

# the Victory is the Lord's

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[ 0 : 00 ] Well, I wonder whether you're the type of person that likes to look back or look forwards.! For example, when you celebrate your birthday, do you spend more time looking back or more time looking forward?

It does probably depend on your age, I guess, because the older you are, like me, you have more to look back on and probably less to look forward to as well. But I think for most of us, whatever the milestone, we like to do a combination of both, don't we?

Look back with happy memories, but also look forward to see what might come in the future years. Well, tonight in chapters 9 and 10, Israel is instructed actually to do the same, to look back and also to look forward.

We've been going through each of the chapters in Numbers up to now, and these are the last two chapters where we have instructions. And then from next week onwards, we get into a bit more action, so to say.

So for those of you who've been coming along, thank you for your patience, or maybe you should be grateful that God has given us all this stuff to look at.

[ 1 : 15 ] So let's begin then in verse 1 of chapter 9, where the Lord spoke to Moses in the desert of Sinai in the first month of the second year after they came out of Egypt.

He said, And if you read there, it was the 14th day of the first month of the first year.

So this is exactly a year on. It's the first anniversary. And unlike the very first Passover, this first anniversary is a remembrance event, right?

Because on the very first Passover, Israel was anticipating God's rescue of them. It hadn't occurred as yet. It's a bit like your wedding, if you're married, versus the first anniversary of your wedding, isn't it?

Because when you get to the first anniversary, you're not getting married again, but you're looking back on that first day. So to hear with the Passover, they're looking back at what God had done on that day a year ago.

[ 2 : 47 ] And they are re-enacting it as well on that night because each household would sacrifice a clean, unblemished year-old lamb like they did on the first one, eat it with unleavened bread and bitter herbs.

And as they do, what they're doing is remembering what happened on that first night when their firstborn son was spared. Every firstborn in the household was spared that night, provided they had smeared the lamb's blood across the doorposts.

Then the angel of the Lord would have passed over, and that's where we get the name from, passed over their house. It symbolized that God looked to the lamb's sacrifice and on that basis forgave the sins of the entire household.

The sins were atoned by the blood of the lamb. And this was a really important thing that God wanted them to do, to look back, so much so that he made it compulsory to observe it every year on that 14th day, which created a problem in verse 6 and 7 for some people, which they brought to Aaron and Moses.

And they said, we have become unclean because of a dead body, but why should we be kept from presenting the Lord's offering with the other Israelites at the appointed time?

[ 4 : 13 ] That is, we can't observe this Passover now because we're unclean, so what should we do? Well, Moses inquired of the Lord, and the solution is one of a fallback or alternative.

Verse 10. So the Lord said, tell the Israelites, when any of you or your descendants are unclean because of a dead body, or are away on a journey, they are still to celebrate the Lord's Passover, but they are to do it on the 14th day of the second month at twilight.

They are to eat the lamb together with the unleavened bread and bitter herbs. They must not leave any of it till morning or break out of its bones. These are all part of the original regulations. When they celebrate the Passover, they must follow all the regulations.

But if anyone is ceremonially clean and not on a journey, but fails to celebrate the Passover, they must be cut off from their people. For not presenting the Lord's offering at the appointed time, they will bear the consequences of their sin.

A foreigner residing among you is also to celebrate the Lord's Passover in accordance with its rules and regulations. You must have the same regulations for both foreigner and native born. So the Lord actually adds two more scenarios to the original issue, covering someone who is travelling and also a foreigner who resides.

[ 5 : 35 ] That is, not just travelling through, but residing among them. Now both of these scenarios are more relevant, I think, for when they are already settled in the land, so that maybe the Lord is looking into the future, not in this second one in the second year.

But the travel scenario was possibly a case where if a person was travelling, came into contact with Gentiles, they may have been unclean.

Or else, what the Lord is trying to envisage is that everyone in the household needed to celebrate it together. Because remember, the blood of the Lamb covered the household.

So you want everyone to come home. A bit like Chinese New Year, you come home for the kind of celebration. You want everyone to come home and then have that feast so that everyone in the household is covered.

Now this solution really is a provision of grace, a concession by God, isn't it? God says actually you needed to do it then, but because of this special situation, which you know, unclean, because of a dead body, not your fault kind of thing, well, you can observe it.

[ 6 : 42 ] You still must observe it, but you can do it a month later. But the idea here is that, or the principle that God is trying to enforce on them is that everyone needed to observe it.

It was a mark of worship because it was to recognise that God had freed them from sin and slavery a year ago. And the consequences, as we read in verse 13, is actually quite severe, isn't it?

