

Cloud, Fire and Quail at Mount Sinai

Numbers 9:15–10:36; 11:1-35

Bible Memory Verse

Ezekiel 36:27-28

I will put my Spirit in you...you will be my people and I will be your God.

Bible Story

The story ends in the book of Exodus with the nation of Israel poised at Mount Sinai awaiting further direction. They had just received instruction on the construction of the tabernacle and they built it. They had just received plenty of rules and regulations to govern them as a people in the book of Leviticus. And now they are ready to do their duty as a nation—the kingdom of priests, the holy nation, and the light to all the other nations. Well, almost...

The book of Numbers opens up with a census and some more various instructions regarding life and living. Then we get to chapter nine and we find more instructions regarding the tabernacle. On the day that the Tabernacle was set up the cloud of the Lord covered and rested upon the tent. At night it looked like fire and during the day it was a cloud. Whenever the cloud lifted from above the Tabernacle the Israelites were supposed to follow the cloud, and when the cloud stopped the people were to stop and camp. The cloud moving was to be seen as a command from the Lord and legally binding.

Trumpets were used for calling the community together and for having the camps set out. When two trumpets were used, the whole community was to assemble and the entrance to the Tent of Meeting (Tabernacle). Only the sons of Aaron were to blow the trumpets. The trumpets were also to be used to call the nation to battle against an oppressive enemy and for the commencement of the various feasts outlined in the book of Leviticus.

Thus, subsequent to the mention of this command from the Lord to move upon the cloud departing above the Tabernacle, the Israelites left Sinai when the cloud instructed them and they began their disbursement and move.

And then the complaining began again; this time about the hardships they were facing. They did this in the hearing of the Lord and the Lord sent fire on the outskirts of the camp and consumed some of the people there. Moses interceded and prayed to the Lord on the people's behalf.

Then the rabble, or the non-Israelite people that came with the nation on their voyage across the desert to the promised land, began to crave other food and influenced the Israelites to complain and wail about no meat to eat. Moses reaction was one of disownment. He was frustrated that this people were never-ending complainers; what would they think to complain of next? They are so ungrateful for the freedom they now have; they would rather be back in slavery (isn't that like us all?). The Lord's reaction was to get seventy elders of the people and place some of the Spirit on them to help bear the load that Moses alone was carrying for the people. And the quail came; lots of it. Enough for a whole month! And the Lord's intention was for them to have so much that they would loathe the amount because of their complaining; and it worked. And He also sent upon them a severe plague; what that was we do not know.

What really sets the stage for what we know is coming (the Israelite's refusal to enter the Promised Land), is the people's bent to disobedience and whims and complaining and distrust. All of their behavior from when the Lord was freeing them from Egypt up through now does not surprise the careful reader of what is soon coming. This also foreshadows what is coming throughout the rest of Israel's history. And it even foreshadows what we ourselves are like. We are not unlike those fickle people that we read about in these accounts. We see ourselves in the mirror of God's Word and through these people. Would we have done anything different if we were in their position? Probably not.

Life Application

Trust and faithfulness and obedience are continual themes throughout these opening narratives of Scripture. We are constantly reminded of how fickle and flighty we as humans are when we encounter the Lord God of heaven and earth, and when asked or commanded to do something, we often balk on account that we do not like it.

It's funny, really, that our human nature (without any instruction) naturally tends to distrust, be unfaithful, and disobedient. We have to really work at countering these seemingly natural tendencies within us. Thank God, that Jesus has given us a way out of our sinful nature and created in us a spiritual, holy nature.

Review Questions

1. What did it mean if the cloud above the tabernacle moved? Then the whole Israelite camp was to follow wherever it led
2. What was used to “call” the community together? Trumpets
3. What happened when the Israelites were complaining that they had to move? Fire consumed some people on the outskirts of the camp
4. When the rabble started to complain, what did they want? Meat
5. What did the LORD God give them? Quail
6. How much Quail did God send them? Too much!

Coloring Sheet

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