

CHAPTER 10

In this chapter we have,

- I.** Orders given about the making and using of silver trumpets, which seems to have been the last of all the commandments God gave upon mount Sinai, and one of the least, yet not without its significance (v. 1-10).
- II.** The history of the removal of Israel's camp from mount Sinai, and their orderly march into the wilderness of Paran (v. 11-28).
- III.** Moses's treaty with Hobab, his brother-in-law (v. 29-32).
- IV.** Moses's prayer at the removing and resting of the ark (v. 33, etc.).

~~CHAP~~ NUMBERS 10:1-10

THE MOVING OF THE CAMP

We have here directions concerning the public notices that were to be given to the people upon several occasions by sound of trumpet. In a thing of this nature, one would think, Moses needed not to have been taught of God: his own reason might teach him the conveniency of trumpets; but the constitution of Israel was to be in every thing divine, and therefore even in this matter, small as it seems. Moses is here directed,

1. About the making of them. They must be made of silver; not cast but of beaten work (as some read it), the matter and shape, no doubt, very fit for the purpose. He was now ordered to make but two, because there were but two priests to use them. But in Solomon's time we read of 120 *priests sounding with trumpets*, ~~CHAP~~ 2 Chronicles 5:12. The form of these trumpets is supposed to have been much like ours at this day.

2. Who were to make use of them; not any inferior person, but the priests themselves, the *sons of Aaron*, v. 8. As great as they were, they must not think it a disparagement to them to be trumpeters in the house of God; the meanest office there was honourable. This signified that the Lord's

ministers should *lift up their voice like a trumpet*, to show people their sins (²⁸¹Isaiah 58:1), to call them to Christ, (²⁷³Isaiah 27:13).

3. Upon what occasions the trumpets were to be sounded.

(1.) For the *calling of assemblies*, v. 2. Thus they are told to blow the trumpet in Zion for the calling of a solemn assembly together, to sanctify a fast, (²⁹⁵Joel 2:15. Public notice ought to be given of the time and place of religious assemblies; for the invitation to the benefit or ordinances is general: *whoever will, let him come*. wisdom cries in the chief places of concourse. But, that the trumpet might not *give an uncertain sound*, they are directed, if only the princes and elders were to meet, to blow but one of the trumpets; less should serve to call *them* together, who ought to be examples of forwardness in any thing that is good: but, if the body of the people were to be called together, both the trumpets must be sounded, that they might be heard at the greater distance. In allusion to this, they are said to be blessed that *hear the joyful sound* (³⁹⁵Psalms 89:15), that is, that are invited and called upon to wait upon God in public ordinances, (⁴⁷¹Psalms 122:1. And the general assembly at the great day will be summoned by *the sound of the archangel's trumpet*, (⁴²¹Matthew 24:31.

(2.) For the *journeying of the camps*, to give notice when each squadron must move; for no man's voice could reach to give the word of command: soldiers with us that are well disciplined may be exercised by beat of drums. When the trumpets were blown for this purpose, they must *sound an alarm* (v. 5), a broken, quavering, interrupted sound, which was proper to excite and encourage the minds of people in their marches against their enemies; whereas a continued equal sound was more proper for the calling of the assembly together (v. 7): yet when the people were called together to deprecate God's judgments we find an alarm sounded, (³⁹¹Joel 2:1. At the first sounding, Judah's squadron marched, at the second Reuben's, at the third Ephraim's, at the fourth Dan's, v. 5, 6. And some think that this was intended to sanctify their marches, for thus were proclaimed by the priests, who were God's mouth to the people, not only the divine orders given them to move, but the divine blessing upon them in all their motions. He that hath ears, let him hear that *God is with them of a truth*. King Abijah valued himself and his army very much upon this (⁴³²2 Chronicles 13:12), *God himself is with us for our captain and his priests with sounding trumpets*.

(3.) For the animating and encouraging of their armies, when they went out in battle (v. 9): “*If you go to war, blow with the trumpets*, signifying thereby your appeal to heaven for the decision of the controversy, and your prayer to God to give you victory; and God will own this his own institution, and *you shall be remembered before the Lord your God.*” God will take notice of this sound of the trumpet, and be engaged to fight their battles, and let all the people take notice of it, and be encouraged to fight his, as David, when he heard *a sound of a going upon the tops of the mulberry trees*. Not that God needed to be awaked by sound of trumpet any more than Christ needed to be awaked by his disciples in the storm, ^{<BIB>}Matthew 8:25. But where he intends mercy it is his will that we should solicit it; ministers must stir up the good soldiers of Jesus Christ to fight manfully against sin, the world, and the devil, by assuring them that Christ is the *captain of their salvation*, and will *tread Satan under their feet*.

