



Numbers - Chapter Ten

I Numbers 1:1-10:10 - Israel Prepares to Enter the Land (continues/concludes)

Summary of Chapter Ten

God instructs Moses to have two silver trumpets made and sets out the regulations for their use. One trumpet signifies the calling together of the leaders whereas both trumpets signify an alarm. Initially, the alarm was sounded to signify the breaking of camp according to the order of march. The trumpets would later be sounded to draw the fighting men to battle and to celebrate national festivals.

It was almost a year since the Israelites had arrived at Sinai. They had witnessed the power of God on the mountain, received the statutes of God, built the tabernacle, the Ark of the Covenant, and all the other utensils that were required for service, had witnessed the priests and Levites being consecrated for service, but now at last it was time to set out towards the Promised Land.

I.j Numbers 10:1-10 - The Silver Trumpets

How was Israel to move in step with the cloud of God's presence? A large group of people needed to be marshalled, or else any movement was bound to be chaotic. So the primary purpose of the trumpets was to signal when the different tribes were to set out. However, they are also to be used to summon the congregation or the chiefs. Their use in war and on the festival days is also prescribed (vv.9-10).

Blowing the trumpets was more than just a way of summoning the people to come to the tabernacle or to follow the cloud; it was a kind of prayer, a plea to God to remember his people and their needs, that one may be remembered before the Lord God.

Two silver trumpets, according to Josephus (Jewish Antiquities 3.291), were just over a foot in length and flared. They are pictured on Titus' arch among the plunder he brought to Rome from Jerusalem. Two ways of blowing the trumpets are mentioned here: simply blowing, and sounding an alarm. The difference is that blowing involves long notes, whereas sounding an alarm is done with staccato blasts. 'On your days of rejoicing' would include such occasions as festivals or victory celebrations after battle.



The Arch of Titus in Rome

¹ The Lord spoke to Moses, saying: ² Make two silver trumpets; you shall make them of hammered work; and you shall use them for summoning the congregation, and for breaking camp.

Numbers 10:1-2

Make two silver trumpets. The two silver trumpets were for use in directing the movement of the camps for marching and for battle, and also for gathering the nation together for an assembly: <<*Moses sent them to the war, a thousand from each tribe, along with Phinehas son of Eleazar the priest, with the vessels of the sanctuary and the trumpets for sounding the alarm in his*

hand>> (Numbers 31:6), and: <<*Praise him with trumpet sound; praise him with lute and harp!*>> (Psalm 150:3).

You shall use them for summoning the congregation, and for breaking camp.

The trumpets were essential tools for the journey to the Promised Land. Without them it would be very difficult to assemble the nation and march towards their destination. Israel needed tools to come into the Promised Land.

Although this passage does not name any particular skilled worker to design and oversee the making of the trumpets, Bezalel seems to be a good candidate for the role: <<*Then Moses said to the Israelites: See, the Lord has called by name Bezalel son of Uri son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah; he has filled him with divine spirit, with skill, intelligence, and knowledge in every kind of craft, to devise artistic designs, to work in gold, silver, and bronze, in cutting stones for setting, and in carving wood, in every kind of craft*>> (Exodus 35:30-33).

³ When both are blown, the whole congregation shall assemble before you at the entrance of the tent of meeting. ⁴ But if only one is blown, then the leaders, the heads of the tribes of Israel, shall assemble before you. ⁵ When you blow an alarm, the camps on the east side shall set out; ⁶ when you blow a second alarm, the camps on the south side shall set out. An alarm is to be blown whenever they are to set out. ⁷ But when the assembly is to be gathered, you shall blow, but you shall not sound an alarm. ⁸ The sons of Aaron, the priests, shall blow the trumpets; this shall be a perpetual institution for you throughout your generations. ⁹ When you go to war in your land against the adversary who oppresses you, you shall sound an alarm with the trumpets, so that you may be remembered before the Lord your God and be saved from your enemies. ¹⁰ Also on your days of rejoicing, at your appointed festivals, and at the beginnings of your months, you shall blow the trumpets over your burnt-offerings and over your sacrifices of well-being; they shall serve as a reminder on your behalf before the Lord your God: I am the Lord your God.

Numbers 10:3-10

When both are blown, the whole congregation shall assemble before you at the entrance of the tent of meeting. Distinctive sounds were made to indicate gathering for assembly, marching, or warfare. God also promised to hear the trumpet of Israel in warfare, and to act on behalf of the nation.

