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Leaving Sinai

10: 11-36

Leaving Sinai DIG: As the Israelites begin their journey from Sinai to the Promised Land, what impressions do you get about the journey from this passage? Who's in charge? How well do they mobilize the people for this trip? Despite such preparations, what problems are they likely to encounter in the wilderness?

REFLECT: Isra'el had been comfortable at Sinai, but God soon said to move on. In what area of your life are you comfortable, but you sense God is telling you to move on? What adventure has God prepared and mobilized you to do? How have you prepared for this? What problems do you anticipate?

Let the march begin.

Newlyweds spent a year together before going to war (**Deuteronomy 24:5**), so Isra'el remained at Mount Sinai for nearly twelve months. **They** arrived there in **the third month** after **their deliverance from Egypt (Exodus 19:1)**, and it was now **the second month of the second year**. During that time, the Torah had been announced and the Tabernacle had been constructed and dedicated. **Moshe** had also dedicated the priests and the Levites, counted the soldiers, and organized the tribes. **Isra'el** was now a nation ready for action.¹⁶⁴

Throughout these early chapters of **Numbers** there is a topical presentation rather than a chronological arrangement of the material. They have been telling us the story of **the Israelite's** preparations to leave Mount Sinai. In the first four chapters of **Numbers**, **they** took a **census (to see link click [An](#) - The Levitical Census)** and assigned **the Levites** to **their** various tasks (see [Ar](#) - **The Four Camps of Levites**). **Numbers 7-10** is a flashback and relates how **Isra'el** was ready to depart from Mount Sinai. **Chapters 9 and 10** tell of the final preparation before the departure **from Sinai** as a flashback **on the twentieth of the second month of the second year (10:11)**; the observance of **the second Passover** six days earlier (**9:1-14**); **the pillar of cloud and fire** as a guide (**9:15-23**); **the trumpet signals** for assembling **the people** and **its leaders** and for breaking camp (**10:1-10**); the order of march (**10:11-28**), and a narrative relating a different marching order (**10:29-36**).¹⁶⁵

These verses describe the actual inauguration of **Isra'el's** march and the events of the first three days. The holy camp of **God's people** sets out for the first time **in the wilderness of Sinai to the wilderness of Paran**. The first three days of the journey go smoothly and without incident. All seems to be moving according to **God's** plan and desire. But, the favorable impression will linger only for a short time, ending abruptly when we come to **Chapter 11**.¹⁶⁶



The march begins (10:11-13): The silver trumpets (see [Bi - Two Silver Trumpets](#)) were meant to create a sense of awe and splendor, like the court of a great king. In fact, as **the children of Isra'el** finally broke camp and left **Mount Sinai**, the entire scene is layered in dramatic pomp and pageantry. **The fire-cloud** (see [Bk - The Pillar of Cloud and Fire](#)), **the silver trumpets**, the camps, the banners were all intended to evoke images of the great and regal procession of a royal host. We are meant to imagine **the Sh'khinah glory**, **a fire by night, a pillar of cloud by day**, rising from **the Tabernacle**. We are meant to hear the staccato blasts of **the silver trumpets**, clear and inspiring, like the fanfare of a king. We are meant to imagine each camp breaking and setting out in order, each beneath its own splendid, tribal **banner**. **On the twentieth day of the second month of the second year** since **the Exodus**, five days after **the Second Passover** (see [Bi - Pesach in the Wilderness](#)). So, **they** had been at **Mount Sinai** for eleven months and twenty days. **The fire-cloud was taken up from over the Tabernacle**. Here we have the first movement of **the Sh'khinah glory** since it had come over the Tabernacle in **Exodus 40** (see the commentary on [Exodus Hh - The Glory of the LORD Filled the Tabernacle](#)). **And the people of Isra'el moved out in stages from the Sinai Desert. The fire-cloud stopped in the Paran Desert**, at the border of **the Promised Land**, as we will see later in **12:16**. So, **they set out on their first journey, in keeping with ADONAI's order**

through Moshe. As they set out, they moved as the army of ADONAI.¹⁶⁷

The grand procession of tribes and Levites (10:14-28): In the lead was Moshe, Aaron and the priests, and the banner of the camp of the descendants of **Judah**, whose companies moved forward; over his company was Nachshon the son of 'Amminadav (see [Am](#) - [The Camp of the Twelve Tribes of Isra'el](#)). Over the company of the tribe of the descendants of **Issachar** was Nethan'el the son of Tzu'ar. Over the company of the descendants of **Zebulun** was Eli'av the son of Helon (10:14-16).

