
NUMBERS 9:1 The LORD spoke to Moses in the wilderness of Sinai, in the first month of the second year after they had come out of the land of Egypt, saying,

The Israelites are reminded of the law that required them to keep the passover at its proper time, and with all its rites, Num 9:1-3. They kept the passover on the fourteenth day of the first month, Num 9:4, Num 9:5. The case of the men who, being unclean through touching a dead body, could not keep the passover, Num 9:6, Num 9:7. Moses inquires at the Lord concerning them, Num 9:8; and the Lord appoints the fourteenth day of the second month for all those who through any accidental uncleanness, or by being absent on a journey, could not keep it at the usual time, Num 9:9-12. Those who neglect to keep this solemn feast to be cut off from among his people, Num 9:13. The stranger who wishes to keep the passover is at liberty to do it, Num 9:14. The cloud covers the tabernacle both by day and night, from the time of its dedication, Num 9:15, Num 9:16. This cloud regulates all the encampments and marchings of the Israelites through the wilderness, Num 9:17-22. Their journeyings and restings were all directed by the commandment of the Lord, Num 9:23.

Verse 1

The Lord spake unto Moses - The fourteen first verses of this chapter certainly refer to transactions that took place at the time of those mentioned in the commencement of this book, before the numbering of the people, and several learned men are of opinion that these fourteen verses should be referred back to that place. We have already met with instances where transpositions have very probably taken place, and it is not difficult to account for them. As in very early times writing was generally on leaves of the Egyptian flag papyrus, or on thin laminae of different substances, facts and transactions thus entered were very liable to be deranged; so that when afterwards a series was made up into a book, many transactions might be inserted in wrong places, and thus the exact chronology of the facts be greatly disturbed. MSS. written on leaves of trees, having a hole in each, through which a cord is passed to keep them all in their places, are frequently to be met with in the cabinets of the curious, and many such are now before me, especially in Singalese, Pali, and Burman. Should the cord break, or be accidentally unloosed, it would be exceedingly difficult to string them all in their proper places; accidents of this kind I have often met with to my very great perplexity, and in some cases found it almost impossible to restore each individual leaf to its own place; for it should be observed that these separate pieces of oriental writing are not always paged like the leaves of our printed books; nor are there frequently any catch-words or signatures at the bottom to connect the series. This one consideration will account for several transpositions, especially in the Pentateuch, where they occur more frequently than in any other part of the sacred writings. Houbigant, who grants the existence of such transpositions, thinks that this is no sufficient reason why the present order of narration should be changed: "It is enough," says he, non ignorare libros eos Mosis esse acta rerum suo tempore gestarum, non historiam filo perpetuo elaboratam," "to know that these books contain an account of things transacted in the days of Moses, though not in their regular or chronological order.'

NUMBERS 9:2 "Moreover let the children of Israel keep the Passover in its appointed season.

NUMBERS 9:3 On the fourteenth day of this month, at evening, you shall keep it in its appointed season—according to all its statutes, and according to all its ordinances, you shall keep it."

Verse 3

According to all the rites of it - See all those rites and ceremonies largely explained in the notes on Exodus 12 (note).

NUMBERS 9:4 Moses spoke to the children of Israel, that they should keep the Passover.

NUMBERS 9:5 They kept the Passover in the first month, on the fourteenth day of the month, at evening, in the wilderness of Sinai. According to all that the LORD commanded Moses, so the children of Israel did.

NUMBERS 9:6 There were certain men, who were unclean because of the dead body of a man, so that they could not keep the Passover on that day, and they came before Moses and before Aaron on that day.

NUMBERS 9:7 Those men said to him, "We are unclean because of the dead body of a man. Why are we kept back, that we may not offer the offering of the LORD in its appointed season among the children of Israel?"

Verse 7

We are defiled by the dead body of a man - It is probable that the defilement mentioned here was occasioned by assisting at the burial of some person - a work both of necessity and mercy. This circumstance however gave rise to the ordinance delivered in Num 9:10-14, so that on particular occasions the passover might be twice celebrated:

1. At its regular time, the 14th of the first month;
2. An extra time, the 14th of the second month.

But the man who had no legal hinderance, and did not celebrate it on one or other of these times, was to be cut off from the people of God; and the reason given for this cutting off is, that he brought not the offering of God in his appointed season - therefore that man shall bear his sin, Num 9:13.

We have already seen, from the authority of St. Paul, that Christ, our Passover, is sacrificed for us; and that it was his sacrifice that was pointed out by the paschal lamb: on this, therefore, we may observe, that those who do not sooner or later eat the true Passover, and get the salvation procured by the sprinkling of his blood, shall be cut off from among those that shall enter into the rest prepared for the people of God; and for the same reason too; they bring not the offering of God in its appointed season, and therefore they shall bear their sin.

