

"Follow God"

Numbers 10

Here in Numbers 10, the Israelites finally start moving away from Mt. Sinai and begin the journey towards the land God promised them. It has only been 19 days since God told Moses to take a census of the all the men 20 and over for putting together an army. And its only been 6 days since a few of the Israelites who celebrated the Passover on the 14th day of the 2nd month, since they were unable in the 1st month because they had come in contact with a dead body. Something God said they could do.

The first 10 verses are about the two silver trumpets which will help the people know when God wants them to come together or go out to battle or rise up and move towards the next place God is leading them or to stop and rest until God leads them again. And in vv. 11-36 we see how that worked as they set out. And it went smoothly at first. Because they faithfully followed God's leading. If we think the people just naturally followed God's leading, let's review the last year of their life.

Prior to Moses' arrival in Egypt, the people had very little firsthand experience with God. However, when Moses came on God's behalf warning the Egyptians of the 10 plagues, they learned quickly and powerfully that God does what He says He will do. When they escaped on Passover night, following God's leading of the pillar of fire, they miraculously saw God rescue them when He opened the Red Sea as Egypt's armies approached and subsequently closed the sea when Israel was safely across. Two months later, they safely arrived at Mt. Sinai. In the 11 months of camping what have they been doing? Listening to God's Word about how to live. Resting from years of slavery. Getting to know their fellow Israelites in peace. Developing community and waiting for God to lead them.

There was one major setback, when they asked Aaron to make gods for them and he made the golden calves. Let's revisit that and see something important.

When the people saw that Moses was so long in coming down from the mountain, they gathered around Aaron and said, "Come, make us gods who will go before us. As for this fellow Moses who brought us up out of Egypt, we don't know what has happened to him."

They grew impatient and wanted to get going and wanted 'gods to lead them'. That proved so disastrous. If Moses hadn't intervened, God's presence would not have gone before them. But God relented. If we're honest, we too get impatient waiting for God's leading. We too follow the wrong voices (often our own or a friend or a misreading of Scripture) and experience more frustration and dissatisfaction in life. Often blaming it on God who we think misled us, when in fact we failed to wait, rest, learn and build community while praying for God's leading. We can be so focused on following God's next step for us that we forget resting and learning and building community is God's leading in our life.

What then can we learn here when we're waiting on God to move us towards experiencing His promised blessings in our life? Listening for God's leading is a process of spiritual maturity. So God makes it clear for Israel to know when He wants them to move out, to camp, to worship or to go to war.

10 The Lord said to Moses: ² “Make two trumpets of hammered silver, and use them for calling the community together and for having the camps set out.

When you and I are thinking about following God’s leading, we often think about life’s experiences: school, marriage, jobs, a place to live, ministry, etc., things we’re not given clear direction for in Scripture. What we overlook when looking for God’s leading is we first have to learn to

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Following His Clear Leading **(10:1-10)**

Remember these words from Jesus in John 10:1?

I tell you the truth, the man who does not enter the sheep pen by the gate, but climbs in by some other way, is a thief and a robber. ² The man who enters by the gate is the shepherd of his sheep. ³ The watchman opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. ⁴ When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice. ⁵ But they will never follow a stranger; in fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognize a stranger’s voice.” ⁶ Jesus used this figure of speech, but they did not understand what he was telling them.

Sheep recognize their shepherd’s voice over time and through experience by how He leads them to what they need. The Israelites have been listening to God’s words for a year now. He has led them safely. Their needs are being met. They complained a bit on the journey but God came through. Now they are getting familiar with His words and building community.

All God’s people need to hear His clear words first,

So we can grow in trusting Him (vv.1-7)

And this is a lifelong lesson that we always need to grow more in. We have many clear words from Scripture that we don’t Listen well to, like,

Col. 3:8 But now you must rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips. ⁹ Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices ¹⁰ and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator. ¹¹ Here there is no Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all. ¹² Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. ¹³ Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. ¹⁴ And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.

Those are pretty clear commands from God’s Word. When the Spirit of God brings these words to our mind (that’s a direct way God leads us) what do we do? When we read “*love one another*” or “*forgive one another*” or “*be my witnesses*” or “*set your mind on things above not on earthly things*” ... do we act on them? God is speaking to us very clearly but we’re not always listening and following His clear voice.

God teaches the Israelites here how to follow Him in a very clear way. Why? They have no clue where they are going. They’ve never had to survive in the wilderness. They’ve never fought a war. They need to learn to love their brothers and sisters because they are going to need each other.