On your days of rejoicing. Trumpets were also to be sounded at the various festivals; they were a way of celebrating God's people coming together and the

presence of the Lord with them. God will use the sound of a trumpet to gather his people for the ultimate assembling together, the rapture of the church, to meet the Lord in the air: <<*For the Lord himself, with a cry of command, with the archangel's call and with the sound of God's trumpet, will descend from heaven, and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up in the clouds together with them to meet the Lord in the air; and so we will be with the Lord for ever. Therefore encourage one another with these words*>> (1 Thessalonians 4:16-18).

II Numbers 10:11-12:16 - Marching from Sinai to Kadesh

As pointed out above, the Book of Numbers alternates static sections devoted to law-giving and organisation with travelogue. In Chapters 10-12 Israel moves from the foot of Mount Sinai to Kadesh-barnea, an oasis on the southern border of Canaan. Initially all runs smoothly.

On the move, the people proceeded in the formation specified in Chapter 2. The Judahite group of tribes headed the procession, as described in 2:1-9. They were followed by the Gershonite Levites with their two wagons loaded with the tabernacle curtains, and the Merarite Levites with four wagons loaded with poles and pegs as described in 3:21-26 and 3:33-37. These Levites preceded the Kohathites so that they could erect the tabernacle before the Kohathites arrived. Then the sacred furniture carried by the Kohathites could be installed immediately in the tabernacle.

The Gershonites and Merarites were followed by the Reubenite tribes as described in 2:10-16. Then right at the centre of the procession came the most sacred items of tabernacle furniture, carried by the as described in 3:27-32. However, it appears that the ark itself went out in front of the whole procession; like the cloud, it symbolised and conveyed God's presence and his guidance of his people. The rear of the procession was brought up by the Ephraimite and Danite groups of tribes as described in 2:18-31.

II.a Numbers 10:11-36 - Departure from Sinai

The Israelites had been encamped at Mount Sinai for more than a year in order to receive the law and make all the articles for the tabernacle. Now it was time to strike camp and resume their journey towards the Promised Land.

II.a.i Numbers 10:11-28 - Israel strikes camp at Sinai

The people of Israel now leave Sinai to begin its journey to the Promised Land under the guidance and direction of the *shekinah* glory, i.e. the dwelling glory cloud. This text describes the striking of the Israelite camp and the order of march of the tribes.

¹¹ In the second year, in the second month, on the twentieth day of the month, the cloud lifted from over the tabernacle of the covenant.

¹² Then the Israelites set out by stages from the wilderness of Sinai, and the cloud settled down in the wilderness of Paran. ¹³ They set out for the first time at the command of the Lord by Moses.

Numbers 10:11-13

In the second month, on the twentieth day of the month would have been after the alternative date for the Passover Festival (9:11), allowing those who were ceremonially unclean for the primary date of celebration.

Then the Israelites set out by stages from the wilderness of Sinai. One would expect the people to have felt tremendous excitement, pride, joy, and safety in God's protection when they set out in this great procession, with trumpets, banners and, in the very front, the cloud of the presence of God himself. They were seeing dramatic evidence of the fulfilment of God's promises to Abraham hundreds of years earlier. Sadly, however, they soon complain (Chapter 11), rebel (Chapter 14), and oppose Moses' authority (Chapter 16).

As the cloud began to move, one might imagine the huge sense of excitement that flowed through the people, now they were on their way to the Promised Land! Previously, their journey had been from Egypt and slavery; now it was to Canaan and liberty.

They set out for the first time at the command of the Lord by Moses. This was the first time Israel marched as an organised, prepared nation. They were not the same group that had escaped Egypt as a disorganised crowd. They had been fully prepared to walk as Promised Land people and it was all focused towards this exact point: bringing them into the Promised Land:

- They were ordered and organised.
- They were cleansed and purified.
- They were set apart and blessed.
- They were taught how to give and how to function as priests.
- They were made to remember judgement spared and deliverance brought.
- They were given God's presence as a guide and the tools needed to lead the people.

One would be tempted to think that after such extensive preparation, a virtual transformation from slaves to Promised Land people, the actual entering into the Promised Land would be easy. This was not the case. The preparation was exactly that, preparation. Ahead of them were still their greatest challenges, challenges that can only be met by faith. A soldier might think rigorous training

exercises finish something, but it does not. It only prepares for a greater challenge: the actual battle itself.

