

Numbers Chapter 10 – John Karmelich

1. First, let me say that Chapter 10 is a difficult one to grasp. On the surface, it appears to be talking about organizing and moving the Israelites from their present camp toward the Promised Land. While the last chapter focused on how to get organized while standing still, this chapter teaches us about how to get organized while "on the move". For us, the lesson has to do with teaching how God wants us to get organized while we are moving to make a difference for Him.
 - a) While the main focus of this chapter is discussing blowing trumpets in order to call and organize the Israelites, the underlying point is about organizational efforts as they travel.
 - b) My big question is of course why should I care how the Israelites got organized and how they moved through the wilderness? The answer is to understand that the purpose of Chapter 10 is to teach us how God wants us to organize as we make a difference for Him.
2. If I had to give a single word title for this chapter, it would be "moving". It is about how God wants us to move (take action) in order to make a difference for Him. Yes, of course I believe we are saved by God's grace alone. If we do trust in that grace, we should do something about it. That is where this chapter comes into play. In effect, it gives us examples and illustrations of how God wants us to move (think "doing things") in order to follow Him with our lives.
 - a) The goal is following God's lead to make a difference for Him. Think of this chapter as God explaining how He wants us to get organized to make that difference for Him.
 - b) To explain further, let me talk about the chapter itself. The chapter starts and focuses on a discussion of two silver trumpets. The text says in effect, "blow them this way" in order to assemble the leaders. The text sort of says, blow them that way" to assemble everybody.
 - i) The text also gives the different occasions when to blow them. This includes the time to prepare for warfare and times to call the Israelites to assembly. Other times it was to remind them to assemble themselves in order to celebrate biblically ordained holidays. OK John, so what? (I'm glad you are thinking that way!)
 - ii) First of all, this is far more than when and how to blow a trumpet. Think of the blowing of the trumpet as a "call" by God. It is a way of announcing to everyone around us that here is what God wants us (or the church) to do. It is a way to say publicly, here is what the church is doing and I want them (us) and everyone watching what it is that I expect my followers to actually be doing.
 - iii) So are you saying this chapter that talks about why trumpets are blown is a series of examples of what we are to do as believers? In effect yes. The reason trumpets are blown is to teach us when we are to do each of the things mentioned in this chapter (i.e., gathering for festivals, leaders gathering, everyone gathering, or even gathering for moving or warfare). The idea in effect is that God wants us to make the effort to move on His behalf and He wants to lead us to make those moves.
 - iv) But doesn't Jesus teach to not do good works for the sake of publicity? (Yes, but in that case Jesus was talking about giving. (See Matthew 6:2). However, Jesus also taught in Matthew 5:16 to "let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven." In effect, that is what this chapter talks about: doing good things to make that difference for God.
 - c) There is also more to this chapter. There are a few verses about Moses talking with his brother in law (not a Jewish person) to come join their march through the wilderness. What is happening here is a lesson about being a witness to non-believers. The idea is about while we are doing God's work, we should never hesitate to ask others to join us.
 - d) Finally the chapter ends with Moses giving some prayers to God. These prayers are not so much for God to act, as it is to remind the Israelites that "God is with us in this plan, and let us be encouraged to keep moving." With that said, it is time to start the chapter.

