

Numbers 9-10 • The Assembly & Working of the Body

Introduction

Although we are saved individually, and although ultimately held individually accountable, we are nonetheless often described in Scripture as belonging to and engaging in something much larger than our self, whether it be the House of God, the Temple, the Church, the Bride of Christ or the Body of Christ. We are individuals assigned roles and responsibilities within a much larger organization who are expected to not just support it, but operate in harmony and submission to it. This “chain of command” does not simply end with a fellowship, congregation, denomination or formal organization, but like army battalions belonging to regiments who belong to divisions, are all ultimately God-directed by His Word and ways.

¹Thus the LORD spoke to Moses in the wilderness of Sinai, in the first month of the second year after they had come out of the land of Egypt, saying, ²“Now, let the sons of Israel observe the Passover at its appointed time. ³On the fourteenth day of this month, at twilight, you shall observe it at its appointed time; you shall observe it according to all its statutes and according to all its ordinances.”

⁴So Moses told the sons of Israel to observe the Passover. ⁵They observed the Passover in the first month, on the fourteenth day of the month, at twilight, in the wilderness of Sinai; according to all that the LORD had commanded Moses, so the sons of Israel did.

⁶But there were some men who were unclean because of the dead person, so that they could not observe Passover on that day; so they came before Moses and Aaron on that day. ⁷Those men said to him, “Though we are unclean because of the dead person, why are we restrained from presenting the offering of the LORD at its appointed time among the sons of Israel?”

⁸Moses therefore said to them, “Wait, and I will listen to what the LORD will command concerning you.”

⁹Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ¹⁰“Speak to the sons of Israel, saying, ‘If any one of you or of your generations becomes unclean because of a dead person, or is on a distant journey, he may, however, observe the Passover to the LORD. ¹¹In the second month on the fourteenth day at twilight, they shall observe it; they shall eat it with unleavened bread and bitter herbs. ¹²They shall leave none of it until morning, nor break a bone of it; according to all the statute of the Passover they shall observe it. ¹³But the

[Read v.1-14]

Q: What is the greater purpose of regularly observing Passover? Of what is it a constant reminder?

A: It is a regular reminder of the fact that redemption—that is, salvation, depends on the power of God through the blood of the Lamb.

Q: What does it mean that it was observed “according to all its statutes and all its ordinances”? (v.3) What do these specific terms refer to?

A: A “statute”—in Hebrew “choq” or “chuqqah”, is a prescribed task of a permanent nature, most often used in regard to strict rules for holy days, sacrifices, and limits on marriage. But an “ordinance”, sometimes also translated from the Hebrew “mishpat” as “judgment”, is what we might call “case law”. It is the application of God’s Word not specifically addressed word-for-word in Scripture. It often comes through God’s prophets and messengers after some aspect of God’s Word is first established.

Point: God is establishing that His people do not simply follow the letter of the Law, but will properly and equally apply it in all situations. One part of the Law never invalidates or nullifies another.

Q: In this case, what wasn’t specifically covered as a “statute” which required an “ordinance”?

A: What to do when someone is found ritually unclean according to the standards of one part of the Law, when at the same time they are required to observe Passover as ritually clean participants. There appeared to be a conflict.

Q: Carefully observe Moses’ response. What is particularly powerful about his approach to finding the solution?

A: He said, “Wait, and I will listen to what the Lord will command concerning you”. (v.8) He does not issue an immediate answer from his own wisdom, but seeks for God’s Word to be the final interpreter of God’s Word.

Application: This should be our first and foremost principle of scriptural interpretation.

Q: What is the greater spiritual meaning afforded this additional ruling?

A: Without it, there may be those who become so fixated on the strict letter of the Law that they will think it permissible to forgo doing anything for anyone in the name of serving God. They would see themselves as exempt from obedience to other parts of the Law, particularly when it comes to the needs of others.

man who is clean and is not on a journey, and yet neglects to observe the Passover, that person shall then be cut off from his people, for he did not present the offering of the LORD at its appointed time. That man will bear his sin. ¹⁴If an alien sojourns among you and observes the Passover to the LORD, according to the statute of the Passover and according to its ordinance, so he shall do; you shall have one statute, both for the alien and for the native of the land.”

Q: What is an actual New Testament example of this in action?

A: We see that it was at Passover when Joseph and Nicodemus became ritually defiled themselves by taking Christ’s corpse from the cross and burying Him in the tomb. (Jn. 19:38-42) The Gospels mention other figures at that time who went to extremes to keep themselves ritually clean, such as when the Sanhedrin would not enter Pilate’s house—a living person but being a Gentile considered “unclean”, but as we can see, neither Joseph nor Nicodemus were violating the Law by doing so.

Q: Which party does God hold responsible when it comes to observing Passover?

A: According to v.13, the word used of such a person is “neglects”. This term, “chadal” in Hebrew, seems to be describing not just a one-time act of forgetfulness, but regularly ceasing the observance.

Point: This would explain the seemingly harsh penalty, “that person shall then be cut off from his people” (v.13), because they are choosing to permanently cut themselves off from God.

