

Numbers Chapter 9 – John Karmelich

1. As I read this chapter a few times, I realized it is describing three separate things that God wants us to understand. Let me explain why they are listed in the order they are in, and of course, more importantly, why we should obey those requests. Let me list them:
 - a) The first few verses say in effect, it has now been a year since these Israelites have left Egypt. It is time for all of them to remember that specific date and celebrate that event as a holiday. This holiday was explained back in Exodus Chapter 12. Only a handful of the details are repeated here in Chapter 9 of Numbers. This holiday is called "Passover", because death "passed over" them and only the firstborn children in Egypt were killed.
 - i) The symbolic idea of that holiday is that Egypt represents life without God. The idea is God separated us from the life of unrepentant sin that eventually leads to death. We Christians can also be thought of as God's chosen people as we too are separated to spend our lives serving Him. That is why Jesus was crucified on that same date in history. The request for us is to take some time to show gratitude to God the Father that He has separated us from the world to be followers of Jesus.
 - b) That thought leads me back to Chapter 9. The second part of this chapter then spends a whole bunch of verses saying in effect, what happens if I can't celebrate this holiday? The chapter then focuses on the issue of those who cannot celebrate this holiday and why.
 - i) Those who cannot celebrate it are called "ceremonially unclean". The point is in effect, what do we do with people who desire to celebrate this holiday, but they can't because they are currently dealing with "death". The idea is that "death" is the opposite of life. The literal aspect was about people who had contact with a dead body and now ceremonially unclean.
 - a) The idea is that we should have a time of confession of our sins before we have a time of drawing close to God. That is why many churches urge or organize times of confession before we can take communion. In effect, we are dealing with "death" as sin left unchecked leads to death.
 - ii) Getting back to the text, the Israelites were to celebrate this holiday quite literally on the first full moon of the springtime. A Jewish month is based on a lunar cycle and I'll explain that in this lesson. If one cannot celebrate this holiday on that day, because of one's "uncleanness", then one must celebrate it, the next full moon a month later. One could look up in the sky and think, it is time for this holiday, because I know it is springtime and I know it is a full moon.
 - iii) OK John, this would be interesting if I was a Jewish person living a few thousand years ago, in the wilderness. How does it apply to me? The idea is first of all, the same day of this holiday is the day Jesus died for our sins. The point is just as God wanted the Israelites to remember how God first separated them as a nation to worship Him, so God has separated us through Jesus' blood to worship Him.
 - iv) This leads me back to Chapter 9. This chapter has a big emphasis on the second month. That is God's way of saying I'm giving you a second chance. When we mess up, He is more than willing to forgive us of our sins and in effect start over. Once we confess our sins to Him, the first order of business is still to worship Him.
 - a) Think of it this way: The first point of the chapter says that in the second year of the Exodus, they are to start remembering this event. The second point of this chapter says, if we mess up in the first month, a second month is coming up soon. To say it another way, this chapter has a big emphasis on "second" to indicate "second chance".
 - v) Meanwhile, there is still a third issue left to discuss in this chapter.

- c) The third big issue brought up in this chapter is all about following God.
 - i) The final section of this chapter talks about a cloud and a pillar of fire that hung over God's tabernacle (His "presence") in the middle of the wilderness. Later I'll talk a little about the practical aspects of how that might have looked.
 - ii) For now, just know that the way the Israelites knew it was time for them to move, was when this cloud would move and therefore, the Israelites knew it was time for them to move from their present campsite to wherever God was leading them.
 - iii) OK John, as you like to say, so what? The idea is that the first order of business for the believer is to worship Him and remember what God has done for our lives. Once we do that, He can then lead us to where He wants us to go in life.
 - iv) So are you saying, that if I stop to remember how Jesus has died for my sins every now and then, God will be a "cloud and a pillar of fire" over my head to lead me where He wants me to go in life? Figuratively speaking, yes. Literally, no.
 - a) Yes there is meaning to the cloud and fire reference and I'll get into that in this lesson. The point is just as God was willing to lead the Israelites into the Promised Land, so God is more than willing to guide us into a purpose filled life of following Him with our lives now.
 - b) To put it another way, one thing people want to get out of life is meaning. God wants us to enjoy our lives. He wants us to be full of joy. (Don't get me started on Christians and misery. ☺) The greatest joy one can have in life is knowing that one is making a difference in the world. None of us know how long we have to live. What God wants out of us, is to use the most valuable things He gives us: our time and our resources, in order to make a difference for Him in this world.
 - d) Putting this all together, the whole point of this chapter, is that God wants to lead us to where He wants to lead us in life. It starts by acknowledging Him as God. The purpose of the Passover holiday for the Jews and for the Christian remembering God has paid the price for our sins. Then and only then can we have "communion" with Him (a symbolic way of drawing close to God) so that He can lead us where He wants to in life.
 - i) OK then what? Part of the joy of living the Christian life is discovering what is one's talents and opportunities presented in order to make a difference for Him. The answer for me is not the answer for you and vice versa. Therefore, in effect, only God can answer the question of what He wants you and me to do for Him. The point is to pray about it, and use one's God's given talents in order to make that difference for Him in this world.
2. With that extra long speech out of my system, it is time for my lesson title: "Understanding how God wants us to live our lives". That's it.
- a) It starts with taking the time to acknowledging Him as God, which is what the Passover Holiday is represents as it points toward what Jesus did on that same calendar day.
 - b) It is about having that second chance in life by our willingness to confess our sins before Him. The point is no matter how much we mess up, God is more than willing to forgive us if we are willing to turn from that sin and realize "He was right and we were wrong". That is why this chapter has such a big emphasis on the second Passover and the second month of their calendar year that one can also celebrate this holiday.
 - c) Finally, the chapter talks about how God is to lead the Israelites out of the wilderness towards the "Promised Land". The idea is just because we are in our own "wilderness" doesn't mean God wants us to stay in that place. He wants to lead us to a great life based on trusting Him and letting the Spirit of God lead us as to how He wants us to live our lives serving Him.
 - d) OK enough confusion for one introduction. Let's start the text itself, and see if I can clear up some of these issues.