3. Chapter 10, Verse 1: The LORD said to Moses: ² "Make two trumpets of hammered silver, and use them for calling the community together and for having the camps set out. ³ When both are sounded, the whole community is to assemble before you at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting. ⁴ If only one is sounded, the leaders--the heads of the clans of Israel--are to assemble before you. ⁵ When a trumpet blast is sounded, the tribes camping on the east are to set out. ⁶ At the sounding of a second blast, the camps on the south are to set out. The blast will be the signal for setting out. ⁷ To gather the assembly, blow the trumpets, but not with the same signal.
- a) As I said in my introduction, this chapter can be confusing to read. Here are a bunch of verses saying in effect, two trumpets are to blow different ways. One way is to call the leaders to assembly. Another is to call everyone to assembly. A third way is to start the march towards the Promised Land by tribe. The point is God is explaining to Moses how the Israelites are to organize. Remember again that there are about 2,000,000 people out in the wilderness. In order to organize such a large crowd, there has to be ways to signal everyone in order to act. These trumpets are those signals.
 - b) So why trumpets? Why not flags? Why not send a messenger out to the leaders of each tribe and say, here is what Moses wants us to do now?
 - i) To answer that question, one has to remember another bible rule: Whenever one is confused about a term or word used in the bible (such as trumpets here), look at the first time that word is used in the bible. There is usually a consistent pattern of how terms are used. (For example the number seven is associated throughout the bible as a complete period of time as God rested on the seventh day.) My point is simply that many terms are consistent in their use throughout the bible.
 - ii) With that said, the first time trumpets was mentioned is back in Exodus Chapter 19, right before the Ten Commandments were given. However that trumpet was describing the sound of God's voice getting everyone's attention right before those commandments were actually given. (Reference is Exodus 19:16).
 - a) My point being is that trumpet sounds was associated with the calling out to God of what is to be done in order to be pleasing to Him. The point for us is not how the Israelites actually moved. The sound of those trumpets is described to teach us how God expects us to act to make a difference for Him. The trumpets are in effect a public notice of what is expected of us. It's not about bragging, but about getting organized to do those works.
 - c) With that said, I can now focus on the specific's of these trumpet blasts here.
 - i) The first set of instructions talks about how to make them. Think about being in the middle of the wilderness and being asked how to construct trumpets: First one has to get the silver. One then has to get it hot enough to shape and melt it. That means they had to make fires hot enough to melt and shape metal. My point is this took some effort in order to get it done.
 - ii) I should know this because? God wanted them made of a certain metal and made a certain way. It is a simple reminder that God wants us to work His way as well as on His timing. What does that mean practically? For starters, it simply means we use our bible as a guide to how He wants us to live and pray about what He wants us to do in order to make a difference for Him in with our lives.
 - iii) The next thing we learn is there are different types of trumpet blasts. To keep it simple, there was one sound to call the leaders. Another sound was given to call everyone and another sound for everyone to get moving. Know that these blasts were to go out to two million people. Therefore, those closest to the sanctuary had to spread the word to those farther back that this signal has now been given.
 - a) Think of these trumpets as a signal for us to do things for God. Again, Exodus 19 had a "trumpet" sound of God calling the Israelites to hear Him. Here we have trumpet sounds for us to go make a difference for Him.

- d) OK John, let's back up a second. Good for the Israelites that they had trumpet calls for them to go do things. Assuming we are not musicians or in the army and have to wake up to a bugle call, why should I care about any of this stuff? In other words, most of don't use trumpets in order for us to make our difference for Him. So given that, what is the point of knowing all of this stuff about trumpets?
- i) The idea is simply that God wants Christians to be organized. It doesn't mean I want you to line up behind some specific person or me. It just means that God desires group efforts to make a difference for Him. Remember that these Israelites were organized by tribes and families within the tribes.
 - ii) Think of that concept like picking a group and then getting involved with that group in order to make a difference for Jesus. The trumpets are a way of saying this is what our group is going to do for God today.
 - iii) Let me try this concept another way: All churches cannot do all things. One group of Christians may have a gift to do "this" and another group to do "that". The secret of living the Christian life is to use what talents God has given us to do things that we enjoy doing anyway to make a difference for Him. In effect, the point is to do something and it is best if we do what we enjoy doing anyway.
 - a) I always like to point out here that I've never met anyone who claims that his or her spiritual gift is taking out the trash. ☺ The point is sometimes there are jobs to be done whether or not we have the gift to do them.
 - iv) Remember that the point of trumpets is a public announcement that "this" is to be done here and now. While some acts of Christian service require things to be done in secret. For example, getting bibles into countries that don't allow bibles to be read. Most of the time, we need to signal others in our church communities that this (whatever this is) is to be done.
 - a) For example, our church organizes a camp every summer to help young people start and grow in their faith. In effect, our leaders have to blow trumpet blasts to say, we need people to do these jobs for this camp to happen. The point is that putting on such events requires organization.
 - b) Speaking of organization let me get back to the text itself.
4. Verse 8: "The sons of Aaron, the priests, are to blow the trumpets. This is to be a lasting ordinance for you and the generations to come. ⁹When you go into battle in your own land against an enemy who is oppressing you, sound a blast on the trumpets. Then you will be remembered by the LORD your God and rescued from your enemies.
- a) The first order of business here is to describe who is to blow the trumpets: Aaron and His sons. The point is that the civil leader (Moses) is not to blow them, but the spiritual leaders of Israel. So why is that? The issue of the moment is fighting. The first idea is that when there are times of war, it is God who protects us and not our own ability.
 - i) Remember that the Israelites were well aware of the fact that they had to fight soon. Back in Chapter 1, God told Moses to count all of the men over the age of 20 for the purposes of fighting a war. Let's face it; if two million people are going to move somewhere, odds are good they are going to have to fight the local residents in order to get established at that location.
 - ii) This might be interesting if I was an Israelite out in the wilderness a few thousand years ago. Why should I care about this war stuff? One point is simply that God never calls on Christians to be pacifists. I don't mean in the literal sense of war, but that is also a part of life as it has been throughout history. The issue for us has to do with spiritual battles. Jesus said we are to be His witnesses to the world and the "gates of Hades (hell) will not prevail against us". (Matthew 16:18 NIV.)
 - iii) The point is simply that being a Christian means that we do fight spiritual battles and God Himself is to guide us in order to win those battles.

