

PARASHAH ONE HUNDRED AND SIX

Numbers 9:22-10:36; Isaiah 27:7-13; Revelation 8:1-6

notes by Tim Hegg

Following God in the Wilderness

Life is punctuated by death. In the fallen world in which we live, we are constantly confronted with both the fact and effects of death—the promised penalty for sin: “in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die” (Gen 2:17). In the place of “walking with God in the cool of the day” (Gen 3:8), an expression denoting the fellowship of Gan Eden, is the example of Israel following the *Shekinah* in the wilderness. HaShem is still leading—still expressing His care and shepherd-like guardianship of His flock—but now in the harsh environment of the wilderness. Our parashah notes that the armies of each tribe stand at their front, reminding us that the shalom of Eden has given way to the wars of this world.

Our text is very clear: Israel was not acting on her own at this point, but was carefully following the *Shekinah* in her travels across the unknown territory of the wilderness. Whether the Cloud lingered a day or two, or a month or two, or even longer, Israel waited and camped until God Himself moved to indicate that Israel, too, should break camp and continue her trip to the Promised Land. The language is remarkable!

At the command of Adonai they camped, and at the command of Adonai they set out; they kept Adonai's charge, according to the command of Adonai through Moses. (10:23)

Everything is done in reference to the will of Adonai. Here is the picture of Israel as she is supposed to be: following HaShem as a nation of individuals who have committed themselves to ways of Adonai.

The manner in which Israel should physically follow the leading of the *Shekinah* is also described. Two silver trumpets (שְׁפִי חֲצוֹצְרוֹת כֶּסֶף, *sh'tei chatzotz'rot keseph*) were to be made and used to signal the nation. Made of hammered silver, they most likely resembled the bell of a modern-day trumpet or “straight-horn,” like those used in the royal courts of England. Such an instrument could make a penetrating sound not unlike a fog horn—a sound which could be heard for miles, especially in the flat land of the wilderness. Certain combinations of blasts meant different things, and though these different signals are only generally described, we may presume that the priests (whose job it was to blow them) devised specific signals so that the nation knew what was expected of them. We may further speculate that the trumpets were made to have different pitches. When one was blown, the sound was easily distinguished from that produced by both when blown simultaneously.

The trumpets were used to summon to the Tent of Meeting (whether of the whole nation or just the tribal leaders), to begin journeying, to announce the *mo'edim* (including Rosh Chodesh or the beginning of each month), and to signal for impending battle. They likewise were used in connection with the sacrifices.

Interestingly, the text states that the silver trumpets “were to be for you a memorial before your God” (10:10, וְהָיוּ לָכֶם לְזִכְרוֹן לְפָנַי אֱלֹהֵיכֶם). We should understand this against the previous notice (v. 8) that they were to be blown “throughout your generations” as a “perpetual statute.” Thus, in the subsequent history of Israel, the blowing of the silver trumpets was to be a memorial of the manner in which God both led and protected Israel on her journey through the wilderness to the Land.

Furthermore, God's intentions for the nation are signalled by the priests, following the pattern set down by Moses, in which God spoke to him, and he related God's message to the people. This foreshadows Yeshua through whom we know the Father. Like the nation of old, we are guided and taught by our High Priest.

The order in which the camp of Israel set out is carefully described. Judah, the tribe of the Messiah, was first. Judah would lead the rest by following the *Shekinah*. So Messiah comes to lead us to the Father. Next came the priests who carried the parts of the Tabernacle proper, then followed the tribe of Reuben, firstborn, who presumably had a strong military presence at the head of the traveling nation. Then came the

Kohathites who carried the sacred objects. The order was such that by the time the Kohathites arrived at the next stopping place, the Tabernacle was already erected so that the sacred objects could be properly placed (10:21). Following the sacred objects were the armies of Ephraim, Manasseh, Benjamin, Dan, Asher, and Naphtali. (The fuller instructions for travel have already been given in Num 2.) According to 10:25, Dan was given the task of mustering the armies for the rear guard as the nation embarked on her travels (וְנִסְעוּ וְדָגְלוּ מִחֲנֵה בְנֵי־דָן מֵאֶסְפֵּי לְכָל־הַמִּחֲנֵה לְצַבְאֵתָם).