The cloud settled down in the wilderness of Paran. This marked the next place where the Israelites would camp. Moses refers to this place in his final blessing upon the people as they stand on the borders of the Promised Land: <<*This is the blessing with which Moses, the man of God, blessed the Israelites before his death. He said: The Lord came from Sinai, and dawned from Seir upon us; he shone forth from Mount Paran. With him were myriads of holy ones; at his right, a host of his own*>> (Deuteronomy 33:1-2).

¹⁴ The standard of the camp of Judah set out first, company by company, and over the whole company was Nahshon son of Amminadab. ¹⁵ Over the company of the tribe of Issachar was Nethanel son of Zuar; ¹⁶ and over the company of the tribe of Zebulun was Eliab son of Helon.

Numbers 10:14-16

The standard of the camp of Judah set out first. Judah, the tribe from who the Messiah would come, were accompanied by the tribes of Issachar and Zebulun, and led the people out on their way to the Promised Land.

¹⁷ Then the tabernacle was taken down, and the Gershonites and the Merarites, who carried the tabernacle, set out. ¹⁸ Next the standard of the camp of Reuben set out, company by company; and over the whole company was Elizur son of Shedeur. ¹⁹ Over the company of the tribe of Simeon was Shelumiel son of Zurishaddai, ²⁰ and over the company of the tribe of Gad was Eliasaph son of Deuel.

Numbers 10:17-20

Then the tabernacle was taken down. It is not clear how long it would take to dismantle the tabernacle and pack it for transportation but it seems that the three tribes in the vanguard would be some distance ahead of the Gershonites and the Merarites, who were protected by the tribes of Reuben, Simeon and Gad.

²¹ Then the Kohathites, who carried the holy things, set out; and the tabernacle was set up before their arrival. ²² Next the standard of the Ephraimite camp set out, company by company, and over the whole company was Elishama son of Ammihud. ²³ Over the company of the tribe of Manasseh was Gamaliel son of Pedahzur, ²⁴ and over the company of the tribe of Benjamin was Abidan son of Gideoni.

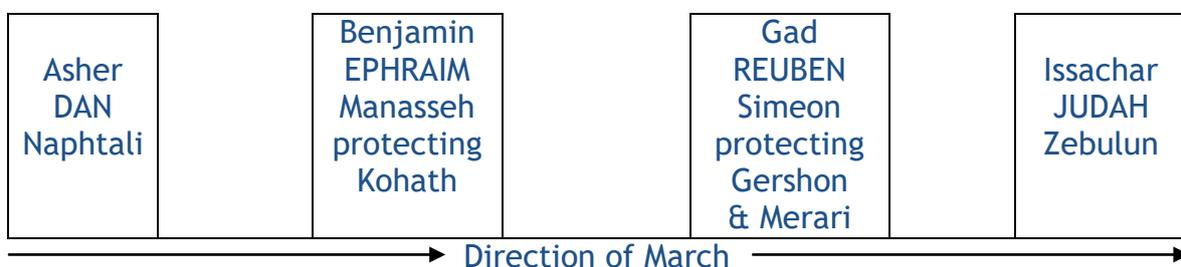
Numbers 10:21-24

Behind those transporting the tabernacle the Kohathites, who carried the holy things, set out protected by the tribes of Ephraim, Manasseh and Benjamin. This left sufficient time for the Gershonites and the Merarites to set up the tabernacle when they arrived at the new location for their camp before the Kohathites arrived with the holy articles that were to be placed inside the tabernacle. The holy things were to be carried on the shoulders and not in carts and if they arrived before the tabernacle was set up there may have been the temptation to place them down on the ground outside of the tabernacle!

²⁵ Then the standard of the camp of Dan, acting as the rearguard of all the camps, set out, company by company, and over the whole company was Ahiezer son of Ammishaddai. ²⁶ Over the company of the tribe of Asher was Pagiel son of Ocran, ²⁷ and over the company of the tribe of Naphtali was Ahira son of Enan. ²⁸ This was the order of march of the Israelites, company by company, when they set out.

Numbers 10:25-28

This was the order of march of the Israelites. The last three tribes of Dan, Asher and Naphtali formed the rearguard to protect those in from attack. The ordering was given by God in Numbers Chapter Two.



II.a.ii Numbers 10:29-36 - Request to Hobab to Accompany Israel

The relationship of Hobab and Reuel to Jethro (Exodus 3:1 and 18:1-2) is uncertain. The least difficult solution is that Reuel and Jethro are alternative names of Moses' father-in-law. This would make Hobab Moses' brother-in-law. In Judges 4:11 Hobab's descendants are called Kenites, whereas here he is called a Midianite. Probably the Kenites were a subgroup of the Midianites.

