forbidding the doubting Israelites to enter Canaan and His reward in giving Joshua and Caleb the blessed joy of entrance.

*Outline of Chapter 6: The Nazirite Vow*

1. The Nazirite Vow Made (vv. 1, 2)
2. Requirements for Living the Vow (vv. 3-12)
3. Ceremonies on Completing the Vow (vv. 13-20)
4. The Vow Reiterated (v. 21)
5. Benediction (vv. 22-27)

*The Principle of Separation.* In the external details of the Nazirite vow God was again seen to use the external symbols to teach the inner basic spiritual truths to His people. Much of the Old Testament teaching is lost if this fact is forgotten. Obedience to the outward form without obedience in the heart has always been hypocrisy in the eyes of God. In Old Testament days, no less than at any other time, God was after the heart.

The word *Nazirite* is derived from a Hebrew root meaning "to separate." Clearly the Nazirite vow was one of separation. Any Israelite could make the vow, man or woman. It could be taken at any time (6:2). The invitation was not to classes or groups, such as



priests or princes, since it was not service that was basically involved but living.

The Nazirite vow involved two basic principles:

(1) *The "separation from" principle* (6:3, 4). Here, the emphasis was not on the things from which the Nazirite was to separate himself. The intention of this part of the vow was not essentially to reaffirm one's desire to separate himself from sin. Rather, there was to be a "separation from" on the basis of priorities and surrenders in life. Eating dried grapes (6:3) was not a sinful act, so refraining from eating dried grapes was not an act *per se* of refraining from sinning. Because the vine products as a whole were classified under luxurious and sumptuous living, therefore the Nazirite would be willing to surrender these temporal niceties for fare of eternal values.

The second part of this vow involved the hair (6:5). The Israelitish custom was to keep the locks of the hair short. The law of the Nazirite was to let the hair grow. Such a sight would be a public, visible sign that the person had taken this vow, that he was foregoing society's dignity and custom of short hair in order to go about with the "diadem of his God upon his head" (Lev. 21:12) as the symbol of strength and vitality (cf. II Sam. 14:25, 26). And if there was ridicule by his neighbors for this visible sign of the vow, he was willing to surrender his popular reputation in favor of divine approbation.

The third part of the vow involved provision for an emergency: coming near a dead body (6:6-12). If such a thing happened, even by accident, the Nazirite would bring upon himself ceremonial uncleanness, and he would "defile the head of his separation" (6:7, 9). For such defilement he forfeited his status as under the vow, and

he could be reinstated only after fulfilling specified regulations (6:9-12).

In one sense, all three provisions of the vow were rules of "separation from": separation from vine products, separation from customary cutting of hair, separation from ceremonial uncleanness. In another sense, however, only the first rule was a "separation from"; the second was a public testimony of the separation vow; and the third was ceremonial provision for maintaining the sanctity of the vow.

(2) *The "separation unto" principle.* This was the positive side of the vow, and was its ultimate purpose in the life of the Israelite. If God appealed to the "separation from," it was because He wanted "separation unto." "When either man or woman shall make . . . the vow of a Nazirite, to separate himself unto Jehovah, he shall separate himself from . . ." (6:2, 3).

Throughout the chapter the phrase "unto Jehovah" is repeated (see vv. 2, 5, 6, 7, 8, 14, 17, 21). The emphasis is definitely on "Master control." Jesus gave the same kind of invitation to His disciples and the multitude when He said, "If any man would come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me" (Mark 8:34). There was the "separation from"—denying self—that there might be the "separation unto"—following Christ.

It must not be interpreted that Jehovah, in spelling out the regulations of the law of separation (6:21), was teaching that intimate devotion with Him comes by legalistic works apart from heart attitude. Since the vow was voluntary, the decision to enter it was from the heart (6:2). The duration of the vow was unspecified (6:4, 6), so the individual himself chose the time period, whether

temporary or permanent. A command of God can never be really obeyed without the heart's assent. Further, it is on the basis of this fact that one may conclude that if the heart attitude is one of real desire for "separation unto" the Lord, with undivided loyalty to Him as Master of the life, then the laws of the "separation from" will not be difficult commands to obey.

The Aaronic benediction of 6:22-27 is located in the context very appropriately. All the previous verses speak of the *law* of separation; now shines the *grace* of God's face (6:25). The fact that Aaron and his sons were to pronounce the benediction upon the children of Israel did not make it irrelevant to the Nazirite. If such blessings were promised an Israelite, how much greater measure of such blessing could the Nazirite expect! Looking at it from another angle: if the Israelites really perceived that these blessings were all of grace and none deserved, would not some of them, out of gratitude, choose to take the Nazirite vow to enter this special relationship with Jehovah?

