

CHAPTER 9

INTRODUCTION TO NUMBERS 9

In this chapter the command for keeping the passover is repeated, and it was accordingly kept, (^{000E}Numbers 9:1-5); but some persons being defiled and disqualified for observing it, Moses inquires of the Lord, on their solicitation, what should be done in such a case, (^{000E}Numbers 9:6-8); when it was ordered to be kept by such, and those on journeys, on the fourteenth day of the second month, but not by others, who were to observe it according to its first appointment, (^{000E}Numbers 9:9-14); and an account is given of the appearance of the cloud by day, and fire by night, upon the tabernacle, which directed the children of Israel when to journey, and when to pitch their tents, (^{000E}Numbers 9:15-23).

Ver. 1. *And the Lord spake unto Moses in the wilderness of Sinai,* etc.] While the people of Israel were encamped there, before they took their journey from thence:

in the first month of the second year, after they were come out of the land of Egypt: the following order was given some time in the first month of the second year of Israel's departure out of Egypt; the precise day is not mentioned, it must be in the beginning of the month before the fourteenth day of it, in which the passover is ordered to be kept, according to the first institution of it; very probably immediately after the setting up of the tabernacle, and the consecration of Aaron and his sons; and it must be before the numbering of the people the fixing of their standards, the appointment of the Levites, and the dedication of them; since the order for the numbering of the people was on the first day of the second month, (^{000E}Numbers 1:1), but the account of them was postponed to this time, in order to give a relation of an affair which was not finished until the second month, and therefore the whole is laid together here:

saying, as follows.

Ver. 2. *Let the children of Israel also keep the passover,* etc.] Though this ordinance was enjoined the people of Israel, and observed by them at the time of their coming out of Egypt, and had been since repeated,

(⁽¹²³¹⁵⁾Leviticus 23:5); yet without a fresh precept, or an explanation of the former, they seemed not to be obliged, or might not be sensible that they were obliged to keep it, until they came into the land of Canaan, (⁽¹²³²⁵⁾Exodus 12:25); and therefore a new order is given them to observe it:

at his appointed season; and what that season is is next declared.

Ver. 3. *In the fourteenth day of this month*, etc.] The first month, the month Nisan or Abib, answering to part of our March:

at even ye shall keep it, in his appointed season: between the two evenings, (⁽¹²³¹⁶⁾Exodus 12:6); and even if it fall on the sabbath day, as Jarchi; and this was a sabbath day, according to the Jewish writers ^{f91}:

according to all the rites of it, and according to all the ceremonies thereof shall ye keep it; the former of these, according to Jarchi, respects the lamb, and the requisites of it, that it should be without blemish, a male, and of the first year; and the latter, according to him and others, the removal of the leaven, and the seven days of unleavened bread, and the eating of the lamb with bitter herbs: they take in no doubt all that were prescribed by the original law, except the sprinkling of the blood on the doorposts, and also eating the passover in haste, with their loins girt, and shoes on their feet, and staves in their hands; though some think these latter might be observed at this time, when they were unsettled.

Ver. 4. *And Moses spake unto the children of Israel, that they should keep the passover.*] The time now drawing nigh for the observation of it, it being now almost a year since their coming out of Egypt.

Ver. 5. *And they kept the passover on the fourteenth, day of the first month at even in the wilderness of Sinai*, etc.] No mention is made of keeping the feast of unleavened bread seven days, only of the passover, which indeed was only enjoined at this time, though the feast of unleavened bread used to follow it, and did in later times; but perhaps it would not have been an easy matter to have got the flour to make it of, sufficient for so large a body of people, for seven days together in the wilderness; though they might be able to furnish themselves with what was enough for one meal from the neighbouring countries, and especially from Midian, where Jethro, Moses's father, lived, and which was not very far from Sinai, where the Israelites now were:

according to all that the Lord commanded Moses, so did the children of Israel; which is observed to their honour; though Jarchi gives this as a reason why this book does not begin with this account, as the order of things seems to require, because it was to the reproach of the Israelites, that all the forty years they were in the wilderness they kept but this passover only; the reason of which was, because of the omission of circumcision during that time, through the inconveniences of travelling, and the danger of circumcision in it, without which their children could not eat of the passover, (^{<0128>}Exodus 12:48).