3. Chapter 9, Verse 1: The LORD spoke to Moses in the Desert of Sinai in the first month of the second year after they came out of Egypt. He said, ² "Have the Israelites celebrate the Passover at the appointed time. ³ Celebrate it at the appointed time, at twilight on the fourteenth day of this month, in accordance with all its rules and regulations. "
- a) It's just not possible to study a book called Numbers without discussing, well numbers. To understand this text, I need to explain how the Jewish calendar works. It is 12 months like our calendar, but each month is a lunar cycle in length. It is also a little shorter than our 365-day calendar. Their modern calendar adds a month every 13 years to catch up. Also know that the Jewish New Year is in the fall. Yet when the original Exodus from Egypt began, God said that this month (in the spring) is to be the "beginning" of months. (See Exodus 12:2.) Therefore, the first month of the spring is used to calculate when the religious holidays take place. If that isn't confusing enough, the holiday of Passover is kept on the 14th day of the first spring month.
- i) OK, why the 14th? Wasn't that a tough thing to remember out in the desert? No, and let me explain why: Again, the Jewish month is based on a single lunar cycle. The day of the month with no moon is the first day of the month. The 14th day of a lunar cycle is the first full moon. Therefore, the Jewish people celebrate the holiday of Passover on the first full moon of the spring.
- ii) By the way, in case you were interested, that system is how we calculate Easter: It is always the first Sunday after the first full moon of the springtime. I'll explain why that is important later, but that gives us a clue why this holiday is significant.
- iii) The short version is if it is the first full moon in the springtime, the Jewish people know it is time for them to remember the day they left Egypt.
- iv) Also know this is not just a one-day celebration. It is actually three holidays over an eight-day period. (All of this is taught in the book of Exodus.)
- b) Consider the fact that the original Passover celebration was actually the night before they left Egypt. The evening of Exodus was when the Jewish people put lamb's blood on their doorposts to avoid the plague of the death of the firstborn son. My point here is simply that wasn't until the next morning that the Jewish people started to leave Egypt.
- i) This holiday is called "Passover" because the plague of death "passed over" them. God spared the lives of their firstborn sons due to the blood that was placed on their doorposts. It happens to be the exact day that Jesus was crucified on the cross, and that is the significant aspect for Christians. The idea points to us in the sense that we have been spared the eternal death sentence in hell by Jesus' blood.
- ii) Think of it this way: The reason Jewish people can be "Jews" is because God spared them from the death sentence upon the world (Symbolized by the death plague in Egypt). That is why they are to remember this event. The reason that Christians can be Christians is on that date the price for our sins was paid for.
- c) Does all of this mean that Christians should celebrate Passover with the Jewish people? I would say, have to? No. Should, Yes. Assuming one gets the chance. If one has Jewish neighbors, ask (nicely) if one can come join their celebration of Passover when it comes around so one can see how they celebrate and remember this holiday to this day.
- i) Sometimes people ask, what if I am Christian from a Jewish background? Should I still celebrate this holiday? I like to argue "yes" not because one is saved through Jesus but in order to remember one's Jewish heritage and the fact that God does and still has a future plan of salvation for the Jewish nation. I'll spare the details for another day. My point is I believe all Jewish people should honor this day.
- d) With that speech out of my system, it time to come back to these verses. Speaking of time let me explain the time line. In effect the exact moment of this chapter is after the events of Chapters 7 and 8, but before the events of Chapters 1 through 6. The good news after this chapter, we get into a normal time line of telling this story of the years in the desert.