Then the Tabernacle was taken down; and the descendants of Gershon (see [Au](#) - [The Clan of Gershon](#)) and the descendants of Merari (see [Av](#) - [The Clan of Merari](#)) set out, carrying the Tabernacle (10:17). When the fire-cloud stopped, they would have time to set up the Tabernacle so that the Kohathites could set the holy things in it.

Next, the banner of the camp of **Reuben** moved forward by companies; over his company was Elitzur the son of Sh'de'ur. Over the company of the tribe of the descendants of **Simeon** was Shlumi'el the son of Tzurishaddai. Over the company of the descendants of **Gad** was Elyasaf the son of De'u'el (10:18-20).

Then the Kohathites set out (see [At](#) - [The Clan of Kohath](#)), carrying the holy objects so that [at the next camp] the Tabernacle would already be set up before the Kohathites arrived to set up the holy objects (10:21).

Next, the banner of the camp of the descendants of **Ephraim** moved forward by companies; over his company was Elishama the son of 'Ammihud. Over the company of the tribe of the descendants of **Manaseh** was Gamli'el the son of P'dahtzur. Over the company of the descendants of **Benjamin** was Avidan the son of Gid'oni 10:22-24).

The banner of the camp of the descendants of **Dan**, forming the rearguard for all the camps, moved forward by companies; over his company was Achi'ezer the son of 'Ammishaddai. Over the company of the tribe of the descendants of **Asher** was Pag'i'el the son of 'Okhran. Over the company of the descendants of **Naphtali** was Achira the son of 'Enan. Then Moshe gives the summary: This is how the people of Isra'el traveled by companies; thus, they moved forward (10:25-28).

Hobab the Midianite (10:29-32): Here a new person is suddenly introduced. His presence is very instructive because he offers us a solid glimpse of the **Gentile** in the midst of Isra'el. His name was **Hobab**. He was Moshe's brother-in-law (Hebrew: *chothen*) and

the son of Reuel the Midianite (also known as **Jethro**, which is a title like king or pharaoh, in **Exodus 3:1, 4:18**). By that time it very well could have been that **Jethro** could have died, and if so, **Habab** would have been the patriarch of **the Kenite** branch of **the Midianites**. Apparently, after **Jethro** left for **Midian** (see the commentary on **Exodus Cw - Moses and Jethro**), **Hobab** had stayed with **Moses** until the present time. Now although the Sh'khinah glory would lead the people through **the wilderness**, **Hobab** with expert knowledge of **the wilderness** lands of **Sinai**, would be a significant aid in locating water and pastures in regions unknown to **Moshe**. As a result, here we have a great example of divine leadership and human wisdom.

Therefore, **Moshe said to Hobab, "We are traveling to the place about which ADONAI said: I will give it to you. Come with us, and we will treat you well, because ADONAI has promised good things to Isra'el."** Paul says the same thing in **Romans 11** with regard to **the olive tree** (see the commentary on **Romans Cz - The Illustration of Isra'el's Future**). Even though **the B'rit Chadashah** is made with **Isra'el**, it doesn't mean that it is only *for Isra'el*: **For Messiah Himself has brought peace to us. He united Jews and Gentiles into one people when, in His own body on the cross, He broke down the wall of hostility that separated us (Ephesians 2:14 NLT).** Hence, **the New Covenant** is not two Covenants, one with **Isra'el** and one with the Church. It is only one **Covenant**, but with two "participants," **Isra'el** and the Church (see the commentary on **Jeremiah Eo - The Days are Coming, declares the LORD, When I Will Make a New Covenant with the People of Isra'el: The Church's Relationship to the B'rit Chadashah**). **Gentiles** are not absorbed into any tribe, in other words, **they** don't become **Jews** (see **Galatians Ak - The Hebrew Roots Movement: A Different Gospel**).¹⁶⁸

But Hobab replied, "I will not go; I would rather go back to my own country (not far from Mount Sinai) and my own kinsmen." Moshe continued, "Please don't leave us, because you know that we have to camp in the desert, and you can serve as our guide. If you do go with us, then whatever good ADONAI does for us, we will do the same for you." In a sense this urging was an act of evangelism. **Hobab** did not come easily. But subsequent biblical texts indicate that at last, **he** did come. In that regard, **he** was just like **Ruth**, who, leaving all behind, joined **Naomi** in route to **the Promised Land** with the promise of something ahead that was of more value than anything left at home. To come with **Moses** was not just to change **Hobab's** address, but to change **his** family. To come with **Moshe** was to gain a **New Land**. To come with **Moses** was to believe in **the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob** (see **Ruth An - Your People Will Be My People and Your God My God**).