Anyone who is able to do it and does not do it are to be cut off. Now whether cutting off means that they are going to be excluded from the camp, like exiled permanently or maybe for a time, or in some sense cutting off could actually be meaning that they will be put to death, either way the end result is that actually they will be bearing the consequences of their sins.

And it makes sense because God is saying you had the opportunity, you should have recognised your freedom and your forgiveness, but you refused to do it.

And so you will bear that, the consequences of your action, which belies the lack of your faith in your own heart. And that's the same for us as Christians as well, isn't it?

[ 7 : 56 ] We look back to the cross of Jesus. We just sung that hymn, right? The old rugged cross. We look back to it continually. It was a once-only event in history, but we keep looking back to the death of Jesus because it is His blood shed on the cross which allows our sins to be forgiven and for us to continue to live in Christ, having eternal life because of what happened.

So this looking back is an important thing that we do as a church. When we gather, what we sing, how we pray, when we read God's Word, when we encourage each other, and then of course once a month, particularly when we remember in the Lord's Supper, we are constantly looking back to the cross to remind ourselves why we don't have to bear the consequences of our sins.

It's only because of Jesus. And that's the same as well when you have doubts in your own life, right, when you're by yourself and somehow you're guilt-ridden or whatever, you need to look back.

Look back at the cross, not at how good you are, whether God's still present in my life. No, look back at the objective act of Christ's death on the cross as the basis and the assurance for your salvation, not the subjective feelings that you may have as to whether you're good enough or you're close enough with God.

Look back to the cross. Now, having given them the instruction to do that, God now moves on to what He wants them to do as they journey in the present.

[ 9 : 45 ] And that is to look up at the cloud, which displayed God's presence and also guided and led them as to where they were to go. Now, it's no coincidence, isn't it, that those two words, presence, C-E, and present, T, all have the same, both words have the same root, isn't it?

Because knowing God's presence for us and for Israel helps us to live by faith in the here and now, the present. So, verse 15, Now, many of you, as we've been going through numbers, would have heard me say time and time again just how important the tabernacle is because it symbolizes God's presence.

Now, here, with the cloud by day and the cloud that looks like fire by night, God adds an added dynamic, if you like, to provide them with the sense that He's not only present, but He's there to give them ongoing direction and leading.

And so, from that, the people knew that even though Moses and Aaron were their leaders, it was God Himself that was leading them.

So, in verse 17, Whenever the cloud lifted from above the tent, the Israelites set out. Whenever the cloud settled, the Israelites encamped. And those two words, encamped and set out, I mean, I think Ruth, when she read it, she's going, How many times am I reading these two words, encamped and set out?

[ 11 : 39 ] But that's exactly it, right? At the Lord's command, the Israelites set out. At His command, they encamped. As long as the cloud stayed over the tabernacle, they remained encamped.

And on and on, we'll read that whatever happened to the cloud, it was either to set out or to encamp. Now, incidentally, if you're wondering, I think this cloud would have been visible right to the edge of the camp, right?

Remember, this camp was probably about two or three kilometres in sort of diameter or circumference or whatever you want to call it. Radius? No? Yes, radius. Yes.

But this cloud was such that it was probably visible even if you were right at the edge of the camp. And that's why at night, it looked like fire because they can't see the cloud at night.

So the cloud began to look like a fire so that even at night, they could see and they could know that the Lord was present. But more than that, they would also know when they were to encamp and when they were to set out.

[ 12 : 42 ] And so whether they were going to stay a few days or they were going to stay for a long time, day by day, they had to follow the Lord's leading. And as we've seen throughout Numbers as well, when God gave instructions, it was paramount for the people to obey.

And up to now, it's going to change in a while as we get into chapter 11, but right up to now, every time the Lord commanded something and Moses told it to them, they obeyed.

Right? You keep hearing it. And here in verse 23, it's exactly the same thing. At the Lord's command, they encamped and at the Lord's command, they set out. They obeyed the Lord's order in accordance with His command through Moses.

So, the Lord commands, Moses tells them, so like, the cloud itself going up and down is not going to make much sense, right? Moses actually has to tell them this is what it means.

And then, they obeyed as they're told. Alright? So, up to now, chapter 9 and 10, so far, so good. Come back next week, and the story changes.

[ 13 : 50 ] Now, chapter 10, God provides another way for them to follow His lead. So, not only are they to look up at the Lord's presence, they are also to listen out for the trumpets as well.