Q: Is it specified that every “alien” must observe Passover?

A: The phrase “sojourns among you” (v.14) describes those who have permanently taken up residence, not those who are merely on their way passing through. It is actually using the opposite example of the ethnic member of Israel who “neglects” the Passover, showing that all those under the umbrella of Israel are to be held to the same standard regardless of ethnicity. There is no loophole here either.

Application: God’s people do not simply follow the strict letter of the Law, but the spirit of the Law in all situations. God gives wisdom to resolve all issues.

[Read v.15-23]

¹⁵Now on the day that the tabernacle was erected the cloud covered the tabernacle, the tent of the testimony, and in the evening it was like the appearance of fire over the tabernacle, until morning. ¹⁶So it was continuously; the cloud would cover it by day, and the appearance of fire by night. ¹⁷Whenever the cloud was lifted from over the tent, afterward the sons of Israel would then set out; and in the place where the cloud settled down, there the sons of Israel would camp. ¹⁸At the command of the LORD the sons of Israel would set out, and at the command of the LORD they would camp; as long as the cloud settled over the tabernacle, they remained camped. ¹⁹Even when the cloud lingered over the tabernacle for many days, the sons of Israel would keep the LORD’s charge and not set out. ²⁰If sometimes the cloud remained a few days over the tabernacle, according to the command of the LORD they remained camped. Then according to the command of the LORD they set out. ²¹If sometimes the

Q: What is the very first training which new military recruits receive?

A: How to form into basic units such as platoons, companies and battalions upon command, and then to uniformly move out as directed and to where directed. Soldiers learn quickly that they are no longer individually in control, but exclusively subject to authority.

Q: What is the greater message behind v.21?

A: God not only led them in the daytime, but in the nighttime as well. As long as God is leading, the conditions are irrelevant.

Application: We are to follow God’s leading under any and every condition.

Q: What is the greater principle being taught in v.22?

A: Because it was never known if the cloud would remain for a day, a month or even a year, it was impossible for man to make a calculated forecast of God’s intentions.

Application: We cannot predict, much less dictate, parameters to God; we must continually walk by faith regardless.

cloud remained from evening until morning, when the cloud was lifted in the morning, they would move out; or if it remained in the daytime and at night, whenever the cloud was lifted, they would set out. ²²Whether it was two days or a month or a year that the cloud lingered over the tabernacle, staying above it, the sons of Israel remained camped and did not set out; but when it was lifted, they did set out. ²³At the command of the LORD they camped, and at the command of the LORD they set out; they kept the LORD'S charge, according to the command of the LORD through Moses.

^{10:1}The LORD spoke further to Moses, saying, ²"Make yourself two trumpets of silver, of hammered work you shall make them; and you shall use them for summoning the congregation and for having the camps set out. ³When both are blown, all the congregation shall gather themselves to you at the doorway of the tent of meeting. ⁴Yet if only one is blown, then the leaders, the heads of the divisions of Israel, shall assemble before you. ⁵But when you blow an alarm, the camps that are pitched on the east side shall set out. ⁶When you blow an alarm the second time, the camps that are pitched on the south side shall set out; an alarm is to be blown for them to set out. ⁷When convening the assembly, however, you shall blow without sounding an alarm. ⁸The priestly sons of Aaron, moreover, shall blow the trumpets; and this shall be for you a perpetual statute throughout your generations. ⁹When you go to war in your land against the adversary who attacks you, then you shall sound an alarm with the trumpets, that you may be remembered before the LORD your God, and be saved from your enemies. ¹⁰Also in the day of your gladness and in your appointed feasts, and on the first days of your months, you shall blow the trumpets over your burnt offerings, and over the sacrifices of your peace offerings; and they shall be as a reminder of you before your God. I am the LORD your God."

Q: How might v.16, that God was present "continuously", be understood in the New Testament model of God's people?

A: We not only have the Holy Spirit in both the Church at large and each of us individually, but the Spirit's continual guidance through the whole Word of God.

Application: *God gives daily direction and guidance to our walk.*

[Read 10:1-10]

Q: What are the things specified for the silver trumpets?

1. Summoning the whole congregation. (v.2-3)
2. Summoning the leaders only. (v.4)
3. Sounding an alarm to set out. (v.5-6)
4. When going to war. (v.9)
5. During feasts, the first day of each month, and along with sacrifices. (v.10)

Q: What might be significant about the fact these trumpets are made of silver?

A: Silver in Scripture is a representation of redemption.

Q: Why would it be very practical for the priests to operate the trumpets?

A: Being the chief operators of the Tabernacle, they would be the first to notice changes in the cloud or pillar of fire and could thus inform everyone of God's intentions and leading. And as the designated leaders, they should be the most sensitive to God's leading.

Q: How do we see the silver trumpets used in a New Testament setting?

A: They are used to call the Church together, both the resurrected and the raptured.

