

Marching to the Promised Land

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[0 : 00] So let's turn to the book of Numbers, and Numbers chapter 10. And you'll find that on page 118.

So I'm reading Numbers chapter 10, verses 11 to 36. You'll see in our church Bibles, the title is given, Israel leaves Sinai.

And this passage records the camp of Israel beginning to move, getting on their journey as they leave Sinai to journey towards the promised land.

So Numbers chapter 10, verse 11. First, by their companies.

And over their company was Nashon, the son of Aminadab. And over the company of the tribe of the people of Issachar was Nethanel, the son of Zuar. And over the company of the tribe of the people of Zebulun was Eliab, the son of Helon.

[1 : 37] And when the tabernacle was taken down, the sons of Gershon and the sons of Merari, who carried the tabernacle, set out. And the standard of the camp of Reuben, set out by their companies.

And over their company was Elisur, the son of Shedeur. And over the company of the tribe of the people of Simeon was Shilumiel, the son of Zurishaddai. And over the company of the tribe of the people of Gad was Eliasaph, the son of Duel.

Then the Kohathites set out, carrying the holy things. And the tabernacle was set up before their arrival. And the standard of the camp of the people of Ephraim set out by their companies.

And over their company was Elishamah, the son of Amihud. And over the company of the tribe of the people of Manasseh was Gamaliel, the son of Pedazur. And over the company of the tribe of the people of Benjamin was Abiddan, the son of Gideoni.

Then the standard of the camp of the people of Dan, acting as the rear guard of all the camps, set out by their companies. And over their company was Ahiezer, the son of Amishaddai.

[2 : 51] And over the company of the tribe of the people of Asher was Pagiel, the son of Ocran. And over the company of the tribe of the people of Naphtali was Ahira, the son of Enan.

This was the order of march of the people of Israel by their companies when they set out. And Moses said to Hobab, the son of Reuel, the Midianite, Moses' father-in-law, We are setting out for the place of which the Lord said, I will give it to you.

Come with us and we will do good to you, for the Lord has promised good to Israel. But he said to him, I will not go. I will depart to my own land and to my kindred.

And he said, that's Moses, please do not leave us, for you know where we should camp in the wilderness. And you will serve as eyes for us. And if you do go with us, whatever good the Lord will do to us, the same will we do to you.

So they set out from the mount of the Lord three days' journey. And the ark of the covenant of the Lord went before them three days' journey to seek out a resting place for them.

[4 : 01] And the cloud of the Lord was over them by day whenever they set out from the camp. And whenever the ark set out, Moses said, Arise, O Lord, and let your enemies be scattered, and let those who hate you flee before you.

And when it rested, he said, Return, O Lord, to the ten thousand thousands of Israel. The word of the Lord. Amen. And let it be a blessing to us today.

Well, a very good morning to you all. Please do turn back to Numbers chapter 10 on page 118 there in the Church Bibles. Do please have that open as we think for a few moments about these verses together.

Before we jump in, let me pray, and we'll get started. Let's pray together. Heavenly Father, we do thank you so much for your words to us, your living words.

Lord, we are indeed all gathered here to hear you. Please let our minds and wills be stirred as we seek to love and fear you.

[5 : 16] So help us now by your spirit. Help us to hear and to apply your living words. For your sake we ask it. Amen. Amen. How will we ever make it to the promised land?

How are we going to get there? That was the question that was surely on the mind of every Israelite person as they began their journey into the barren, bleak wilderness towards the promised land of Canaan.

As they faced the necessary battles on the way. How are we going to make it? So many unknowns. So many uncertainties. The unrelenting heat of the desert.

The uncomfortable nature of the journey. The lack of basics like food and water. How are we going to do it? There are enemies to face as well. Will we make it?

Will we press on in light of what God has said? Or do we go on what we see around us? What are we basing our journey on?

[6 : 22] What God has said and what we can see? I'm sure that's a question that crosses your mind as you journey through the often barren wilderness of life.