So, that's chapter 10. And so, I hope you've got your Bibles open as well, because we didn't quite read this just now, and I'm going to read it now. Not all of it, but some of it. So, verse 1, the Lord said to Moses, make two trumpets of hammered steel and use them for calling the community together and for having the camps set out.

When both are sounded, the whole community is to assemble before you at the entrance to the tent of meeting. If only one is sounded, the leaders, the heads of the clans, are to assemble before you. When a trumpet blast is sounded, the tribes camping on the east are to set out. At the sounding of a second blast, the camps on the south are to set out. The blast will be the signal for setting out.

Together, the assembly, blow the trumpets, but not with the signal for setting out. So, obviously, you can see there's a difference between blowing the trumpet and blasting the trumpet, right?

[ 15 : 00 ] And there are differences between the one and the two trumpets. Now, we're not going to really dwell on that, but the idea here is that once the Lord gave the word, that is, once they saw the cloud arise or descend, arise, yes, probably not descending, arise, then the priest, in that sense, had the job to take over to coordinate the precise timing of how they're to move.

So, what we're seeing here is that, yes, God leads the people, but he still uses humans like Aaron and his sons to lead, to determine the logistics of the move.

the next thing to notice is the various functions of the trumpets, right? So, yes, firstly, it's used to gather the men. So, when it says the assembly is all the men, when it says the second blast, that's the two blasts, two sounds, that's the leaders.

So, it's used to gather the men before the tent, but it's also used to signal the timing of the move. Now, when we get to verse 8, we will see that once they get into the land, it will be used as well in battle, right?

And then in verse 10, also used at times of rejoicing. So, verse 8, or verse, yep, verse 8, the sons of Aaron, the priests, are to blow the trumpets.

[16:25] This is to be a lasting ordinance for you and the generations to come. When you go into battle in your own land against an enemy who is oppressing you, sound a blast on the trumpets.

Then you will be remembered by the Lord your God and rescued from your enemies. Also, at your times of rejoicing, your appointed festivals and new moon feasts, you are to sound the trumpets over your burnt offerings and fellowship offerings and they will be a memorial for you before your God.

I am the Lord your God. So, you can see then that it wasn't just sounding the trumpet to call people to action, but symbolically as well, when they get into the land, they were to blast the trumpet as a way to call to the Lord for help.

So, it's not just horizontal, but a vertical call as well. And of course, it served as a remembrance in times of celebration. But here, God gives these instructions because he's saying that I promise that when you sound these trumpets, when you're in the land, I will come to your rescue just as I have in the past.

I will remember you as my people and come to rescue you from your enemies. Alright, so I think with all these instructions given now, Israel is ready to start on its journey.

[17:52] Verse 11. So, on the 20th day of the second month of the second year, the cloud lifted from above the tabernacle of the covenant law. Now, it's 20 days of the second month, so that's 20 days after the census.

And I think being day 20, remember how if they couldn't celebrate because they were unclean, they would celebrate on the 14th day of the second month? Well, seven days after that is day 20.

So, really God is saying now that everyone has celebrated the Passover, even those who are unclean at the time, people, you all can start on your journey. Where do they go?

Then the Israelites set out from the desert of Sinai and traveled from place to place until the cloud came to rest in the desert of Paran. They set out this first time at the Lord's command through Moses.

Now, if you want to know where these two places are, Sinai and Paran, there's a map on the next slide to give you an idea. The word's a bit small, but Sinai is right at the bottom of the V, the root, the red little root.

[18:54] That's Mount Sinai there. And then, the area to the north of that is the wilderness of Paran. So, there's a wide area there. But, I think, after this leg of the journey, which is the red line going northeast, where they end up is south, in the southeast corner of the desert of Paran, or wilderness.

And then, what happens now is that the marching order in which they are to go and set out on the journey is provided. Now, it is similar to chapter 2.

Some of you will remember when we're in chapter 2. But there are some slight variations. And, you know, you can come and talk to me about it later in more detail. But, similar to chapter 2, it's Judah now that leads the way with Issachar and Zebulun as part of the first division.

Remember, Judah wasn't the oldest son, but because the others had disqualified themselves, Judah becomes number one. So, verses 14 to 16, they are the first to set out. And then, in verse 17, and this is the first variation, unlike in chapter 2, before the next three tribes set out, is the Gershonites and the Merorites, who are the Levites, that go next.

So, remember, they are the ones that were given the carts and the oxen because they had to carry the frames and the furnishings of the tabernacle. And, they're asked to go next because, as we come to verse 21 later, we see that the Lord wants them to get to the destination ahead of the Kohathites who are carrying the holy things.

