



LEADER'S GUIDE

Week 5: Numbers 10 & 11

Wilderness

October 16, 2016

Before you begin this study, ask the Holy Spirit to show you what God is saying in these scriptures.

In the wilderness, God can seem distant, aloof, or even vindictive. The wilderness often engenders hope and darkness.

Day 1: Numbers 10:10-32

1. **Read Numbers 10:11-13. How long had Israel been at Sinai?** (see Exodus 19:1) They had been at Sinai for 11 months. In the first ten chapters of Numbers, the Tabernacle was set up, the tribes were arranged around it, worship and Passover had been celebrated, and the Lord's presence was visible in a cloud over the Tabernacle.
2. **Numbers 10:11 says "the cloud lifted." What was the significance of the cloud lifting and settling?** (see Numbers 9: 15-23) The cloud represented God's presence – when it lifted from the Tabernacle, the Israelites moved on, when it settled they stopped and camped. God is leading His people! **What other passages of scripture speak about clouds, and what does the cloud signify in these passages?** (see Exodus 13: 21; Isaiah 19:1; Daniel 7: 13; Matthew 24: 30; Mark 13: 26; Revelation 1: 7) In Exodus 13, the Lord guided the Israelites with a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. Isaiah 19 describes God riding on a swift cloud, such that the idols of Egypt tremble and the hearts of Egyptians melt. Daniel 7 reflects Daniel's vision of God coming with the clouds of heaven to receive the worship of people throughout the world. Matthew 24 and Mark 13 describe Jesus coming on a cloud with power and glory to redeem His people. Revelation 1 refers back to Daniel's vision.
3. **In Numbers 10:12, from where do the Israelites leave? They leave from Mount Sinai. To where are they heading?** They are heading to the Desert of Paran. (see if you can find this on your map)
4. **Read Numbers 10: 14-28. What do you note about this leaving from Mt. Sinai?** It was orderly and organized.

Day 2: Numbers 10: 33 - 36

1. **Numbers 10: 33-36 says that the Israelites traveled 3 days from Mt. Sinai. What went before them?** The Ark of the Covenant. **What was over them?** The cloud of the Lord
2. **Note the words Moses used each time the Ark of the Covenant (also called the Ark of Testimony) set out and each time the ark settled. What effect do you think these words should have had on Israel, and what effect do you think these words actually had?** It reminded them of God being present, that He went with them and settled with them.
3. **In our worship services the Pastor says words that begin the time of worship, and at the end of the service the Pastor says a blessing. What effect does this have on you?** It calls attention at the beginning of the service that we are here to worship God and He is here with us. At the end of the service the words remind us that God goes with us into our week.

Digging deeper: A study of the Ark of the Covenant (Testimony) – what is it, what is it made of, what is in it, what is the significance or message of the ark to the Israelites. The Ark of the Covenant of the Lord, as described in Exodus 25: 10-22, was a beautiful acacia wooden chest overlaid in pure gold. It was 4 feet

long, 2 ½ feet wide, and 2 ½ feet deep, with golden rings to hold rods used to transport the ark. It held the two stone tablets of the Ten Commandments (Deuteronomy 31: 26), a pot of manna (Exodus 16: 31-35), and Aaron's rod (Numbers 17: 2-11). These items symbolized God's presence in the Tabernacle, a reminder to the Israelites of the Exodus, and God's ongoing guidance and provision. The ark had two guardian cherubim attached to its lid, made of a pure gold slab (Exodus 25: 18-20). The cherubim were facing each other, looking down at the lid, with wings stretched upward over them. It symbolized the throne of God where He ruled the nation of Israel, and is sometimes referred to as God's footstool (Psalm 132: 4). On the annual Day of Atonement, the lid is where the High Priest sprinkled drops of blood from the sacrificial lamb, to plead for the forgiveness of the Israelites' sins. For this reason, the area of the lid was also referred to as the Mercy Seat.

The Ark was kept in the Tabernacle (also referred to as the Tent of Meeting), in a smaller inner-most sacred room within the main room (Exodus 26: 31-34). The room was called the Most Holy Place of Holies, where God was believed to be present. The ark was highly protected, and moved when necessary to new temple locations. It is believed to have been lost, captured, or destroyed by the Babylonians in 587, during the fall of Jerusalem. Biblical scholars feel this is what the Lord intended, in preparation for the long-awaited Messiah (Jeremiah 3: 16). Jesus came as the High Priest, the mediator of the New Covenant (Hebrews 9). The cross of Christ and His resurrection accomplished atonement once and for all. As His followers, we are now the temple of the Holy Spirit living in us. We have unlimited access to Him and will for eternity. There will be no more secret places or mysteries in heaven. Revelation 11: 19 refers to a "new ark" as part of the heavenly temple where all is revealed to us in Glory.