The Lord promised to give *happiness* and *security* (6:24). The Lord would give *grace* and favor (6:25). The Lord would give *peace* of heart (6:26). The blessings of Canaan, God's rest-land, were summed up in this great benediction. These were the things the Israelites could have—on the journey and in the promised land—if they would put the Lord's name over their lives (6:27). *IF NOT*—that tragic story is told in most of the remaining chapters of Numbers.

#### D. Offer Gifts (7:1-88)

A real measure of the genuineness of a man's living for God is his liberality in giving of his material wealth

back to God for His service. In the life of Israel, God made it clear that He wanted worship to be central—on the journey and in the possessed land. Ministers of the worship service, with their material support, were required. The support must come from each of the tribes, whether living in want, as the wilderness trials might bring, or in plenty, as Canaan was promised to bring. How would the people of Israel respond, whether individually, or represented by their leaders?

The response was very favorable. The time was the day that Moses finished setting up and anointing the tabernacle and its furniture (7:1; cf. Lev. 8:10 ff. for the chronological identification). In a few weeks the Israelites would depart from Sinai on their journey to Canaan. A pressing need existed in connection with the service of the tabernacle: how to transport the tabernacle and all its fixtures. There was no problem with the Kohathites: they were to bear the smaller items (ark, candlestick, etc.) on their shoulders, with the use of poles (7:9). But the burden of the Gershonites was heavy (coverings, curtains, hangings); that of the Merarites heavier still (beams and pillars).

The princes, representing each tribe, were up to the occasion. They brought their “oblation before Jehovah”: six covered wagons and twelve oxen (7:3). The Gershonites were given two wagons and four oxen, while the Merarites, because of their larger and heavier burdens, received four wagons and eight oxen (7:4-8). The Kohathites needed no wagon help.

But though the occasion of the offering was the mundane need of transportation, the description of the offering emphasizes its hallowed aspects. The offerings are described by such phrases as: “their oblation before Je-

hovah" (7:3); "presented them before the tabernacle" (7:3); "offered for the dedication of the altar" (7:10, 11; cf. 7:84, 88). The gifts were given to *God*, as dedicatory gifts to His service, and then God assigned the gifts to the mundane need (7:4-8).

With the wagons and oxen were offered other costly gifts. Each prince brought the same gifts, and because so much was involved (e.g., slaying animals for offerings) the procedure of offering was one tribe's gifts per day. In the text the listings of the gifts, though identical for each tribe, are recorded at length in what appears at first glance to be needless duplication (7:12-83), the intention apparently being to remind the reader that *no gift to God goes unrecorded in His book*. The total sum of the gifts is given in 7:84-88.

#### E. *Transitional Section* (7:89—8:4)

Just as the Nazirite chapter describing the vows of an Israelite ended with the bright note of God's benediction, so this gift chapter, describing the offerings of the princes, ends with the warm note of communication by God. When Moses approached the Lord in the tent of meeting "to speak with him," then "he heard the Voice speaking unto him" (7:89). This was the Lord's response to the readiness with which the princes gave their support to His sanctuary.

In another respect, verse 89, together with 8:1-4, can be seen as introductory to what follows, the cleansing of the Levites (8:5-26). According to 8:15, the Levites were to go into the tent of meeting to do its service. What kind of service would that be? Cold, formalistic and dead, with no contact with the living God? No, it would be service in a place where God dwelt and where

He spoke with His people. *Voice* is the key word of 7:89.

Further, what kind of service would the Levites perform? That which brought its worshipers into shades of darkness? That which shed no light on other peoples of the world round about, dwelling in darkness? No, it would be service in a place where there was *light, divine light*. Aaron was given the directions: "When thou settest up the lamps, the seven lamps shall give light in front of the candlestick" (8:2, ASV margin). *Light* is the key word of 8:1-4.

A *Voice* and a *Light*—with these the Israelites could be assured of a successful journey through the wilderness.

#### F. *Cleanse the Levites* (8:5-26)

Vessels chosen of God to do His service must be clean. The choice of the Levites has already been described in 3:5 ff. Some of the duties of their service are listed in 4:4 ff. Now God gave Moses directions for cleansing and offering them for service: "Thou shalt cleanse them, and offer them" (8:15). They were to be symbolically purified from the *defilement of sin* (8:21): (1) by sprinkling water on them, the water probably coming from the laver in the sanctuary; (2) by shaving off the hair from their bodies; (3) by washing their clothes (8:7). Then they were to be ceremonially atoned for from the *curse of sin* by offering two bullocks: "the one for a sin-offering, and the other for a burnt-offering, unto Jehovah, to make atonement for the Levites" (8:12).

