

The Journey

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Numbers 9:18-22

Num 9:18 At the commandment of the LORD the children of Israel journeyed, and at the commandment of the LORD they pitched: as long as the cloud abode upon the tabernacle they rested in their tents.

Num 9:19 And when the cloud tarried long upon the tabernacle many days, then the children of Israel kept the charge of the LORD, and journeyed not.

Num 9:20 And *so* it was, when the cloud was a few days upon the tabernacle; according to the commandment of the LORD they abode in their tents, and according to the commandment of the LORD they journeyed.

Num 9:21 And *so* it was, when the cloud abode from even unto the morning, and *that* the cloud was taken up in the morning, then they journeyed: whether *it was* by day or by night that the cloud was taken up, they journeyed.

Num 9:22 Or *whether it were* two days, or a month, or a year, that the cloud tarried upon the tabernacle, remaining thereon, the children of Israel abode in their tents, and journeyed not: but when it was taken up, they journeyed.

There is so much that God's people can learn from the Old Testament about spiritual things that relate to the Lord's church. When we look at the doings of the children of Israel there are multitudes of times that biblical accounts about them are temporal symbology of spiritual things about the church. Some religious teachers have gone so far as to say that Israel was the Lord's church in the ancient days, but Israel was not the Lord's church. Jesus himself established His church during His earthly ministry. Those who refuse that truth teach that because Stephen made this statement when speaking of Moses being with the children of Israel in the wilderness that it was the church: (Act 7:38) "This is he, that was in the church in the wilderness with the angel which spake to him in the mount Sinai, and *with* our fathers: who received the lively oracles to give unto us...." I want to remind all of you that the Greek word *ekklesia* was translated church through much of the new testament, but that in its literal translation it is the word assembly. If here in Stephen's defense oratory the word was used to signify the church of the Lord Jesus Christ, then there are instances in the N.T. where Jesus' church was a town meeting, a mob of angry people, or other called public assembly not connected at all with an ongoing worship of God (Acts 19:32, 39).

But, much of the biblical account concerning Israel does type the Lord's church in the world. And that is what I want us to look at today. We may take this account of how God ordered the movements and the stops of Israel and find a great lesson for ourselves as a church in it. May the Holy Spirit help us to do so as we notice:

Looking for an object lesson in v. 18 (read)...we should see:

I. The church should find a commandment from the Lord for every spiritual expedition

- We have three plain and powerful ones that are specific and target-oriented: Mat. 28:19-20 "Go ye," etc.

Looking at the entire text, we can learn:

II. The church has a charge from God to both rest and move; but only according to His

indication

- Illustrate: The cloud begins to lift from off the tabernacle and begins to move away from the camp
 - > Symbolic of the Lord indicating that it is time for us to break camp, break our rest and begin another spiritual march as a church

- The cloud settles over the tabernacle after a period of travel.
 - > Symbolic of the Lord indicating that it is time for the church to pause, take stock, rest, prepare

 - > How carefully do we think about Eccl. 3:1-8 To every *thing there is* a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven: 2 A time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up *that which is* planted; 3 A time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up; 4 A time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance; 5 A time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together; a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing; 6 A time to get, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to cast away; 7 A time to rend, and a time to sew; a time to keep silence, and a time to speak; 8 A time to love, and a time to hate; a time of war, and a time of peace.

- So, the experience of a church is such that there are times when it seems to be staying in just one place; there are other times when it seems to be an assembly in motion

- We rarely have difficulty understanding God's intent about the times He commands a church to be in motion. It is the time that a church is asked to camp in the spiritual sense that we may have problems understanding. There is a notion today among evangelical assemblies that if a church is not out there beating down doors, challenging people on the street; being very vocal in public about the things of the gospel, then they are not doing the Lord's will. But, although there is no excuse for not seizing opportunity to do the work of the Lord in a public ministry, I believe that the Bible teaches that there are times when the Lord's church is to stand still...to camp in a fashion...as we see in this type of the church in our text.

