

# The Journey

GOD GIVES DAILY GUIDANCE TO HIS PEOPLE.

## Numbers 9:15-23

**15** On the day the **tabernacle** **A** was set up, **B** the **cloud** **C** covered the tabernacle, the tent of the testimony, and it appeared like **fire** **D** above the tabernacle from evening until morning. **16** It remained that way continuously: the cloud would cover it, appearing like fire at night. **17** Whenever the cloud was **lifted up** **E** above the tent, the Israelites would set out; at the place where the cloud stopped, there the Israelites camped. **18** At the **LORD'S command** **F** the Israelites set out, and at the LORD'S command they camped. As long as the cloud stayed over the tabernacle, they camped. **19** Even when the cloud stayed over the tabernacle **many days**, **G** the Israelites carried out the LORD'S requirement and did not set out. **20** Sometimes the cloud remained over the tabernacle for only a few days. They would **camp** **H** at the LORD'S command and set out at the LORD'S command. **21** Sometimes the cloud remained only from evening until morning; when the cloud lifted in the morning, they set out. Or if it remained a day and a night, they moved out when the cloud lifted. **22** Whether it was two days, a month, or longer, the Israelites camped and did not set out as long as the cloud stayed over the tabernacle. But when it was lifted, they set out. **23** They camped at the LORD'S command, and they set out at the LORD'S command. They **carried out the LORD'S requirement** **I** according to his command **through Moses**. **J**

### Exploring Key Words

- A** Israel's portable worship structure. It is also referred to as the tent of meeting and tent of testimony. It was built at the command of God "that I may dwell among them" (Ex. 25:8).
- B** The tabernacle was set up in the middle of Israel's camp, symbolizing God's dwelling place among His people.
- C** A visible sign of God's presence (see Ex. 13:21; 14:19-24). Before the tabernacle was built, the Lord appeared to Moses in a cloud outside the camp (33:7-10). After the tabernacle was completed, the cloud covered the tabernacle (Lev. 16:2,12-13).
- D** The fire of God's presence first appeared to Moses at the burning bush (Ex. 3:2). It led the Israelites out of Egypt (13:21-22; 14:24), rested on Mount Sinai (19:18), and settled on the tabernacle (40:38).
- E** The cloud and fire allowed Israel to travel day or night. The movement of the cloud/fire was God's signal that it was time to depart or make camp.
- F** This was not a verbal command, but a visual one that Israel could follow faithfully.
- G** Sometimes, the cloud stayed for several days, as when Israel camped at Sinai. Other times, it would remain only a few days (v. 20) or even just one day (v. 21).
- H** "Abode" (KJV); "Encamp" (NIV). When and where they would camp was determined entirely by God.
- I** Having learned important lessons regarding disobedience at Sinai, the people were willing to trust God's directions.
- J** God gave His word to Moses, who relayed it to the Israelites.



## God's Presence (Num. 9:15-16)

- God was with the Israelites as they journeyed from Mount Sinai to the plains of Moab. He dwelt among His people by covering the tabernacle in the center of the Israelite camp.
- The Lord directed His people with fire at night and through a cloud during the day. These provided a continuous and visible manifestation of God's glory and a reminder of His consistent guidance.

## Faithful Direction (Num. 9:17-21)

- The Israelites watched the cloud and the fire. When the cloud lifted from its place above the tabernacle and moved, the Israelites moved with it. They followed the cloud of God's presence as He directed.
- Likewise, when the cloud remained over the tabernacle and did not move, they stopped traveling and remained in that location.

## Active Obedience (Num. 9:22-23)

- The Israelites were faithful to follow God's direction regardless of the amount of time spent traveling or camping. Whether it was a single day or an extended period of time, the Israelites journeyed or camped at the Lord's command.

## Summary Statements

### *God gives daily guidance to His people.*

- Believers can be assured that God is with them and can provide trustworthy guidance.
- Following God's guidance will require believers to act on His instruction.
- Following God in faith means that we act on His timeframe and not our own.

## Memory Verse

### *Numbers 9:23*

## Key Doctrine

### *God*

To God we owe the highest love, reverence, and obedience.  
(See Deuteronomy 6:4-9; 1 John 5:3.)



For additional commentary, see the Leader Guide or Adult Commentary, available for purchase at [goExploreTheBible.com](http://goExploreTheBible.com).

## ENGAGE

*Think of a time when bad directions led you somewhere unexpected. How can getting just one detail wrong disrupt our travels? (PSG, p. 1)*

- Many of us rely on GPS navigation when going someplace new. Not only will it tell us to turn left in 1.2 miles, but it will also tell us what time we can expect to arrive.
- GPS systems weren't as reliable when they first came out. They were programmed at the factory and didn't automatically update with the most up-to-date information. They didn't know about new roads or routes. Thus, sometimes they gave wrong information, and people got lost.

*Bonus: Who or what serves as your "GPS" for life? Why do you trust that person or thing to help you navigate life?*

## EXPLORE

### 1. GOD'S PRESENCE (NUM. 9:15-16)

*Bonus: What is your process for making decisions? How did you develop that process?*

- The tabernacle was a portable, tent-like structure with two primary parts: the outer courtyard and a smaller structure covered with skins and cloth. Inside the structure were two rooms: the holy place and the holy of holies.
- The Hebrew word translated "tabernacle" means "dwelling place." Thus, the tabernacle was a visual reminder of God's presence with His people.
- The tabernacle was "covered" by a cloud by day and fire by night. The term "continuously" means without interruption. The fire and cloud represented God's presence as He guided His people on their journey toward Canaan.