So God commands Moses to have two special silver trumpets made and depending on whether it's long blast or a short blast or multiple long or short blasts, this is how God is going to lead you for now. All you have to do is learn what the different types of trumpet blasts mean. Listen, learn, obey.

The tribes are to go out in the order God commanded in Num. 2. You also have to learn to trust the ones sounding the trumpets. You assume that they're paying close attention to God so they know when God says do this or go here or stop, you do. We all need mature people in our life who have learned over time how to act on the Word of God and the leading of God. But we have to start listening to and obeying first the clear words from God before we recognize His leading in the less clear areas of life. When we listen to God's clear words in Scripture,

The more prepared we are to handle life's challenges (vv.8-10)

Aaron has to learn how to communicate God's will and the people have to recognize when an alarm is sounded.

⁸ "The sons of Aaron, the priests, are to blow the trumpets. This is to be a lasting ordinance for you and the generations to come. ⁹ When you go into battle in your own land against an enemy who is oppressing you, sound a blast on the trumpets. Then you will be remembered by the Lord your God and rescued from your enemies.

God wanted them to know not just when they will face a battle but that He will go with them and give them victory when they trust Him. We see this in 2 Chron. 13. Abijah, king of the Southern Kingdom of Israel (the two tribes that were following God) were having a civil war with Jeroboam and the 10 Northern tribes. He warns Jeroboam, who had the military advantage with an army of 800,000 vs. 400,000 of Abijah's. In vv.4-12 an outnumbered Abijah challenges Jeroboam, stating that they abandoned God, they formed their own priesthood, they made golden calves to worship and that they were the ones who were in danger because they rejected the true God. Then he concludes in v.12 saying,

¹² God is with us; he is our leader. His priests with their trumpets will sound the battle cry against you. Men of Israel, do not fight against the Lord, the God of your fathers, for you will not succeed."

¹³ Now Jeroboam had sent troops around to the rear, so that while he was in front of Judah the ambush was behind them. ¹⁴ Judah turned and saw that they were being attacked at both front and rear. Then they cried out to the Lord. The priests blew their trumpets ¹⁵ and the men of Judah raised the battle cry. At the sound of their battle cry, God routed Jeroboam and all Israel before Abijah and Judah. ¹⁶ The Israelites fled before Judah, and God delivered them into their hands. ¹⁷ Abijah and his men inflicted heavy losses on them, so that there were five hundred thousand casualties among Israel's able men. ¹⁸ The men of Israel were subdued on that occasion, and the men of Judah were victorious because they relied on the Lord, the God of their fathers.

When God says He will do something and when His people obey Him, He does it. Here in Num. 10:9, God clearly says ,

⁹ When you go into battle in your own land against an enemy who is oppressing you, sound a blast on the trumpets

Even though we're told by Jesus, 'In this world you will have trouble' [John 16:33] or by Paul, 'I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us' [Rom. 8:18] or by James 'Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance' [1:2-3], we're still surprised when they come. This is why memorizing verses like these is so crucial to prepare us for the

challenges we face, so that even if we're initially surprised and disappointed (our natural response) we turn very quickly to the Word and say, 'Lord I know you are still with me and using this for Your purpose of conforming me to Jesus.'

In vv.11-28, we are given the details of how they first went out when the cloud of God's presence lifted above the Tabernacle.

¹³ *They set out, this first time, at the Lord's command through Moses.*

And back in Ch. 2-3. God told them how each tribe was to go out, who was to lead and in what order and they did exactly what God clearly said to do.

And They Didn't Go Ahead of God **(10:11-28)**

Judah went first because God told Judah to go first. Nahshon was the one God said to lead them and Nahshon led them. Then the tribe of Issachar, then Zebulun, then Tabernacle was dismantled and the Merorites and Gershonites did their job exactly as God prescribed and so on down to v.28.

They and we all have God-given roles to play (vv.11-16, 18-20, 22-27)

No role was more important than any other. No tribe was more important than any other. Just because you were assigned a leadership role it didn't mean you were more important; it just means you have different roles and when we all obey God and fulfill the roles He has given us, God moves forward and His plans succeed and Jesus' church is built and people get saved and so on. At this point, they all did what God asked and they got to where God led them, having their needs met. It's a dull part of the chapter but it sure is important.