- Because camp-time is not so well understood, I want us to think for awhile about reasons why the church may be commanded to rest in their tents:
 - > Reason One: Things are going on in the business of God that need time to unfold
 - God does business on a large scale. He may have things being prepared that will dovetail with the onward march of His church, but meantime He would have His church rest in the camp:
 - We see such bible incidents as Joshua and the children of Israel marching around Jericho. Can't we just imagine how God may have prepared a fault line underneath those walls that was sensitive enough to respond to the tramp of those thousands of feet and that trumpet blast?
 - We see this in such examples as the adventures of Jonah...he was ordered to Ninevah...if we look carefully at that account we can't help but see God behind the scenes working...he is preparing a great fish to swallow Jonah (we don't know anything about that preparation except that it was done. He was preparing the hearts of the Ninevites to repent (we don't know what God did to set the stage for that)

- Then we see Elijah making that infallible declaration to Ahab that it wasn't going to rain for awhile. What must God have been doing in that droughty time? And there is Elijah by the brook Cherith...where did those ravens come from and where did they get that food they brought Elijah?
- > Reason Two: Things are going on among God's people that need time to unfold
- Illustrate: all the sacrifice offerings of the Israelites were brought to the tabernacle while Israel was encamped
 - It was during the rests at camp that the scores of human tasks needed for survival and living were performed
 - In the same way, such stopping by the church gives time for thinking about where we are going - both about that which lays before us in the journey, and that which awaits us when we arrive.
- > An outstanding example of just such a camping season by the Lord's church is found in Acts 1:12-14 (Narrate the account of Jesus ascending after the crucifixion; charging them to tarry in Jerusalem until they were imbued with power, etc.). So they are waiting: 12 Then returned they unto Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is from Jerusalem a sabbath day's journey. 13 And when they were come in, they went up into an upper room, where abode both Peter, and James, and John, and Andrew, Philip, and Thomas, Bartholomew, and Matthew, James *the son* of Alphaeus, and Simon Zelotes, and Judas *the brother* of James. 14 These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brethren.
- > This was a pause in the usual ministry they had been doing with Jesus. And although this was that great waiting for the coming of the Holy Spirit, it is typical of times in the life of a church when the Lord causes them to pause.
- > Some things needed to be done during that 40 or so days. Interactions among church members as they grew together; business meetings to appoint someone to take Judas' place. Prayer and supplication to be made; things to share together during this waiting period.
- > Reason Three: Things are going on within God's children that need time to mature
- Illustrate: babies grow while they sleep
 - the body synthesizes and metabolizes some nutrients better when it is resting;
 - while the body is resting, new cells are produced and energy is built
 - In the same way, the spiritual you has spiritual things to gain in those times when spiritual advancement seems to have come to a halt - when you are in the camp.
 - There is a verse in Song of Solomon that gives us a word picture of just how spiritual things can happen even when there seems to be no forward spiritual progress: Song of Solomon 3:1 By night on my bed I sought him whom my soul loveth....I sought him, but I found him not.
 - Notice that this seemed to be a fruitless effort of the child of God to find the Lord for fellowship. But, in reality it teaches us something about spiritual stirring even when there seems to be a spiritual lull...that is revealed by the statement "...I sought him whom my soul loveth...."
- So, the Lord's churches are made up of people. Those people are dealt with individually by the Holy Spirit, even while they are being dealt with as part of His church. Some of the things that the Holy Spirit intends to accomplish in us will happen while we are "in the

camp.”

- Reason Four: the church may need rest for healing
 - > she cannot perform well if there are travel wounds
 - > We always remember that during the 40 years in the wilderness, the bible says that the shoes of the Israelites did not wear out. But this did not mean that a long day walking over the sand and rocks did not make a bunch of sore feet; it does not mean that some did not fall down, sprain ankles, cut shins, pull muscles, get backaches as they journeyed
 - > injuries gotten as a result of the behavior of members must go through a healing process
 - In Num. 12, Miriam and Aaron spoke out against Moses; as a result Miriam became leprous; this was an injury to the health of the entire congregation of Israel. They stayed in camp until she was healed.
 - In Exodus 32, we find that Aaron did damage to the congregation of Israel by patronizing them in their demands about making them a so-called god to worship. He took their gold and made a golden calf and by it he encouraged them to bow down and worship it. This act of a leader of the congregation was part of what resulted in a multitude of them being killed and in them staying in the camp longer.
 - The concluding statement written for an eternal record about this says: (Exo 32:35) And the LORD plagued the people, because they made the calf, which Aaron made.

III. The church needs to be doing something after the stop imposed by the Lord has ended

- Our O.T. type is the children of Israel traveling toward the promised land
 - > This is symbolic of a journey to a more spiritual plane

 - > The church’s activities should move it closer to spiritual rest
 - Spiritual rest is found when we get to and keep a more spiritual attitude

 - > The church’s activities should indicate what it’s objective is
 - What we do should reflect some aspect of the Great Commission

 - > The church’s journey should be more purposeful than other activity in the wilderness
 - It is spiritual travel that makes the activity of the church to have purpose

- The church needs to have an eye upon God’s presence in order to know when to stop and go