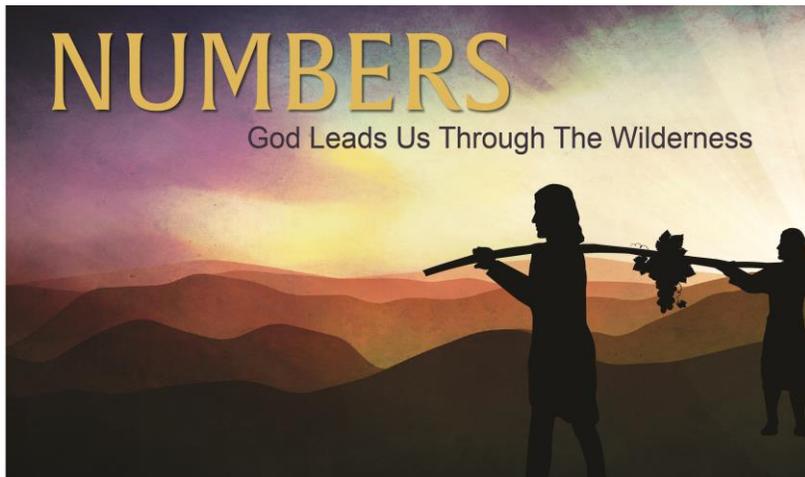


God Leads Us into the Wilderness

Fall Sermon Series on Numbers
Kenwood Baptist Church
Pastor David Palmer
October 2, 2016

TEXT: Numbers 10:11-13, 29-36; 11:1-3

The great hymn *To God Be the Glory* was written in Cincinnati by William Doan when he was teaching Sunday School at Mount Auburn Baptist Church near Christ Hospital. That is the church that planted Kenwood Baptist Church. So, we have a really deep connection with that song. You might say it's almost like the theme song of Kenwood.



If you are new or just joining us, we are in a series this fall on the Book of Numbers. The Book of Numbers is virgin territory for many of us, but we need to remember that this was virgin territory for God's people as well. They had never gone through this land before. They had never followed God's visible presence and leadership in their lives, and this is something that you and I must learn as well. The Book of Numbers is the fourth book of the Bible. It is the story of entering into the wilderness like children and coming out the other side as sons and daughters of the King. What we learn in Numbers is that God leads us through the wilderness. The wilderness is not a destination, it's a process. It is an important piece of our discipleship. This morning, it is very exciting because we actually get to leave camp.

Let's just quickly review where we have been. We have been at the base of Mount Sinai now for almost a year. God reaches out a mighty outstretched arm in the events of the exodus and brings us out of Egypt to this place, this great triangle of land. In the bottom corner of the triangle is Mount Sinai. It is a three-day journey, and that is important to remember. He reveals



His purpose at Mount Sinai. God brings us there, encamps in visible glory, reveals His will, and



commissions us as His representatives in the midst of the world. We are preparing, in the first 10 chapters of Numbers, for the second part of the journey up the other side of that triangle to claim our inheritance. As a prelude to embarking, there are the final steps of preparation.

The first thing God teaches us to do in Numbers 9 is to celebrate the Passover. We need to remember who we are. We easily forget. This is the first time that we are celebrating the Passover after coming out of Egypt, the very first time. Do you remember what God was doing a year ago right now? We need to impress these events on our hearts and minds. This is the God that we are following: the God who lead us out with visible glory, defeated our enemies, split the sea, and rescued us. This is the God we worship and serve. God's people celebrate the Passover to remember who they are. Then God, in Numbers 10, gives us a signal how we will know when to go. At its most important level, we know when to go when we see God move. This is important



for all of us. In Numbers 10, God also gives us the concrete symbol of a trumpet. I love trumpets. Trumpets give such a distinctive sound. This is not the shofar, the ram's horn. This is a hammered, silver trumpet, and God instructs Moses to have these made. They are awesome instruments.

Remember, they have to be loud enough that two million people can hear them. So these trumpets resound, and it's a signal. We know what these trumpets look like. Interestingly, the text just says silver trumpets, but archaeologically we know what these trumpets look like because of the depiction of the trumpets that were taken by the Romans when they destroyed the temple of Jerusalem.