We too are on a journey. We're not going from Egypt to Canaan, but we are going to the land that God has promised, the new creation. That's where we're all going, those who are Christians. Let's be honest. The new creation, the promised land God has promised, it often seems so distant, so unreal.

The more pressing concerns of what we see around us, the problems that we face today, they seem far more real, don't they? The crisis at work, the difficulties of family relationships, sickness. We can think of those that Ed was praying about. Real difficulties, strained relationships, not much to look forward to, financial worries. All these things seem far more real than what God has promised, the promised land.

[7 : 33] This is the question that our passage seeks to address this morning. How will you make it to the finish line? How will you make it to the land that God has promised you through the daily wilderness of life?

How will you be prepared for the necessary battles that you will face along the way? Now, let's just step back for one moment. We're jumping in here in the middle of the book of Numbers. Possibly unfamiliar to many of you. What is Numbers all about? Where are we in the Bible? Well, Numbers is a book written by Moses. And it covers a 40-year period, beginning about a year after the miraculous exodus from Egypt.

And it's during that year, that year after the exodus, spent at Sinai that the Lord gives them the Ten Commandments. He gives them instructions for building the tabernacle. And many other instructions and commandments.

And that's all covered in Exodus and Leviticus. The Lord has been preparing his people for the journey to the land of Canaan, which he promised to Abraham many centuries before.

[8 : 43] And that journey begins in our passage here this morning. Numbers starts in the wilderness at Sinai, on the brink of the promised land.

It's just a two-week march from where they're camped to the land of Canaan. Two weeks. It begins in the desert. And it ends 40 years later still in the wilderness, still on the brink of the promised land. Chapters and chapters and chapters of wandering in the wilderness. So in one sense, nothing really happens. They camp out in the wilderness for a long time.

It's one long camping trip. They've made a bit of a meal of what should have been an 11-day march. They seem no closer to the destination that the Lord had planned for them.

And Numbers is, in many ways, a sad story. But Numbers is also the story of two generations. Numbers is marked by two big censuses that were carried out.

[9 : 53] One at the start and one 40 years later. It's the story of two generations, two armies. Those censuses were there to carry out a number crunching exercise of how many men were able to fight.

This is one at the start of the journey and there's one 40 years later. The first generation, the generation that set out to go to the promised land. They never made it.

And that's the generation that we read about here in chapter 10. They never made it to the promised land. All but two died in the wilderness. The second generation, they were the generation that entered the promised land.

Numbers is a story of two generations, two armies. The first generation rebelled and died in the wilderness. The second obeyed and they entered the land.

Numbers, as I said, is a book written by Moses. And he wrote it for that second generation.

[11:04] The generation that stood on the brink of the promised land. He wrote them the whole Pentateuch. Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy. To prepare them to enter the land.

He writes to warn them not to rebel like their parents did. But instead, enter the promised land. He's equipping that second generation for entry, for battle into the promised land.

And over these three Sundays, we're zooming in on that first generation. The generation that didn't make it. And we're noticing what Moses was wanting to teach that second generation.

And then how that applies to us. So that's a bit about where we're going. Let's jump back to Numbers chapter 10. So let's look down at this first generation as they begin their journey.

Chapter 10, verse 11. And we're asking the question that the passage seeks to answer. How will this people, how will this army make it to the promised land?

[12:09] How are they going to get there? Two ways we see in this passage. First, the Lord's army will make it to the promised land as they obey. And second, the Lord's army will make it because he is with them.

He is fighting for them. And he will bring them into the land. Grasping these two things and acting in response to them was the way that his first readers, that second generation, were going to enter the land.

And for us now, as we head to the new creation, these things will make us ready. They will prepare us for the journey to come. So firstly then, looking at verses 11 through to 28, the Lord's army will make it to the promised land as they obey.

The people set out there in verse 11. The signal to go was that the clouds over the tabernacle lifted. Back in chapter 9, it is explained that this is the cue for the people to pack up and set off.