- i) To explain, you may recall from the last lesson, Chapter 7 took place on the first day of the first month of the second year that the Jewish people left Egypt. That started the whole 12-day period of "one tribe per day offering the exact same amount of gifts". The topic of Chapter 7 was about giving. Chapter 8 then focused on the dedication of the one specific tribe of Israelites called to be the priests. The main issue of that chapter was how one was to be called to do service for God.
- ii) All of that leads to Chapter 9. The point here is in effect, "Everything is now in place order to worship God the way He wants to be worshipped". The first order of worship is to remember the "Exodus", which is to remember the day that the Jewish nation was born. That is why this chapter here in Numbers recalls some of the events of the original Exodus and says in effect "remember this" event.
- e) OK John, suppose we are not Jewish. Why should I care about any of this? Yes I get the idea that Jesus was crucified on that day. Yes I understand that we Christians should always focus upon Him as the reason for our salvation. However, unless we are going to the house of a Jewish friend, we celebrate Easter Sunday not Passover. What gives?
 - i) The related lesson for us about this chapter is part of worshipping God is to recall what He has done for us. Part of the joy of living the Christian life, especially in difficult times, is to count our blessings. When one is in a bad mood, I find that nothing helps more than to remember the good things God has done for us in our lives. If we can't think of anything else, we can always show gratitude for our salvation, and that is part of the idea behind this holiday.
 - ii) For the Jewish people back then, it meant, "Yes I could complain about having to live in this horrible wasteland, living in a tent". Or they could think, "Hey I was a slave, but now I am free. It is because of how God has rescued me into a new life of serving Him, that I can be grateful for my life." That is why the first order of business in worshipping God is always to remember what He has done for us.
 - a) If nothing else, to remember such events is designed to get us in a better mood so that we can spend time with other Christians and be joyful as we do so despite whatever is going on in our lives.
- f) The really good news here is that I'm done talking about Jewish holidays, calendars and time frame, and I can now focus on the main purpose of this lesson. This leads to Verse 4:
- 4. Verse 4: So Moses told the Israelites to celebrate the Passover,⁵ and they did so in the Desert of Sinai at twilight on the fourteenth day of the first month. The Israelites did everything just as the Lord commanded Moses.
 - a) If there is one thing I know about my bible, is that it loves to mention obedience. It is as if God is saying, "I am so proud that those people who do honor me do what I ask them to do, let me take a moment and praise them for their obedience."
 - i) This does not mean that God needs something. He is perfect by definition and He does not need anything. The observance of Passover was for the Israelites benefit. Now that everyone is organized out in the wilderness, the first order of business is just to remember the "Exodus" itself.
 - b) I started thinking "Of course the Israelites celebrated this holiday. They were out in the middle of nowhere with nothing better to do." The real issue for us of course, is why should we care and how does any of this affect us?
 - i) The answer comes back to my introduction for this lesson. This chapter has a big emphasis on a "second chance" to worship God. There is more text devoted in this chapter to what does one do when one can't celebrate this holiday than to actually celebrating it. This is God telling us in effect, "No excuses. If you can't celebrate it "now" I (God) am more than willing to give us a second chance in life."
 - a) The point being that God wants us to have a relationship with Him, so bad that He is always willing to give us a second chance after we mess up.

