

BIBLE BRIEFING

NUMBERS 9:15 – 12:16

“Your Wilderness Guides”

Introduction

If you are going on a wilderness adventure it's a good idea to have a guide

God would soon take His people through the wilderness to their Promised Land. He would be their guide; but He would use means to guide them:

1. To guide Israel on their journey to the Promised Land, God used a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night (9:15-23).
2. To announce the will of God to the people, He ordered the priests to blow two silver trumpets (10:1-10).
3. To strengthen and encourage the people of God, He provided several layers of leaders over and among them.

We begin by looking at the pillar that would direct their physical movements.

Numbers 9:15 Now on the day that the tabernacle was raised up, the cloud covered the tabernacle, the tent of the Testimony; from evening until morning it was above the tabernacle like the appearance of fire.

Numbers 9:16 So it was always: the cloud covered it *by day*, and the appearance of fire by night.

Numbers 9:17 Whenever the cloud was taken up from above the tabernacle, after that the children of Israel would journey; and in the place where the cloud settled, there the children of Israel would pitch their tents.

Numbers 9:18 At the command of the Lord the children of Israel would journey, and at the command of the Lord they would camp; as long as the cloud stayed above the tabernacle they remained encamped.

Numbers 9:19 Even when the cloud continued long, many days above the tabernacle, the children of Israel kept the charge of the Lord and did not journey.

Numbers 9:20 So it was, when the cloud was above the tabernacle a few days: according to the command of the Lord they would remain encamped, and according to the command of the Lord they would journey.

Numbers 9:21 So it was, when the cloud remained only from evening until morning: when the cloud was taken up in the morning, then they would journey; whether by day or by night, whenever the cloud was taken up, they would journey.

Numbers 9:22 *Whether it was* two days, a month, or a year that the cloud remained above the tabernacle, the children of Israel would remain encamped and not journey; but when it was taken up, they would journey.

Numbers 9:23 At the command of the Lord they remained encamped, and at the command of the Lord they journeyed; they kept the charge of the Lord, at the command of the Lord by the hand of Moses.

Seven times you are told the movements of the pillar were “**at the command of the Lord.**” God asked no counsel from the leaders or people; He had no set or fixed pattern of when He would ‘move.’ They had to watch and be ready at a moments notice to pack-up; or learn to stay in one place for a long time, but living day-by-day.

Two silver trumpets were blown to order their movement:

Numbers 10:1 And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying:

Numbers 10:2 “Make two silver trumpets for yourself; you shall make them of hammered work; you shall use them for calling the congregation and for directing the movement of the camps.

Numbers 10:3 When they blow both of them, all the congregation shall gather before you at the door of the tabernacle of meeting.

Numbers 10:4 But if they blow *only* one, then the leaders, the heads of the divisions of Israel, shall gather to you.

Numbers 10:5 When you sound the advance, the camps that lie on the east side shall then begin their journey.

Numbers 10:6 When you sound the advance the second time, then the camps that lie on the south side shall begin their journey; they shall sound the call for them to begin their journeys.

Numbers 10:7 And when the assembly is to be gathered together, you shall blow, but not sound the advance.

Numbers 10:8 The sons of Aaron, the priests, shall blow the trumpets; and these shall be to you as an ordinance forever throughout your generations.

Numbers 10:9 “When you go to war in your land against the enemy who oppresses you, then you shall sound an alarm with the trumpets, and you will be remembered before the Lord your God, and you will be saved from your enemies.

Numbers 10:10 Also in the day of your gladness, in your appointed feasts, and at the beginning of your months, you shall blow the trumpets over your burnt offerings and over the sacrifices of your peace offerings; and they shall be a memorial for you before your God: I *am* the Lord your God.”

Differences in the trumpet blasts – their number or cadence – would accomplish different results. Two trumpet calls would assemble the people; one would assemble the leaders. When it was time for the camp to move, the trumpets would give a signal for each set of three tribes to march. Later in Numbers you'll see the trumpets call the soldiers to prepare for battle.

After settling in the land, the blowing of trumpets was an important part of the festivals on their religious calendar.

In the time of King David, the number of trumpeters was increased to seven. (First Chronicles 15:24). In Solomon's day, there were one hundred twenty (Second Chronicles 5:12).

God was ready:

Numbers 10:11 Now it came to pass on the twentieth *day* of the second month, in the second year, that the cloud was taken up from above the tabernacle of the Testimony.

The cloud over the Tabernacle moved; the priests blew the trumpets; the priests and Levites dismantled the Tabernacle. **The march to Canaan had begun!**

Numbers 10:12 And the children of Israel set out from the Wilderness of Sinai on their journeys; then the cloud settled down in the Wilderness of Paran.