As the cloud lifts, the people set off on their march from Sinai. And they journey to wherever the cloud settles. The Lord is leading them. He's going ahead of them. And here, the cloud sets off and it settles in the wilderness of Paran.

[13:37] That's where they go on their first leg of the journey. And the people set out exactly as the Lord has commanded them, exactly as was prescribed in the earlier chapters of Numbers.

They go at the command of the Lord. And they are making a promising start. But if you were to read through the opening chapters of Numbers, you can't miss the constant refrain of obedience through the opening chapters.

End of chapter 1. Thus did the people of Israel. They did all according to the Lord had commanded Moses. End of chapter 2. Thus did the people of Israel. They did according to all that the Lord commanded Moses.

End of chapter 3. According to the word of the Lord as the Lord commanded Moses. And again, the end of chapter 4. People constantly refraining throughout the opening chapters. The people obey the command of the Lord.

And then here again in chapter 10. We get lots and lots of detail. From verse 14 down to verse 28. Detail about the order they set out in.

[14:42] Which companies go first and who's with that company and what comes next. Very detailed. Why all this detail? Well, I think it is in part to show their obedience to the Lord.

Their obedience to what the Lord had instructed. Back in chapter 2 of Numbers, the Lord gives a very detailed, precise set of instructions about the order of the march of the people.

And that's exactly what we have here in chapter 10. They are following that ordering exactly. And the ordering reflects the fighting purposes of the Lord's people.

They are heading into battle. They're heading into battle against the Lord's enemies to take possession of the land that was promised. We'll come back to this idea of battling a bit later.

But here in chapter 10, we see the people following exactly the formation of battle that the Lord had given them earlier. This is what was going to bring them to the promised land.

[15:44] Following what the Lord had said. Believing that the Lord would do as he said he would do. But the people, they don't go on this way. They didn't make it, that first generation.

They didn't get there. Because they were unwilling to believe and obey what God had said. They were unwilling to believe that God would do what he had promised.

They had all they needed. They had all the instructions that they needed to go and enter the promised land. But they didn't make it. So as you and I venture towards the land that God has promised.

As you pilgrim, as we sung, through this barren land. You are to take your cue from the Lord's command. His word. And put it into practice.

That is what will secure you on your journey. The question is, do you believe the word of God? And are you consistently willing to act upon it? In the long run.

[16:50] This seems kind of boring. This seems unglamorous. This seems tedious. Doesn't it? Obeying the Lord's word.

And it seems like that. It seems tedious. When we forget who God is. When we forget what he has done in history. When we forget what he has done in our church.

When we forget what he has done in your own personal life. When you choose to remember all that God has done. All that God has promised. Obedience today.

Right now. Obedience tomorrow. Seems the right response. When we remember. All that God has done. All that he has said. Obeying him will bring us safely.

To that land. To obey wholeheartedly. To obey precisely. It's not pick and choose. It's wholeheartedly. All of what God has said.

[17:50] And it's not something that's left for the super spiritual. Obedience is the mark of the regular believer. This is in part.

What will make us fit for the journey. But it's not all. We're not just left on our own. We're not left without reason to obey. They.

Those Israelites. That second generation. Were to obey God. And we are too. Because of the second point. From our passage. The Lord's army will make it. Because he is with them.

And he will fight for them. And he will bring them to the land. This is verses 29 to the end. The Lord's army will make it. Because he is with them.

He's fighting for them. And he will bring them into the land. Now at this point. We're slowing down a bit. As we listen in on the conversation. Between Moses. Moses.

[18:48] And Hobab. And Moses words. There at the end. In verses 35 to 36. The narrative of the story. Really slows up here. As we focus in on a conversation.

Between two men. And it's worth taking note of. When the Bible does that. When a story slows right down. And you get a conversation. Let's take note. It's worth taking note.

It's worth taking note. So the main question being posed. By this passage. As I've said. How will the people make it to the promised land? We've seen the human obligation to obey.