If one tribe or one person doesn't follow God's clear leading, God's plan is not accomplished or significantly delayed. Judah wasn't more important than Naphtali, their roles were just different. Roles do not determine value. Roles are about responsibility. If Nahshon ignores God's clear command to lead the whole thing, then everything breaks down. If Ahira, the leader of Naphtali, the last tribe sleeps in and doesn't fill his role, then those at the end are affected and later on if they are attacked from the rear and that tribe isn't there, it affects the whole group.

Every person in Christ is equal in identity. None of us are more important, but God assigns us different roles, each of which is accompanied by a gift from God's Spirit. In our roles we have various levels of responsibility. There's a lot of confusion about roles in ministry because we have wrongly equated our value by our roles and not our equal position in Christ.

All the leaders hear the clear command of God. They know what they're supposed to do and they obey. They don't delay obedience nor do they run ahead of God.

And when we serve God together we'll see God is leading (vv.17, 21)

The priests did their roles. The Levites carried the Tabernacle pieces when they were supposed to, as did the Kohathites who were carrying the ark of the covenant and the Tabernacle furniture. V.33 shows us the ark goes out in front; God leads the way, so that when the cloud signals to stop, the Levites set up the Tabernacle before the rest of the people arrive (v.21).

As simple as this is, it's a powerful word picture for all of God's people. Follow God's clear leading in Scripture first and foremost. Obey His Word. Trust God's wisdom for the roles and gifts He has given you by His Spirit. Work with the people of God for the common purpose of seeing God glorified and the gospel of Jesus made known. The instructions for the Israelites were not difficult, and neither are God's instructions to us His people today. Love one another, forgive one another, grow in the Word, do not forsake our assembling together, do not grumble, love your spouse, train your children in the Lord, pray for one another, draw near to God. Those are just a few clear instructions from God in His Word. When we obey them, He moves and works and we'll see His hand in our lives. And when we're obeying God's clear instructions,

We'll Ask Others to Join Us **(10:29-36)**

When we are obeying the Lord, we're enjoying life more. We're seeing how He's working around us and we understand what a joy living for God is. We want others

To taste the goodness of God (vv.29-32)

Ps. 34:8 should be our song:

⁸ *Taste and see that the Lord is good; blessed is the man who takes refuge in him.*

When we're enjoying the abundant life Jesus said abiding in Him will give us and we'll invite others to come too. Moses knew that. He stops at his brother-in-law's place, Jethro's son Hobab. And he invites him to join them on a journey with God.

²⁹ *Now Moses said to Hobab son of Reuel the Midianite, Moses' father-in-law, "We are setting out for the place about which the Lord said, 'I will give it to you.' Come with us and we will treat you well, for the Lord has promised good things to Israel."* ³⁰ *He answered, "No, I will not go; I am going back to my own land and my own people."* ³¹ *But Moses said, "Please do not leave us. You know where we should camp in the desert, and you can be our eyes."* ³² *If you come with us, we will share with you whatever good things the Lord gives us."*

Moses left his father-in-law in obedience to God's clear command. He has seen God work and provide. He wants his family to join them and experience the goodness of God as he had and he invites Hobab to join him. While Hobab initially declined, Moses appeals to him because Hobab has gifts to offer. His knowledge and experience in the wilderness would be helpful to know where water is and grass for the animals. Practical ways in which he would be helpful. Isn't this a failure on Moses' part to trust God? No. Moses knows Hobab's practical knowledge would be helpful just as we also rely on each other's practical knowledge and skills in ministry and life. Moses assures him that following God will produce good in his life.

And what is God's good for us?

To know His ongoing presence (vv.33-36)

They leave with God guiding the way and God showing them when to leave and when to stay. Moses knows God is good and trustworthy and he establishes a brief rallying prayer for when God says to go and when God says to rest. Moses believes God and trusts God that when they follow His leading it will be good and God will cause the enemy to fear and the people to rejoice.

Sometimes we run ahead of God when it comes to trying to discern His voice and leading and other times we stay when we're called to move. If we're not obeying God in His clear voice of Scripture, how can we be prepared when trying to discern His direction for less clear areas? Jesus said

He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. ⁴ When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice.

Read the Word and get used to His voice. Obey the Word and watch God work. Over time we recognize when the Spirit reminds us of the Word to apply it in our life, but we'll also become more familiar with the ways He nudges us to serve, to talk, to be silent and to encourage. God is always about doing His good in others' lives, so we know His nudging will always be centered around His goodness.

Matt. 7:24 "Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man

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If you have any comments or questions about this message please
contact us at olivet@rideau.net