- b) This leads to a quick discussion about the battles that God calls us to fight.
 - i) How do we fight against demons we can't see? How do they attack us anyway? The way I describe spiritual attacks is, try making a difference for God and watch the consequences. As I was correctly taught many years ago, if you don't believe Satan is real, try opposing him and then, watch him work.
 - ii) The point for Christians is that we don't have to fear such forces. Drawing upon God's power and strength means that we (collectively) can defeat such forces. The point being is whatever efforts we make for God can be successful if we pray our way through them and trust Him to lead us through such times.
 - iii) This surprisingly leads me back to the trumpets. The point of this text is that the spiritual leaders are to assemble the people in order to fight these wars. Think of it in terms of "you #1" do this function and "you 2" do that function and "you #3" pray while the others are doing those functions. The point is that trumpets are signals as how we are to get organized.
 - a) Again using my church's annual missionary camping trip as an example, it would not make a difference for God unless volunteers existed for every function from leadership down to the simplest task along with others who prayed for them. No job is more important than any other. The point as it ties to these verses is in effect the leaders are to "blow the trumpets" to organize everyone so that jobs and missions can get done.
 - c) Coming back to the verses, note that Verse 10 says that the trumpet blasts will help the Israelites to remember that it is God Himself that rescues them from their enemies.
 - i) In other words, the Israelites associated the trumpet blasts with God. Therefore, when they fought these battles they could remember that it was God Himself who gave them victory and not their own ability to defeat their enemies.
 - ii) Whenever I meet those who say modern Israel is not part of God's redemptive plan for that nation, I tell them to study the history of warfare of that country. They have won battles and wars in cases where they were greatly outnumbered and in many cases out gunned. It was and is, only by God's intervention that this nation continues to exist as a modern nation.
 - iii) Meanwhile, it is time to discuss another purpose of the trumpet blowing:
5. Verse 10: Also at your times of rejoicing--your appointed feasts and New Moon festivals--you are to sound the trumpets over your burnt offerings and fellowship offerings, and they will be a memorial for you before your God. I am the LORD your God."
- a) The point here is that trumpet blasts were not just for times of warfare or times of calling the leaders together. The trumpets were also used at the times of specific holidays when offerings were made to God.
 - b) Back in Exodus and Leviticus, different holidays are declared throughout the year for the Jewish people. I won't discuss those holidays here other than to say they have symbolic meaning for the Christian as well. For example, I mentioned in the last lesson how Jesus was crucified on the Passover holiday. My point is simply that those Jewish holidays have symbolic means for Christians.
 - c) With that said, let me talk a little about "New Moon" festivals as that is a new topic.
 - i) If you recall from the last lesson, the Jewish month is based on a complete lunar cycle. A new moon (the nights with no moon in the sky) is a new month. The point is the Israelites are to have feasts on the first day of the month. OK, what gives? Consider being out in the wilderness. The only natural light at night is the moon. A night of no moon means trusting God for protection from predators. Having a feast then means we trust in God's protection during dark times.
 - ii) With that said, the point is trumpets are blown to assemble people as if to say, "we are trusting God through this specific holiday or this specific situation".