Ver. 6. *And there were certain men who were defiled by the dead body of a man*, etc.] The Targum of Jonathan adds,

“who died by them suddenly,”

whereby pollution was contracted, (see ^{<0419>}Numbers 6:9); though perhaps this was a whole house or family, one of which was dead, and so all were defiled, being in the place where the dead body was, or had touched it, or been concerned however in the burying of it, and on account of which were unclean seven days, and so might not eat of any holy things, as the passover; and though at the first institution there was no such law, yet since that time there was, which obliged them, (see ^{<0472>}Leviticus 7:20,21); and it is said ^{f92}, that the section concerning the red heifer, and so of defilement by a dead body, was delivered on the day the tabernacle was erected, even on the first day of the first month; and though recorded in (^{<0491>}Numbers 19:1-22); yet was given out before this; and indeed otherwise it is not easy to conceive how these men should know that the dead body of a man was defiling:

that they could not keep the passover on that day; as others did, the fourteenth of Nisan, it being, according to the Targum of Jonathan, the seventh day of their defilement:

and they came before Moses, and before Aaron, on that day; on the selfsame day the passover was kept, and they were sensible of their pollution, which disqualified for it; and therefore it should rather seem to be the first day of their pollution than their last; since otherwise they would doubtless have inquired about this matter before the passover came; unless the time of their pollution was so near out, that they thought they might eat it safely, on which they desired advice.

Ver. 7. *And those men said unto him,* etc.] To Moses, who was the chief magistrate, though Aaron was the high priest. Jarchi says, they were both sitting together when the men came, and put the question to them, but it was not proper to speak to one after another; for if Moses knew not, how should Aaron know? says he; the more difficult matters were brought to Moses, and he gave answers to them:

we [are] defiled by the dead body of a man; they had touched it, or had been where it was, or at the funeral of it, and so were defiled: this they knew was their case by a law before mentioned, and which they speak of, not as a sin purposely committed by them, but as what had unhappily befallen them, and they could not avoid; and express their concern, that upon this account they should be deprived of the ordinance of the passover and as this confession shows an ingenuous disposition, so what follows, a pious, religious, and devotional frame of mind:

wherefore are we kept back, that we may not offer an offering of the Lord in his appointed season among the children of Israel? they speak very honourably of the ordinance of the passover, they call it “an offering of the Lord”, the passover lamb being a slain sacrifice; and this offered to the Lord, by way of thanksgiving, for, and in commemoration of, their wonderful deliverance out of Egypt, and done in faith of Christ the passover, to be sacrificed for them; and it gave them much uneasiness that they were debarred by this occasional and unavoidable uncleanness, that was upon them, from keeping it; and what added to it was, that they could not observe it on the day which the Lord had appointed, and when the whole body of the children of Israel were employed in it; for it is no small pleasure to a good man to observe every ordinance of God in the manner and at the time he directs to, and his people in general are attending to the same; and the rather they were urgent in their expostulations, because it is said^{f93}, this was the seventh and last day of their pollution, when they should be clean at evening, and the passover was not to be eaten until the evening, and therefore so earnestly expostulate why they should be kept back from it.

Ver. 8. *And Moses said unto them, stand still,* etc.] Where they were; Aben Ezra says, at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation:

and I will hear what the Lord will command concerning you; as it was a singular case, of which there had been no instance before, Moses would not determine anything about it himself, but would inquire of the Lord his

mind and will concerning it; and for that purpose, very probably, went into the most holy place, where the Lord had promised to meet him and commune with him, from off the mercy seat, about any matter of difficulty he should inquire about, (⁴⁰⁵²Exodus 25:22).

Ver. 9. *And the Lord spake unto Moses*, etc.] From between the cherubim, after he had laid the case before him, and he gave him an answer:

saying; as follows.