Two vital identifications were made in the course of the ceremony. In the first, the Israelites (probably represented by leaders of each tribe) laid their hands upon the Levites (8:10), presenting them to the Lord as their representatives, to serve Him as living sacrifices. In no

way, however, were the people of Israel by this “proxy” procedure exempt from their own individual life responsibilities to the Lord. In the second identification, the Levites laid their hands on the heads of the bullocks (8:12), in effect accepting the slaying of the bullocks as symbolizing their desire to present their own bodies to the Lord as a living sacrifice.

The purification rites and the ceremonial offerings teach the truth that God’s servants must be pure in heart and sacrificial in spirit. Now appears the complementary truth that these servants must be undivided in their loyalty (8:14-19). Here is amplified what had been recorded earlier about the Levites’ appointment (3:5 ff.), that they were separated “from among the children of Israel”(8:14) and “wholly given unto” the Lord (8:16).

Next, the Lord’s servants must be obedient, ready and quick to follow His directions. No more succinctly could the record reveal the obedience of Moses, Aaron, the Levites and the Israelites than by saying, “*Thus did* Moses, and Aaron, and all the congregation of the children of Israel . . . according unto all that Jehovah commanded . . .” (8:20); and, “. . . the Levites purified themselves . . .” (8:21).

Not unrelated to the context of the previous paragraphs, the listing of the age limits for service as a Levite (8:23-26) teaches another truth about the active service of God, that it demands the utmost and the best in strength and wisdom. Here the age spread is given as twenty-five to fifty years. Earlier the ages of serving sons of Levi were stipulated from thirty to fifty years (4:47). The twenty-fifth to the thirtieth year period probably was a term of internship or probation. Before beginning the formal years of service the Levites underwent many years

of training, and after completing active duty, a term of lighter service was maintained (8:25, 26). The service of God, whether in the training, probationary, active or semiretired stage, was vital for the success of God's people on their journey.

**G. *Keep the Passover* (9:1-14)**

The words of the Lord, "When I see the blood, I will pass over you" (Exod. 12:13), may not have been put to music in that day, but they were surely spoken with an authority and impact whose ring will continue to reverberate throughout the halls of time and into the boundless spaces of eternity. At that first Passover event, the Israelites were given the command to "observe this day throughout your generations by an ordinance for ever" (Exod. 12:17). The memorial Passover was to be an annual feast, the first ceremony of which was to fall on the fourteenth day of the first month, at even (Exod. 12:18). Because it was a memorial feast, its main point was to remind the Israelites of their great deliverance from Egypt's bondage. No wonder, then, that it becomes a meaningful point of record in Numbers. For the people had been so delivered. Would they now remember the Lord and keep the feast?

The date of this celebration of the Passover at Mount Sinai, the fourteenth day of the first month, was prior to the date of the opening words of the book of Numbers, the first day of the second month. Why, then, was the recording of this Passover delayed until this point in Numbers? The answer is to be found in the circumstances around the "little Passover" described in 9:6-14.

The main Passover was the great annual feast. Because it was the people's old covenant gospel of the



grace of God speaking to them, through the main symbol of the shed blood, of the Lord's gracious deliverance, it was a fitting national celebration on the eve of departure on the journey from Sinai to Canaan.

But God wanted *all* His people eligible to partake to join in the soul-searching events of the feast. For most of the people, there were no major hindrances. To be sure, the task of administering all the parts of the feast to such a multitude was a staggering one, but one can now see why God directed such order and efficiency and participation by so many servants in the services of the tabernacle. It is possible that at least fifty thousand lambs were required for this feast for its approximately two million participants. It was the priests' task to sprinkle the blood (probably on the altar of burnt offering), assisted in this service by the Levites. This was a task of Herculean proportion, but nonetheless very possible (cf. the sprinkling of the blood of 256,500 lambs upon the altars of the temples in Emperor Nero's time). Whatever the staggering tasks facing the servants of God, His inviolable commandment was, "Let the children of Israel keep the passover in its appointed season" (9:2). And no commandment of God regarding the journey was impossible, even if miraculous help was necessary. With sincere and holy simplicity the record answers, "*And they kept the passover . . . according to all that Jehovah commanded Moses, so did the children of Israel*" (9:5).