The Lord has promised good to Israel, that is, the land and Hobab is offered part of the promise but he apparently rejects the offer of a share in Canaan, in stark contrast to Abraham's response to God's call in Genesis 12:1-4. It is not clear if Moses' subsequent entreaty persuaded him to change his mind, for the text does not say. In Numbers Chapters 25 and 31 the Midianites are fierce enemies of Israel, but in Judges 1:16 and 4:11 the Kenites are Israel's allies, living in Canaan.

Verses 33-36 describe the first three-day march from Sinai toward Kadesh led by the cloud and the ark. The repetition of three days emphasises the short distance travelled; it does not imply the ark was separated from the main party by this distance. As the ark set out and rested (vv.35-36), Moses expressed his confidence that God would bring Israel successfully into Canaan.

²⁹ Moses said to Hobab 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 to Israel.'³⁰ But he said to him, 'I will not go, but I will go back to my own land and to my kindred.'³¹ He said, 'Do not leave us, for you know where we should camp in the wilderness, and you will serve as eyes for us.'³² Moreover, if you go with us, whatever good the Lord does for us, the same we will do for you.'

Numbers 10:29-32

Come with us, and we will treat you well. Moses was a wise enough leader to know his limitations, and to know that he needed help. Instead of just saying, "well, God got us this far and he'll see us through without Hobab" he knew God's help often comes through men like Hobab. Although Israel was guided by God, there was still help needed by man, men like Hobab. God plans it this way, often arranging it so his help comes to his people partially through people he has ordained to help them.

The Lord has promised good to Israel. It should always be remembered that, although God's promises can always be trusted, they are usually conditional on his people being obedient to his will.

Do not leave us. Since he knew God could use Hobab in a significant way, Moses was willing to appeal to him, and not take an initial 'no' as his final answer: <<*What do you think? A man had two sons; he went to the first and said, "Son, go and work in the vineyard today." He answered, "I will not"; but later he changed his mind and went*>> (Matthew 21:28-29).

You will serve as eyes for us. Hobab was a man raised in the wilderness of Midian and used to caring for the sheep as did his sisters. He would be able detect whether the desert was safe or not: <<*I was eyes to the blind, and feet to the lame*>> (Job 29:15).

³³ So they set out from the mount of the Lord on three days' journey with the ark of the covenant of the Lord going before them for three days' journey, to seek out a resting-place for them,³⁴ the cloud of the Lord being over them by day when they set out from the camp.

³⁵ Whenever the ark set out, Moses would say,
‘Arise, O Lord, let your enemies be scattered,
and your foes flee before you.’

³⁶ And whenever it came to rest, he would say,
‘Return, O Lord of the ten thousand thousands of Israel.’

Numbers 10:33-36

The cloud of the Lord being over them by day when they set out from the camp. As they began the journey to the Promised Land, they were guided by God’s presence, and not by themselves. They followed the cloud no matter where God led them. If they were to camp in a rough place, they did it. If they were told to go on from a comfortable place, they did it. They allowed themselves to be guided by God, not by their own desire for comfort and ease.

Arise, O Lord, let your enemies be scattered, and your foes flee before you. This was the prayer of Moses when the presence of God led them on: <<***Now rise up, O Lord God, and go to your resting-place, you and the ark of your might. Let your priests, O Lord God, be clothed with salvation, and let your faithful rejoice in your goodness***>> (2 Chronicles 6:41). The idea was simple: “God, go before us and take care of our enemies. It is too dangerous ahead unless you do so!” What a fitting prayer for every believer to pray! God has things that lay before them, places to lead them, should Christians not pray this same prayer? Is this not a fitting prayer also by which to remember the glory and strength of the resurrected Lord? When Jesus rose up, were not all his enemies scattered? Who dared oppose him? Are not all victories found in his risen glory?

Return, O Lord of the ten thousand thousands of Israel. This was the prayer of Moses when God’s presence stopped, and indicated a place to camp. Moses then prayed, “Here we camp, Lord. Stay with us.” God sometimes tells his people to move on, sometimes tells them to remain in camp; either is right when Christians allow themselves to be guided by his presence. When God appears absent it is normally because the people have drifted away from him: <<***Why, O Lord, do you make us stray from your ways and harden our heart, so that we do not fear you? Turn back for the sake of your servants, for the sake of the tribes that are your heritage***>> (Isaiah 63:17).