Numbers 10:13 So they started out for the first time according to the command of the Lord by the hand of Moses.

Numbers 10:14 The standard of the camp of the children of Judah set out first according to their armies; over their army was Nahshon the son of Amminadab.

Numbers 10:15 Over the army of the tribe of the children of Issachar was Nethanel the son of Zuar.

Numbers 10:16 And over the army of the tribe of the children of Zebulun was Eliab the son of Helon.

Numbers 10:17 Then the tabernacle was taken down; and the sons of Gershon and the sons of Merari set out, carrying the tabernacle.

Numbers 10:18 And the standard of the camp of Reuben set out according to their armies; over their army was Elizur the son of Shedeur.

Numbers 10:19 Over the army of the tribe of the children of Simeon was Shelumiel the son of Zurishaddai.

Numbers 10:20 And over the army of the tribe of the children of Gad was Eliasaph the son of Deuel.

Numbers 10:21 Then the Kohathites set out, carrying the holy things. (The tabernacle would be prepared for their arrival.)
Numbers 10:22 And the standard of the camp of the children of Ephraim set out according to their armies; over their army was Elishama the son of Ammihud.
Numbers 10:23 Over the army of the tribe of the children of Manasseh was Gamaliel the son of Pedahzur.
Numbers 10:24 And over the army of the tribe of the children of Benjamin was Abidan the son of Gideon.
Numbers 10:25 Then the standard of the camp of the children of Dan (the rear guard of all the camps) set out according to their armies; over their army was Ahiezer the son of Ammishaddai.
Numbers 10:26 Over the army of the tribe of the children of Asher was Pagiel the son of Ocran.
Numbers 10:27 And over the army of the tribe of the children of Naphtali was Ahira the son of Enan.
Numbers 10:28 Thus was the order of march of the children of Israel, according to their armies, when they began their journey.

Their marching order was not an option; it was an obligation. It was one of the non-negotiables.

Numbers 10:29 Now Moses said to Hobab the son of Reuel the Midianite, Moses' father-in-law, "We are setting out for the place of 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."
Numbers 10:30 And he said to him, "I will not go, but I will depart to my *own* land and to my relatives."
Numbers 10:31 So *Moses* said, "Please do not leave, inasmuch as you know how we are to camp in the wilderness, and you can be our eyes.
Numbers 10:32 And it shall be, if you go with us - indeed it shall be - that whatever good the Lord will do to us, the same we will do to you."

Hobab was Moses' brother-in-law. Moses wanted his in-laws to travel with him. Hobab preferred the comfort of his own land and people to the uncertain future that required faith. Moses convinced him to go, promising him he would share in the blessings God had promised Israel.

Commentators are split as to whether or not Moses was acting from the right spiritual motive. He said to Hobab, "[you can be our eyes.](#)" In other words, Hobab knew the terrain and could be of help on the journey – like a guide. But didn't they have the pillar to guide them?

I've taken the approach of being gracious towards Bible characters, giving them the benefit if there is any doubt. In this case, sure they had the pillar to guide them... But they could still benefit from someone who knew the lay of the land in the direction God was leading. The pillar gave the general direction; but they still needed to find water holes and pasture.

Charles Spurgeon said,

"We ought to learn from this, I think, that while we ever seek the guidance of God in providence, yet we may frequently find direction and guidance in the use of our own common sense, our own discretion with which the Lord has endowed us."

We should have an intelligent faith – using both heart and mind in determining God's will.

There was also an evangelistic aspect to what Moses did by inviting Hobab to join him. It's our privilege to invite others to join the journey.

God first takes them on a long weekend – sort of a dry-run:

Numbers 10:33 So they departed from the mountain of the Lord on a journey of three days; and the ark of the covenant of the Lord went before them for the three days' journey, to search out a resting place for them.

Numbers 10:34 And the cloud of the Lord was above them by day when they went out from the camp.

Numbers 10:35 So it was, whenever the ark set out, that Moses said:

"Rise up, O Lord!

Let Your enemies be scattered,
And let those who hate You flee before You."

Numbers 10:36 And when it rested, he said:

"Return, O Lord,
To the many thousands of Israel."

Wow! What could possibly go wrong?

Numbers 11:1 Now *when* the people complained, it displeased the Lord; for the Lord heard *it*, and His anger was aroused. So the fire of the Lord burned among them, and consumed *some* in the outskirts of the camp.

Numbers 11:2 Then the people cried out to Moses, and when Moses prayed to the Lord, the fire was quenched.