Now we see the Lord's work. He is with his people. God is with his people. And he will bring them to the land he's promised. And three things to note here.

Three things to see. The first one. In verses 29 to 32. 29 to 32. We see here. The goal. Of the Lord's people. The goal.

[19:46] The destination. Of the Lord's people. Looking down. At the conversation there. Between Moses and Hobab. We see that Moses. Invites. His brother-in-law. To come along.

With the people of God. Hobab. Isn't an Israelite. He's a Midianite. And Moses. Offers him. The place. With the people of God. To join with him.

In the great benefits. Of being part. Of. The Lord's people. What is Moses' sales pitch? How does he sell it to Hobab? How does he try and.

Convince him. To come along. Well he sets before him. The great goal. Of their venture. Into the wilderness. That is the land. Look down at verse 29.

We are setting out. For the place. Of which the Lord said. I will give it to you. Come with us. And we will do good to you. For the Lord has promised. Good to Israel.

[20:44] He's directing Hobab's attention. To the great goal. The land that God had promised. Centuries before. To Abraham. Moses' horizon. Lies beyond.

The seeming. Unending wilderness. That is visible. And he looks. To the promised lands. That awaits them. At the end of the journey. That promised rest. He sets before Hobab.

The great blessings. Of being part. Of the people of God. Great blessing. And benefits. Come. From being part. Of the Lord's people. Moses was clear.

Wasn't he? Clear that he wanted. His brother-in-law. To come and join. In with the great benefits. Of being one of the Lord's people. He makes a clear. A sincere appeal.

To his brother-in-law. To join with them. He cared deeply. What was best. For Hobab. And this is something. You and I need to share. That real concern.

[21 : 40] For those. Who are perhaps. Outside. The family. Of God's people. A concern. For what is truly. In their best interests. And it isn't.

Material comfort. It isn't. Success. And career. Rather. What is truly. In their best interest. Is knowing. The creator God.

That is the appeal. We make. To our neighbors. Our friends. Our colleagues. Have you invited them. To consider. The great benefit.

Of being one of the Lord's. Have you invited them. To join you. On that journey. To God's promised. New creation. And I wonder.

If that is our goal. What is the thing. That we look. Ahead to. I find it. So incredibly easy. To lose. Perspective. To lose sight.

[22 : 35] Of the destination. That God. Has secured. For me. I forget. That this land. This journey. Is just. A camping trip. It's not. The final destination.

Where is your. Goal. What are you. Fixing your eyes on. Remember. The great goal. Of the Lord's people. It lies. Beyond the wilderness. Of this life. It lies.

In the new creation. When Christ returns. And he renews everything. That is where we are headed. The best. Is yet to come. That is the great.

Wonderful truth. That Christ will bring. As he returns. Where are your eyes fixed? Is it on the visible? The difficulties we see now.

Or is it. On what God has promised. The new creation. That is the first thing. To notice. The goal. Of the Lord's people. Second.

[23 : 33] Verses 33 and 34. The presence. Of the Lord. With his people. Look down again. At verses. 33 and 34. There. So the people. Set out.

From the mount. Of the Lord. Three days journey. And the ark. Of the covenant. Of the Lord. Went before them. Three days journey. To seek out. A resting place. For them. And the cloud.

Of the Lord. Was over them. By day. Wherever they set out. From the camp. So the people. Set out. On their initial. Three day leg. Of the journey.

And it's clear. Isn't it. That the Lord. Is with his people. Going before them. In the ark. Of the covenant. He's with them. In the cloud. Of the Lord. Over them. They weren't.

Kicked out. Into the wilderness. On their own. No. The Lord. Was leading them. He was. Guiding them. Providing for them. Protecting them. And fighting for them.

[24 : 29] What a reassuring sight. That must have been. For the people. The Lord. Who so wonderfully. So visibly. Led them out of captivity. In Egypt.