6. Verse 11: On the twentieth day of the second month of the second year, the cloud lifted from above the tabernacle of the Testimony.¹² Then the Israelites set out from the Desert of Sinai and traveled from place to place until the cloud came to rest in the Desert of Paran.¹³ They set out, this first time, at the LORD's command through Moses.
- a) When I started this chapter, I mentioned that this is the first time the Israelites actually moved anywhere from the start of this book. The actual moment of them starts here in these verses.
 - b) If you recall from the last lesson, the Israelites paused to celebrate the Passover holiday on the 14th day of the second month, which is the first full moon in the spring. The point is that it is now six days later, and God says in effect, "Party's over, let's get moving." What fascinated me is that if one reads the book of Exodus, the Israelites were to eat unleavened bread (bread with no yeast) for seven days starting with "Passover". My point is that the Israelites moving in effect while still celebrating the week long Passover holiday.
 - i) What I'm getting at is just because the Israelites paused to eat Passover, and just because the type of bread they are to eat is still in effect, they still have to obey God's desire for their lives. If you think about it, "moving" and eating bread where one does not have to wait around for yeast to rise is a good time to be moving.
 - ii) If you know your bible, then you know that yeast is a symbol of sin. Just as sin left unchecked rises on it's on, so does yeast when added to bread. This does not mean yeast is a bad thing. It is just used as a word picture to remind us that just as sin left unchecked grows, as does yeast when it is left inside of bread.
 - iii) My point here is simply that the Israelites were on the move eating bread without yeast. It is a symbol of moving where God wants us to move and at the same time avoiding what is sinful for our lives.
 - c) Meanwhile, the Israelites moved from the Desert of Sinai to the Desert of Paran. OK, and I should know this because? Think of it as moving from the middle of nowhere place #1 to the middle of nowhere place #2. The only difference is this second place is much closer to where the "Promised Land" (i.e., the location of the modern Israel) is actually located.
 - i) This brings me back to one of the main themes of the book of Numbers. It is the idea that just because we are in a wilderness does not mean we have to stay in our wilderness. God wants to guide us, through and eventually out of it.
 - ii) In effect, the book of Numbers is much more than just getting the Israelites from the land of Egypt into the land of Israel. It is about teaching us how to go through our own "wilderness" times. This includes times when one is dealing with the loss of a loved one or a time of depression in one's life, or some other difficult time. The point is just as God guided the Israelites through their wilderness and actually got them out of there, so He wants to guide us through our own difficult times.
 - iii) To guide the Israelites, the actually had to start moving. This is that first step. In effect, everything in the book so far was about how to get organized before we even take that first step. Just as God wants to give us perspective before we can start our journey, so the Israelites had to organize before they started moving. That is why the actual moving doesn't begin until here in Numbers Chapter 10.
7. Verse 14: The divisions of the camp of Judah went first, under their standard. Nahshon son of Amminadab was in command.¹⁵ Nathanel son of Zuar was over the division of the tribe of Issachar,¹⁶ and Eliab son of Helon was over the division of the tribe of Zebulun.¹⁷ Then the tabernacle was taken down, and the Gershonites and Merarites, who carried it, set out.
- a) Speaking of "why the Israelites waited until Chapter 10" to start moving, we in effect, are reviewing some comments that go back to Numbers Chapter 2 (Verse 9) that teaches that as the Israelites marched through the desert, the tribe of Judah as to lead them. They were to be followed by the tribe of Issachar and then the tribe of Zebulun.
 - i) To explain the significance we have to review a little of Chapter 2.

- ii) When the Israelites camped out in the desert, there were three tribes camped to the east of the tabernacle (the structure where God is to be worshiped), three more tribes were to camp to the south, three more to the west and last three to the north.
 - iii) The point being is the God's tabernacle was the center of their camp, just as God desires to be the center of their and our lives. Now visualize two million people camped out in the wilderness. In effect, from a helicopter, they are camped out in the shape a giant cross with hundreds of thousands of people in each of the four directions from the central marker of this camp (the tabernacle structure).
 - iv) The point as it ties back to Chapter 10, is that method of organization was not just for camping, but for how they are to organize to move. In other words, when Moses gave the order that everyone is to start moving say to the north, it does not mean that everyone just starts walking north. The actual march through the desert in effect was a wide single line formation, lead by the tribe of Judah.
- b) And I should care about all of this stuff because? Here is the good part. ☺ The tribe of Judah is the specific tribe of Israel where the "Messiah" would be born from. Over four hundred years earlier, when there were just 12 sons of one man (that started the twelve tribes of Israel), one of those sons named Judah was predicted by his father Jacob to be the one through which the Messiah (who we call Jesus) was to come from. (See Genesis 49:8).
- i) OK again John, so what? The point is just as we Christians look to Jesus to guide our lives, so in effect Jesus is guiding the march through the wilderness. He in effect is telling the Israelites go this way and follow me to the Promised Land.
 - ii) All right, how does this apply to me practically? Let's suppose we are moving through our own wildness experience. Who do we look to, to guide us through and out of that experience? That is where Jesus comes in.
 - iii) Let me share a story of a prominent Christian apologist who told about when he went through a period of his life of deep depression. He said he had to learn to attack the depression every way possible: He sought doctor's advice on what type of medication to take with it physically. He sought Christian friends to help him through it spiritually. He exercised and ate right as well. He also prayed for help for God to mentally deal with it.
 - a) This leads me back to Verse 11 that states God lead the Israelites from Desert of Sinai and to the Desert of Paran. My point is simply when God leads us through times of depression, it is not an instant journey to get over such issues. Sometimes healing takes time. Just as the Israelites had to go from one desert to another to get to the Promised Land, so God often has to lead us on our own long journey to get us through such times.
 - iv) My point is not that each one of us will have to deal with depression at some point in our lives. My point is most people do through some sort of "wilderness" type of experience in our lives. We should do whatever we can to deal with our issues anyway and every way we can. At the same time, we should look to Jesus to guide us through that experience, as did this person, and in effect as the Israelites did as they wandered through the wilderness.
- c) The next thing to say about these verses is simply that the leaders of each of these tribes are named again. So are those names there for us to win at bible trivia? No. ☺
- i) The names are there, first, so that the Israelites themselves would know who were the leaders of each of their tribes. Next, it reminds us once again that God loves obedience. Here were these leaders, leading their individual tribes to march out in the order that God called them out to go.
 - ii) On a related note, notice that the tabernacle was taken down to be moved right after these three tribes moved. It is another way of say Jesus (symbolically shown through the tribe of Judah) leads the process of God leading the Israelites.