[20:33] So, they needed to get there first, pitch the tent, as it were, and then when the Kohathites get there, they can immediately move the holy things into the tent. So, then, verse 18, after these Levites go, Reuben, Simeon, and Ged, the tribes that camped in the south, they go next.

Then, the Kohathites, carrying the holy things, follow them. Then, the third group, Ephraim, Manasseh, and Benjamin, who are the tribes and the sons of Rachel, they go next. And then, lastly, Dan, Asher, and Naphtali, verse 25, who are from the tribes of the sons of the maidservants, they are the ones that go last. So, again, if you're wondering the order, visually, that's a slide of the order.

Okay? Forward is to the right. Now, you will notice that what I've done in there is that, based on verse 33, it's actually Moses, Aaron, and the Ark of the Covenant that leads the whole march. Okay? And this really gives you a picture, doesn't it? That it is God, again, that is leading the way. And when you go through and read it yourself later, you will sense that what is being described here is actually a military procession.

[ 21 : 50 ] Yes, they're the people of God, but they're sort of marching as though they're heading into battle. Why? Well, because it says that the leaders of Judah, Reuben, and Ephraim, and Dan are in command of their division.

That is, they're like the commanders of that little division leading those three tribes forward. In verse 25, for example, when it talked about the last division of Dan, Asher, and Naphtali, they are described as the rear guard for all the units.

So these are all military terms, isn't it? Rear guard, guarding, and then the units, units of an army. And then if you type back to verse 8, where Aaron and his sons were sounding the trumpet, then the picture you get is that as priests, they're actually also, if you like, the commanders-in-chief of God's army, right?

Because they coordinate the movement of the troops, right? They may not be the ones that is going out to battle themselves, but they're sort of giving instructions to the people as to what God wants of them.

And so the picture you get as a whole is that as the people respond in obedience, what we're witnessing is an army moving in unity, acting as one under God's command.

[ 23 : 15 ] And friends, as we draw this analogy to us today as a church, we too are God's people, but we are also a church that is on mission, aren't we?

That is, we have a battle to fight, a spiritual battle. Before Jesus ascended to heaven, he gave his disciples the Great Commission, and it's from heaven now that he coordinates the expansion of his kingdom.

He's given us, he's poured out his spirit to guide and lead us. And for those of us who just finished the series in Ephesians, we saw how God's master plan was to bring unity to all things under Christ. And then Paul said in chapter 6 that we are engaged in spiritual battle. So, while we may not literally hear the blast of trumpets, we hear, don't we, the call of our Lord and Saviour.

He says, the harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. As he poured out his spirit in Acts chapter 1, he also said that he did that so that we might be witnesses to the ends of the earth.

[ 24 : 28 ] That is our mission, isn't it? To roll back the kingdom of darkness and bring the gospel of light to people. So friends, we're a church, we're all together, we also need to remember that we have work to do.

And we are to engage in it joyfully, in unity, passionately, working to see God's kingdom grow. So, first point was to look back.

Second point was to look up at God's presence and be ready for battle. And the last point is to look forward, which is what Moses does now as he looks to the promised land.

Here, in verse 29, we see an exchange between him and his brother-in-law, Hobab. So we read, Now Moses said to Hobab, son of Reuel, I think that's the right pronunciation, the Midianite, Moses' father-in-law, we are setting out for the place about which the Lord said, I will give it to you.

Come with us and we will treat you well for the Lord has promised good things to Israel. Now, Reuel, actually, we've already met. He comes by another name, by the name of Jethro, right, in Exodus.

[ 25 : 40 ] And Jethro, what happened was that when Moses first left Egypt in Exodus, Jethro came from Midian and met him in the wilderness. And there, we read that he heard of the good things, exact phrase, the good things that the Lord had done for Israel.

And so here, the same phrase is being used again, but with his son, or Moses' brother-in-law. Now, very likely, at that time when Jethro came out, probably Hobab came and visited as well.

Jethro, we know, went home after that, but it seems that Hobab must have stayed on. So now, Moses persuades Hobab to join them in the land of promise. And Moses appeals to this very same thing, the good things the Lord has promised to Israel.

Moses is looking forward to the promised land and he's so sure and confident that God will fulfill his promises that he's able to then, on that basis, share it with his brother-in-law.

Now, for whatever reason, Hobab is sort of reluctant. Maybe he misses his dad at home, or maybe he doesn't feel like he belongs because he's a Midianite, but Moses persists.

[ 26 : 58 ] And so he says, please do not leave us. You know where we should camp in the wilderness and you can be our eyes. If you come with us, we will share with you whatever good things the Lord gives us.