The Arch of Titus in Rome, on its interior panels, depicts the plunder of Jerusalem and the most

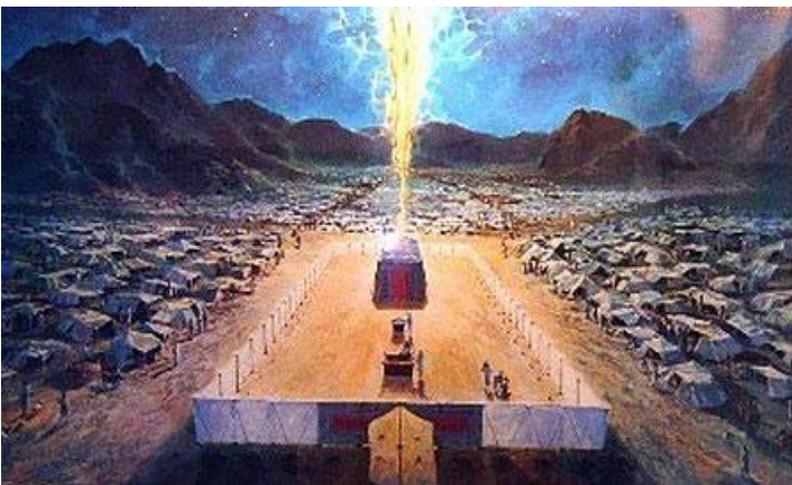
valuable things. There are pans of incense, and here the image of the silver trumpets is on a display, or on a table on which they were set. Archaeologists have also found that when God's people reach the land and the temple is constructed, there was a place of trumpeting that was sound for the community to commemorate sacred time, weekly times of worship and major festivals throughout the year. Again, when the temple was destroyed, one of the stones that was pushed over from the top of the 75 foot high wall built by Herod the Great has inscribed on it in Hebrew very clearly that this is the place of the trumpeting. This is the place where the trumpeter stood to announce the times of meeting.



When we come back to Numbers 10, we see that for the first time, the journey into the wilderness really begins. God's visible glory, His holiness in the midst of the camp, for the very first time, the cloud which has been there visible, guiding the people, moves out. Remember that the whole camp is organized around God's visible glory, and when we come to Numbers 10:11, we read for the very first time:

“In the second year, in the second month, on the twentieth day of the month, the cloud lifted from over the tabernacle of the testimony.”

God's people have been here for almost a year, and the cloud that we've been looking at as the



orienting center of our lives actually moves. Numbers 10 is very exciting because it's like the trip actually begins. I remember that when I was a child, the great summer trip was the easterly migration to Cedar Point. I remember all the preparations, loading the camper, making sure there was food, making sure we had tickets, a ride plan, and everything was loaded. Then we got out in the driveway and just set out. It was thrilling! Who knew what would happen? But it was going to be fantastic, and that sense of excitement

permeates Numbers 10. As God's people move out in stages from the wilderness, the cloud moves out ahead of them and they follow. As we read in Numbers 10:13:

“They set out for the first time at the command of the LORD by Moses.”

Can you imagine it? They set out for the very first time. It's like a wilderness excursion. For the very first time, you leave the safety of home. I remember as a young boy the very first time that we went to a major city, a big city. We packed the car and my mom said we were going to Chicago. I said: “What’s Chicago?” My mom said: “You will see when you get there.” I had never seen anything like the Magnificent Mile. It was extraordinary, and I remember the excitement of that journey. For the very first time, the people set out at the command of the Lord by the instrumentality of Moses. We see narrated for us this orderly departure of the camp. Again the Scripture goes out of its way to show this is not a chaotic mob. This is the Ark of the Covenant going first: the tribal encampments; the curtains for the tabernacle; another group of tribes; the sacred vessels; and then the tribes behind that. It's an orderly departure, and they set out, 600,000 families. As they are leaving, Moses speaks to Hobab, the son of his father-in-law, and in his excitement, he says in Numbers 10:29,—and this is like Old Testament missions:

“We are setting out for the place of which the LORD said, 'I will give it to you.' Come with us, and we will do good to you, for the LORD has promised good to Israel.”