- d) Speaking of the tabernacle itself, we get instructions here about how the tabernacle itself is to be transported. If you recall from previous lessons, there was one tribe of Israel called to be the priests. Part of their job was to assemble and disassemble the tabernacle structure so that it can be transported. The idea is in effect, God goes where His people go. Just as God is everywhere, so He wants us to take Him with us wherever we go.
 - i) Also remember that the priests were divided into groups. To put it simply, the head priest and his sons were in charge of covering up what was inside of this structure to be transported. Then one group of these priests literally had to carry everything that was inside the structure on their shoulders. The rest of that tribe was divided into two groups. One group was in charge of the roof coverings and another group was in charge of assembling and disassembling the structure itself.
 - ii) There is meaning behind each of those groups of priests and their functions and I discussed that back in Chapters 3 and 4 of Numbers. The point here in Chapter 10 in these verses is the chapter is describing the same group of Levites (one of the 12 tribes) who were in charge of transporting the structure itself, are mentioned here to follow the tribe the first three tribes of Israel as they march.
 - iii) OK, so what? The idea is that one of the purposes of the first three tribes of Israel was to protect the tabernacle structure as they marched.
 - a) The reason this structure goes after these three tribes is so that the structure can be set up as soon as this first group of Levites got to the next point of destination. Think of this large movement of people as describing enough Israelites to protect this stuff as they move. The idea is about the presence of God's structure being set up as soon as one gets to the new destination.
 - b) So if God is God, why does He need protection? The idea of this march in this formation is not for His sake, but for ours. The idea is that God wants us to be a good witness for Him wherever we go in life. We don't always know where we are going, but He wants to guide us and be a part of our lives as we move through our world.
 - c) Therefore, as the tribe the Messiah (Jesus) was from, so the march through the wilderness is symbolic of the presence of God going with us. That is why this section describes the tribe of Judah leading the way so that the "presence" of God can be set up as soon as possible.
 - d) The idea for us Christians is that we look to Jesus to guide us and we want to take God with us wherever we go through our lives. If one gets that, then one gets the idea why the text is written the way it is written.
 - e) Meanwhile, we still have more people and things to transport through the desert.
- 8. Verse 18: The divisions of the camp of Reuben went next, under their standard. Elizur son of Shedeur was in command. ¹⁹ Shelumiel son of Zurishaddai was over the division of the tribe of Simeon, ²⁰ and Eliasaph son of Deuel was over the division of the tribe of Gad. ²¹ Then the Kohathites set out, carrying the holy things. The tabernacle was to be set up before they arrived.
 - a) The way to describe this (I feel like a parade announcer here) is that three of the 12 tribes of Israel have already moved out as stated in the previous verses, along with the people who carried the structure that make up the tabernacle. Now in Verses 18 through 20 we have the second set of three tribes moving out, along with the priests who have to carry what is normally inside the tabernacle on their shoulders. That way, this second group of three tribes are in effect in charge of protecting what is set up inside of the tabernacle. It gives this second group a purpose as they march through the wilderness.
 - b) The other idea is that the tabernacle would be set up by the time this second group arrived at the new destination so that the interior items can be set up in the tabernacle.
 - c) Again, we get the names of the leaders of the tribes and priests mentioned, as if God is commending them for their leadership in doing what He has called them to do.

- d) OK John, once again, this would be interesting if I was living in that wilderness a few thousand years ago, among the Israelites. How does any of this apply to me?
 - i) To explain the significance, think of a time when you were dealing with a very serious problem. Let me come back to the prominent Christian (a professor of a major United States seminary) who suffered for a long time from depression. The point is to try to learn from the principals I am about to explain when we have to deal with a serious "wilderness" problem in our own life.
 - ii) The key point is that just because we are in our own "wilderness" does not mean we have to stay there forever. God wants to guide us through whatever we are dealing with at the moment. In order to get out of our wilderness we first of all, have to want to get through it. We have to want to change and want to work our way through it. Next, we need to look to God not only to guide us through such times, but to be the center of our lives as we make decisions during difficult times. We don't need to protect God as if He needs protecting. We need to protect Him in the sense we still trust in Him to see us through such times and trust that He does still have a plan to use us for His glory.
 - iii) Going back to the prominent Christian theologian, he prayed his way through his problems and sought help from both friends as well as medical doctors. The point is God can and does give us victory through the toughest of times if we are willing to trust in Him and believe that He wants to get better. Just as this person got both medical and spiritual help, so should we in our difficult times.
 - iv) Just as these Israelites were assigned to protect God's presence as they traveled through their own wilderness, so God wants us to guard our own relationship with Him. The point is we do whatever we can in order to get better in tough times, and at the same time trust in Him to get through whatever we have to deal with at any given moment. Practically speaking, we get whatever help we can, both from God and from man just as this prominent Christian leader had to do in His own life.
 - v) To summarize all of "Numbers" in one key thought, "Just because we are going through a wilderness experience doesn't mean we have to stay there". That is what this book is trying to teach us and that is why the Israelites moved through this place the way they moved.
 - vi) Meanwhile, half of the Israelites still haven't started to move yet. Therefore, let us move on through the rest of the text of this chapter.

