

"Trust to Obey God"

Numbers 9

As we come to Numbers 9 we are finally going to start moving away from Mt. Sinai and begin the journey towards the land of Canaan. And yet, we are told about something that actually happened one month prior to all the instructions recorded in Num. 1-8. If you look back at Num. 1:1 we read,

The Lord spoke to Moses in the Tent of Meeting in the Desert of Sinai on the first day of the second month of the second year after the Israelites came out of Egypt. He said: ² "Take a census of the whole Israelite community.

While here in Ch. 9 we read,

The Lord spoke to Moses in the Desert of Sinai in the first month of the second year after they came out of Egypt. He said, ² "Have the Israelites celebrate the Passover at the appointed time. ³ Celebrate it at the appointed time, at twilight on the fourteenth day of this month, in accordance with all its rules and regulations."

I believe there are two reasons why Moses waits to list this here. The second reason I'll explain later which will give a practical explanation for why but the first reason is a more theological and spiritual challenging reason.

The Israelites left Egypt in Ex. 14 on the night of the Passover, when after celebrating the Passover, God rescued them from slavery once and for all. All those who obeyed God's command to keep the Passover by killing a lamb on the 14th day and spreading the blood of the sacrificed lamb on your doorpost, would be spared from losing one's first-born child. God then lead them safely through the miraculous Red Sea crossing by His visible presence, going before them (fire by night and cloud by day). Here in Ch. 9 just prior to their leaving, Moses shares God's instructions about celebrating the Passover again (vv.1-14) followed by God's leading them by fire at night and cloud by day towards the land of Canaan (vv.15-23). So it's an intentional reminder that when you trusted God the first time by obeying Him in observing the Passover, God led you safely to where He wanted to take you. Now, they are being challenged again; are you trusting God to lead you in the future to where He wants to take you by observing the Passover again? That's the whole point of the Passover. Look what God did for you when you trusted Him. Observe it every year as a reminder that when you trust God, He will lead you well in life.

The instruction, then, to observe the Passover 9 months after they arrive at Sinai, in obedience to God's law, interrupts the instruction narrative. A reminder that, yes, God has lots for you and me to learn, but don't forget to pause and reflect on His saving work in your life to encourage you to keep trusting Him to lead you where He wants you to go. Yes, we must keep learning from His Word, so we'll trust His leading in our lives because we haven't arrived yet either. And we can trust Him. Keep

...

Trusting in Your Compassionate God
(9:1-14)

Have the Israelites celebrate the Passover at the appointed time. ³ Celebrate it at the appointed time, at twilight on the fourteenth day of this month, in accordance with all its rules and regulations.”

⁴ So Moses told the Israelites to celebrate the Passover, ⁵ and they did so in the Desert of Sinai at twilight on the fourteenth day of the first month. The Israelites did everything just as the Lord commanded Moses.

The word that's associated with the Passover here in these 14 verses is “celebrate”. It occurs 9x. Passover was to be celebrated. Why?

Because salvation is worth celebrating! (vv.1-5)

Some translations use the word ‘keep’ or observe’ but most translations use the word “celebrate”. The Hebrew word is a basic word meaning, ‘do, act or create’ but the context of the passage led many translators to put ‘celebrate’ since its an observance of when God saved you. When God delivered you. The word is used many times in the creation account, especially when God ‘made’ man and woman in Gen. 1:26 and all was very good. And at the exodus God made a path for Israel to get out and saved them from harm in order to bring them to something good. He was making a new way for them, a good path for their life. This of course is worth celebrating.

Celebrate the Passover with “all its rules and regulations”. That included eating the bitter herbs to remind you of the bitter life God saved you from. It also includes remembering the cost of your salvation [death of the lamb for you], your part in your salvation [believe that what God says in applying the shed blood of the lamb to your home will spare you from death], your current life at peace with God, the future blessings He has for you in this life and your secure future where you and God will dwell securely forever.

So, we have lots to celebrate too because the Passover pointed forward to and was fulfilled in Jesus, who, became the Passover Lamb for our sins. When we believed God's Word by faith, applying His blood to our life which spares us from eternal death, gives us peace with God now, we look forward to how he's going to bless and lead us in the near future as well as look forward to our forever home with Him.

Have we thanked God recently for our salvation? Do we occasionally shutter at the bitter life we left behind that God saved us from? I hope and pray we do and I hope and pray you are grateful that He is a gracious and compassionate God. Something we didn't understand before we got saved. A lot of people think God is cruel, vindictive, and unbending [mostly thanks to Satan who lives to deceive people about God]. Even Christians can wrongly think that. And here's an interesting illustration in vv.5-14 that He is a compassionate God.

⁶ But some of them could not celebrate the Passover on that day because they were ceremonially unclean on account of a dead body. So they came to Moses and Aaron that same day ⁷ and said to Moses, “We have become unclean because of a dead body, but why should we be kept from presenting the Lord's offering with the other Israelites at the appointed time?” ⁸ Moses answered them, “Wait until I find out what the Lord commands concerning you.”

Moses too was compassionate and wise. He could have made a judgment based on God's Law and said ‘I am sorry but you disobeyed God. Thus says the Lord. You disobeyed Him.’ But he didn't. Every situation in life is not addressed in God's Word. So we need to pray and discern from God's Word the best decision to make. Moses does go to God and

God extends grace to any who believe (vv.5-9)

²⁷ “So they will put my name on the Israelites, and I will bless them.”