"And He will send forth His angels with A GREAT TRUMPET and THEY WILL GATHER TOGETHER His elect from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other. — Matthew 24:31

Behold, I tell you a mystery; we will not all sleep, but we will all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For this perishable must put on the imperishable, and this mortal must put on immortality. — 1 Corinthians 15:51-53

For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord. — 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17

Application: *God not only leads, but gives warning when needed.*

¹¹Now in the second year, in the second month, on the twentieth of the month, the cloud was lifted from over the tabernacle of the testimony; ¹²and the sons of Israel set out on their journeys from the wilderness of Sinai. Then the cloud settled down in the wilderness of Paran. ¹³So they moved out for the first time according to the commandment of the Lord through Moses. ¹⁴The standard of the camp of the sons of Judah, according to their armies, set out first, with Nahshon the son of Amminadab, over its army, ¹⁵and Nethanel the son of Zuar, over the tribal army of the sons of Issachar; ¹⁶and Eliab the son of Helon over the tribal army of the sons of Zebulun.

¹⁷Then the tabernacle was taken down; and the sons of Gershon and the sons of Merari, who were carrying the tabernacle, set out. ¹⁸Next the standard of the camp of Reuben, according to their armies, set out with Elizur the son of Shedeur, over its army, ¹⁹and Shelumiel the son of Zurishaddai over the tribal army of the sons of Simeon, ²⁰and Eliasaph the son of Deuel was over the tribal army of the sons of Gad.

²¹Then the Kohathites set out, carrying the holy objects; and the tabernacle was set up before their arrival. ²²Next the standard of the camp of the sons of Ephraim, according to their armies, was set out, with Elishama the son of Ammihud over its army, ²³and Gamaliel the son of Pedahzur over the tribal army of the sons of Manasseh; ²⁴and Abidan the son of Gideon over the tribal army of the sons of Benjamin.

²⁵Then the standard of the camp of the sons of Dan, according to their armies, which formed the rear guard for all the camps, set out, with Ahiezer the son of Ammishaddai over its army, ²⁶and Pagiel the son of Ochran over the tribal army of the sons of Asher; ²⁷and Ahira the son of Enan over the tribal army of the sons of Naphtali. ²⁸This was the order of march of the sons of Israel by their armies as they set out.

[Read v.11-28]

Q: How might we draw an additional inference to life in the military? What is the role and identity of every individual soldier?

A: Every individual soldier not only recites the precise name and number of his assignment—"I belong to 3rd platoon of Bravo Company of the 2nd Battalion of the 31st Infantry Regiment"—but they have been trained for their individual role both in that unit and the army at large.

Q: How might this be implemented in New Testament terms?

A: We all have individual gifts and responsibilities where we are "assigned" in the Body of Christ, but for the leading and direction by God in course of carrying out the work and mission of the overall Church. We are simultaneously individually directed in carrying out the greater work of the Church as directed by Christ.

Q: How and when did God's people know when to move out?

A: By the specific sounding of the trumpets which the priests—the leaders closest in service to God in the center of God's people.

Application: *God's leading of His people is controlled and orderly.*

²⁹Then Moses said to Hobab the son of Reuel the Midianite, Moses' father-in-law, "We are setting out to the place of which the LORD said, 'I will give it to you'; come with us and we will do you good, for the Lord has promised good concerning Israel."

³⁰But he said to him, "I will not come, but rather will go to my own land and relatives."

³¹Then he said, "Please do not leave us, inasmuch as you know where we should camp in the wilderness, and you will be as eyes for us. ³²So it will be, if you go with us, that whatever good the LORD does for us, we will do for you."

³³Thus they set out from the mount of the LORD three days' journey, with the ark of the covenant of the LORD journeying in front of them for the three days, to seek out a resting place for them. ³⁴The cloud of the LORD was over them by day when they set out from the camp.

³⁵Then it came about when the ark set out that Moses said,

"Rise up, O LORD!
And let Your enemies be scattered,
And let those who hate You flee
before You."

³⁶When it came to rest, he said,

"Return, O LORD,
To the myriad thousands of Israel."

[Read v.29-36]

Q: What is the precedent which seems to be taking place here?

A: That one does not have to be an ethnic Jew to follow God or become a member of Israel.

Q: What does Moses' brother-in-law represent?

A: He represents all those who leave the old life behind.

Q: Why might some infer that Moses is making a mistake?

A: To some expositors, this is interpreted as Moses relying on the flesh instead of God.

Q: Why would that be a wrong interpretation? What is this actually addressing?

A: When people sin or make big mistakes in Scripture, the text always documents it. The absence of any such correction more likely indicates that God will use Hobab's abilities for His own purposes and glory since he is leaving his old life in the world for the new in God.

Q: But what do we see will be the primary guide for God's people?

A: The Word as represented by the Ark of the Covenant.

Application: *God will use man's abilities to accomplish His greater purposes, but His first and foremost leading will be by His Word.*

Overall Application

The working of God's Word in both the Church collectively and each individual believer:

- *There is no situation to which God's Word cannot be applied, even if it is not specified word-for-word in the text.*
- *God's Word gives daily guidance to the whole Body and every individual member within.*
- *God's Word not only provides organization, but as needed, warning.*
- *God's Word is never haphazard or "by chance", but controlled and orderly.*
- *God's Word will mold and direct man's abilities.*