9. Verse 22: The divisions of the camp of Ephraim went next, under their standard. Elishama son of Ammihud was in command. ²³ Gamaliel son of Pedahzur was over the division of the tribe of Manasseh, ²⁴ and Abidan son of Gideoni was over the division of the tribe of Benjamin. ²⁵ Finally, as the rear guard for all the units, the divisions of the camp of Dan set out, under their standard. Ahiezer son of Ammishaddai was in command. ²⁶ Pagi el son of Ocran was over the division of the tribe of Asher, ²⁷ and Ahira son of Enan was over the division of the tribe of Naphtali. ²⁸ This was the order of march for the Israelite divisions as they set out.

- a) These seven verses describe the second half of the Israelites marching out in tribal order. Yes the names of the leaders of the tribes were listed and the fact is emphasized that the tribes moved in an orderly fashion by tribe. Think of this group of tribes as "protecting the back" of the whole group as they went. If one is in the back of this procession it does not mean one is less important. It just shows that God wanted the Israelites to move through the wilderness in an orderly fashion.
- b) The idea for us in our own wilderness wandering, is God wants to get all of us (or think of every aspect of our lives) completely through such a time. God wants everyone who trusts in Him to work his or her way through their wilderness in order that we can say and believe that we trust God to guide us through such a time as this.

- c) Before I move on to a different topic in the last part of this chapter, I wanted to take a moment and ask the question, "Why does God allow us to go through such times?" To use the example of the prominent Christian leader: If God loves His people so much, why did He allow him to go through that period of deep depression? The easy thing to say is that demonic attacks happen and I am not ruling that out as a possibility. But if God created all things, including demonic forces, then one has to conclude that in effect He does allow things like that to happen to our lives. So what gives?
 - i) To steal a line from one of my favorite Christian teachers (Chuck Missler), he is convinced God stays up late at night thinking, "Hey Chuck, do you really trust Me, even now? Even through this?" The idea is that God does test us to see if we really do trust Him as He wants us to grow in our trust of Him. Therefore, He allows us to go through tough periods of our lives so we can trust Him all the more and be grateful as He leads us through such times.
 - ii) Can I explain all the evil things that happen in this world? Can I explain why God allows some people to live to an old age and others to die young? Of course not. If there is a God who judges all people fairly and we live forever, that is the only mental way I can deal with such tragedies. I just know that the best way to get through life is to trust God to guide me through my life no matter what happens.
 - iii) This surprisingly, leads me back to this section of Numbers. The point is this large group of Israelites got through their wilderness by moving in order by trusting God to guide them and be amongst them. They also trusted in their leaders to help them move through the wilderness. That is how God will also get us through our own wilderness, by keeping Him in our thoughts as well as having the help of other believers around us as we move.
- 10. Verse 29: Now Moses said to Hobab son of Reuel the Midianite, Moses' father-in-law, "We are setting out for the place about 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."
 - a) All of a sudden, the chapter changes topics completely. Instead of talking about all of the Israelites marching through the wilderness, we are now with the leader Moses, having a talk with his brother in law named Hobab. To explain what is going on here, we have to recall a few facts back in the book of Exodus.
 - i) Over 40 years before Moses lead the Israelites out of Egypt, Moses was guilty of taking the law in his own hands by killing an Egyptian who had hurt one of his fellow Jewish people in Egypt. Moses then ran for his life out into the wilderness himself. During those years, he met a woman who became his wife and Moses developed a close relationship with his father in law. All of this is from Exodus Chapter 2. This father in law was named Reuel. He was from a group of people called the Midianites. Chapter 2 of Exodus also said that this man Reuel had a total of seven daughters, and Moses married one of them.
 - b) This leads us back here to Verse 29. Now we read of Moses talking to one of his brother in laws again, over 40 years after Exodus Chapter 2. The text doesn't say how they got to see each other. Did Moses just find him out in the desert and now they are talking? All we know is they got together at this point for a discussion.
 - c) This leads to the next point of this verse. This verse has Moses asking his brother in law to help guide the Israelites through the wilderness. Moses is effectively saying to him, "You know this area. (Verse 31 coming up.) You are family. Come join us as we are going to a land promised to the Jewish people many centuries earlier. In effect, Moses is laying out Gods redemptive plan for the Israelites to his brother in law and saying, "Hey come along with us and you too can be a part of history. If our God can get two million people out of Egypt and still be alive, won't it be interesting to see what He is going to do for us in the future? Come along, and be a part of this history."