It’s crucial for us to get this in our heads that God wants to bless His people. The reason He was going to bring them into the promised land was because it was a good and spacious land flowing with milk and honey – words that describe the fruit of a healthy land and animals.

The challenge for Israel here and the challenge we face every day while living in a sin-infected world is to keep believing that God wants to bless us and give us His peace and make His face shine upon us.

Believe this is His continual purpose for your life (vv.15-18)

Moses describes the way God led Israel by His presence depicted as a cloud during the day and as a fire at night. The cloud directing them and shielding from the hot sun and the fire providing heat and giving light. And it was always above the tent of meeting, the symbolic presence where God dwelt.

¹⁷ Whenever the cloud lifted from above the Tent, the Israelites set out; wherever the cloud settled, the Israelites encamped. ¹⁸ At the Lord’s command the Israelites set out, and at his command they encamped. As long as the cloud stayed over the tabernacle, they remained in camp.

Even when they didn’t know where they were going, they always knew God was with them. So you always had to believe by faith that God’s purpose was to lead you to the place of blessing. Israel’s experience as well as our own, however, often question God’s purpose, especially when 1) we’re unsure of where He’s taking us; 2) we think His timing is off; and 3) we doubt His leading when we experience difficulties.

We know Israel knew Num. 6:24-26 was God’s purpose for them in other places. Listen to Ps. 67

¹ May God be gracious to us and bless us and make his face shine upon us, [Selah] ²that your ways may be known on earth, your salvation among all nations. ³ May the peoples praise you, O God; may all the peoples praise you. ⁴ May the nations be glad and sing for joy, for you rule the peoples justly and guide the nations of the earth. [Selah] ⁵ May the peoples praise you, O God; may all the peoples praise you. ⁶ Then the land will yield its harvest, and God, our God, will bless us. ⁷ God will bless us, and all the ends of the earth will fear him.

How are the nations supposed to come to praise God? When God’s people, who trust God’s plan to bless them and in whom He has placed His Name, live in such a way that they reflect God’s presence.

Yet His people did not always trust Him and even though God warned them about exile, they refused to repent so He sent them to Babylon in 605 BC. But even in exile the prophet Jeremiah was told by God to write a letter saying that the exile would only last 70 years and He reminded them of His continual purpose for their life in v.10

When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will come to you and fulfill my gracious promise to bring you back to this place. ¹¹ For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. ¹² Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. ¹³ You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. ¹⁴ I will be found by you,” declares the Lord, “and will bring you back from captivity. I will gather you from all the nations and

places where I have banished you,” declares the Lord, “and will bring you back to the place from which I carried you into exile.”

We see God’s purposes confirmed by Jesus as well.

John 10:9 I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. He will come in and go out, and find pasture. ¹⁰ The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.

Jesus admitted too that we would have trouble in the world:

^{16: 32} “But a time is coming, and has come, when you will be scattered, each to his own home. You will leave me all alone. Yet I am not alone, for my Father is with me. ³³ “I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.”

Jesus’ overcoming the world assures us we will too. That’s why we can trust God’s purpose to bless us ultimately in His presence knowing this is His path for us. So when we’re unsure or doubt we go to His promises and remind ourselves of these verses and Rom. 8:28-30

²⁸ And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. ²⁹ For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. ³⁰ And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.

So while we know what God’s purpose is for us, like Israel experienced

Our obedience or disobedience to God’s leading affects our enjoyment of His blessings (v.19-23)

In this summary statement of how God led Israel in the wilderness we are told that the people obeyed God each time the cloud moved or settled or the fire moved or settled.

²⁰ Sometimes the cloud was over the tabernacle only a few days; at the Lord’s command they would encamp, and then at his command they would set out. ²¹ Sometimes the cloud stayed only from evening till morning, and when it lifted in the morning, they set out. Whether by day or by night, whenever the cloud lifted, they set out. ²² Whether the cloud stayed over the tabernacle for two days or a month or a year, the Israelites would remain in camp and not set out; but when it lifted, they would set out. ²³ At the Lord’s command they encamped, and at the Lord’s command they set out. They obeyed the Lord’s order, in accordance with his command through Moses.

However, we know this was a general description and they will complain in a very short time. As do we too. We forget the promises God has made to bless us and lead us to green pastures and make us lie down in quiet waters and restore our souls and guide us in “*paths of righteousness for His Name’s sake.*” Not our Name.

God wants to bless us but the blessing He gives and we need is the security of His keeping us, the strength and em-powerment of His face shining on us, His gracious-not-treating-us-as-our-sins-deserve and His turning His favour toward us so we experience His shalom; our oneness with Him and each other.

Maybe you’re not at peace with God today because you’re unhappy with His leading. Our unpleasant circumstances might be a result of our disobedience and failure to trust God. Often our

confusion or dissatisfaction in God is because we're impatient in His timing or we don't believe He's got our needs in mind. God's good is not our comfort but His presence in our life and our conforming to Christ because He wants to shine through us so others know His Name. To trust God is to obey God knowing He wants to bless us with His presence, power and peace. *God will bless us and all the ends of the earth will fear Him.*" Believe it. Live by it.

* * * * *

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