

The Long Journey Begins
Numbers 10 – 14
February 5, 2012

What does the Bible Mean?

Read. Numbers 10: 1-10

Moses is to make two silver trumpets. There are at least three Hebrew words for trumpets. Some are for animal bones. This word is for a metal trumpet. These are for sacred – not secular – purposes. They were to only be blown by the priests.

The slender, about a foot long with a bell at the end trumpets were to be used as an alarm – several blasts – and as a long blow to gather the people and/or leaders. The alarm could be a battle cry or a shout for joy or as when the foundation for the second Temple was set, for rejoicing.

Read. Numbers 10: 11-14

On the twentieth day of the second month of the second year in Sinai, the cloud lifted from the tabernacle and the people moved out into the Sinai to Paran. The exact location of Paran is not known. It is referred to in the Old Testament. It is likely located south of the Negev roughly east from the tip of the Gulf of Aqaba. The scripture continues tribe by tribe to describe the procession of people on the journey. The journey was for three days (V 33) and the cloud was upon them (V 34). When they set out Moses said,

“Rise up, O Lord!
May your enemies be scattered;
may your foes flee before you.” (V 35)

When they rested Moses said,

“Return, O Lord,
to the countless thousands of Israel.” (V 36)

In Verses 29-32, Moses tells his father-in-law that the people were setting out to the promised land. Moses urged him to come along, but he refused in order to stay in his own land with his own kin.

Read. Numbers 11: 1-3

This is the first rebellion by the people against God. The “complaints” suggested acts of faithlessness. God's anger burns the edges of the camp and God's anger is only mitigated by Moses' intercession.

Read. Numbers 11: 4-9

The *rabble with them* complained about the food. They were not satisfied with the manna that God had faithfully supplied daily. They said that they missed the meat and garnished food in Egypt. Perhaps the rabble were part of the non Israelites who came out of Egypt.

The passage continues. Moses is beyond himself. He asks God why he has brought such trouble on his servant. He helped deliver the people. Why must he now carry them in his arms as infants? The task is too much!

God instructs Moses to assemble seventy elders before the tabernacle. God will share some of the Spirit given to Moses with the leaders. They will then share the burdens.

Read. Numbers 11: 23

Moses then assembled the elders and God shared his Spirit with the others and they prophesied. Two other elders, but not part of the seventy, also prophesied. Moses' aide, Joshua, asked Moses to stop them. Moses protested that he wished all the people would have God's Spirit and would prophesy.

Read. Numbers 11: 29-30

We see here that people outside the institutional leadership may well have genuine words and thoughts from God.

Now God brought a wind and quail were driven to them as far as a day's walk from the camp. The people went out. No one gathered less than ten bushels! But before they even chewed the meat (while it was between their teeth), God was angered and he struck them with a severe plague.

Read. Numbers 12: 1-9

Moses is described as more *humble* (or meek) than anyone else on the earth. He was not concerned with his status but only to be God's servant.

After Miriam and Aaron complained, God loses no time. He assembles Miriam, Aaron and Moses outside the camp. God affirmed that his relationship with Moses is special. God left (the cloud lifted) and Miriam was leprous like snow. Why was Miriam singled out? Some suggest that it was because leprosy would have kept Aaron from performing priestly duties for a time. Aaron pleaded with Moses to not hold their foolishness against them and Moses called to God for healing. God answered that she should be held for seven days outside the camp. The people stayed and after seven days went on in the desert of Aaran.

Chapter 13 begins with God telling Moses to send twelve men into Canaan to explore the land. The Israelites are now at the doorstep of their destination. The men were leaders because important judgments were needed. The men included Caleb, son of Jephunneh, from the tribe of Judah and Joshua (Hoshea), son of Nun from Ephraim.

Read. Numbers 13: 17-20

They went as far as Hebron or perhaps even as far as the border of Syria. They brought back clusters of grapes that took two men with a pole to carry one cluster. They were gone for forty days. They came back to Kadesh, an oasis where much of the forty years in the wilderness would be spent. It is on the border between the Wilderness of Paran and the Wilderness of Zin about fifty miles south of Beersheba. When they returned, they gave their report. The land did flow with milk and honey (was very fertile). They presented the grapes. *But*, the people are powerful, the cities are fortified and large. Even the giant descendants of Anak were there. They reported that the Amalekites, Hittites,

Jebusites, Amorites and Canaanites lived there.

Read. Numbers 13: 30-33

The conversation continues in Chapter 14. The people were fearful. Why would God bring us here to have us die by the sword. Let's find a leader and go back to Egypt.

Ten of the people reported in the negative. They saw the land as dangerous (devours its inhabitants, but all lands have difficulties) *and* they were only grasshoppers (or weaklings – inferior) in their own sight. They didn't recognize the part of God in the equation! Caleb and Joshua (in Chapter 14) saw it differently. They saw that God was with them. They could rely on him!

Read. Numbers 14: 6-9

The *entire assembly* talked about stoning Joshua and Caleb. Then God appeared.

- “How long will these people treat me with contempt?”
- “How long will they refuse to believe in me, in spite of all the miraculous signs I have performed among them?”

It isn't only man who cries, “How long?” God also cries, “How long?” We need to remember that there may be limits even to the patience of God.

God would strike the people down with a plague and make a new, stronger nation out of Moses.

Moses protested (he was very humble). When the Egyptians hear of this they will tell others who already know of the great power of God. If God destroys the people now everyone will say, “The Lord was not able to bring these people into the land he promised them on oath; so he slaughtered them in the desert.”

Read. Numbers 14: 17-19

Moses refers back to the forgiveness for erecting the golden calf in Exodus. Then God had allowed the people to be re-established as a holy people. This is more serious. God will (in two versions) forgive the people by allowing the next generation to enter the promised land. The old generation will die in the desert over the next forty years (a year for each day of the mission). The story references the census in Chapter 1 which numbered the people from twenty years old and upward. Only the young would survive. Only two members of the old generation, Joshua and Caleb, who trusted in God, will enter the promised land.

Read. Numbers 14: 20-25

Read. Numbers 14: 26-35

The ten men who spread the bad report were struck down and died of a plague. Only Joshua and Caleb of the twelve on the mission survived.

The people mourned the deaths. The next morning they went to the hill country. “We have sinned. We will go up to the place the Lord promised.” Moses warned them that their efforts would not

succeed because, “God is not with you.” They went anyway and were beaten off by the Amalekites and Canaanites. Sometimes when we miss an opportunity, it is too late.

What does the Bible mean to me?

- When God wants to get your attention and give you marching orders, what “trumpet blast” does he use?
- What adventure has God mobilized you or the church to do? How have you/we prepared for this?
- What is the attitude of the Israelites when they were critical of the manna God had provided?
- When do we get discouraged about our situation in life?
- What complaints damage our relationship with God?
- Why does Moses want to quit?
- Why did Moses wish that all God's people could prophesy as even the two “outsiders” did?
- Israel was on the edge of realizing their promised land. Might we be that close and don't realize it?
- When you consider God's call, do you feel like a “grasshopper”? What giants do you fear?
- What can we do to ensure that our fears do not interfere with God's work in our lives?