- ii) OK John, I sort of know that. What's the point? God instigated this holiday in order to get us to focus upon Him. It is a way of saying, "A purpose of having a church service is to get us collectively to focus on what He has done for us."
 - a) When we go to church, it should not just be to sing songs or hear a sermon or get together with friends. It should be remember what God has done for us as believers. That is why the first order of business for those Israelites now that they are organized (Chapters 1-8) is just that: to remember what God has done for them in their lives.
 - b) When we get together to worship as a group of believers, in effect, the first order of business is collectively worship God by being grateful for what He has done for our lives both individually and collectively.
 - c) Once we do that, then God can lead us where He wants us to go. That is in effect, the summary of this lesson: Having "communion" with God so that He can lead us where He wants us to go in life. If one gets that, then one gets the main point of this chapter.
- c) Meanwhile, we still have a bunch of verses to discuss in this chapter.
- 5. Verse 6: But some of them could not celebrate the Passover on that day because they were ceremonially unclean on account of a dead body. So they came to Moses and Aaron that same day ⁷ and said to Moses, "We have become unclean because of a dead body, but why should we be kept from presenting the LORD's offering with the other Israelites at the appointed time?"
 - a) As I read these verses, I kept thinking, the text doesn't say: What if I can't celebrate this Passover holiday because I killed someone, or I stole something or even if I'm dealing with some other issue in my life? What bothered me was the question, of all the issues to bring up here, why say one is "ceremonially unclean on account of a dead body"?
 - i) OK, as you know, I get paid the big bucks to figure these things out. ☺
 - ii) I suppose the first answer the more serious sin issues have already been dealt with in previous chapters of the bible leading up to this point.
 - iii) The second answer is God wants us to focus on life and to state the obvious death is the opposite of life. Know the purpose of this Jewish holiday is to remember how God has spared the life of the Israelites by "death" passing over them. Back in Exodus Chapter 12, lamb's blood was put on the doorposts of their homes to say to God, I trust in this blood (symbolic of Jesus' blood for our sins) for the complete payment of sins and therefore "eternal death" can "pass-over" me.
 - a) Therefore, one is ceremonially unclean if one had recent contact with a dead body. I suppose that people who work in the funeral business or medical examiners of dead bodies have to deal with issue. The point back then is that touching what is dead would take away the symbolism of celebrating one's new life in trusting God in order to guide one's life.
 - b) OK John, this would be interesting if I was in the funeral business thousands of years ago amongst the Israelites. Why should I care about any of this stuff?
 - i) The idea for us is this holiday is focusing on "new life". The idea is about taking a few moments to remember how Jesus died for our sins. So can a Jewish funeral director celebrate this holiday? While I don't know the specifics of how Jewish people treat such issues today, I do know that for us Christians, the issue is about focusing on our new life as believers.
 - ii) Does this mean if I accidentally touch a dead body, I can't celebrate Easter?
 - a) No. Next question. ☺
 - b) However, if one is dealing with death in one's family at the moment, it is hard to appreciate the joy of living the Christian life when one is dealing with the issue of death. Meanwhile, Moses himself still needed to consult God on the issue in Verse 8 as he hasn't read my commentary. ☺

6. Verse 8: Moses answered them, "Wait until I find out what the LORD commands concerning you."
- a) I have to admit I do wonder if God spoke to Moses any more clearly than He leads you and I as believers. Did Moses just think out these answers and realize that God was inspiring him as he prayed, or did Moses literally hear God in an audible way?
 - i) I figure if "God is God" He can communicate to us any way He wants. This is one of those issues we will have to find out when we get to heaven.
 - ii) In the meantime we just have to trust the fact that God did somehow communicate the following message to Him. I figured out many years ago, that God wants me to focus on the "why" question and not the "how" question. Speaking of "why", let us look at the next set of verses and figure out why God gave these commands.
7. Verse 9: Then the LORD said to Moses, ¹⁰ "Tell the Israelites: `When any of you or your descendants are unclean because of a dead body or are away on a journey, they may still celebrate the LORD's Passover. ¹¹ They are to celebrate it on the fourteenth day of the second month at twilight.
- a) The main point here is that if a person could not celebrate the Passover holiday because they were either ceremonially unclean or because they were away on a journey. However they could still celebrate it a month later on the next full moon.
 - b) Again, if one is in the middle of the desert, one would know when it is time to remember this event simply because one would look for the next full moon to begin the event.
 - c) The idea literally back then was if a person accidentally touched a dead body, or if a person was away on a long journey, they are required to still celebrate this holiday but they must wait a month and do it then.
 - i) I suppose that part of the idea is for a person to realize that "death" is the opposite of life. If one has to touch a dead body or one is grieving over the lost of someone they loved, God still wants us to remember how He has given us new life by He Himself paying the price for our sin. That is why there is the one-month gap (ok, technically it is 28 days, but you get the idea) before one celebrates this holiday.
 - ii) The penalty for not celebrating this holiday is coming up in a few verses.
 - d) Next the text mentions a "long journey". Does that mean that if one is out of town, one cannot celebrate this holiday where they were? The idea is that God wants us to focus on Him collectively and not just individually. One of the reasons He wants us to gather as a church body is just that, to focus on Him together. As I like to say, "Christianity was never designed to be billions of solo efforts for God".
 - i) The next few verses will explain further why it is was necessary for the Jewish people to be "back home" to celebrate this event. Speaking of those verses:
8. Verse 11 (cont.) : They are to eat the lamb, together with unleavened bread and bitter herbs.
- a) The first thing to note about these verses is that much of it is repeating what has already been taught in Exodus Chapter 12. Let me discuss what has been written here and then I'll discuss why these key points are repeated: On the night of the original Exodus, the Israelites were to eat three specific things: lamb, unleavened bread and bitter herbs.
 - b) Before I describe what is to be eaten, let me also say that the word translated "twilight" is also translated "between the evenings". The point is this ceremony is to begin once it dark. If you recall the story of Jesus being crucified, there is a reference to a "darkness over the land" while that event took place. (Matthew 27:45). If you get nothing else out of the story of "Passover", know that every part of the story somehow is symbolic of what Jesus did on the cross over a thousand years after this original exodus took place.
 - i) Meanwhile the Israelites were all to eat lamb. Think of John the Baptist making the statement about Jesus that "Look, the lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world". (John 1:29 NIV). My point is John the Baptist was staring at a very alive Jesus and understood His role for dying for our sins.