This is the same thing, if you recall, as in Exodus when God brought His people out with a mighty outstretched arm. There is a great verse in Exodus 12:38 that says there was a mixed multitude of Egyptians that said: “This must be the real God and we are going to go, too.” This is what it means when Jesus says: “Follow Me, whoever you are, whatever your background.” When you see that this is the real story of the world, this is the true God, these are His people, I want to go too. Hobab in initial fear gives an anti-Abraham call. He says in Numbers 10:30:

“I will not go. I will depart to my own land and to my kindred.”

In the Hebrew text, this is almost the reverse image of what God says to Abraham. God tells Abraham: “Go, leave your family and your kindred to the land I will show you.” Hobab says: “No, I'm staying with my people.” But Moses says in Numbers 10:31:

“Please do not leave us, for you know where we should camp in the wilderness, and you will serve as eyes for us. And if you do go with us, whatever good the LORD will do to us, the same will we do to you.”

When you join in this redeemed multitude, there are porous borders on the outside that anyone can come, whatever background and whatever God's destiny for this people is, you get the same. The Hebrew narrative in its laconic style doesn't tell us whether he came or not. It just moves on, and we have to wait for Judges 4:11 where we read this line:

“Now Heber the Kenite had separated from the Kenites, the descendants of Hobab the

father-in-law of Moses, and had pitched his tent as far away as the oak in Zaanannim, which is near Kedesh”

So he actually did come, which is awesome. Sometimes people come to church for a while. They are in the back row. It’s as if they are saying: “I’m not sure.” If you’re not sure this morning, just go ahead and come with us because whatever God is going to do with us, He will do for you.

They set out from Mount Sinai, a three-day journey. The Ark is in the front, seeking out a resting place for them. The word that is used here for *seeking out* is the same word that we will talk about next Sunday about *spying out* or looking for, reconnaissance. The Lord is going out in front. We see God's visible leadership, the cloud by day, and whenever the Ark set out we have this great summons that Moses says in Numbers 10:35:

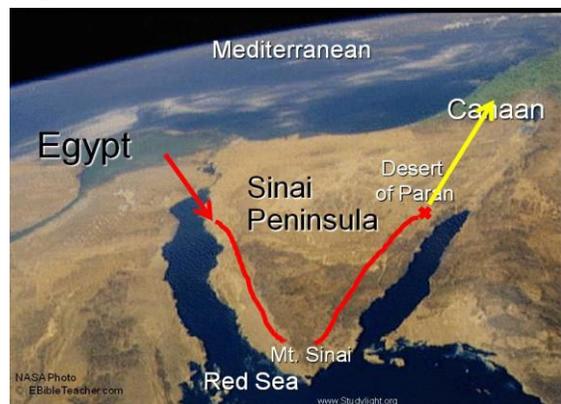
“Arise, O LORD, and let Your enemies be scattered, and let those who hate You flee before You.”

Notice that God fights the battles. The Lord goes out in front, and those who hate Him flee before Him, picking up language from Abraham’s call in Genesis 12 that God goes in front. He is our victorious, conquering, leading King, and then when the Ark and the visible presence of God stops, there is the acclamation of praise in Numbers 10:36:

“Return, O LORD, to the ten thousand thousands of Israel.”

When the Ark and the visible presence of God stop, the tabernacle would be set up and the people encamp. It’s dynamic; it’s ongoing; it’s movement. These verses are so significant in the life of the synagogue liturgy that Numbers 10:35 is the passage that is read right before God's Word is brought out from the Ark in the synagogue, and Numbers 10:36 is the passage that is read after the Scripture reading. These are some of the most well-known verses in all Scripture.

So the Lord sets out for the first time. Where is He taking us? Does He know the way? He does. All the earth belongs to Him, and we read that the Lord goes out in front and spies out a place in the Desert of Paran. It is three days up the other side of this triangle. Remember that it is three days out of Egypt to Mount Sinai, so for three days we are thinking like children on a big road trip that we are almost there, right? Are we there yet? It took us three days to get here; three days up the other side. People are making plans. Yet, those three days up the other side, instead of euphoria and confidence in God, we hear to our great alarm that



when God's people go three days into the wilderness all the sudden they start to panic. In Numbers 11:1, we read:

“And the people complained in the hearing of the LORD about their misfortunes.”