Numbers 11:3 So he called the name of the place Taberah, because the fire of the Lord had burned among them.

The Jews had about a three-day tolerance: Three days out from the Red Sea, they had complained there was no water. Now, three days on their way to Canaan, they complained again. We're not sure exactly what they were complaining about.

God fired the complainers. Notice, they were the ones “[on the outskirts](#).” You need to get involved, get into it; living on the outskirts lends itself to complaining.

Numbers 11:4 Now the mixed multitude who were among them yielded to intense craving; so the children of Israel also wept again and said: “Who will give us meat to eat?

Numbers 11:5 We remember the fish which we ate freely in Egypt, the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic;

Numbers 11:6 but now our whole being *is* dried up; *there is* nothing at all except this manna *before* our eyes!”

Numbers 11:7 Now the manna *was* like coriander seed, and its color like the color of bdellium.

Numbers 11:8 The people went about and gathered *it*, ground *it* on millstones or beat *it* in the mortar, cooked *it* in pans, and made cakes of it; and its taste was like the taste of pastry prepared with oil.

Numbers 11:9 And when the dew fell on the camp in the night, the manna fell on it.

We're not sure why this mixed-multitude of non-Israelites accompanied the children of Israel on their Exodus from Egypt. Perhaps it was the potential of a better life than the one they were leaving behind. The better life had not yet materialized for them, mostly because they thought of it in terms of the best this world could offer. Rather than be amazed and satisfied by food from heaven... They preferred the local flavors of Egypt. They had no taste for the things of God.

Materialism is more like a mirage than an oasis in your desert-time on earth.

Murmuring is a serious sin. We are told, “[do all things without murmurings and disputings](#)” (Philippians 2:14).

God had given them Moses to help lead and guide them. Moses was a man with like passions as ours. He grew weary in his well doing:

Numbers 11:10 Then Moses heard the people weeping throughout their families, everyone at the door of his tent; and the anger of the Lord was greatly aroused; Moses also was displeased.

Numbers 11:11 So Moses said to the Lord, "Why have You afflicted Your servant? And why have I not found favor in Your sight, that You have laid the burden of all these people on me?"

Numbers 11:12 Did I conceive all these people? Did I beget them, that You should say to me, 'Carry them in your bosom, as a guardian carries a nursing child,' to the land which You swore to their fathers?

Numbers 11:13 Where am I to get meat to give to all these people? For they weep all over me, saying, 'Give us meat, that we may eat.'

Numbers 11:14 I am not able to bear all these people alone, because the burden *is* too heavy for me.

Numbers 11:15 If You treat me like this, please kill me here and now - if I have found favor in Your sight - and do not let me see my wretchedness!"

Few things are more discouraging to a servant of God than to criticize him unjustly. Equally high as a discouragement is to complain about God's blessings. Moses saw his service as an "[affliction](#)," God's people as a "[burden](#)." As a result, it interrupted his own fellowship with God and he despaired of life.

Moses was not suicidal; but he did despair of life. It wasn't from any physical or chemical problem; it was from exhaustion.

God provided helpers for Moses:

Numbers 11:16 So the Lord said to Moses: "Gather to Me seventy men of the elders of Israel, whom you know to be the elders of the people and officers over them; bring them to the tabernacle of meeting, that they may stand there with you.

Numbers 11:17 Then I will come down and talk with you there. I will take of the Spirit that *is* upon you and will put *the same* upon them; and they shall bear the burden of the people with you, that you may not bear *it* yourself alone.

It's a mature thing to share the load of ministry. But you must pay attention to some things or else the helpers can themselves become burdensome:

1. First, there must be evidence that God has already raised them up and provided them. They are already "[known](#)..."
2. Second, they must be willing to stand with you in support.

3. Third, they must be likeminded about your ministry. They didn't just receive the Spirit; they shared in the Spirit of Moses' ministry.

Numbers 11:24 So Moses went out and told the people the words of the Lord, and he gathered the seventy men of the elders of the people and placed them around the tabernacle.

Numbers 11:25 Then the Lord came down in the cloud, and spoke to him, and took of the Spirit that *was* upon him, and placed *the same* upon the seventy elders; and it happened, when the Spirit rested upon them, that they prophesied, although they never did so again.

The one-time gift of prophecy was a visible sign that God had given them the Holy Spirit.

Numbers 11:26 But two men had remained in the camp: the name of one was Eldad, and the name of the other Medad. And the Spirit rested upon them. Now they *were* among those listed, but who had not gone out to the tabernacle; yet they prophesied in the camp.

Numbers 11:27 And a young man ran and told Moses, and said, "Eldad and Medad are prophesying in the camp."