- ii) Going back to the Israelites, they did understand that some of the lamb's blood was to be put on their doorposts. That blood did represent the fact that their sins were to be "covered". Those Israelites were protected from losing their firstborn children by placing that blood on their doorposts. Many scholars suspect that while they were out in the wilderness, these same Israelites put some lamb's blood on the entrance of their tent as they remembered this event.
 - a) The point is these Israelites were to consume all of the lamb that was to be sacrificed on their behalf. Notice that one of the requirements was that the entire lamb be eaten. (Verse 12). The idea for us Christians is that we are to completely "consume" the fact that Jesus has paid the price for our sins.
- iii) OK John, the Israelites back then obviously didn't get the connection between Jesus and eating the lamb and neither do most Jewish people today. For them, they did get the idea that they were spared death and enter new life based on the fact that God did spare them by placing lamb's blood on their doorposts.
 - a) By consuming all of the lamb, it is a symbolic way of showing that they did accept the fact of what God spared them by that act.
 - b) So why don't more Jews today see what is obvious to us Christians? The longer I live, the more I realize that unless God opens up people's hearts to the truth about Jesus, one cannot argue somebody into believing. That is why it is important to pray for people's hearts to be open to the Gospel.
- c) The second thing that must be eaten is unleavened bread. For those who are not familiar with this bread, think of "flat bread" or "pitas". It is bread with no yeast.
 - i) The idea is to remember that they had to leave Egypt in a hurry and there was no time to wait for yeast to rise in the bread making process.
 - ii) In both the Old and New Testament "yeast" or "leaven" (same thing) is associated with sin. That is because if we leave sin alone, it grows worse. Just as putting leaven in bread causes it to grow. One reason for eating unleavened bread is to show our willingness to turn from sin in our lives and not let it grow unchecked.
 - iii) The idea was not that the Jewish people had to eat the bread fast. It is to recall the fact that their transformation was in effect "instant". There is no going back once realizes God is in charge of our lives and we should now live to serve Him.
- d) The final thing that is mentioned is "bitter herbs". Think of eating something that tastes bitter. The idea is that it is not pleasant to eat. The idea for the Israelites was to recall their old life under slavery and how bitter that was.
 - i) The idea for us Christians is to think about our lives before we committed them to serving God. Even if we can't remember that far, think about our lives during the times we mentally turn from doing God's will for our lives. That thought should be bitter to us just as sin should be bitter (unpleasant) to us.
 - ii) So John, are you saying we Christians should celebrate Passover? No, and yes. In effect, when we take communion, part of that process should be to take a moment and recall any sins we should confess to God. That in effect is our bitter herbs. When we eat communion bread, we are in effect eating that unleavened bread. When we recall how Jesus died for our sins, we are eating the whole lamb. My point is while Christians don't generally celebrate the actual holiday of Passover, we should in effect celebrate this event when we take communion at church.
- e) Speaking of celebrating Passover, the modern Jewish ceremony is similar to what is being described here but often has some variations. I've been to a handful of Jewish celebrations of this event and I have witnessed some variation. My point is if one does get a chance to celebrate this holiday with some Jewish friends, one will see the symbolism even if our Jewish friends don't get it. At the same time, it won't be exactly as it is described here.
- f) Meanwhile, we sill haven't finished the regulations of the Passover.