NUMBERS 9:8 Moses answered them, "Wait, that I may hear what the LORD will command concerning you."

NUMBERS 9:9 The LORD spoke to Moses, saying,

NUMBERS 9:10 "Say to the children of Israel, 'If any man of you or of your generations is unclean by reason of a dead body, or is on a journey far away, he shall still keep the Passover to the LORD.

NUMBERS 9:11 In the second month, on the fourteenth day at evening they shall keep it; they shall eat it with unleavened bread and bitter herbs.

NUMBERS 9:12 They shall leave none of it until the morning, nor break a bone of it. According to all the statute of the Passover they shall keep it.

NUMBERS 9:13 But the man who is clean, and is not on a journey, and fails to keep the Passover, that soul shall be cut off from his people. Because he didn't offer the offering of the LORD in its appointed season, that man shall bear his sin.

NUMBERS 9:14 "If a foreigner lives among you, and desires to keep the Passover to the LORD; according to the statute of the Passover, and according to its ordinance, so shall he do. You shall have one statute, both for the foreigner, and for him who is born in the land."

NUMBERS 9:15 On the day that the tabernacle was raised up, the cloud covered the tabernacle, even the Tent of the Testimony: and at evening it was over the tabernacle as it were the appearance of fire, until morning.

Verse 15

The cloud covered the tabernacle - See the whole account of this supernatural cloud largely explained, Exo 23:21; and Exo 40:34-38. Calmet observes that the 15th verse, beginning a new subject, should begin a new chapter, as it has no connection with what goes before; and he thinks this chapter, begun with the 15th verse, should end with the 28th verse of the following. (Exo 10:28)

NUMBERS 9:16 So it was continually. The cloud covered it, and the appearance of fire by night.

NUMBERS 9:17 Whenever the cloud was taken up from over the Tent, then after that the children of Israel travelled; and in the place where the cloud remained, there the children of Israel encamped.

NUMBERS 9:18 At the commandment of the LORD, the children of Israel travelled, and at the commandment of the LORD they encamped. As long as the cloud remained on the tabernacle they remained encamped.

NUMBERS 9:19 When the cloud stayed on the tabernacle many days, then the children of Israel kept the LORD's command, and didn't travel.

NUMBERS 9:20 Sometimes the cloud was a few days on the tabernacle; then according to the commandment of the LORD they remained encamped, and according to the commandment of the LORD they travelled.

NUMBERS 9:21 Sometimes the cloud was from evening until morning; and when the cloud was taken up in the morning, they travelled: or by day and by night, when the cloud was taken up, they travelled.

Verse 21

Whether - by day or by night - As the heat of the day is very severe in that same desert, the night season is sometimes chosen for the performance of a journey; though it is very likely that in the case of the Israelites this was seldom resorted to.

NUMBERS 9:22 Whether it was two days, or a month, or a year that the cloud stayed on the tabernacle, remaining on it, the children of Israel remained encamped, and didn't travel; but when it was taken up, they travelled.

Verse 22

Two days - a month - a year - It was by the Divine counsel alone that they were directed in all their peregrinations: and from the above words we see that their times of tarrying at different stations were very unequal.

NUMBERS 9:23 At the commandment of the LORD they encamped, and at the commandment of the LORD they travelled. They kept the LORD's command, at the commandment of the LORD by Moses.

Verse 23

Kept the charge of the Lord - When we consider the strong disposition which this people ever testified to follow their own will in all things, we may be well surprised to find them, in these journeyings, so implicitly following the directions of God. There could be no trick or imposture here. Moses, had he been the most cunning of men, never could have imitated the appearances referred to in this chapter. The cloud, and every thing in its motion, was so evidently supernatural, that the people had no doubt of its being the symbol of the Divine presence. God chose to keep this people so dependent upon himself, and so submissive to the decisions of his own will, that he would not even give them regular times of marching or resting; they were to do both when and where God saw best. Thus they were ever kept ready for their march, though perfectly ignorant of the time when they should commence it. But this was all well; they had the presence of God with them; the cloud by day and the fire by night demonstrated that God was amongst them. Reader, thou art here a tenant at will to God Almighty. How soon, in what place, or in what circumstances, he may call thee to march into the eternal world, thou knowest not. But this uncertainty cannot perplex thee, if thou be properly subject to the will of God, ever willing to lose thy own in it. But thou canst not be thus subject, unless thou have the testimony of the presence and approbation of God. How awful to be obliged to walk into the valley of the shadow of death without this! Reader, prepare to meet thy God.