Day 3: Numbers 11: 1-3

- 1. In Numbers 11: 1, the people complained. They had only traveled for 3 days (Numbers 10:33). What were they complaining about?** The people were complaining about their hardships. **In what other situations had the Israelites complained?** (see Exodus 14: 10-12; Exodus 15: 22-24; Exodus 16: 1-3; Exodus 17: 1-2) At the Red Sea when Pharaoh's army was coming, 3 days into the desert of Shur when there was no water, In the Desert of Sin when there was no meat, and at Rephidim when there was no water.
- 2. Why do you think the Israelites complained rather than trying to cope with their situation?**
- 3. In verse 1, who heard the Israelites complaining?** The Lord heard their complaining. **What was aroused in God?** His anger was aroused. **What did He do?** He sent fire, which consumed some of the outskirts of the camp. Once again we see God using fire – here to consume rebellious complainers. The Hebrew word for "the camp" suggests people who were encamped, therefore people were consumed. (from Walvoord and Zuck). Fire in the Old Testament is often associated with God's presence. We saw this in the burning bush in Exodus 3:2-4, the pillar of fire at night in Exodus 13:2, and on Mount Sinai in Exodus 19:18. Therefore, in the Law given to Moses and the Israelites sacrifices were made by fire. **Where else does God use fire to consume?** (see Genesis 19:12-14, 23-25; Leviticus 10: 1-2; Psalm 106: 16-18) In Genesis 19 the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah and all that was in them were burned with burning sulfur – which may have arisen from tar pits or volcanoes in the area. Matthew Henry states "Burning lusts against nature were justly punished by this preternatural burning. It is designed for a standing revelation of the wrath of God against sin and sinners in all ages." Interesting note: the valley where Sodom and Gomorrah was comprises the Dead Sea – where nothing lives. In Leviticus 10, Aaron's sons were consumed for using unauthorized fire in sacrifices. In Psalm 106:16-18 retells the story of Korah, Dathan and Abiram swallowed by the earth and their 250 followers were consumed by fire. The full story is in Numbers 16.

4. **How easy it is to complain when God doesn't do what we expect, want, or ask, or when it doesn't seem like God is meeting our perceived needs. What do you complain and grumble about? How significant are these objects of your complaint? Does our complaining block our ability to obey God? Does it block our ability to worship God? What does it take to break us out of complaining or grumbling?**

Digging deeper: study how fire is described in the Bible and used by God to purge or punish, refine or purify, and to accept.

- God uses fire to purge and punish. We saw this in Numbers 11:1-3; Leviticus 10:1-3; Numbers 16 and retold in Psalm 106:16-18 in question 3 above. Also see Isaiah 33:11-14 where Assyria would destroy Judah. These are instances of God purging His chosen people. God also punishes Israel's enemies or God's enemies. This is seen in Genesis 19: 23-25 of Sodom and Gomorah; Isaiah 1:28-31 where Babylon is punished and in Isaiah 30:30 where the Assyrians were defeated when they first went against Jerusalem. Also in Deuteronomy 9:3 God says he would go ahead for them and destroy the Canaanites as the Israelites proceed into the Promised Land and drive them out. In Matthew 3:10-12 Jesus teaches that the fruitless tree will be cut down and burned. Why would God do this? Isaiah 1:28-31 says that God declares that all rebels and sinners will burn. God could not allow rebelliousness in the leaders of His people or amongst the people or the nation would never be able to move into and take the Promised Land. Later in Israel's history, as they become more entrenched in idolatry and rebellion to God, God allows their enemies – Assyria and Babylon – to destroy and overtake Israel and burn Jerusalem. "Fire was regarded by primitive peoples as supernatural in origin and especially Divine." (ISBE) Many groups worshipped fire gods, often with human sacrifices. "God is jealous of the honor of His institutions and will not have them invaded." (Matthew Henry)
- God also uses fire to purify and refine (see Deuteronomy 4:24; Zechariah 13:9; Isaiah 4:4; Malachi 3:1-4; 1 Corinthians 3:14) Deuteronomy 4:24 states that God would purify what is precious just as fire purifies precious metals and destroys what is worthless. Zechariah 13:9 says that God uses fire to refine – like refining silver. Isaiah 4:4 says that God will cleanse Israel with judgement that will be like fire that will burn away the nation's undesirable filth (sin). Malachi 3:1-4 states that the refiners fire burns out the dross from metal ores to purify it – here God will purify the Levites. And 1 Corinthians 3:13 says that fire will test the quality of each man's work.
- God also uses fire to signify acceptance. (see Exodus 19:18-19; Leviticus 9:24; Judges 6:20-22; 1 Kings 18:36-39 and 2 Chronicles 21:26). In Exodus 19:18-19 God comes to meet with His people descending on the mountain in fire. In Leviticus 9:24 sacrificial fire came forth from God on the sacrifice. In Judges 6:20-22 God accepts Gideon's sacrifice by lighting it with fire. In 1 Kings 18:36-39 God lights the sacrifice of Elijah with fire in front of the prophets of Baal. In 2 Chronicles 21:26 God lights David's sacrifice.