Who brought them through the Red Sea. Who defeated the entire Egyptian army. This is the Lord. Who is going ahead of them. He is still with them. He is going before them.

And this is the case. For you now. If you're a Christian. The Lord. Is with you. The Lord has gone before you.

Securing your safe arrival. How has he done that? Well it's through the Lord Jesus Christ. His life. His death. His resurrection. His ascension. He has overcome death.

And Satan. He is now seated with the Father. In heaven. And every Christian. Is united with. The Lord Jesus Christ.

[25 : 27] We are united with him. And not only that. But his Holy Spirit. Lives. Within every believer. His. Our. Deposit.

Guaranteeing. Our future inheritance. He is the one. Who has rescued you. He is the one. Who will bring you home. The Lord.

Is with you. Through the day to day battles. The day to day. Wilderness of life. The Lord is with you. As we meet together. Sunday by Sunday.

As we together. Draw near to God. He draws near to us. Regularly coming together like this. Is one of the key ways. That we can. Make it.

That we can get there. To the land that he's promised. As we meet together. We know and experience God with us. Don't give up on coming together. It's how we're going to make it.

[26 : 27] So the presence of the Lord with his people. And then finally. Verses 35 and 36. The conflict. Of the Lord's people.

The conflict. Now this final point. Is a crucial one. All of what has come before in numbers. Has been.

A preparation. Of the army of Israel. For their departure. Into battle. We can't miss. The terminology. Throughout this passage.

Of battle. And fighting. The people set out by companies. They're on a march. And then here at the end. We get a clear picture. Of what's going on. Yes.

I want a journey. To the promised land. But it's a journey. With battles. All along the way. The Lord has been preparing. His army. The first.

[27 : 20] Census. That we read about. At the start of numbers. That's a list of men. Who are able. To fight. Who are able.

To go to war. And there are 600,000. Of them. And the Lord. Then gives them. The marching instructions. He prepares them. For the battles. They will have to fight. Have to fight. In order. To enter the land. He's promised. But. They are not left. To fight. Alone. Look at Moses words. Here at the end. Of the chapter.

These are words. He recited. Every time. That the people. Set off. From camp. Every time. They went off. He recited. These words.

The people. Would have come. To know. These words. Very well. Imagine hearing. These over. And over. And over. Every time. You set out. Every time. You return. To camp.

[28 : 16] Moses. Says these things. So look again. At verse 35. And whenever. The ark set out. Moses said. Arise. Oh Lord. And let your enemies. Be scattered. And let those.

Who hate you. Flee before you. And when it. Rested. He said. Return. Oh Lord. To the ten. Thousand. Thousands. Of Israel. Dale Ralph Davis.

Would have us. Translate that final. One. Slightly differently. He says. The translation. Ought to be this. Return. Oh Lord. You who are. The ten. Thousand.

Thousands. Of Israel. You who are. The real army. Of God. That's what Moses. Is saying there. Moses is clear. About the reality.

Of this journey. To the land. That God is giving them. It's a journey. Which will take them. Into conflict. With the Lord's enemies. But the great assurance.

[29 : 12] There in verse 36. Is that that is. The Lord. Himself. Who is the real army. Of Israel. He is the one. Who's going to truly. Fight the battles.

He is the one. Who's going to win the victories. Over his enemies. Now of course. The visible army. Of Israel. Had to do their bit. They had to go. And fulfill their roles.

And responsibilities. They had to go. Into battle. But it is the Lord. Who guarantees. And achieves the victory. As we'll see. As we go through.

The following chapters. The first generation. Weren't prepared. To go into battle. When the Lord. Directed them to. When he promised. To be with them. They wouldn't go.

And then when the Lord. Told them to go back. Out into the wilderness. The people. Decided to go into battle. When the Lord said. He wasn't going to be with them. And they failed.

[30 : 07] They were defeated. Moses. Original audience. That second generation. As they stood. On the brink. Of the promised land. They faced. Battles.

They would have to fight. Would they be prepared. To fight. The clear message here. Is that. The Lord. Is with them. In the battle.