Ver. 10. *Speak unto the children of Israel, saying*, etc.] Not to the men only that came to Moses for advice, but to the body of the people; for the answer of the Lord concerned them all, and carried in it a rule to be observed in the like case, and others mentioned, in all succeeding ages, as long as the passover was an ordinance of God:

if any man of you; or “a man, a man”, or any private man; for, according to the Jewish writers, this law only respects private persons, as those were who were the occasion of its being made:

or of your posterity; or “in your generations”^{f94}, or “ages”; which shows that this law respected future times, and not the present case only:

shall be unclean by reason of a dead body; (see ⁴⁰⁰⁶Numbers 9:6); Maimonides^{f95} says, this only respects uncleanness by a dead body, and not uncleanness by any creeping thing; for such as were unclean by them might sacrifice, though a private person, and eat the passover at evening with purity, when he had been cleansed: yet he says elsewhere^{f96}, that such that had issues, and menstruous women, and those that lay with them, and women in childbed, were unclean, and were put off to the second passover; and so the Targum of Jonathan here adds,

“or that has an issue, or a leprous person:”

or [be] in a journey afar off; which, according to Ben Gersom, was fifteen miles; so in the Misnah^{f97}, and the commentators on it:

yet he shall keep the passover of the Lord; not the first, but second, according to the directions given in (⁴⁰⁰¹Numbers 9:11-14).

Ver. 11. *The fourteenth day of the second month at even they shall keep it*, etc.] The month Ijar, as the Targum of Jonathan, which answers to part of our April and part of May; so that there was a month allowed for those

that were defiled to cleanse themselves; and for those on a journey to return home and prepare for the passover, which was not to be totally omitted, nor deferred any longer; and it was to be kept on the same day of the month, and at the same time of the day the first passover was observed; still the more to keep in mind the saving of their firstborn; and their deliverance out of Egypt at that time: an instance of keeping such a passover we have in (^{<401>}2 Chronicles 30:1,2), etc.

[and] eat it with unleavened bread and bitter [herbs]; in the same manner as the first passover was eaten, (^{<027>}Exodus 12:8); only no mention is made of keeping the feast of unleavened bread seven days, which some think those were not obliged unto at this time, only to keep the feast of the passover.

Ver. 12. *They shall leave none of it unto the morning*, etc.] None of the flesh of the passover lamb, what was left was to be burnt with fire, (^{<020>}Exodus 12:10);

nor break any bone of it; the same was enjoined, (see Gill on “^{<024>}Exodus 12:46”);

according to all the ordinances of the passover they shall keep it: as when observed in its time, excepting the feast of unleavened bread, which followed the first passover, and those rites which were peculiar to the passover, as kept at their first coming out of Egypt; as the sprinkling the blood of the lamb on the doorposts, eating it in haste, etc.

Ver. 13. *But the man that [is] clean*, etc.] Free from any pollution by a dead body, or the like:

and is not in a journey; in a distant country; for if he was on a journey in his own nation, he ought to return and attend the passover, which all the males from the several parts of the land were obliged unto; wherefore the Vulgate Latin version of (^{<090>}Numbers 9:10); is a wrong one; “or in a way afar off in your nation”; for at whatsoever distance they were in their own nation, they were bound to appear:

and forbearth to keep the passover; the first passover in the first month, the month Nisan, wilfully, through negligence, or not caring to be at the expense and trouble of it, or on any pretence whatsoever: Ben Gersom interprets it of one that will not keep neither the first nor the second passover:

even the same soul shall be cut off from his people; either be excommunicated from them, or cut off by death by the immediate hand of God:

because he brought not the offering of the Lord in his appointed season: this is the ground and reason of the resentment; it was a breach of the divine command, which required this offering; ingratitude to God, being a thank offering for a singular deliverance; and this aggravated by its not being brought at the appointed time, which was the fit time for it:

that man shall bear his sin; be chargeable with the guilt of it, and bear the punishment of it; he on himself, as Aben Ezra notes, he, and he only; not his wife and family, for he being the head and master of the family, it lay upon him to provide the passover lamb for himself and his house.

