

Explore the Bible: God Leads

November 8, 2019

- *The Explore the Bible lesson for Dec. 1 focuses on Numbers 9:15-23.*

Putting things together is at the bottom of my list of favorite things to do, and there is a reason why. Two years ago, my wife and I were looking into buying a dining table. We had one, but we were not fond of it. It was small and not too sturdy. After looking several places, we concluded dining tables were overpriced and cheaply made; therefore, we decided to build our own. After finding an easy-to-follow blueprint online, I went to the hardware store and bought all the lumber and materials I needed for the project.

I came home from work and enthusiastically started working on the project. That continued for three days. On the third day, when almost all the pieces were screwed on and glued together, I noticed one of the 4×4 boards I had cut two days prior was in the wrong place. I stopped. I wanted to cry. I wanted to throw everything away, go to the store and buy an easy-to-assemble dining table to avoid the hassle, but it was too late. I had to take pieces apart, cut a new piece and replace it. It wasn't fun.

Nobody likes having to start over, particularly when it's because you did something wrong. Can you imagine the hassle the Israelites had to go through during their exodus from Egypt every time they encamped and every time they had to set out?

The presence (Numbers 9:15-16)

The presence of the Lord had been present among the Israelites since the day they came out of Egypt. Once they left Egypt, the Lord led them in a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night (Exodus 13:21). At Mount

Sinai, the Lord came to Moses in a dense cloud, so the people could hear God speak to him (Exodus 19:9).

The people of Israel experienced the presence of the Lord in a twofold manner: (1) God's continual care for the Israelites and (2) God's supernatural powers.

God continued to care for his people after leaving Egypt. A cloud, an incredible visible sign of God's presence, covered the tent—day and night. So, this is how it continued to be (9:16). If you've ever been to the desert, you know the many dangers that this entails. Wild animals, lack of resources, drastic temperature change (hot during the day/cold at night) and so on. The people needed to understand that having God's presence always with them was a blessing—something false gods couldn't offer.

The relationship between God and his people became more personal. It wasn't just Moses experiencing God's presence, but also the people who were participants—first-hand witnesses—of this divine experience.

The practice (Numbers 9:17-22)

Every time I read these verses, the first thing that pops into my mind is the 2010 movie, *The Karate Kid*. In this movie, Mr. Han decides to teach kung fu to Dre Parker. When Dre goes to his first kung fu class, he expects to learn how to throw punches and amazing kicks, but Mr. Han has something different in mind. Mr. Han begins his first lesson by teaching Dre discipline. He asks Dre to take off his jacket and to hang it on a stick. Then he asks him to take the jacket off the stick and place it on the ground. Finally, Mr. Han asks him to pick up the jacket and put it on. Then he repeats the same process all over again for several days.

Although this may seem like a tedious routine, imagine doing what the Israelites had to do, setting up and taking down the tent every time the

Lord commanded. To have an idea of the set-up procedure, read Exodus 40. It wasn't an easy pop-up tent. It was a meticulous process that people needed to follow strictly.

The cloud didn't follow a predictable pattern. The Israelites couldn't figure out the movement of the cloud. It was to demonstrate that God was in control of every move they made. Without God's command, they didn't do anything.

The principle (Numbers 9:23)

Obedience goes beyond the simple act of obeying a command. We can all be obedient when we are asked to do one thing. But when we are asked to do the same thing repeatedly—set up/set out—it reflects a change in the way we think. It also shows a new attitude that leads to true dependence on the one and only God. Note the way God treated his people: He didn't force them to obey. They had to decide to follow God day after day. It was a daily choice.

The people learned two things about God during this time: (1) They learned to listen to God's voice; and (2) They learned to obey God's command. Perhaps there is something we all can learn from this. Listening to God's voice is not enough. We need to learn to obey his commands. It is in the listening and obeying—both together—that we can discover God's will and his purposes. We need to let God be the guide who directs our path. We need to let God lead us.

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