- d) If you haven't figured it out by now, this text is about Moses being a witness to others.
 - i) To put it another way, does God want us to wait until everything is perfect before we tell others about Jesus? Just because we are in our own wilderness experience, doesn't mean we can't ask others to join the "winning team"?
 - ii) Think of this text another way: God does not strike Moses dead for asking a non-Jewish person to join this group. Is God more than capable of leading everyone without the help of Moses' brother in law? Of course. However, God wants all people to be saved and He wants us to reach out to others. That in effect is what Moses is doing here.
 - iii) At this point, let me add the next two verses, and I'll continue this topic:
- 11. Verse 30: He answered, "No, I will not go; I am going back to my own land and my own people."
³¹ But Moses said, "Please do not leave us. You know where we should camp in the desert, and you can be our eyes. ³² If you come with us, we will share with you whatever good things the LORD gives us."
 - a) The first thing to say about Verses 30 and 31 is that Moses' brother in law wanted to go back to his own people. Still, Moses was begging this man to join their group. Moses was saying to his brother in law, "You know this territory. We could use your expertise. Besides, you are the brother in law of the leader. It is a good deal for you to join us."
 - b) At this point, let me discuss why his brother in law was saying no. After all, Moses must have told him about the miracles that occurred in Egypt. At the least, the brother in law must have thought, "If this god got all 2,000,000 Israelites out of Egypt alive, I must admit that this is a powerful god."
 - i) The point for us is that other people may acknowledge that God is very powerful, but they still want to live their own way. This brother in law wanted to go back to his own lifestyle despite being aware of the miracles that God can do. That is a great description of why many people turn down the offer to draw close to Him. They are just too comfortable where they are in their lives. Despite the evidence of the good things God can and does for those who trust in Him, people don't want to change because simply, change can be scary.
 - ii) Many people have the false notion that they can't follow Jesus, because they have to give up too many things they enjoy in order to live that lifestyle. The truth is one is much more free to do anything they want one they make the commitment to follow God. Unfortunately too many people refuse to see that, and Moses' brother in law is a perfect example of someone saying, "I see the miracles that God can do, but I am just too comfortable where I am in my life".
 - c) All of that leads to Verse 31. Notice Moses does not give up that easily on his brother in law. In effect, Moses understood the stakes are too high to quit that easily. His brother in law saw enough of God's work to understand what He can do, and now Moses' brother in law is accountable for that knowledge. Therefore, Moses pleads with this man to come join them. The text never says whether or not Moses does talk him into actually coming along. However, the book of Judges, (1:16) mention that the children of Moses' father in law did travel with them to Israel, so the answer may have been yes here, although we don't know how and when this family did join the Israelites.
 - d) Meanwhile, notice how Moses did entice his brother in law. It wasn't "We can't do this without you" or "our God needs you". It was "you have a skill and we could use that skill". It would be like inviting someone to church because, "We need an outfielder for our church baseball team and you could help." In other words, we invite people to come join us because they could be of help to us. We then let God work on that person's heart once they see what it is like to be among believers. (My thanks to Jon Curson who gave the illustration of the "we need a baseball player for our team illustration".)