(4.) For the solemnizing of their sacred feasts, v. 10. One of their feasts was called *a memorial of the blowing of trumpets*, ^{<BIB>}Leviticus 23:23, etc. And it should seem they were thus to grace the solemnity of all their feasts (^{<BIB>}Psalm 81:3), and their sacrifices (^{<BIB>}2 Chronicles 29:27), to intimate with what joy and delight they performed their duty to God, and to raise the minds of those that attended the services to a holy triumph in the God they worshipped. And then their performances were for a *memorial before God*; for he takes pleasure in our religious exercises when we take pleasure in them. Holy work should be done with holy joy.

^{<BIB>}NUMBERS 10:11-28

THE REMOVAL OF THE CAMP

Here is,

I. A general account of the removal of the camp of Israel from mount Sinai, before which mountain it had lain now about a year, in which time and place a great deal of memorable business was done. Of this removal, it should seem, God gave them notice some time before (^{<BIB>}Deuteronomy 1:6, 7): *You have dwelt long enough in this mountain, turn you and take your journey towards the land of promise*. The apostle tells us that *mount Sinai genders to bondage* (^{<BIB>}Galatians 4:24), and signifies the law there given, which is of use indeed as a schoolmaster to bring us to Christ, yet

we must not rest in it, but advance towards the joys and liberties of the children of God, for our happiness is conferred not by the law, but by promise. Observe,

1. The signal given (v. 11): *The cloud was taken up*, and we may suppose it stood for some time, till they were ready to march; and a great deal of work it was to take down all those tents, and pack up all those goods that they had there; but every family being employed about its own, and all at the same time, many hands made quick work of it.

2. The march began: *They took their journey according to the commandment of the Lord*, and just as the cloud led them, v. 13. Some think that mention is thus frequently made in this and the foregoing chapter of the *commandment of the Lord*, guiding and governing them in all their travels, to obviate the calumny and reproach which were afterwards thrown upon Israel, that they tarried so long in the wilderness, because they had lost themselves there, and could not find the way out. No, the matter was not so; in every stage, in every step, they were under divine direction; and, if they knew not where they were, yet he that led them knew. Note, Those that have given up themselves to the direction of God's word and Spirit steer a steady course, even when they seem to be bewildered. While they are sure they cannot lose their God and guide, they need not fear losing their way.

3. The place they rested in, after three days' march: They went *out of the wilderness of Sinai*, and rested *in the wilderness of Paran*. Note, All our removals in this world are but from one wilderness to another. The changes which we think will be for the better do not always prove so; while we carry about with us, wherever we go, the common infirmities of human nature, we must expect, wherever we go, to meet with its common calamities; we shall never be at rest, never at home, till we come to heaven, and all will be well there.

II. A particular draught of the order of their march, according to the late model.

1. Judah's squadron marched first, v. 14-16. The leading standard, now lodged with that tribe, was an earnest of the sceptre which in David's time should be committed to it, and looked further to the captain of our salvation, of whom it was likewise foretold that *unto him should the gathering of the people be*.

2. Then came those two families of the Levites which were entrusted to carry the tabernacle. As soon as ever the cloud was taken up, the tabernacle was taken down, and packed up for removing, v. 17. And here the six wagons came laden with the more bulky part of the tabernacle. This frequent removing of the tabernacle in all their journeys signified the movableness of that ceremonial dispensation. That which was so often shifted would at length vanish away, ^{<3813>}Hebrews 8:13.

3. Reuben's squadron marched forward next, taking place after Judah, *according to the commandment of the Lord*, v. 18-20.

4. Then the Kohathites followed with their charge, the sacred furniture of the tabernacle, *in the midst of the camp*, the safest and most honourable place, v. 21. And they (that is, says the margin, the Gershonites and Merarites) did *set up the tabernacle against they came*; and perhaps it is expressed thus generally because, if there was occasion, not those Levites only, but the other Israelites that were in the first squadron, lent a hand to the tabernacle to hasten the rearing of it up, even before they set up their own tents.

5. Ephraim's squadron followed next after the ark (v. 22-24), to which some think the psalmist alludes when he prays (^{<3812>}Psalm 80:2), *Before Ephraim, Benjamin, and Manasseh*, the three tribes that composed this squadron, *stir up thy strength* (and the ark is called his strength, ^{<3813>}Psalm 78:61), *and come and save us*.

