

February 7

Numbers 9 (partially) 10 and 11

Today we read a Numbers chapters 10, 11 and brief excerpt from Chapter 9. I want you to notice two things about Numbers 10 - the first is that the cloud, signifying the presence of God to guide and protect them, appeared for the first time right after the first Passover and it moved them from Sinai into their journey toward the Promised Land immediately after the second Passover. We see that this theme of complete dependence upon God to lead them is further underscored in chapter 9 by the words repeated three times in verses 18, 20 and 23. *"At the Lord's command they would encamp and then at His command they would set out."* They didn't pore over maps figuring the pros and cons of different routes to the Holy Land - they simply waited for the cloud to move. When it moved they moved; where it went, they went; when it stopped they stopped. Moses didn't call the shots. Moses didn't decide where they would stay or whether they would stay in that spot for one day, one month or one year. All of that was up to God.

The second is that we saw here the first mention of the two silver trumpets that God commanded Moses to make, in order to quickly communicate with the nation, whether they were on the march or in the encampment. Old Jewish tradition tells us that long blasts of these trumpets were used to assemble the people for meetings and worship. Short staccato blasts sounded the call to battle and the signal to move out on the march. From a very early time, then, the people of God have been trained to listen for a trumpet blast. And we too wait in eager expectation of a trumpet blast - the one the Scripture calls "the last Trumpet" and oh, what a day that will be.

In chapter 11, after an exceedingly long period of three days, (72 hours again) we read, *"the people complained about their hardships in the hearing of the Lord."* Three days! 72 hours - interestingly enough that is exactly the length of time after the miracle at the Red Sea before they started complaining in the Book of Exodus. Are you kidding me? After all that God had done - after all that they had seen - they spend just three days walking in the wilderness and Moses has a rebellion on his hands. No wonder his attitude is, 'God, what have I done to displease you so that you put the burden of all these people on me? If I have found favor in your eyes just kill me now. I can't take any more if this!'

And the complaints are incredible - 'we don't like manna! Give us something good to eat. Remember how good the food tasted in Egypt? The fish - and those wonderful Egyptians overlords - they gave us the food for free - the cucumbers, melons, leeks and onions and garlic!' Do you believe that? Not one word about slavery - no remembrance of the whips - totally forgetting their 'lack of freedom - the cruelty of the overseers - not one word about 400 years without any pay or money - just 'remember those nice Egyptian who fed us?' Friend, the next time you are all set to complain about the circumstances in which you find yourself, remember just one thing. Memory is a very selective thing. We only really remember the things we want to remember, and we have this incredible

propensity for harkening back to the good old days that weren't all that good when we were just trying to survive them.

Until we experience the New Heavens and New Earth, where everything really will be perfect, we are going to be continually in the position of having a regular, daily choice to make. We can choose to focus on the blessings and praise God for them and move forward, or we can focus on the problems and whine and complain about them. That will foster an ungrateful and rebellious spirit and cause us to lose our joy, our victory and our peace with God. But we can do it if we want.

Choose your attitude today - one of joy and gratitude, not of complaining. It could be about cafeteria food, your boss, your marriage, your church, your health. Choose joy rather than complaints and it will be amazing how much better your experience is!

There is another really important dynamic occurring in this passage. We are looking at the first clinically certifiable case of ministerial burnout. That's what is wrong with Moses here. The people, the work, the pressure - it all got to him and it wore him down. He's burned out. We'll see some other cases of this before our tour through Scripture comes to its completion. The other most important case that leaps into my mind is that of Elijah who also burned out in the service of God.

Did you notice God's solution? He does not rebuke Moses for his frustration or his exhaustion. God's solution is: *"gather the elders together and I'll put my Spirit on them too and they can help you share the load."* How often I need to be reminded of this. Moses was as close as the Old Testament comes to the idea of a superstar minister - one omni-competent individual who can do it all. But friends, note this and note it well. Moses couldn't do it alone! *"Bring the elders,"* God said, *"and I will take of the Spirit that is on you and put the Spirit on them. They will help you carry the burden of the people so that you will not have to carry it alone."*

I am a pastor. Your position might be a very different one, but all of us are carrying responsibilities and if they are too heavy, God's word to us is "share them" with other Spirit-filled people and together we'll get the job done without killing anyone. Here in the church, I need elders to work with me side by side. Gifted teachers fill every classroom. Pastors carry the leadership load. As a body we need EVERY person to do their part so that everyone will be blessed and nobody will be burned out.

There is an amusing but instructive sidebar story here as well. Two of the 70, upon whom God was going to place His spirit, were Eldad and Medad, and they missed the meeting. They're still in the camp when this little Pentecostal experience happens and they start prophesying. This really bothers Joshua who hasn't quite got the idea yet. 'Moses! They're trying to take over your job! They are prophesying among the people.' But Moses has a true pastor's heart. *"I wish that all the Lord's people were prophets and that the Lord would put His spirit on all of them."*

Friend, in the New Testament, at the real Pentecost, that is just exactly what God did. The idea of one superstar pastor who runs around doing everything is absolutely abhorrent to the one who really understands the Scripture. The word to us is: 'Share the burden and get the ministry done!'

May God's blessings rest on you this day.