Ver. 14. *And if a stranger shall sojourn among you, and will keep the passover unto the Lord*, etc.] Then he must become a proselyte of righteousness, and be circumcised, or otherwise he might not eat of the passover, (⁽¹²³⁾Exodus 12:48); Ben Gersom interprets this of the second passover, and of a proselyte that was not obliged to the first, he not being then a proselyte, but became one between the first and the second; and so Aben Ezra understands it of a second passover, though he observes, that some say the first is meant:

according to the ordinance of the passover, and according to the manner thereof, so shall he do; according to the several rites and ceremonies, whether of the first or second passover, that an Israelite was obliged to observe, the same a proselyte was to observe, and what they were has been already taken notice of:

ye shall have one ordinance, both for the stranger and for him that was born in the land: for a proselyte, and a native of Israel; (see ⁽¹²⁴⁾Exodus 12:49).

Ver. 15. *And on the day that the tabernacle was reared up*, etc.] Which was the first day of the first month in the second year of the people of Israel's coming out of Egypt, (⁽¹²⁵⁾Exodus 40:1,2,17);

the cloud covered the tabernacle, [namely], the tent of the testimony; that part of the tabernacle in which the testimony was, that is, where the ark was, in which the law was put, called the testimony; and this was the most holy place; and over the tent or covering of that was this cloud, which

settled upon it, as Ben Gersom thinks, after the seven days of the consecration of Aaron and his sons; on the eighth day, when it was said unto the people of Israel, “today will the Lord appear unto you”, (^{<R01>}Leviticus 9:1,4); “and the glory of the Lord shall appear unto you”, (^{<R05>}Leviticus 9:6); and here the Targum of Jonathan calls this cloud the cloud of glory, because of the glory of God in it; of which (see ^{<B04>}Exodus 40:34-38);

and at even there was upon the tabernacle, as it were, the appearance of fire until the morning; the same phenomenon, which looked like a cloud in the daytime, appeared like fire in the same place in the nighttime, throughout the whole of it until morning light, when it was seen as a cloud again: this was a token of the presence of God with the people of Israel, of his protection of them, and being a guide unto them by night and day, while in the wilderness; and was a figure of his being the same to his church and people, in the present state of things; (see ^{<204>}Isaiah 4:5).

Ver. 16. *So it was alway*, etc.] Night and day, as long as the people of Israel were in the wilderness, (see ^{<B21>}Exodus 13:21,22 ^{<B09>}Nehemiah 9:19);

the cloud covered it [by day]: the phrase, “by day”, is not in the text, but is easily and necessarily supplied from (^{<B18>}Exodus 40:38); and as it is in the Targum of Jonathan, and in the Septuagint, Vulgate Latin, Syriac, and Arabic versions, and which the following clause requires:

and the appearance of fire by night; when as a cloud it could not be because of the darkness of the night; as in the daytime it could not be discerned as a body of fire or light, because of the light of the sun; but being seen under these different forms, was serviceable both by day and night, for the following purposes.

Ver. 17. *And when the cloud was taken up from the tabernacle*, etc.] Or went up from it, higher than it was before, yet not out of sight, but hung as it were hovering in the air over the tabernacle, but at some distance from it; this was done by the Lord himself:

then after that the children of Israel journeyed; as soon as they saw the cloud moving upwards, the Levites took down the tabernacle, and each took their post assigned them in the carriage of it, and the priests blew their trumpets mentioned in (^{<B10>}Numbers 10:2,4,8-10), and the whole camp moved and marched on in their journey:

and in the place where the cloud abode, there the children of Israel pitched their tents; when it stopped and remained without any motion, it was a signal to the children of Israel to stop also, and to set up the tabernacle, and pitch their tents about it by their standards, and according to the order of encampment which had been given them.