An interesting note is included regarding Chovav, the son of Reuel, Moses' father-in-law (10:29ff). Apparently Chovav had acted as the "scout and guide" for Israel as they traveled since he was familiar with the wilderness territories. Since Israel was now going to the Land which God had promised to give to her, Chovav decided his duties had ended and that he would return to his home in Midian. Moses realized, however, that without his help ("you will be eyes for us") the nation would be vulnerable both to the harshness of the wilderness as well as to the people who might attack them on their way. But note carefully the manner in which Moses persuades Chovav to remain with them:

So it will be, if you go with us, that whatever good Adonai does for us, we will do for you.
(10:32)

Chovav would share in the blessings which God would pour out upon Israel. In other words, the covenant blessings are available to all who are attached to Israel. Here is a very important point: God promises to bless Israel, but this blessing has nothing to do with one's individual bloodline, but rather on one's attachment to the covenant nation. All who are part of God's people receive the same blessings—there is no distinction.

According to the end of our *parashah*, the Ark of the Covenant holds the central place in the traveling nation of Israel. The safety along the journey which Israel would enjoy is because God is in her midst. The traveling of the Ark in the midst of the people is remembered each time we take the Torah scroll from its place, for we recite these words of Moses:

Rise up, Adonai! And let Your enemies be scattered, And let those who hate You flee before You.

And when we return the Torah to its place, we recite:

Return, Adonai, To the myriad thousands of Israel.

We thus are reminded each and every time that we remove the Torah scroll and return it after reading, that like Israel of old, we too are on a journey—one in which the Word of God in our midst is the key and all-important factor. If we should "travel" safely and if our enemies would be subdued, it is because God is travelling with us.

And behold, I am with you always, even to the end of the age (Matt 28:20).

The choice of Isaiah 27:7-13 for the *haftarah* is clear: the blowing of the trumpet (in this case, the great shofar) will once again cause the assembling of Israel together, and will bring her to the Land. Like the blowing of the trumpets during the wilderness journey, the sons of Israel will know and obey the sound of HaShem's trumpet, and will return as He fights for them and subdues their enemies. They will return to the Land and worship at His holy mountain, a reference which presupposes the rebuilding of the Temple and re-establishment of the Temple service.

Likewise, the Apostolic passage utilizes the metaphor of the blowing of trumpets. No doubt built upon

the general awareness that blowing of the trumpets signaled the need to gather for action, so the trumpets sounded in the apocalypse of John signal the Divine activity which brings about the ordained end of the nations' domination and the salvation and regathering of Israel to her rightful, covenant position.

If we might use these sections as illustrative of our own life of faith, we may consider the fact that we too are on a journey. Even as Israel was not to consider the wilderness to be her permanent abode, so we are to reckon ourselves as citizens, not of this world, but of a City whose Architect and Builder is God Himself (Heb 11:10). We are travelers, anticipating our rest in the New Jerusalem, a city we have already "seen" by faith, and even experienced a foretaste of its joys through the fellowship of the Ruach.

Yet we are still in the wilderness—our journey has not ended. Death still punctuates our wilderness life, and we, like the Apostle Paul, await with groaning our full redemption (Rom 8:23f). We have left Egypt, this is a surety. But we have not yet entered our complete and final rest. We therefore must journey with our eye upon God and the Promised Land to which He is bringing us.

But we must journey, not in our own strength, nor in our own wisdom, but according to the pattern God Himself has given us. Even as Israel of old was given clear "marching orders," so we too have been given the pattern of life which we must follow as we journey. If we would reach our desired destination, then we must journey with HaShem in our midst—with Him as our Guide and Defender. And we must not become "content" with staying in the wilderness, regardless of how difficult the journey may be.

Nor may we lose heart in the struggles that come as a result of our journey, for our hopes are cast upon a better place—a place in which the dwelling of God and His glory is no longer restrained by our weakness and disobedience, but where the Rest purchased for us becomes a reality. As we have this hope within us, we are purified and strengthened to continue the journey (cf. 1Jn 3:1–3).