9. Verse 12 (Part 1): They must not leave any of it till morning or break any of its bones.
- a) There are two other strange parts of this regulation. The first is the entire lamb must be consumed. The symbolic idea is that God completely took away our sins and we must "completely" take of that lamb in effect to say that it should affect every part of our lives.
 - i) If you recall, the text said a few verses earlier that if one is away on a journey, they must celebrate the holiday the next month. Part of the reason is because the entire lamb must be consumed. If one is by themselves, it is hard to eat an entire lamb. That is just one reason why we should celebrate this holiday with others.
 - ii) The other reason is that on the original Exodus, the event causing the death of the firstborn Egyptians only happened one evening. By not leaving any lamb until the morning reminded the Israelites of the time length of this "Passover".
 - iii) I suppose for us the idea is to remember that a life of sin (that is never turning to God for forgiveness) is in effect a death sentence. It is an instantaneous thing and is symbolically represented by the fact that it was completed in one night.
 - b) The second part is the fact that none of the lamb's bones are to be broken. Think about trying to kill and cook a lamb with no broken bones. That takes a little work.
 - i) In the Gospel of John, John himself makes the point that when Jesus was on the cross, none of his bones were broken (John 19:36). My point is John the Gospel writer understood that this verse in Numbers literally points to Jesus' sacrifice.
 - ii) It is strange to consider the idea that none of Jesus' bones were broken. Pontius Pilate ordered the soldiers to break the bones of those who were on crosses in order to speed up the death sentence. For those who don't know, crucifixion is a slow and painful death. If one breaks the legs of someone on a cross, they can't push up on their legs to take a breadth and then they die quicker.
 - iii) For those who are or were in the military, one understands the idea that when one is given a command, one follows it. Yet the specific soldier in charge of Jesus saw that He was already dead and then in effect disobeyed that command as it served no purpose. Little did that soldier realize he was fulfilling biblical prophecy by not obeying that command to break the legs of those on the cross.
 - c) OK John, that is neat that not breaking the bones fulfilled prophecy. Why did Moses give that order since he probably didn't understand that prediction? I don't know. I suspect it is to show that our lives are symbolically broken by sin, but at the same time, we are still fully there. Think of the idea of Jesus dying for our sins, but still a living entity. I could be wrong here, but other than prophecy, I don't know the reason for this ritual.
10. Verse 12 (cont.): When they celebrate the Passover, they must follow all the regulations. ¹³But if a man who is ceremonially clean and not on a journey fails to celebrate the Passover, that person must be cut off from his people because he did not present the LORD's offering at the appointed time. That man will bear the consequences of his sin.
- a) The first thing to notice about this text is the emphasis on obedience. Again, Exodus Chapter 12 gives more details about how the holiday is to be observed. The point here is essentially, "celebrate this holiday as I ask you to do so." That simple means to eat a meal with those three requirements (lamb, unleavened bread and bitter herbs) and do it on the specific date of the year that is the same date as you left Egypt.
 - b) The next issue the chapter brings up is the fact if a person is ceremonially clean and not traveling on a journey, here is the penalty for not celebrating this holiday.
 - i) The penalty is one is to be cut off from his people. The word translated "cut off" literally means to be killed. In reality, I don't know if anyone was actually killed for failing to observe this holiday, as the bible does not record such stories.
 - ii) The idea for us Christians is in effect, "anybody who fails to realize that Jesus paid the price for one's sins" is eternally condemned. It is like trying to approach God based on one's own good works and not on the price Jesus paid for our sins.

11. Verse 14: " `An alien living among you who wants to celebrate the LORD's Passover must do so in accordance with its rules and regulations. You must have the same regulations for the alien and the native-born.' "
- a) The final regulation stated amongst these verses has to do with a non-Jewish person who wanted to celebrate the Passover. The text says that such a person must follow the same set of regulations in order to observe it. (That is, sit through the same ceremony and eat the same food.) Therefore, if we ask our Jewish friends to come over for a Passover meal, we can point to this verse and say, "see non-Jewish people can celebrate the Passover". ☺
 - b) The reason God put this verse here is to say in effect, "Anyone can be forgiven of their sins if they are trusting in His provision for their sins." This leads to an interesting question: Why are there not "Jewish evangelists"? Why don't Jewish people go from door to door telling others to become Jewish? The answer (as best I understand it) is that they believe that living a religious Jewish lifestyle benefits their lives on earth, but the salvation of a non-Jew is based on living a God-fearing life and doing good works gets one saved.
 - i) That is why it is so hard for religious Jews to accept Jesus' payment for their sins. That means they can't try to prove to God how good of a person they are in this life. It is a big stumbling block for both Jewish and non-Jewish people to get past.
 - ii) Meanwhile, we still have to finish the chapter.
12. Verse 15: On the day the tabernacle, the Tent of the Testimony, was set up, the cloud covered it. From evening till morning the cloud above the tabernacle looked like fire. ¹⁶ That is how it continued to be; the cloud covered it, and at night it looked like fire.
- a) We now start the third and final section of this chapter. The main point from Verses 15 to the end of the chapter (Verse 23) is that the way the Israelites knew it was time to move from "Point A to Point B" was that this cloud covering and pillar of fire moved.
 - i) Remember that the big goal was to get the Israelites from Egypt into the Promised Land. The point is that God wanted to lead them "His way and on His timing". The way the Israelites knew when it was time to move was to watch this cloud and pillar of fire. That is how they knew when it was time to pack up and march.
 - b) I have to admit, I have trouble picturing how this actually looked. I have seen the movie "The Ten Commandments" and I have seen paintings of this pillar and cloud. It makes me wonder how it actually looked. Did the cloud cover the entire group of Israelites, or was it a tiny cloud that just stood over the tabernacle? Was it like a fog bank that just stood over the tabernacle? The answer is no one knows for sure.
 - i) When it comes to the miraculous, I just read the text at face value and accept the fact as it reads. Again, if God is God, then accept that He can do anything, and that includes having a cloud that just covers this tabernacle or the whole group.
 - c) Since I can't solve the "how" question, it is time for me to get back to the "why" question.
 - i) The idea of a cloud covering God's presence represents the fact that we can't fully comprehend God. Think of being inside a thick fog. One cannot see very well. That's the idea, we can't fully grasp God, but we know He is there. That is why in the Gospel accounts whenever God the Father is presenting Himself there is usually a reference to a thick cloud. (See Matthew 17:5 and 24:30 as examples).
 - ii) So if a cloud represents the fact that we can't fully comprehend God, why does the text also say He was a "pillar of fire"? Throughout the bible, "fire" is associated with judgment. (See Isaiah 4:4 and Hebrew 10:27 as examples). If one has ever worked with metals (like refining gold or silver), one knows one has to heat it very high in order to remove any impurities from that metal.
 - iii) The "pillar of fire" is that visual reminder that God is judging how they (and us) are living. If they needed a visual reminder that they are to celebrate this holiday, having God's eternal judgment hanging over their head with this visual reminder, should at the least, keep them on their toes.