They were concerned; they were anxious. The ESV translates this as *about their misfortunes*, which masks the fact that the people were grumbling. They were complaining. They were alarmed. They were unsure. They had been gone three days from the mountain and they were panicked. The text does not tell us exactly what their concern was, but we infer by the outcome that they were concerned because they were burning up with thirst and they had gone three days without any water. They were worried, they were nervous, and they cried out to the Lord. They use the same language in Numbers 11:2 that is used of the crying out of Israel to God in Exodus after 400 years. They were likening the three days of being thirsty to 400 years of oppression in Egypt. If you put those on the scales, being thirsty and 400 years generational oppression, I think one of these is more significant than the other, and yet they were hitting full panic. I know that you have the same temptation that I do in this. It is the reality that sometimes when God goes out in front of us to lead us, we panic because we have a faulty vision of discipleship that says discipleship is about being comfortable. It is about a sedan chair ride with air-conditioning to the Promised Land. It's about God's eliminating all enemies, providing sumptuous fare along the way, reaching the Golden Shores of glory, setting up the palaces of eternity, and isn't this great! We have a faulty vision of discipleship that says that discipleship is easy, and it's like we stop reading the Bible. Jesus says as His controlling image of discipleship: “If you want to follow Me, pick up your cross, and follow Me. If you want to find your life, lose it with your eyes riveted on Me.” This complaining provokes God's anger, and there is a burning that breaks out at the edge of the community, and it cost the lives of some of God's people. This is important for us to see.

Numbers 11 continues that after this crisis over not having enough to drink, or water to drink, God's people begin to weep and lament that they don't have enough food. In Numbers 11:4-6 and following, the people then romanticize the past:

“Now the rabble that was among them had a strong craving. And the people of Israel also wept again and said, ‘Oh that we had meat to eat! We remember the fish we ate in Egypt that cost nothing, the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic. But now our strength is dried up, and there is nothing at all but this manna to look at.’”

They say they are burning up with thirst—that's their language probably. “What time is dinner?” Then they say: “We are really hungry. Oh we wish we had meat to eat!” Then there is the incredible ability of the human mind to have selective memory. It's amazing how we can remember an offense forever, and yet we can forget our password. We can forget our anniversary. We can forget God's Word treasured in our heart. The people romanticize the

past. They are thirsty; they are hungry, and they say: "Don't you remember the fish that we had from the Nile? Don't you remember the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic? All this food that is very heavily laden with water? Don't you remember that? Now our strength is withering. There is nothing but this manna to look at." Despising God's provision of daily food and selective memory! It is astonishing that there is a clear remembrance of the cucumbers and the melons and the leeks and the onions and the garlic, and there is no mention of the slavery and the burdens and the 24-7,365 days of work, the beatings. It's gone from our minds, and all we can remember are the cucumbers. The taskmasters weren't handing out melons for 400 years, and yet that's how we remember it. We are tempted to romanticize the past and disregard God's present provision. This grumbling and complaining is so close to our heart, and it leads Moses into a leadership meltdown. Moses, who has been God's instrument for all these years in bringing the people out of Egypt, has a meltdown, a serious one. This is like a total failure from a leadership perspective. In Numbers 11:11, Moses says to God:

"Why have You dealt ill with Your servant? And why have I not found favor in Your sight, that You lay the burden of all this people on me?"

Moses says: "With all due respect, Lord, I thought You loved me, and you put me in charge of all these people and it is a heavy load." He goes on to say in Numbers 11:12:

"Did I give them birth, that You should say to me, 'Carry them in your bosom, as a nurse carries a nursing child,' to the land that You swore to give their fathers?"

"How am I going to do this?" Remember how long this is been going on? Three days! Only three days from the mountain and everything is coming apart. "The cucumbers! the melons! Oh, we remember the garlic." Moses says to the Lord: "Why do You hate me so much to put me in charge of these people? Where will I get food for all these people? They are weeping before me: 'Give us meat.' I can't carry these people alone. The burden is too heavy." My favorite is the ending in Numbers 11:15 where Moses says:

"If you will treat me like this, kill me at once, if I find favor in your sight."