He will fight for them. He will bring the victory. And that's the question. We too face. On the journey. Of the Christian life.

We are not called. To take up literal weapons. But the battle. Is no less real. This is slightly. Embarrassing to admit. Neither I. Nor my dad. Come out very well here. But. The first CD. I remember listening to. Was. Status Quo's. Greatest Hits.

[31 : 03] This was the early 90s. CDs were in. And my dad. Just bought his first CD player. And a few CDs. One of which. Was. Status Quo. Now.

One of the songs. On that album. Which has always stuck in my head. Was called. In the army now. And the repeated refrain. Throughout that song.

Is. You're in the army now. You're in the army now. It's quite a sobering song. And that's true of you. Christian. You're in the army now.

You're in Christ's army. And we are right now. In the midst. Of a battle. We. Do not.

Wrestle. Against. Flesh and blood. But against the rulers. Against the authorities. Against the cosmic powers. Over this present darkness.

[31 : 59] Against the spiritual forces of evil. In the heavenly places. Ours. Is a fight. Against the world. The flesh. And the devil.

It's a spiritual battle. A spiritual battle. To be fought with spiritual weapons. The question is. Are you prepared for the battle? Do you see that there is a conflict?

Do you see that there is a battle? Battle. We. As a church. Need to see that there is a battle. And the devil is a wise.

Opponent. He is a wise serpent. And he will attack. When we think we're strong. In the areas we think we are strong in. So let's not be complacent.

There is a real battle. There is a real enemy. But having said that. Will you be confident. That even in the midst of conflict. The Lord.

[32 : 58] Is with us. And he has guaranteed. Through his death and resurrection. The final victory. It doesn't matter who is against you. It doesn't matter who you're facing.

If God is on your side. Moses constantly reminded his people. Of this. With his words. There in verses 35 and 36. Again and again.

He asked God to go out. And fight for the Israelites. Every time they set out. A reminder to himself. A reminder to his people. That it was really the Lord's battle.

We just had to obey. You and I need to remember this as well. Our Christian life. Is a fight. Which we need the Lord to fight for us.

Won't that truth. Shape. How we pray. Won't that truth. Shatter any sense of pride. In victories in the Christian life.

[33 : 58] Because they're not really your victories anyway. Won't that truth. Bring calm. Instead of panic. When all you can see. Is enemies of Christ. Circling around.

When things are just not going well. Difficulties are pressing in. The Lord fights for us. The people of Israel.

Were on a battle march. Through the wilderness. If they were to succeed. They had to keep on obeying the Lord's instructions. They started out well. They made a promising start.

But they had to keep going. They would have been able to keep going. If they remembered that the Lord was with them. He was leading them all the way.

He was guiding them. He was fighting for them. But the sign that they truly grasped this. Was that they would go into battle. That they would fight. And the sad story of numbers.

[34 : 52] The sad story of that first generation. Is that they didn't. Would the second generation. Learn from their example. Would you learn.

From their example. You too. We all live. In a wilderness. Life. Doesn't often make sense. There are many difficulties.

You too are marching. To the promised land. But as you fix your eyes. On our great king's return. You can press on.

Knowing that he is with you. That is the great assurance. He is with you. And he is guaranteed. The promised land to come. There is certainty there.

Will you obey his commands. Will you trust. That as he fights the daily spiritual battles. On your behalf. You fight them too.

[35 : 51] He gives you the strength. The Lord Jesus. Is all we need. As we head to the promised land. Let me pray. Let me pray. Father.

We do thank you. So much. That you. Are with us. The Holy Spirit. Dwells. In every believer.

Guaranteeing. Our inheritance. In the new creation. Help us. Father. In the midst. Of life's. Daily battles. To keep obeying.

To keep trusting. Knowing. Knowing that you are with us. That you will bring us. Safely. Through the promised land. As we battle through.

The daily battle. Help us for your sake. We ask this in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.