*How can you be assured of God's presence in your life? What are some ways you can benefit from His presence? (PSG, p. 4)*

### 2. FAITHFUL DIRECTION (NUM. 9:17-21)

*Bonus: On a scale of 1-5, with 1 being "can't stand it" and 5 being "comfortable with it," how would you rate your attitude toward waiting? Why?*

- Numbers 9 does not describe how "the cloud was lifted up above the tent." It also doesn't explain how long it took for the cloud to reposition itself. Instead, the focus was on God's leading and His people's following.
- Two verbs in verse 18 describe what the Israelites did: "set out" and "camped." It is important to remember that more than 600,000 men left Egypt. The number of people swells when you add women and children. Yet, God's instructions and leadership ensured that setting out and camping did not deteriorate into a mob of confusion.

- At times, the cloud stayed in place for "many days." Other times, the wait lasted "only a few days"—or maybe even overnight (v. 21). Regardless of the duration, these verses serve as a reminder that the Lord sometimes compels His people to wait.

*Have there been times when God made you wait for an answer or solution from Him? How did that experience affect your faith? (PSG, p. 6)*

### 3. ACTIVE OBEDIENCE (NUM. 9:22-23)

*Bonus: When has someone asked you for advice only to ignore your suggestions? How did that make you feel?*

- The succinct phrase "when it was lifted, they set out" conveys two ideas. The first is an abrupt action. The people followed the Lord's directive promptly. Second, they followed His lead decisively and consistently. Thanks to the Lord's guidance, they knew each day where they were supposed to be.
- Three times verse 23 refers to the "LORD's command." The literal translation of the Hebrew is, "at the mouth of the LORD." The dual emphasis of the verse is on God's directions and the people's obedience. Israel was dependent on God's guidance. When He led, they obeyed.

*Why does it matter that we follow the Lord's lead? Why do we sometimes delay doing what He wants us to do? (PSG, p. 8)*

## CHALLENGE

As a group, consider some ways you can identify and obey God's direction as individuals, a Bible study, and a church.

*How might the Lord be leading your Bible study group or church into a new ministry? What can the group or church do to follow His lead? (PSG, p. 9)*

Encourage adults to evaluate their personal level of obedience to what God is calling them to do.

*How are you doing at following the Lord's lead? How can you become more attentive to His guidance? (PSG, p. 9)*

### FURTHER DISCUSSION



Scan here for additional discussion questions for this week's study.

**BIBLE SKILL (P. 8, PSG)**

Use a Bible dictionary to learn more about a biblical concept.

Exodus 9:15-23 describes how God led His people through the wilderness. Read the article “Pillar of Fire and Cloud” in a Bible dictionary and record any new insights. Reflect on these questions: ***How does God primarily guide His people today? What is the relationship between Bible reading and prayer and God’s guidance? How can you be sure you are following God’s will for your life?***

Encourage adults to list signs they encounter each day and the guidance those signs provide. List their responses on the board. Direct them to work in pairs to complete the Bible Skill activity on page 8 of the PSG. After a few minutes, allow volunteers to share how God chose to guide His people in the wilderness. Lead a brief discussion on how believers can discern His guidance and leadership today.

**OBJECT LESSON: DIARY**

Show adults a diary or journal. Allow volunteers to share their experiences keeping a diary or journal through the years. Talk about why people might keep a diary or journal.

Give each adult a sheet of paper and pencil. Direct them to read Numbers 9:15-16 and to write a diary entry in the voice of an Israelite experiencing these events. After a few minutes, allow a few volunteers to share their entries.

Emphasize the power of God’s presence among His people. Remind adults that God still reveals His presence to those who will trust Him. Suggest adults consider beginning the practice of keeping a journal or diary as a way to remember how God has worked in their lives and to express gratitude to Him for that work.

**GOD’S CONTINUED GUIDANCE**

*“Guide me, O Thou great Jehovah, Pilgrim through this barren land. I am weak, but Thou art mighty; Hold me with Thy powerful hand.” (Baptist Hymnal, 2008, No. 82)*

The hymn writer described the life of a believer by using the image of God leading His people through the wilderness, saved from bondage but not yet in the promised land. He emphasized the truth that we need God’s guidance and protection each step of the way.

In Numbers 9, we see that God used the fire and the cloud to guide His people through the wilderness. He determined the direction they were to travel, and He determined the duration of their stay at any one place. In His grace, God would not send the Israelites out to survive on their own wisdom and resources. He would guide them daily and meet their needs.

As believers, we are saved by God’s grace, but we also live daily by His grace. This should raise questions in our minds about how we can seek His direction. It should challenge us to listen for vital words of guidance and wisdom He has for us each day.

God can speak in a variety of ways. In the wilderness God used a visual symbol of His presence, His

cloud during the day and His fire at night. If the people wanted to live in God’s presence, they would need to follow His direction faithfully.

We follow the same God today. He gives guidance for our daily lives through various means. With our brains we evaluate situations and make decisions. Through our past experiences, we can acknowledge His presence and work. We can lean into His wisdom through fellow believers.

Primarily, however, our guidance is found in His Word. He has a plan and purpose for each of us, and His Spirit reveals truth as we read and hear His Word. No one wants for us to know God’s will more than He does. We must tune our hearts to listen to Him. As we follow His lead, think His thoughts, and obey His teachings, we can learn to walk faithfully in His presence.

**BONUS CONTENT****Tabernacle**

Scan here to discover more about this place of worship built by the Israelites.