And that's interesting again, isn't it? Because even though I've been saying all along that God is the one that leads, God is not ashamed to use humans, isn't it?

And in this case, even a Gentile in Hobab to fulfill his plans. Because Moses is saying that, Hobab, you actually know the lay of the land. You know where the good places to camp are.

You can be our eyes. So let the Lord use you to guide his people. Now, we're not taught explicitly, but I think we can assume that Hobab was convinced because the next verse, they set out from the mountain of the Lord, that is in Sinai, and traveled for three days.

The ark of the covenant of the Lord went before them during those three days to find them a place to rest. The cloud of the Lord was over them by day when they set out from the camp. Whenever the ark set out, Moses said, rise up, Lord, may your enemies be scattered, and may your foes flee before you.

[ 28 : 10 ] And so again, just by what Moses is saying, even though it sounds strange, it's clear the kind of journey they're on, aren't they? They're headed to a battle, right? The Lord is leading Israel into battle, and Moses is praying and asking for the Lord's enemies to be scattered, for their enemies to flee, even as the Lord leads them through the land.

So, yes, they are to look back on the Passover, and then they are to look up to the Lord for His presence, but also they are to look forward, aren't they, to the victories that God will promise them in the land.

God secured a once-only victory over their sin, but then God will also continue to deliver them so that they will have a final victory when they get into the promised land.

God didn't just rescue them or take you out of Egypt only to lead them to wander in the wilderness aimlessly. No, God had a purpose, isn't it? To lead them and guide them to a final victory, a place of rest in the land.

And so, verse 36, when the ark came to rest, Moses says, return, Lord, to the countless thousands of Israel. Now, in a sense, God is always with them, right?

[ 29 : 33 ] But symbolically, Moses is indicating that when the cloud descends on the tabernacle and the ark comes to a rest, it's as though the Lord is returning from battle.

And the picture here is that one day when they get into the land, the ark will rest one more time and the Lord will return and then dwell with them in a place of rest and peace.

Because the end goal is not that Israel will keep engaging in an endless war, but the end goal for God is that he might finally achieve that victory and dwell with them among the thousands.

He says there are countless thousands. That is not just the thousands they could count in this generation, but all other generations forward because these are the ones that he has called, he has redeemed, he has saved, he has delivered in order to lead them into a place of peace and rest.

And brothers and sisters, Jesus has done the same for us. There are countless of millions, aren't there, that will enter God's final rest. When that final victory is won, that final goal is achieved, we will all enter into the new creation.

[ 30 : 53 ] And so we too cry out, like Moses did, for the Lord to return, the Lord Jesus to return, because on that day all wars will cease and our final enemy, which is death itself, will be defeated.

Now, in a sense, we all have our trials, don't we? All sorts of battles that we quote unquote have in our life, but the one battle that we will all have is the battle with death, isn't it?

We will all face death one day or another, unless the Lord Jesus comes before then, death will be our final enemy. And what the Lord says, what God says, is that we can look to that final battle with confidence because the Lord Jesus has already achieved it for us.

Hence, we had that second reading in the New Testament where Paul says, listen, I tell you a mystery. We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed in a flesh, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet.

Here we have another trumpet, may not be silver, but the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised, imperishable, and we will be changed. For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable and the mortal with immortality.

[ 32 : 13 ] When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true. Death has been swallowed up in victory.

Hence, where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting? The sting of death is sin and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God.

He gives us victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. We have this victory because we look back at what Jesus has done on the cross. He has delivered us from sin.

And so with that, we are able to continue to look to God now in His Word and by His Spirit answer the call to live faithful lives in seeing God's kingdom expand.

And with that, we keep looking forward to that day when death will be swallowed up in victory because of Jesus. Because on that day, like Moses, there are so many good things that the Lord has promised us in Christ.

[ 33 : 23 ] So, from start to end, the victory is the Lord's. And in case you're reading the title, the punctuation there is wrong. There shouldn't be a question mark.

The victory is the Lord's exclamation mark. It should be. He has defeated sin on the cross. He will continue to lead us by faith and He will return to come and take us into His eternal glory.

So let's pray now and praise Him for that as we close. Father, we praise You for Your mighty salvation. Achieve for the countless of millions that You call Your own that are members of Christ's body, people bought by the blood of Jesus.

Thank You for all that You've done through Your Son. You have defeated sin. You have conquered death. Please now help us by the power of Your Spirit to live for Your kingdom and to look with eager anticipation to Your Son's return.

As John writes in the book of Revelation, Maranatha, come Lord Jesus. In His name we pray. Amen.