- d) This leads me to another question before I move on: Why did the Israelites still complain out in the desert? If they had this strong visual reminder of God's presence with the cloud and the fear of His judgment with the pillar of fire, why did they complain as we will read about beginning two chapters from now in the book of Numbers?
 - i) Let's face it, even if we realize God is there, we tend to complain that our situation and we want God to fix it. It is as if those Israelites were thinking, hey God, we know You are there, based on the miracles and the fact of this pillar of fire we see every night. Still, why aren't You making our lives better at this moment? Why do we have to do what You say and how is that going to make our lives better? Yes, You freed us from slavery (as God has also forgiven our sins through Jesus), but we are still in this really hot wilderness (or pick out one's own complaints).
 - ii) In other words, God, why aren't You doing what I want You to do right now as opposed to just having me follow You? Instead of just remembering what You did for us with this holiday, why don't You just fix my problems my way?
 - a) That is another reason why people can't accept Jesus payment for their sins. It comes back to wanting God to work their way on their timing and not trust Him to guide their lives. The whole purpose of this exercise in following God is to get them and us to realize that God is there and if He is there, He wants us to live to make a difference for Him on His timing and live the way He wants us to live, not for His benefit, but for ours.
 - iii) Meanwhile, we still have more verses to read about how the Israelites "moved".

13. Verse 17: Whenever the cloud lifted from above the Tent, the Israelites set out; wherever the cloud settled, the Israelites encamped. ¹⁸ At the LORD's command the Israelites set out, and at his command they encamped. As long as the cloud stayed over the tabernacle, they remained in camp. ¹⁹ When the cloud remained over the tabernacle a long time, the Israelites obeyed the LORD's order and did not set out. ²⁰ Sometimes the cloud was over the tabernacle only a few days; at the LORD's command they would encamp, and then at his command they would set out. ²¹ Sometimes the cloud stayed only from evening till morning, and when it lifted in the morning, they set out. Whether by day or by night, whenever the cloud lifted, they set out. ²² Whether the cloud stayed over the tabernacle for two days or a month or a year, the Israelites would remain in camp and not set out; but when it lifted, they would set out. ²³ At the LORD's command they encamped, and at the LORD's command they set out. They obeyed the LORD's order, in accordance with his command through Moses.

- a) The first thing I noticed as I read this is the fact that Moses wrote it past tense. It is not as if they text says, "We stayed here for three days and then moved on and then we stayed in that spot for one day or one year and then moved on." Moses wrote this part of the text in effect after watching this process occur for a long time and understood the pattern.
 - i) OK, so what? The point is the Israelites knew when it was time to move and then learned when it was time to not move. I'm sure a few people were willing to test this system at first, and then got a clue that "we don't move until God moves".
 - ii) All right, good for the Israelites. How does any of that affect my life? After all, it would be a lot easier to follow God if I had this visual sign of knowing when to move and when to stand still. Why doesn't God work in our lives like this today?
 - a) Remember that even with God's visual presence telling them where to go, when to stop and when to move, they still complained about it. The visual experience of seeing God work in our lives is not enough to get us to do what He wants for our lives, as demonstrated by the Israelites at that time.
 - b) OK then, so how does God guide us? That is why we have our bible. God is more than willing to guide us, if we are willing to move. We learn best from experience when He is and is not guiding us. We see our lives unfold and we realize He is guiding us the whole time.