The Hebrew is very clear: *If You love me, then kill me now*. The trip is just beginning, just three days in. If you have a faulty vision of discipleship, you will end up right here. If I have a faulty vision of leadership, I'll end up right here too. Many of you know Bill Artzt. We love Bill. I love taking mission trips with Bill. God leads Bill in a dynamic real-time kind of way. He is now doing a D.Min. at Covenant Seminary in St. Louis. Bill and I were talking on the phone just a couple of days ago, and Bill was telling me that he locked himself out of his apartment in St. Louis. He couldn't make a call; security wouldn't respond; the locksmiths wouldn't respond. He was standing outside his apartment, and he said: "Lord, this is why I didn't want to come here. I'm locked out and no one's responding. All my friends are in Cincinnati, and I'm standing out here exposed." And Bill said: "The Lord just said to me, 'Bill, if you could just get a hold of yourself for

a minute, I may have something for you here.” The only people that responded were a couple of students from Saudi Arabia. They responded and invited Bill to their home, and it ended up as the beginning of a relationship. If we could just get a hold of ourselves, it’s only three days.

The answer of the Lord to Moses is shared leadership. The answer to Moses, as a story within a story, is that the Lord says that He will come down and He will proliferate leadership, godly leadership, in the community. Lord says in Numbers 11:17:

“And I will come down and talk with you there. And I will take some of the Spirit that is on you and put it on them, and they shall bear the burden of the people with you, so that you may not bear it yourself alone.”

Notice that it is clear that there is a real diminishing, if you will. It is not just theoretical. The Lord says He will take some of the Spirit that is on Moses and give it away. Shared leadership is not just in titles or positions. It is a real empowering of the Spirit, and that is how God's people are to be led. Kenwood cannot be led by just one person. We are about 600 families, so of think about 600,000 families. Try to do that by yourself. Some of you this morning are trying to lead alone, and you need this corrected from God's Word. The Lord provides an answer to Moses in shared leadership.

How does He answer the people's cry out for food? The way that the text introduces this lament for food literally says that *they craved a craving*. They craved a craving for food. Remember they were panicking over being thirsty, and now they were panicking about not having enough to eat. Instead of trusting the Lord as our steady guide, filling our vision with Him and confident in His ability to provide, God’s people are panicked again. Don't think this is far from your own heart and mine. The Lord answers by His sending His Spirit, just as He took his Spirit and proliferated leadership. The ESV says *a wind* from the Lord, but it’s actually the



same word in the Hebrew. The Spirit of the Lord moves and brings quail up from the sea. They fall beside the camp and they are spread out all around the camp, two cubits above the ground—three feet. Quails migrate in huge numbers across the Sinai Peninsula in regular intervals, northward in the spring, southward in the fall. They are carried along by winds from the Red Sea or the Mediterranean, and once they're exhausted, they fall, and they

land on Sinai. They are tired, and they just sit there. These quails are not huge. They are about

seven inches long and generally weigh about four ounces. The Lord brings quail. Don't make a distinction between natural and supernatural action. The Lord can move supernaturally, but it looks like He just moved and breathed by His Spirit and the quail dump happens. The crucial part of the story is the people's reaction. In Numbers 11:32, when they saw the quail:

“And the people rose all that day and all night and all the next day, and gathered the quail. Those who gathered least gathered ten homers.”

The homer is a dry measurement of about 58 gallons. So the least anyone gathered of the quail was twenty trash cans full. It's like filling the bed of a pickup truck with quail, and that's the least anyone gathered. What's going on here? It's not the miracle of how to get this many quails to land here. There are six billion birds migrating right now on the planet. There are plenty of birds. The real extraordinary thing is what this shows about us. What are we doing? We are so panicked three days into the journey that we are crying out that we are going to burn up with the lack of water. We are crying out for the melons and the cucumbers, and when we see God's provision, we gorge ourselves on it. The least anyone gathers is to fill their pickup truck with quail. In Numbers 11:33, we read the people didn't even take time to cook the quail:

“While the meat was yet between their teeth, before it was consumed, the anger of the LORD was kindled against the people.”