- e) The main point is God always calls on us to be a good witness to others. What I have discovered is that people are more willing to listen to us during our tough times. It would be like them thinking, this person has it really rough right now, but I admit, they have a good attitude despite what they are going through. I admit, I would like to have that type of joy in my life when I deal with my own tough times. That is why God desires that we have joy in our lives (through His power) no matter what our "wilderness" is like.
 - i) Trusting in God gives us the ability to be a good witness for others, just as Moses was trying to be a good witness to his brother in law despite traveling through the wilderness and despite the fact the Israelites are currently on the move.
 - f) Meanwhile, this is the end of the description about being a good witness. It is time for the Israelites to get moving through the wilderness. The chapter ends with a description of how the Israelites traveled at this time and how Moses blessed everyone.
12. Verse 33: So they set out from the mountain of the LORD and traveled for three days. The ark of the covenant of the LORD went before them during those three days to find them a place to rest.
³⁴ The cloud of the LORD was over them by day when they set out from the camp.
- a) The bottom line here is the actual moving is now occurring. So why does the text say that they moved "three days"? Probably to show that is how far they actually went.
 - b) Notice the "ark of the covenant" lead this procession. If you were paying attention earlier in the lesson, the items that were inside of the tabernacle were transported in the middle of the march. (Remember the whole thing about those who carried the structure of the tabernacle went with the first group so that when everything else arrived, the tabernacle could be set up as soon as possible?) Well, apparently there is an exception for the most important item inside the tabernacle, the "ark of the covenant" that represents the actual presence of God Himself. To put it simply, the "ark" led the march.
 - i) The point here is that God "symbolically" lead this march through the desert. Yes the tribe of Judah lead the parade, (I won't get started again how Jesus came from this tribe), but even in front of all of those people "God Himself" is leading the way for where we should go in life.
 - ii) If you recall from the last lesson, I wondered if the cloud that covered them was just over the tabernacle or over the whole group? Verse 34 says the cloud covered the entire group of Israelites. Remember that they were traveling through a hot and unbearable climate. The cloud is a picture of God giving them comfort even through this time of wilderness traveling. I could give a whole sermon on that point alone, but I suspect by now you get the idea. ☺
 - c) The main point is God guided the Israelites where He wanted them to go. The question for us of course is why doesn't God guide us that way? Why don't we get a big cloud that says in effect, "go this way"? The answer is that the Holy Spirit guides us as to where God wants us to go in life. Sometimes we get intuitive senses of where to go in life and I have learned to trust Him to guide me that way. Part of my prayer life is to ask God (that is to remind myself that He desires) to guide me where to go, and well, "it works". Like all people, often I have no idea what to do next and I just have to make the best decisions possible and realize that God is guiding my life, "cloud or not".
13. Verse 35: Whenever the ark set out, Moses said, "Rise up, O LORD! May your enemies be scattered; may your foes flee before you." ³⁶ Whenever it came to rest, he said, "Return, O LORD, to the countless thousands of Israel."
- a) This chapter about "moving" ends with a double blessing by Moses. Whenever the great traveling procession began, Moses would yell out in effect, "Come on God, scatter away your enemies". When the procession came to an end, Moses would yell out, "Return oh God to the countless thousands (again, I estimated about 2 million, but there is no word for "million" in Hebrew) of Israel." The main point here is that one signal that the march would start and stop is that Moses would say this blessing to start and stop the process.

- b) The question of course, is why give this blessing? Would God not be with these people as they traveled through the wilderness without this blessing? Was it necessary in order for Israel to defeat their enemies or for God to watch over each person there?
 - i) To understand, let us remember the purpose of prayer: It is not just for God to act, but also for us to get our will in line with His will. Since we don't know what is His will, it is acceptable to ask for His will to also be our will.
 - ii) OK John, I sort of know that. Why ask for one's enemies to be scattered? If God is God why does He have enemies anyway? Don't think of the enemy as a group as powerful as God. Think of the enemy as those who don't want God's will for their lives. The prayer is in effect saying, "Dear God, guide us so that Your will may be done, even amongst the people who don't want to accept You as God."
 - iii) A second purpose of this prayer is for the Israelites themselves to have confidence. It is one thing to watch God work, such as the parting of the Red Sea. It is another thing to actually get involved in His desire for our lives. God wanted the Israelites to actually fight the inhabitants of the Promised Land and even some other groups before they got there. I believe Moses gave this prayer to inspire the confidence amongst the Israelites that God will lead them to victory if they trust Him to lead them as such.
 - a) In other words, I suspect word got out around the Israelite camp of Moses' pray both for victory and for God's will to be amongst the Israelites. The idea was to build the confidence of the Israelites as they went.
 - iv) Good for them. How does this affect me? Part of the idea is that we should pray to encourage others to trust Him as He works through all of our lives. Not only should we encourage others to draw close to God, but pray that His Spirit may work through them so that they can draw closer to Him.
 - v) Remember that these Israelites are on the move. Encouraging people to "move" (make a difference for Him) is more than asking others to do thing. It should be a spiritual exercise as well. My point is we should pray for God to work through others around us as well as to work through our own lives, not that our will get done, but His will get done.
 - c) One more thing, and then I'll wrap this up. Does this prayer mean that God wants us to kill people? Of course not. Over 400 years prior to the Israelites marching to their land, God promised Abraham that his descendants would inherit this land and also that at that time (400 years later) God will judge the inhabitants of the land of Israel for their sins.
 - i) The point is sometimes God uses one group of people to judge another. That is the case here, and it is not an argument for killing, for the sake of killing. There are times for war, and that is a separate topic. The point here is that God wants His people to make a difference in life for Him (the greatest purpose that one can have in life) and even guide us through our own wilderness times. During such times of guidance, it is helpful for our leaders to give a blessing to remind us that God is there and there is a purpose for us making a difference for Him.
 - ii) On that positive note, it is time to end in prayer.
14. Heavenly Father, guide us as we move to make a difference for You. We don't know what is going to happen next in our lives. We don't know why You allow us to go through our own wilderness wanderings. We just know that You desire to guide us through our lives. Be with us, as we live to make a difference for You. Help us to have joy in our lives no matter what is the circumstances of the moment. Help us to trust You to lead us and trust You so that we can make a difference to those around us. Be with us as we march toward the "Promised Land" of being with You forever. We ask this in Jesus name. Amen.