Numbers 11:28 So Joshua the son of Nun, Moses' assistant, *one* of his choice men, answered and said, "Moses my lord, forbid them!"

Numbers 11:29 Then Moses said to him, "Are you zealous for my sake? Oh, that all the Lord's people were prophets *and* that the Lord would put His Spirit upon them!"

Sixty-eight of the men gathered at the Tabernacle. God granted them the Holy Spirit, as evidenced by a one-time prophecy-a-thon. Eldad and Medad were chosen, but absent. God did not discipline them in any way so it's safe to assume their absence was not out of disobedience. God poured-out His Spirit upon them right where they were!

Joshua had a zeal for the Lord. He also had a zeal for Moses. You know, there's nothing wrong with being supportive of your leaders – even zealous for them, to protect them. Joshua's zeal was tempered by his submission and Moses redirected it. Moses seems to have been back in a good temper – thankful for the Lord's help.

Numbers 11:30 And Moses returned to the camp, he and the elders of Israel.

Moses already had leaders – judges - to help him resolve social issues:

Exodus 18:25 And Moses chose able men out of all Israel, and made them heads over the people: rulers of thousands, rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens.

These seventy would help shoulder the *spiritual* issues. After all – the heart of the problem is the problem of the heart, and that requires spiritual change, not just social expertise.

Don't forget the original problem – the murmurings of the people about the lack of meat in their desert diet.

Numbers 11:18 Then you shall say to the people, 'Consecrate yourselves for tomorrow, and you shall eat meat; for you have wept in the hearing of the Lord, saying, "Who will give us meat to eat? For *it was well with us in Egypt.*" Therefore the Lord will give you meat, and you shall eat.

Numbers 11:19 You shall eat, not one day, nor two days, nor five days, nor ten days, nor twenty days,

Numbers 11:20 but *for* a whole month, until it comes out of your nostrils and becomes loathsome to you, because you have despised the Lord who is among you, and have wept before Him, saying, "Why did we ever come up out of Egypt?"'"

Numbers 11:21 And Moses said, "The people whom I *am* among *are* six hundred thousand men on foot; yet You have said, 'I will give them meat, that they may eat *for* a whole month.'

Numbers 11:22 Shall flocks and herds be slaughtered for them, to provide enough for them? Or shall all the fish of the sea be gathered together for them, to provide enough for them?"

Numbers 11:23 And the Lord said to Moses, "Has the Lord's arm been shortened? Now you shall see whether what I say will happen to you or not."

Numbers 11:31 Now a wind went out from the Lord, and it brought quail from the sea and left *them* fluttering near the camp, about a day's journey on this side and about a day's journey on the other side, all around the camp, and about two cubits above the surface of the ground.

The birds were on their regular migration when the Lord diverted them by sending a wind. "**Two cubits high**" is approximately three feet. They may have been stacked three-feet deep; there were millions of them!

Numbers 11:32 And the people stayed up all that day, all night, and all the next day, and gathered the quail (he who gathered least gathered ten homers); and they spread *them* out for themselves all around the camp.

They busied themselves salting & drying the birds for future consumption. Look at all the extra work to have quail. Manna required only brief gathering.

Numbers 11:33 But while the meat was still between their teeth, before it was chewed, the wrath of the Lord was aroused against the people, and the Lord struck the people with a very great plague.

Numbers 11:34 So he called the name of that place Kibroth Hattaavah, because there they buried the people who had yielded to craving.

Numbers 11:35 From Kibroth Hattaavah the people moved to Hazeroth, and camped at Hazeroth.

The meaning of the name of the place was '*Graves of Lust.*' Your lusts are a graveyard waiting to be inhabited.

God had warned the Jews that the way they treated the manna would be a test:

Exodus 16:4 Then the Lord said to Moses, "Behold, I will rain bread from heaven for you. And the people shall go out and gather a certain quota every day, that I may test them, whether they will walk in My law or not.

In rejecting the manna, they were rejecting the Lord and His care over their lives.

Our equivalent is the Word of God. We're to feed and feast on it; it is our daily provision. When we grow discouraged or dissatisfied with God's provision in and for our lives... We are in danger of rejecting His Word in favor of the things of this world.

Often times, when God wants to judge a people, He simply gives them what they want! You don't even recognize it's a judgment; you think it's a blessing... Until it reveals itself as a plague on your heart or your home or in the household of faith.

There were several 'layers' of leadership among the children of Israel:

1. They were led by God through Moses as Moses related to them the things God told him through the veil.
2. They were led by God as He used the social judges & spiritual Elders to help them.