6. Dan's squadron followed last, v. 25-27. It is called the *rearward*, or *gathering host*, of all the camps, because it gathered up all that were left behind; not the women and children (these we may suppose were taken care of by the heads of their families in their respective tribes), but all the unclean, the mixed multitude, and all that were weak and feeble, and cast behind in their march. Note, He that leadeth Joseph like a flock has a tender regard to the hindmost (^{<3816>}Ezekiel 34:16), that cannot keep pace with the rest, and *of all that are given him he will lose none*, ^{<3817>}John 17:11.

NUMBERS 10:29-36

MOSES'S REQUEST TO HOBAB

Here is,

I. An account of what passed between Moses and Hobab, now upon this advance which the camp of Israel made towards Canaan. Some think that Hobab was the same with Jethro, Moses's father-in-law, and that the story, Exodus 18, should come in here; it seems more probable that Hobab was the son of Jethro, *alias* Reuel, or Raguel (^{Q128}Exodus 2:18), and that when the father, being aged, went to his own land (^{Q127}Exodus 18:27), he left his son Hobab with Moses, as Barzillai left Chimham with David; and the same word signifies both a *father-in-law* and a *brother-in-law*. Now this Hobab staid contentedly with Israel while they encamped at mount Sinai, near his own country; but, now that they were removing, he was for going back to his own country and kindred, and his father's house. Here is,

1. The kind invitation Moses gives him to go forward with them to Canaan, v. 29. He tempts him with a promise that they would certainly be kind to him, and puts God's word in for security: *The Lord hath spoken good concerning Israel*. As if he had said, "Come, cast in thy lot among us, and thou shalt fare as we fare; and we have the promise of God that we shall fare well." Note, Those that are bound for the heavenly Canaan should invite and encourage all their friends to go along with them, for we shall have never the less of the treasures of the covenant, and the joys of heaven, for others coming in to share with us. And what argument can be more powerful with us to take God's people for our people than this, that God *hath spoken good concerning them*? It is good having fellowship with those that have fellowship with God (^{Q103}1 John 1:3), and going with those with whom God is, ^{Q82}Zechariah 8:23.

2. Hobab's inclination, and present resolution, to go back to his own country, v. 30. One would have thought that he who had seen so much of the special presence of God with Israel, and such surprising tokens of his favour to them, would not have needed much invitation to embark with them. But his refusal must be imputed to the affection he had for his native air and soil, which was not overpowered, as it ought to have been, by a believing regard to the promise of God and a value for covenant blessings.

He was indeed a son of Abraham's loins (for the Midianites descended from Abraham by Keturah), but not an heir of Abraham's faith (³¹¹⁸Hebrews 11:8), else he would not have given Moses this answer. Note, The things of this world, which are seen, draw strongly from the pursuit of the things of the other world, which are not seen. The magnetic virtue of this earth prevails with most people above the attractives of heaven itself.

3. The great importunity Moses used with him to alter his resolution, v. 31, 32. He urges,

(1.) That he might be serviceable to them: *“We are to encamp in the wilderness”* (a country well known to Hobab), *“and thou mayest be to us instead of eyes, not to show us where we must encamp, nor what way we must march”* (which the cloud was to direct), *“but to show us the conveniences and inconveniences of the place we march through and encamp in, that we may make the best use we can of the conveniences, and the best fence we can against the inconveniences.”* Note, It will very well consist with our trust in God's providence to make use of the help of our friends in those things wherein they are capable of being serviceable to us. Even those that were led by miracle must not slight the ordinary means of direction. Some think that Moses suggests this to Hobab, not because he expected much benefit from his information, but to please him with the thought of being some way useful to so great a body, and so to draw him on with them, by inspiring him with an ambition to obtain that honour. Calvin gives quite another sense of this place, very agreeably with the original, which yet I do not find taken notice of by any since. *“Leave us not, I pray thee, but come along, to share with us in the promised land, for therefore hast thou known our encampment in the wilderness, and hast been to us instead of eyes; and we cannot make thee amends for sharing with us in our hardships, and doing us so many good offices, unless thou go with us to Canaan. Surely for this reason thou didst set out with us that thou mightest go on with us.”* Note, Those that have begun well should use that as a reason for their persevering, because otherwise they lose the benefit and recompence of all they have done and suffered.