Ver. 18. *At the commandment of the Lord the children of Israel journeyed,* etc.] Or “mouth of the Lord”; not that there was any command in form given, or any audible voice heard, directing when to march; but the removal of the cloud was interpretatively the order and command of God for them to move also:

and at the commandment of the Lord they pitched; their tents; when the cloud stopped, they understood that as a signal to them, as a token of the will of God that they should stop likewise; it was to them as an authoritative command, which they obeyed:

as long as the cloud abode upon the tabernacle, they rested in their tents; whether a longer or a shorter time, as is after expressed.

Ver. 19. *And when the cloud tarried long upon the tabernacle many days,* etc.] Or years, for days are sometimes put for years, and in some places the cloud tarried several years; or however, if it stayed but a month or a year in any place, as in (⁴⁰¹²Numbers 9:22);

then the children of Israel kept the charge of the Lord, and journeyed not; they not only kept watching when it would move, or set sentinels for that purpose to observe it, but they kept the charge, order, or commandment, which the tarrying of the cloud was a token of, and did not attempt to proceed in their journey until they had an intimation so to do by its motion; and all this while, likewise, the tabernacle being up, they observed all the precepts and ordinances of the Lord in the service of it.

Ver. 20. *And [so] it was, when the cloud was a few days upon the tabernacle,* etc.] Or “days of number”, which were so few that they might be easily numbered: the Targum of Jonathan interprets them of the seven days of the week, as if the sense was, when the cloud rested a week on the tabernacle:

according to the commandment of the Lord they abode in their tents; during these few days, be they a week, or more, or less:

and according to the commandment of the Lord they journeyed; when it removed from the tabernacle.

Ver. 21. *And [so] it was when the cloud abode from even unto the morning,* etc.] The whole night, during which time they rested in their beds:

and [that] the cloud was taken up in the morning, then they journeyed; whether [it was] by day or night that the cloud was taken up, they journeyed; whether at morning or midnight; for sometimes, as Aben Ezra observes, they travelled in the night; whensoever their sentinels gave notice that the cloud was taken up, even though at midnight, they arose and prepared for their journey; and by this it is evident, that the appearance by day and night was the same body called the cloud, though beheld in a different view, in the daytime as a cloud, in the nighttime as fire.

Ver. 22. *Or [whether it were] two days, or a month, or a year, that the cloud tarried upon the tabernacle,* etc.] Sometimes it tarried but half a day, sometimes a whole day, sometimes two days, at other times a whole month, and even a year; a full year, as the Targum of Jonathan and Aben Ezra; or a longer time, as the Vulgate Latin version, for in one place it tarried eighteen years, as Maimonides says^{f98}; some say^{f99} nineteen years, as in Kadeshbarnea:

remaining thereon, the children of Israel abode in their tents, and journeyed not; so that, as the same writer observes, it was not because the children of Israel lost their way in the wilderness and wandered about, not knowing where they were, or which way they should go; hence the Arabians call the wilderness, the wilderness of wandering, nor that they were so long wandering in it as forty years, but because it was the will of God that should stay so long at one place, and so long at another, whereby their stay in it was protracted to such a length of time, according to his sovereign will:

but when it was taken up they journeyed; though they had continued ever so long, and their situation ever so agreeable.

Ver. 23. *At the commandment of the Lord they rested in their tents,* etc.] Though ever so disagreeable:

and at the commandment of the Lord they journeyed; though the circumstances might be such, that they could have liked a continuance; but

whether agreeable or disagreeable, they were obedient to the divine will: this, or what is equivalent to it, is frequently observed in this paragraph, to show that the Israelites, though they were an obstinate and perverse people, and must in general be desirous of getting as soon as they could into the land of promise, yet in this case, in all their stations and journeys, were submissive and obedient to the divine will, as all good men should be with respect to happiness; and happy are they who have God to be their guide through it, even unto death:

they kept the charge of the Lord, at the commandment of the Lord by the hand of Moses; observed the rest or motion of the cloud, the order and command of God signified thereby, as it was made known unto them by the ministry and means of Moses.