

## September 7, 2025 Session 1

### The Journey Numbers 9:15-23

**Intro:** It is all about following God. The descendants of Jacob had lived in the northeast region of the Nile Delta for four hundred years. When they left Egypt they entered a great expanse of wilderness of which they knew nothing. God provided for them and guided them with a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. Have you seen the clouds that God has blessed us with?

**Numbers.** The book got its name from the fact that it begins with a census of the fighting men in Israel, and covers most of the years of the Israelites' journey to Canaan. It was a monumental task of asking a group of used-to-be slaves and forming them into a cohesive nation. The tasks of providing laws of conduct, provisions for worship, regulations of that worship, and the organization for travel, protection, and war are outlined. The special task of overseeing the tabernacle and its furnishings was given to the tribe of Levi. These tasks were assigned to the Levites to facilitate worship in the tabernacle, and they were responsible for transporting the tabernacle. Six wagons were given to the Levites for transporting the tabernacle. The ark of the covenant and the other sacred objects of the tabernacle were to be carried. Because worship of the lord was central in all that the Israelites did, the tabernacle was centrally located in the camp with those who led and assisted in worship camped adjacent (near, close, adjoining) to the tabernacle. God had told the people. **Leviticus 11:45** *"For I am the LORD who brings you up out of the land of Egypt, to be your God. You shall therefore be holy, for I am holy."* Holiness within the camp and within the nation was essential. The purification/consecration of the Levites for service to God took place, and the congregation of Israel was ready to leave Mount Sinai after having stayed there for a year. They were now ready to move toward the land that had been promised to them centuries earlier.

### **God's Presence (Numbers 9:15-16) p. 12**

Chapter 9 starts out with the correct procedure for celebrating the Passover. God rescued the Israelites from slavery in Egypt, and made His presence known. The ever-present pillar of cloud by day and fire by night was a visible symbol of the presence of God that accompanied the Israelites throughout their journey from Egypt to the promised land of Canaan. The pillar of cloud appeared when the Israelites left Egypt when the chariots of the Egyptian Pharaoh pursued them.



The pillar of cloud moved between the Israelites and Egyptians, protecting the Israelites as they prepared to cross the Red Sea. God gave Moses instructions about the tabernacle's design and furnishings. **Exodus 25:8** *"And let them [Israelites] make Me a sanctuary [tabernacle], that I may dwell among them."* The tabernacle was God's chosen dwelling place among the Israelites. After the construction of the tabernacle was completed, "...So Moses finished the work. Then the cloud covered the tabernacle of meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle." (Exodus 40:33-34) The Hebrew word translated tabernacle means dwelling place. The tent of testimony is most likely applied to the tabernacle because it housed the ark of the covenant, which contained the Ten Commandments. Two more things would be added later: a gold jar of manna, and Aron's staff.

**Vs. 16** The pillar of cloud/fire was a constant part of the Israelites' journey to the promised land. It was easily recognizable in contrast to all other clouds by its shape and fixed position over the tabernacle or in front of the marching line of the Israelites. Moses spoke of the presence of this pillar of cloud/fire as a clear sign of God's presence and watchcare over the people He had chosen.

### **Faithful Direction (Numbers 9:17-21) p. 13**

The Israelites watched the pillar of cloud. When the cloud lifted from its place above the tabernacle and moved, the Israelites moved with it. They followed the cloud. When the cloud stopped moving and remained in one place, they stopped traveling and remained in that location. The Israelites journeyed or camped at the Lord's command. The dual focus of these verses was on God's leading and His people's following. These verses may have been a song the Israelites sang as they journeyed because there is a repetitive nature of this "Song of the Journey." Even after the golden calf incident, God did not abandon His people. God's presence with His people Israel pointed to their uniqueness among the peoples present in the land of Canaan. Later on the border of the promised land, Moses marveled to the people. Moses said: **Deuteronomy 4:7** *"For what great nation is there that has God so near to it, as the LORD our God is to us, for whatever reason we may call upon Him?"* Could Moses say this about our nation today?

The awareness of the presence of God with them gave the Israelites the certainty that He would also guide them throughout their journey to the land of Canaan. There is a continuing pattern of travel followed by encampment.



However the theme of this entire passage is the leadership of God. The position and movement of the cloud spoke the “orders for the day.” The position of the cloud was within sight of the entire camp of Israel. Every house of Israel was responsible for obedience to the direction of God through the cloud. Over 600,000 men left Egypt; the number of people swells exponentially when we add women and children. Earlier, the Lord laid out an arrangement for the tribal clans and their positions around the tabernacle. God is the creator of order and structure. He is not unorganized. As was organized, the first to set out from the encampment were the Levites. They camped closest to the tabernacle and were responsible for its set-up and transport. Concerning the tabernacle, the ark of the covenant was always out front as the people relocated. Next was the tabernacle structure itself—with its curtains, posts, tent pegs, and ropes. Last in the procession of the levites were the furnishings for the tabernacle. Moses, speaking from the Plains of Moab at the end of their journey, portrayed this divine guidance with the picture of God carrying the Israelites. **Deuteronomy 1:31** *“and in the wilderness where you saw how the LORD your God carried you, as a man carries his son, in all the way that you went until you came to this place.”*

**Vs. 18** The position and movement of the pillar of cloud/fire was a direct command from God as to whether the Israelites should remain where they were encamped or break camp and move on with their journey. The cloud/fire was the visible manifestation of God’s presence with His people. The Israelites wandered in the wilderness for forty years, and the length of days traveled or spent encamped are inconsistent. At times the cloud stayed in place many days, and other times the wait lasted longer. Sometimes the Lord may compel us to wait. Each period of travel and encampment played a role in shaping the generation who would enter the promised land into the nation they would become. Part of the Israelites’ training was that they carried out the LORD’S requirement. How quickly could the tabernacle be set up or taken down? Over 8,500 Levites were responsible for the tabernacle, and each had a task for which he was responsible.

**Vs. 20** Because the amount of time at each encampment was not spelled out by God beforehand, the Israelites needed to be prepared both to stay for an extended period or move at a moment’s notice. At this time in their journey the Israelites were obedient to God’s commands. They would not move forward apart from God’s direction. They were dependent on Him for leadership and guidance. When God led, they obeyed. This certainly



would not always be the pattern of the nation in the years to come, neither in the wilderness nor in the promised land.

### **Active Obedience (Numbers 9:22-23) p. 16**

The visible symbol of God's presence, the pillar of cloud/fire, was such a monumental part of the exodus event that it is written about in a variety of places throughout Scripture: Nehemiah 9:12, Psalms 78:14, Isaiah 4:5. During the Festival of Tabernacles the miraculous presence of God in the pillar of cloud/fire was memorialized by the lighting of four enormous menorahs, or candelabra, in the temple courtyard. The lighting of these menorahs would be a strong reminder to worshipers of God's guidance in the wilderness. More significant is that during a particular Festival of Tabernacles, Jesus declared: **John 8:12** *"Then Jesus spoke to them again, saying, 'I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life.'"* While God led the Israelites through the pillar of cloud/fire during their journey from Egypt to the promised land, followers of Christ now have the assurance of Jesus's divine presence within them in the Person of the Holy Spirit. **Galatians 4:6-7** *"And because you are sons [and daughters], God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, Abba, Father! Therefore you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ."* As we travel this earthly journey following Jesus Christ, we will never walk in darkness again, and through Him we have eternal life. Do you like following Jesus? Do you like to obey Him? We are no longer slaves to sin but we are children of the King of Kings and heirs of His realm.