But some men found themselves, at the time of the Passover, victims of an unfortunate circumstance. They had defiled themselves by contact with human corpses (see Lev. 19:28 for the violation). The desire of their hearts was to join with their brethren in this great and happy, though solemn, celebration. Their own words re-

veal this intense desire to participate: "Why are we kept back, that we may not offer the oblation of Jehovah in its appointed season among the children of Israel?" (9:7).

Moses wisely sought an answer from the Lord, and received one. And in that answer is reflected again the intention of the Lord to let *all* His people join in this happy occasion. Though such a man was ceremonially unclean, said the Lord, "yet he shall keep the passover" (9:10)—but one month later (9:11). The same provision of postponed celebration would also apply to one who was on a distant journey at the regular date of the Passover. But the shirkers among the Israelites (and every society has them) could not postpone their keeping the Passover if they were eligible at the time; in fact, for them not to keep the Passover meant being cut off from the people (9:13).

Finally, God would also include the foreigner sojourning among the Israelites who wanted to keep the Passover, as long as he fulfilled the same requirements of the feast. For there was not to be a double standard; rather, "one statute, both for the sojourner, and for him that is born in the land" (9:14).

It is in the provision for a one-month delay that we can understand the placement of the Passover section here in the account of Numbers. The majority of the Israelites had already participated; now the special cases were brought up; now it could be said that *all* the people were ready for the journey.

#### H. *Follow Your Leaders* (9:15—10:10)

The Israelite hosts had been numbered, organized, sanctified, given adequate spiritual leadership. They had

themselves given gifts and oblations to God, and had celebrated the memorial feast of the Passover. In God's estimate they were now ready for the journey as He gave them one last command: know and follow your leaders.

### 1. Divine Leaders: Signals of Sight (9:15-23)

If up to this point there was any question in an Israelite's mind as to who was really the captain leading the hosts and planning the strategy, there could be none now. For in a clearly visible, undeniably miraculous way, the caller of the signals, the Captain of the hosts, was identified—the God of creation. The visible object was a miraculous cloud. That the cloud was miraculous is seen by the facts: (1) it never dissipated; (2) it did not move according to normal meteorological functions—it might even tarry in one spot for an indefinite period<sup>2</sup> (9:22); (3) at night it took on the appearance of fire (9:16).

The sequence was not, whenever the Israelites stopped the cloud stopped. Rather, whenever the cloud stopped the Israelites were to stop. The principle was that of leadership and following. If the cloud moved, the Israelites must follow; if the cloud stopped, the Israelites must obey (9:17). The action of the cloud was very explicitly identified with the voice of the Lord as Captain: "At the commandment of Jehovah the children of Israel journeyed, and at the commandment of Jehovah they encamped" (9:18). Again and again in 9:15-23 this point is reiterated. In no other place in Numbers is this em-

<sup>2</sup>The Hebrew *yamin* of 9:22 is translated by the A.V. and A.S.V. as "a year." However, the word is used elsewhere to signify an extended indefinite period of time (see Gen. 4:3; 24:53; 40:4), and this is no doubt its intended meaning.

phasis by repetition even matched. The point must have been clear to the Israelites: follow the signals of God!

2. Human Leaders: Signals of Sound (10:1-10)

Communication and revelation from God, clear as it may be, is often missed by the masses if unaided by God's servants. If there was any possibility of false timing or even intentional disobedience of God's signals by the masses, there was insurance in the provision of faithful and discerning leadership by God's appointed servants, Moses, Aaron, and the sons of Aaron (10:8). To the sons of Aaron was given the task of blowing the two trumpets, not only as a marching signal, but also to announce other functions, as 10:1-10 indicates. Moses no doubt was the one who consulted with the sons of Aaron, to give them the signal for blowing.

When the two trumpets were blown, the congregation was to gather at the door of the tent of meeting (10:3). At the sound of one trumpet, the princes were to gather (10:4). When one alarm-type blast sounded for march, the camps on the east side moved (10:5). On the second such blowing, the camps on the south side moved, and so forth, in the order of march earlier organized (10:6). The trumpets were also to herald going to battle (10:9), and to announce the celebration of feast days (10:10).

Trusting in God and following God's leaders, the Israelites were assured victory: "And ye shall be remembered before Jehovah your God, and ye shall be saved from your enemies" (10:9). Should they take their eyes off the cloud and close their ears to the trumpets, however, they were doomed.