- b) One of the great lessons that one learns from studying the Israelites at this point in their history is having the "visual presence" of God is not enough. Even with God being visible every day, they still complained and still at times did not do as they were told.
- i) One thing we tend to wonder as Christians would be, sure it would be easy for God to guide us if we had our own "pillar of fire" indicating when it is time for us to move and when it is time to stay still. Why don't we get that type of guidance on how to live our lives? One answer is one can't live by trust in His existence if we physically saw Him every moment of the day in a visible way.
- a) So why did the Israelites get that visible sign then? To show us, it is not enough. They still complained even when they saw His presence.
- ii) So then, how do we know when it is "time to move", or to go back to the title of our lesson, how do we know how God wants us to live our lives given the fact that we can't literally see Him guide our lives?
- a) Over and above prayer and regular time in His word, learning God's will is best done by observation over time. For example, if one can see one's own actions making a difference for God, then you know it is His will. If one can see applying biblical principals to our lives, one knows it is His will.
- b) Let me try a simpler question: Suppose one is trying to decide whether or not to take a new job or move to say, a new place to live. How does one know whether or not it is God's will to do that action? The obvious answer is to pray about it. One of my favorite simple prayers is simply, "Dear God, bless it or block it".
- c) I like to use Paul's life in the book of Acts as an example in such decisions. Paul usually just went from town to town and preached to whoever was willing to listen to Him. Did God literally tell Paul daily where to go? I doubt it. I think Paul just went forward, trusted God and made the best decisions possible. I believe that is how God wants us to live as well.
- d) The point is God wants us to live by simply "moving forward" and trusting that He is guiding us as we live to make a difference for Him in this world.
- c) Meanwhile, I don't believe I finished talking about these verses.
- i) What caught my attention was that there are seven verses used here to say what most of us could say in one sentence. That is, the Israelites moved when God told them to move and the time length varied over how they stayed or moved at any particular location. So why all of these other details and repetitions?
- a) Part of it is God's love of obedience. His name is mentioned six times in these verses. As I like to point out way too often, the bible goes out of its way to compliment them and us when we are obedient to His desire.
- b) So are you saying we are rewarded in heaven based on obedience? The way I view that is, we are saved by God's grace alone by accepting Jesus' payment of all our sins (past, present and future). Out of gratitude for that grace we should just want to be obedient to Him. If there are rewards in heaven for our obedience, I'll trust in Him to determine what they are.
- c) My main point is that the reason there are seven verses here in Numbers to describe this action of obedience is because God absolutely loves when we are obedient. That is why the text emphasizes this issue so heavily.
- d) On that pleasant note, we are ready to wrap up this lesson. In effect, this also ends the first section of the Book of Numbers. Everything in the book so far takes place at one specific location in the middle of the wilderness. It is here that they Israelites built the tabernacle structure. It was here that God taught them how to get organized. It was here that they celebrated the first Passover. Moses did describe how they "moved" but that is a past tense description. Beginning in Chapter 10, the Israelites actually start moving.

14. With that speech out of my system, let me give some quick closing thoughts and then I'll wrap this up in prayer. The important thing to remember is not all of the details of how Jewish people celebrate the holiday of Passover. It is important for us to understand how Jesus dying for sins is predictive of how God has separated us as Christians in order to make a difference for Him in this world. Most of us know we are saved. That is not the issue. The issue is not the "cloud and the pillar of fire being visible". The important issue for us is what are we doing about it? Are we "moving" so that we can make a difference for God, or are we just waiting for a pillar of fire to tell us when it is time to move. I can tell you right now, that literal pillar will never come. God calls us on to keep moving so that He can guide us.
 - a) Let me end with Psalm 32:8 (NIV) : "I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go (as in "keep moving"); I will counsel you and watch over you."
 - b) The point is, if we are willing to let God guide our lives He will. With that send, let me give the ending prayer:
15. Heavenly Father, we don't always know where You want to lead us. We don't always know what is Your will in the decisions we have to make. We just know that if have dedicated our lives to serving You and if we do turn from sin when we realize we have done so, You do agree to guide our lives. Just as You guided the Israelites, so You are willing to guide us so that we can make a difference for You in this world. Help us to do that, remember our commitment to You, turn from our sins and trust in Your guidance as we go through our lives. We ask this in Jesus name, amen.