Fire is a symbol of God's glory, presence and holiness. He uses it to accept, purify and purge His people. He also uses it to judge and destroy those who persist in sin and rebellion towards Him. Fire is also used for domestic use, sacrifices and to burn idolatrous objects and cities by the Israelites. There is also the eternal fire of hell described in Matthew 4:22; 18:8; 25:41; Mark 9:43,48,49, Jude 7, and Revelation 20:4. We will not discuss this here, but the verses are included if you desire to read more about this.

Day 4: Numbers 11: 1-3

1. **In Numbers 11: 2, to whom do the people cry out?** They cry out to Moses. **What does he do?** He prays to the Lord. **What happened?** The fire died out. **How did God respond to Moses? Why do you think God was angry with the Israelites but responded positively to Moses' prayer?** God's sense of justice and righteousness led Him to be angry with the chronic complainers, who regularly seemed to forget God's wonderful promises to them and the miraculous provisions God had already made for them. On the other hand, however, several times in scripture, God responds to a mediator or an intermediary who pleads on behalf of sinners. In Numbers 11, that was Moses, who was willing to let himself be blotted out of God's book if God would forgive the Israelites. We also have the picture of Jesus on the cross, asking forgiveness for those who crucified Him. God's rich love provides us hope that we too can receive God's forgiveness.
2. **In verse 3, what was the place called when the fire died down?** The place is called Taberah. **What is the meaning or significance of that name?** (see Deuteronomy 9: 22) It is a place where God's anger brought fire in the midst of the people.
3. **Imagine what it was like for the Israelites to be in a remote and barren place, with no clear idea of where they were going. Imagine not only their physical surroundings but their attitudes and emotions. Then recall your own wilderness experience(s). At what times did it seem that God was distant or vindictive? When were you in a place where you did not really know where you were going? What hope, if any, did you have during the darkness? How did you finally emerge from this wilderness, and what difference did that make?**

Day 5

1. **Read Mark 1: 12 and Matthew 27: 46. Compare Jesus' wilderness experiences. Identify the presence of darkness and the presence of hope.** In Mark we see hope in that the angels attended Him after His experience with the Devil and darkness in that He was tempted by the Devil and He was alone. In Matthew we see Darkness as Jesus is on the cross and abandoned by God – no visible hope. **How does it make you feel to realize that Jesus, God's Son, had these wilderness experiences?**
2. **Read Psalm 88: 13-18. Note the Psalmist's description of his wilderness experience. Have you ever been in a time when you had these same feelings? How does it make you feel to read this passage where the experience is not resolved in this Psalm?**

Day 6

(If you have the book Leaving Egypt, read chapter 9. If you do not have the book, consider how you might respond to these questions based on your own experiences and understanding.)

1. In Chapter 9, DeGroat says that the wilderness is experienced in two different ways – one that expresses hope and another that knows only chaos and darkness, where the bottom falls out and everything you knew to be true is called into question. **In what ways have you encountered both hope and darkness, or both of them together? How do you cope when the answers seem to provide you no comfort, no security, and no justice?**
2. On page 125, DeGroat writes "No one can take the wilderness journey for you, but there are people who can walk alongside, helping you navigate the rough terrain along the way." **Who are the people in your life who have helped you journey through the wilderness? Who seems right now to need you to help them on this journey? How can you reach out to them and help them?**
3. On pages 130-131, DeGroat writes, "It's a typically North American phenomenon to glamorize suffering" or "to find a bright side to the pain." **What is your typical response to pain or suffering? What makes you uncomfortable or unsure of how to respond?**