

The Journey  
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Numbers 9:15-23

Opening Illustration: [Barney and Gomer lost in the woods.] What was Barney's blind spot? What is the lesson for all of us?

If we want to stop wandering in the wilderness we need to acknowledge our need for guidance. Sometimes in our life as Christ-followers we just keep wandering in circles instead of admitting our need for God's guidance. The good news is He is always present and ready to show us the way out of our wilderness experience.

Welcome to the fourth book of the Old Testament; the book of Numbers! Anyone know why it has that title? Numbers "tells the story of the Israelites' 40-year journey through the wilderness, from Mount Sinai to the edge of the Promised Land. It recounts Israel's repeated rebellions, God's discipline, and His faithful guidance and provision despite their failures. The book starts with a census of the people, details their wanderings, and ends with a new generation ready to enter Canaan, highlighting themes of faith, obedience, and God's enduring mercy."<sup>i</sup>

The point: Life is a journey; and whether we are on the mountaintop or in the wilderness, followers of Christ always have His presence as a comfort and guide. Because we have God's word as our "roadmap," we can avoid the detours of disobedience if we will just follow His directions daily.

**15** On the day the Tabernacle was set up, the cloud covered it. But from evening until morning the cloud over the Tabernacle looked like a pillar of fire. **16** This was the regular pattern—at night the cloud that covered the Tabernacle had the appearance of fire. **17** Whenever the cloud lifted from over the sacred tent, the people of Israel would break camp and follow it. And wherever the cloud settled, the people of Israel would set up camp. **18** In this way, they traveled and camped at the Lord's command wherever he told them to go. Then they remained in their camp as long as the cloud stayed over the Tabernacle. **19** If the cloud remained over the Tabernacle for a long time, the Israelites stayed and performed their duty to the Lord. **20** Sometimes the cloud would stay over the Tabernacle for only a few days, so the people would stay for only a few days, as the Lord commanded. Then at the Lord's command they would break camp and move on. **21** Sometimes the cloud stayed only overnight and lifted the next morning. But day or night, when the cloud lifted, the people broke camp and moved on. **22** Whether the cloud stayed above the Tabernacle for two days, a month, or a year, the people of Israel stayed in camp and did not move on. But as soon as it lifted, they broke camp and moved on. **23** So they camped or traveled at the Lord's command, and they did whatever the Lord told them through Moses.

- The first time we hear about God’s presence in “the cloud” is Exodus 13:21: “...*The Lord went before them by day in a pillar of cloud to lead them along the way, and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, that they might travel by day and by night.*” The next verse tells us God’s presence in the cloud, “*did not depart from before the people.*”<sup>ii</sup>
- The cloud was not merely a symbol of God’s presence, He was IN THE CLOUD.<sup>iii</sup>
- **Theophany** – The visible or tangible manifestation of God to human beings.
- When did humans experience the ULTIMATE theophany? Why are there no theophanies today; how do Christ-followers experience God’s presence and guidance?
- Jesus promised to be with us ALWAYS through His Spirit (Mt.28:20, Jn 16:13).
- Verse 18: They traveled “at the Lord’s command.” The Hebrew word = “mouth.” These verses don’t say God spoke audibly (other passages DO!). When the cloud moved or stopped, they understood this guidance came directly from “the mouth” of God. How do we get guidance from “the mouth” of God?
- Old saying: “*If you want to hear God speak audibly, read your Bible out loud!*”
- This passage DOESN’T say God explained why they were to move or stay.
- Illustration: [Driving from Ft. Lauderdale to Miami]
- We need to follow God’s directions even when they don’t seem to make sense.
- We must ALWAYS seek and follow God’s directions but especially when we are in the middle of a “wilderness experience.”
- What does that term mean? Based on your study of scripture and life experience, how does God use “wilderness experiences” for our good and His glory?
- Here are a few thoughts from Chuck Swindoll on going through the wilderness:
  - *"Dry times in life aren't meant to ruin you but to shape you!"*
  - *"The desert is given to you that you might be humbled, tested, and shown what is in your heart."*
  - *"If you try to shortcut your desert, you will lead yourself into a cul-de-sac. You cannot go through; you've got to turn around and go back."*
  - *"In the desert, you learn to do things you never dreamed you would have to do... you learn to tolerate and live with things patiently."*
  - *"God is closer to you [in] the desert than ever before."*
  - *"The most precious object of God's love is His child in the desert."*
  - *"The desert may be painful, but it is a school of self-discovery and preparation for your calling."*
  - *"The three responses to the desert: I don't need it, I'm tired of it, or I accept it. Maturity is in acceptance."*<sup>v</sup>
- One last point in Verses 22-23: “*They kept the charge of the Lord.*” NLT: “...*they did whatever the Lord told them.*” God’s guidance only helps us if we OBEY IT.

**James 1:22 (NLT) — 22** But don’t just listen to God’s word. You must do what it says. Otherwise, you are only fooling yourselves. **25** But if you look carefully into the perfect law that sets you free, and if you do what it says and don’t forget what you heard, then God will bless you for doing it.

- These verses tell us the Children of Israel carefully obeyed God’s commands. Why is that interesting based on what we know about them? What did their tendency to disobey God’s commands cost them?
- Why do we sometimes wander in the wilderness instead of seeking God’s guidance?

So, What’s the Takeaway?

- We enjoy laughing about Barney Fife but none of us wants to BE Barney!
- Sometimes in our life as Christ-followers we just keep wandering in circles instead of admitting our need for God's guidance. The good news is He is always present and ready to show us the way out of our wilderness experience.
- Whether we are on the mountaintop or in the wilderness, we have His presence as a comfort and His word as our “roadmap.”
- The key to a successful journey is to acknowledge our need for His guidance and to OBEY what He tells us to do.

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<sup>i</sup> <https://bibleproject.com/guides/book-of-numbers/>  
<https://overviewbible.com/numbers/>  
<https://insight.org/resources/bible/the-pentateuch/numbers>  
<https://www.gotquestions.org/Book-of-Numbers.html>

<sup>ii</sup> *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version* (Ex 13:21–22). (2016). Crossway Bibles.

<sup>iii</sup> Exodus 13:21, Exodus 24:15-16, Exodus 33:9, Numbers 9:15, Numbers 11:25, Exodus 40:34-35

<sup>iv</sup> The Desert: School of Self-Discovery | [Pastor Chuck Swindoll | Insight for Living](#)