Judges 1:16 indicates that **Hobab** accepted Moses' requests to be **the "eyes" for the Israelites in the wilderness**, as **his** descendants received a share in **the Land**. But **he himself** did not share in **the Promised Land**. Presumably, the sadness of **Isra'el's** impending rebellion against **ADONAI** included **Hobab** in judgment (see **Bz - Faith and Obedience**). **He** experienced **God's goodness** in the same way that the rest of **the Israelites** did, in the providential care that **YHVH** gave **His** erring **people** in the inhospitable **wilderness** of **their** banishment. **Hobab** must have been an invaluable aide to **Moshe**. However, the anticipated journey of a few weeks turned out to be a lifetime for **him**.

The three-day procession behind the Ark (10:33-36): So, they set out from ADONAI's mountain and traveled for three days. Ahead of them on this three-day journey went the ark of ADONAI's covenant, searching for a new place to stop. The contradiction with **10:21** and **2:17** is obvious. **Probably during the initial stage, the ark did precede the marchers because the people feared the dangers of the wilderness. The Sh'khinah glory of ADONAI was over them during the day as they set out from the camp (10:33-34).** Eleven months earlier **the people of Isra'el** had emerged as a rag-tag group of former slaves, gathered in **the wilderness** in the first rush of deliverance, but unorganized and unruly. Now **they** were prepared for the march, the battle, and the anticipated victory.¹⁶⁹

The ark of the covenant led them into battle. These words function as a conclusion to the whole passage concerning departure and, in a sense, to the whole **Sinai** narrative (**Exodus 19** to **Numbers 10**). This passage functions in a way parallel to **the Aaronic blessing** (see **Bb - The Aaronic Blessing**). Its language is elevated prose at the least with a good deal of parallelism.¹⁷⁰

Introductory prose line (five Hebrew words): **When the ark moved forward, Moshe** made a call for **God** to rise up and **scatter His enemies: Arise, ADONAI! May your enemies be scattered! Let those who hate you flee before you!**" This was essentially a war cry. It was as if **he** was the general shouting on behalf of **the Commander-in-Chief** to all of **His enemies**, "Here we come, you better run for your life!"

Introductory prose line (five Hebrew words): **When Moses stopped, he** called for **God** to rise up and bless **His** people: **Return, ADONAI of the countless thousands of Isra'el (10:35-36)!¹⁷¹** When "the battle" was finished, the general was able to tell **his Commander-in-Chief** that because of **His** brilliantly orchestrated victory, **He** may now rest peacefully in the victorious camp of **His** army. **The ark** going forward at the head of

Isra'el's tribes typified **Ha'Shem** in front of **His people** protecting **them**, helping **them**, and leading **them** on to final victory (see the commentary on **Deuteronomy Ag - The Problem of Holy War in the TaNaKh**).

Thus, in these words of **Moses** we have a shout of victory based solidly on the faithfulness of **ADONAI** to **His** covenantal promise to the patriarchs. **The people** were on **their** way to Canaan; soon Canaan would be **the land of Isra'el**, or so they thought, based on these words of high-spirited confidence in **YHVH**. Significantly, **David** used these same words of **Moshe** in the beginning of **his** triumphal song in **Psalm 68**.¹⁷²

*Dear Heavenly **Father**, Praise **You** for your wisdom in guiding me. Sometimes after being in one place in life for a while, it gets comfortable and I don't want to move on; but it is very reassuring to know that when **You** tell me to move, **You** have already gone ahead of me to prepare the situation and **You** go with me! All praise and glory to **Your** gracious presence and guidance of all the details of my life! In **Messiah Yeshua** holy **Name** and **His** power of **His** resurrection. Amen*