

# Israel and the Cloud

By Rodney Pitts

In Numbers 9:16-23 we learn of how Israel was to know when God desired for them to move or rest as they journeyed through the wilderness. These movements were not randomly made, but were by the command of the Lord (Num. 9:18) and were always initiated by God through the movements of the “cloud by day” and the “fire by night” that stayed above the tabernacle (Num. 9:16). Although these facts from history long since passed may seem inconsequential to most, we should not underestimate their value for those who seek to know God and serve Him acceptably today. For, God has said these things are “written for our learning” that through them we might have hope (Rom. 15:4). So, if you desire to have hope in Christ, I encourage you to considering the following points.

## ***When The Cloud Moved, Israel Moved***

We are told that “Whenever the cloud was taken up from above the tabernacle, after that the children of Israel would journey...” (Num. 9:17). Again, I understand that many may not think much of this. Yet, for those who have ever taken their family on an extended camping trip and experienced how much time and energy it takes to assemble the necessary gear, set up camp, and take it down again, etc., this takes on a completely different meaning. Israel’s movement was no simple affair. Yet, if they hoped to continue to be guided by God, they still had to move when God desired for them to move, no matter how they felt about it. For, when the cloud began to move, even if the cloud had remained stationary for only one night (Num. 9:21), the Jews had to stop whatever they were doing, pack up all their belongings, load them on to whatever means they had of transporting them, and *move*.

## ***When The Cloud Stopped, Israel Stopped***

Just as Israel had to move when the cloud moved, we learn that “...in the place where the cloud settled, there the children of Israel would pitch their tents” (Num. 9:17). This meant that even if they did not like the area that God chose for them, they camped there anyway. And, we learn that they had to stay where God caused the cloud to stay, whether it was “two days, a month, or a year that the cloud remained above the tabernacle, the children of Israel would remain encamped and not journey” (Num. 9:22). So, the Israelites were not at liberty to determine where they would stop or how long their stay would be. They simply followed the cloud wherever it moved and remained camped wherever it remained.

## ***Lessons Learned***

Israel’s wandering in the wilderness teaches us that following God requires *faith*. For, Israel had to go whenever and wherever the cloud went and stop whenever and wherever it stopped. This was true despite the fact that Israel did not necessarily know where the cloud was leading them. Of course, human wisdom may have determined that certain paths were easier to walk and certain places easier to make camp than those chosen by God. For, people have always tried to second guess God. But, any Israelite that may have chosen to go their own way, to take the path that seemed smoother or to camp in the area that was obviously flatter than God’s choices, would have left behind the guidance and protection of God. True faith meant trusting in the Lord’s guidance, no matter where it took them. And in this same way, we must completely trust in God and His guidance given us in His word. This requires that we “walk by faith, not by sight” (2 Cor. 5:7). And, since “faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Rom. 10:17), faith in God means trusting His word enough to move when it says to move, while also staying where it says to stay...no matter what we might think about it.

Through God’s guidance of Israel’s wandering we learn that following God requires *commitment*. Israel had to pick up camp and move whenever the cloud moved. This was true even when they had only one night to rest (Num. 9:21). The physical and mental strain this may have placed upon them cannot be denied. Yet, those who desired to follow the Lord and live within His protection had to go when God said go. And, such is true of us today. The religion of Christ is not a “soft” one—one in which people can do as their heart pleases. God requires total commitment and obedience, even when this means the possibility of heartache, rejection by others, or even the necessity of putting our lives on the line (Heb.

12:3-4; 1 Pet. 4:14-16). For, the Lord himself has said, “Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. Indeed, the devil is about to throw *some* of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life” (Rev. 2:10).

Finally, the account of Israel’s movements in connection with the cloud shows us that following God requires ***obedience***. Faith and obedience have always worked hand in hand in God’s plan. When God said, “When the cloud moves...you move,” God expected enough *faith* in the Israelites to *obey!* And, it must be admitted that if Israel had not obeyed, their “professed” faith in God would have been useless. They would have been left behind by God to die. In this same fashion, God requires faith and obedience in every person who seeks to follow Him today. James tells us that “...faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead” (Jas. 2:17). And, God has made it clear that only those who obey Him will be saved, seeing that “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven” (Matt. 7:21). Anyone, therefore, who will be saved today by faith in Jesus will have to have faith enough to “obey” Him seeing that “as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also” (Jas. 2:26). And, let us not forget that Christ through His life and sacrifice for our sins “became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him” (Heb. 5:9).

We hope that you will thoughtfully consider the lessons learned from the wanderings of Israel. For, those who follow Christ must live their lives in true faith, commitment, and obedience to God. ■