(2.) That they would be kind to him: *What goodness the Lord shall do to us, the same we will do to thee*, v. 32. Note,

[1.] We can give only what we receive. We can do no more service and kindness to our friends than God is pleased to put it into the power of our hand to do. This is all we dare promise, to do good as God shall enable us.

[2.] Those that share with God's Israel in their labours and hardships shall share with them in their comforts and honours. Those that are willing to take their lot with them in the wilderness shall have their lot with them in Canaan; *if we suffer with them we shall reign with them*, ^{<302>}2 Timothy 2:12; ^{<228>}Luke 22:28, 29.

We do not find any reply that Hobab here made to Moses, and therefore we hope that his silence gave consent, and he did not leave them, but that, when he perceived he might be useful, he preferred that before the gratifying of his own inclination; in this case he left us a good example. And we find (^{<016>}Judges 1:16; ^{<056>}1 Samuel 15:6) that his family was no loser by it.

II. An account of the communion between God and Israel in this removal. They left *the mount of the Lord* (v. 33), that Mount Sinai where they had seen his glory and heard his voice, and had been taken into covenant with him (they must not expect that such appearances of God to them as they had there been blessed with should be constant); they departed from that celebrated mountain, which we never read of in scripture any more, unless with reference to these past stories; now farewell, Sinai; *Zion* is the mountain of which God has said. *This is my rest for ever* (^{<124>}Psalm 132:14), and of which we must say so. But when they left the *mount of the Lord* they took with them the *ark of the covenant of the Lord*, by which their stated communion with God was to be kept up. For,

1. By it God did *direct their paths*. The ark of the covenant went before them, some think in *place*, at least in this removal; others think only in *influence*; though it was carried in the midst of the camp, yet the cloud that hovered over it directed all their motions. The ark (that is, the God of the ark) is said to *search out a resting place* for them; not that God's infinite wisdom and knowledge need to make searches, but every place they were directed to was as convenient for them as if the wisest man they had among them had been employed to go before them, and mark out their camp to the best advantage. thus Canaan is said to be a land which God *spied out*, ^{<306>}Ezekiel 20:6.

2. By it they did *in all their ways acknowledge God*, looking upon it as a token of God's presence; when that moved, or rested, they had their eye up unto God. Moses, as the mouth of the congregation, lifted up a prayer, both at the removing and at the resting of the ark; thus their going out and

coming in were sanctified by prayer, and it is an example to us to begin and end every day's journey, and every day's work, with prayer.

(1.) Here is his prayer when the ark set forward: *Rise up, Lord, and let thy enemies be scattered*, v. 35. They were now in a desolate country, but they were marching towards an enemy's country, and their dependence was upon God for success and victory in their wars, as well as for direction and supply in the wilderness. David used this prayer long after (~~1781~~ Psalm 68:1), for he also fought the Lords' battles. Note,

[1.] There are those in the world that are enemies to God, and haters of him: secret and open enemies; enemies to his truths, his laws, his ordinances, his people.

[2.] The scattering and defeating of God's enemies is a thing to be earnestly desired, and believably expected, by all the Lord's people. This prayer is a prophecy. Those that persist in rebellion against God are hastening towards their own ruin.

[3.] For the scattering and defeating of God's enemies, there needs no more but God's arising. *When God arose to judgment*, the work was soon done, ~~1783~~ Psalm 76:8, 9. "Rise, Lord, as the sun riseth to scatter the shadows of the night." Christ's rising from the dead scattered his enemies, ~~1783~~ Psalm 68:18.

(2.) His prayer when the ark rested, v. 36.

[1.] That God would cause his people to rest. So some read it, "*Return, O Lord, the many thousands of Israel*, return them to their rest again after this fatigue." Thus it is said (~~2614~~ Isaiah 63:14), *The Spirit of the Lord caused him to rest*. Thus he prays that God would give Israel success and victory abroad, and peace and tranquillity at home.

[2.] That God himself would take up his rest among them. So we read it: *Return to the thousands of Israel*, the *ten thousand thousand*, so the word is. Note, *First*, The church of God is a great body; there are many thousands belonging to God's Israel. *Secondly*, We ought in our prayers to concern ourselves for this body. *Thirdly*, The welfare and happiness of the Israel of God consist in the continual presence of God among them. Their safety consists not in their numbers, though they are thousands, many thousands, but in the favour of God, and his gracious return to them and residence with them. These thousands are cyphers; he is the figure: and

upon this account, *Happy art thou, O Israel! who is like unto thee, O people!*