3. They were led by the High Priest and the assisting priests in their worship.

In addition, Moses' sister, Miriam, was respected among God's people. After all, she had been used by God to save Moses' life when he was sent floating down the Nile River; and she was a prophetess who had led the Jewish women in praising God.

Sister Miriam is about to create some problems:

Numbers 12:1 Then Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses because of the Ethiopian woman whom he had married; for he had married an Ethiopian woman.
Numbers 12:2 So they said, "Has the Lord indeed spoken only through Moses? Has He not spoken through us also?" And the Lord heard *it*.
Numbers 12:3 (Now the man Moses was very humble, more than all men who were on the face of the earth.)

Aaron (Moses' brother) was involved; but three pieces of evidence seem to indicate that Miriam was the leader in this rebellion:

1. She is mentioned first – something unusual in itself.
2. The verb for "**spoke**" is in a feminine form.
3. Only Miriam is disciplined.

Miriam attacked Moses new wife. It's likely that his first wife, Zipporah, had died. He remarried a woman from "**Ethiopia**." As long as Moses did not marry a woman from Canaan, his marriage was acceptable to the Lord (Exodus 34:12-16).

Miriam attacked the wife. It's a common strategy of Satan. Attack the wife, or the children, and the ministry is weakened and could fail.

Truth is, this had nothing to do with Moses' wife. Miriam's real issue was within her own selfishness: , "**Has the Lord indeed spoken only through Moses? Has He not spoken through us also?**" She was jealous that her little brother got all the press! And she felt threatened by the new distribution of spiritual leadership to seventy Elders. Aaron was certainly guilty; he was a follower – easily swayed.

Moses wisely left his defense to the Lord. He responded with humility.

Numbers 12:4 Suddenly the Lord said to Moses, Aaron, and Miriam, “Come out, you three, to the tabernacle of meeting!” So the three came out.

Numbers 12:5 Then the Lord came down in the pillar of cloud and stood *in* the door of the tabernacle, and called Aaron and Miriam. And they both went forward.

Numbers 12:6 Then He said,

“Hear now My words:

If there is a prophet among you,

I, the Lord, make Myself known to him in a vision;

I speak to him in a dream.

Numbers 12:7 Not so with My servant Moses;

He *is* faithful in all My house.

Numbers 12:8 I speak with him face to face,

Even plainly, and not in dark sayings;

And he sees the form of the Lord.

Why then were you not afraid

To speak against My servant Moses?”

Numbers 12:9 So the anger of the Lord was aroused against them, and He departed.

Numbers 12:10 And when the cloud departed from above the tabernacle, suddenly Miriam *became* leprous, as *white* as snow. Then Aaron turned toward Miriam, and there she was, a leper.

Miriam and Aaron had their assigned ministries. They should have been content. God had chosen Moses. To keep sin from spreading, God acted swiftly in judgment.

Numbers 12:11 So Aaron said to Moses, “Oh, my lord! Please do not lay *this* sin on us, in which we have done foolishly and in which we have sinned.

Numbers 12:12 Please do not let her be as one dead, whose flesh is half consumed when he comes out of his mother’s womb!”

Numbers 12:13 So Moses cried out to the Lord, saying, “Please heal her, O God, I pray!”

Aaron was the High Priest, with the responsibility to intercede for God’s people. Here he found himself in the embarrassing position of having to intercede for himself and his sister.

Moses – *what humility!*

Numbers 12:14 Then the Lord said to Moses, “If her father had but spit in her face, would she not be shamed seven days? Let her be shut out of the camp seven days, and afterward she may be received *again*.”

Numbers 12:15 So Miriam was shut out of the camp seven days, and the people did not journey till Miriam was brought in *again*.

Numbers 12:16 And afterward the people moved from Hazeroth and camped in the Wilderness of Paran.

Shame for Miriam brought delay for the people. The rebellious person can hinder the progress of the entire congregation.

Conclusion

God still guides:

1. We do not have His visible presence in the pillar; we have something better – His invisible presence, through the indwelling Holy Spirit.
2. Trumpets are not a big part of our daily movement... But we are awaiting a trumpet blast from heaven that will raise the dead in Christ and then gather all the living believers in the Rapture of the Church.
3. Moses desired that all God's people prophesy. We may not all prophesy; but we are a royal priesthood, able to counsel and encourage one another. Each of us can be a Hobab to someone else – a set of eyes to help guide them through the experiences of life.
4. The names may be different, but God still gives us layers of leadership.

Jesus promised He would never leave or forsake you... And He won't! He'll lead and guide you as you avail yourself of the means He has provided.