They slaughter the quail and seem to eat it raw. Why is God's anger kindled? It is kindled because gathering a pickup truck full of quail and devouring it while it is still raw in your mouth is a flagrant and egregious statement that God cannot provide for you. It is such an offensive declaration that God doesn't know what He is doing with us, and as we are gorging ourselves on this quail, it cost some of us our lives. The text doesn't tell us if it's a disease that breaks out from eating raw meat or if it is what happens when you overeat to such a degree, but some of us perish in the wilderness. The name of the place is *Kibroth-hattaavah*, which means *graves of craving*.

You see, there is a lot to learn in the wilderness. The excitement and the euphoria—celebrate the Passover, make silver trumpets, see God's visible glory setting out—but three days in and we are in full panic alarm: not enough to drink, not enough to eat. The journey through the wilderness is a necessary portion of our discipleship. Let me apply this to us in a couple of ways.

Number one: Numbers 10 and 11 remind us that **the journey through the wilderness will be difficult**. Life is difficult in ways. It's astonishing how much we try to tell ourselves that this is not the case. It's astonishing how often we tell our children that this is not the case. It's amazing how we imbibe the spirit of our time that says life is about being comfortable, about having everything provided for us, a sense of entitlement, and missing what happens, the transformation that happens to us by going through difficulty. A vital part of parenting is

helping your children follow the Lord through the hard seasons. You become the person that you're supposed to become not by tiptoeing from mountaintop to mountaintop. Life is not always comfortable. There will be times where there is a shortage of water. Why? Why does God not just give you everything you could possibly need daily? Because we would lose our vision of Him. We would be overwhelmed with His provision and have our eyes on the gift rather than the Giver. The Lord does know what He's doing. He knows that we will be okay as long as our eyes are fixed on Him. The journey through the wilderness will be difficult. The journey through the wilderness shows us that we need to learn much more about trusting God. This is the first time since the Exodus that God has moved out in front of the people, the very first time. There are going to be 41 more of these before reach the edge. I am going to date myself here briefly, but I remember Magic Johnson's first NBA game. He had won the NCAA championship at Michigan State. In his very first NBA game, Kareem Abdul-Jabbar won the game with one of his trademark skyhook shots and Magic Johnson was jumping up and down and grabbing onto Kareem and celebrating. He just couldn't get hold himself. Kareem said to Magic Johnson: "Calm down, man, there are 81 more games." It was just the first game of the regular season.

Number two: **There is a lot more to learn about trusting God.** Are you willing to embrace that? We need to embrace that. What do we learn about trusting God? Don't be afraid of the dry season. Some of us are so afraid of difficulty; some of us are so afraid to leave the safety of the mountain; and yet we discover here and throughout this wilderness journey that the oasis will come. God knows where they are. You don't; I don't. But I know that the journey must be lived and carried out with our eyes riveted on the Lord. We also need to repent of romanticizing the past. There are all kinds of ways we do this. Sometimes we lay heavy burdens on our children by saying things like: "Boy, our life was really great and easy before you were born." We say things like that. Some of you have the spiritual maturity to not do that. We say things like: "It was so good before." Watch out for selective memory, and when you find yourself telling your wife or telling your close friend: "Don't you remember the cucumbers, the melons, and the garlic?" make sure you include within the narrative the slavery, the beatings, the agony and the tears of waiting for God's promise. Don't romanticize the past. Don't gorge yourself on what you think you need to eat. You see, we thought that was what we needed. We need meat. We looked past the manna of daily provision from our heavenly Father, and when we saw what we thought we needed, we filled the bed of our pickup trucks with it. There is food to eat through the journey, and God designed it to be provided daily because He wants to be in a dynamic, ongoing, covenant relationship that is lived out of daily obedience. You can't fill the back of your pickup truck with this. You have to receive His daily portion. Let's prepare our hearts to partake together now.

Lord Jesus, we love You and extol You, and we ask You to teach us as we move through the wilderness. We thank You for Your provision of manna, bread from heaven, provision of forgiveness, of daily relationship with You, of constant provision. We delight in You. We ask for Your forgiveness, Lord, now for where we have complained about a lack that we perceive or where we have taken our eyes off of You and it's proved costly in our lives and those nearby. Forgive us, Lord, we pray.

In Jesus' Name, Amen.