

NUMBERS 10:11-12:16 --- from Sinai to Kadesh-Barnea

HPC Trinity Class

Feb. 2, 2025



A **Blast from the Past**

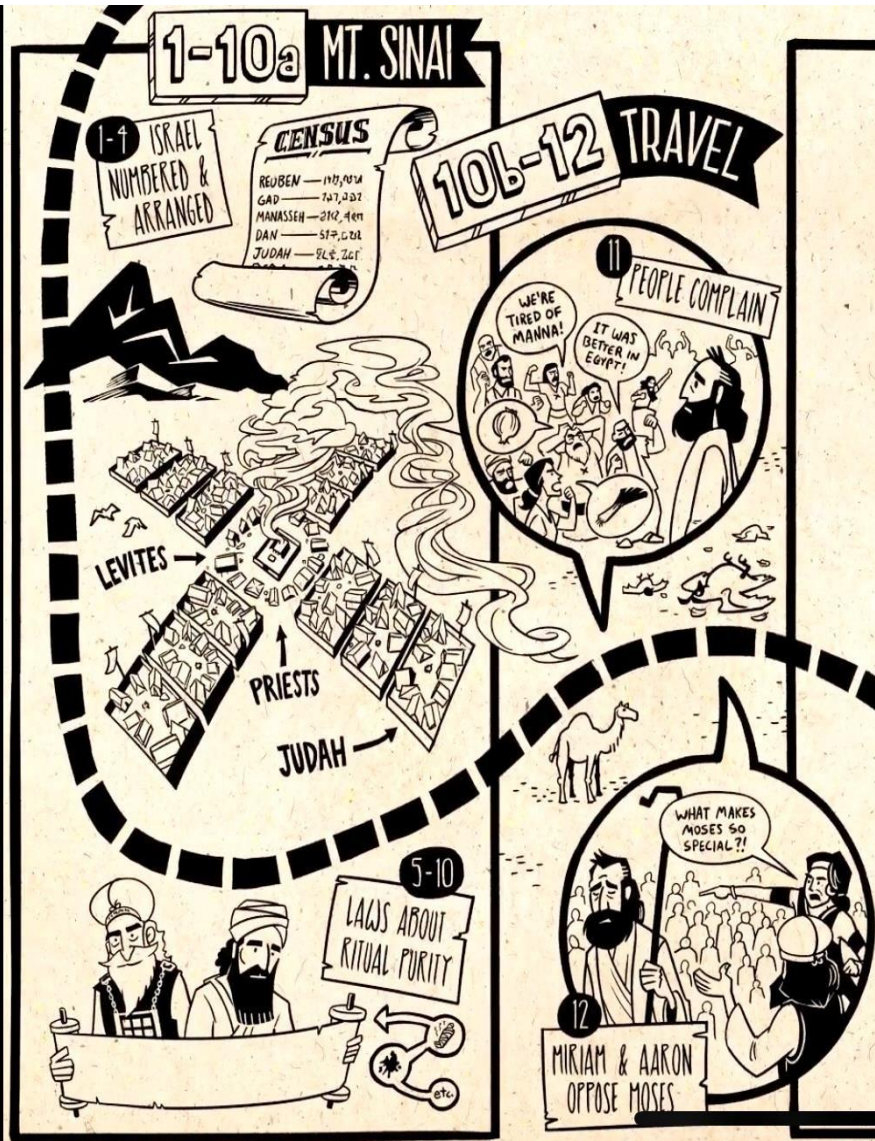
(i.e., last week)

regarding the silver trumpets (*shôphârs*) of NU 10:1-10---

By Jewish tradition, blowing long blasts were for assembling the people; short, staccato blasts were used in battle or to order the tribes to start moving.¹

Shôphârs were not considered musical instruments, but were noise makers, with the Godly purpose of panicking the enemy. "After the destruction of the temple and the general banishment of all instrumental music, the *shôphâr* alone survived, just because it was *not* a musical instrument."²

These two "hammered silver" trumpets of Moses' must have been better, though, probably long and straight with a wide opening like a contemporary trumpet.³



READ 10:11-13---"On the twentieth day of the second month of the second year..."
The

¹ Allen, pgs. 778-80.

² Interpreter's, vol. 3, pg. 473.

³ Bellinger, pg. 217 fn, citing E. W. Davies' *Numbers*, pg. 85.

second month = *Iyar* (April/May). This is the first time that Moses and the people broke camp and began travelling as an organized unit, constantly following the cloud of God. They must have surely felt that they would soon be in the Promised Land!

10:14-28---Breaking camp.

The order of the tribes' processional was important. Each tribe had a responsibility in moving specific items from camp to camp. The "holy things" (v.21) were some of the last to be packed and carried. This allowed time for the rest of the camp's new site to be in place upon their arrival.

10:29-32---Moses tries to convince his brother-in-law (or "father-in-law") Hobab, to come with him. Hobab is the son of Reuel and is not an Israelite.⁴ He apparently has an expert knowledge of the desert lands of the Sinai. But Hobab balks at the thought of continuing, and even says that he wants to return to Egypt.

WHY GO BACK NOW??

- a desire to return to "my own land and my own people" (v. 30)—he's homesick.
 - Hobab's attitude demonstrates "the traditional ancient Eastern pattern of adherence to family and place."⁵ i.e., Egypt.
 - Returning to Egypt also implies Hobab's desire to return to its plethora of gods.



His final answer is not recorded here, but Hobab's descendants, the Kenites, are later said to be living in Canaan (JDG 1:16 and 1 SA 15:6), indicating he must have complied with Moses request.

READ 10:33-36---Their first march. Moses asks that God be with them.

Chapter 11---The complaints begin. (See page one for a detailed sketch. 😊). These begin on day number three of their trek into the desert...and it makes God angry. He sends fire but then shows mercy after Moses prays. "*Taberah*" means "burning."

- v. 4 uses the word "rabble" in describing those who are discontented, implying that these complainers are not Israelites.
- In ancient times, a sign of God's wonder and grace was that he provided food for his people. "The biblical view is that food is sacral; there are no



⁴ "The people are open to wisdom from those outside their own group, an important piece of advice for contemporary communities of faith." [Bellinger, pg. 217.]

⁵ Allen, pg. 783

'common meals.'"⁶ Bland or not, these wanderers were spurning God's gift!

- vs. 4 and 5---One has to wonder how often Egypt's slaves were able to have meat or fresh vegetables. Now, all they had was the manna. (Back in Egypt fish were able to be caught by the poor and by slaves in the many canals.)

Moses is hopping mad now.

READ 11:10-15

God hears Moses' lament and supplies a solution: delegation (v. 16). Plus a promise of meat, and



...more meat, and



...more meat, and.....

But the real issue here is stated plainly by Moses in v. 20 as he addressed his people:

"You have rejected the Lord, who is among you...." It's not like God has been a straggler on this trek, bringing up the rear in a long train of sojourners. No, he has been their leader, guide, and inspiration from the beginning.

These ungrateful people are living for the moment, in the here-and-now.

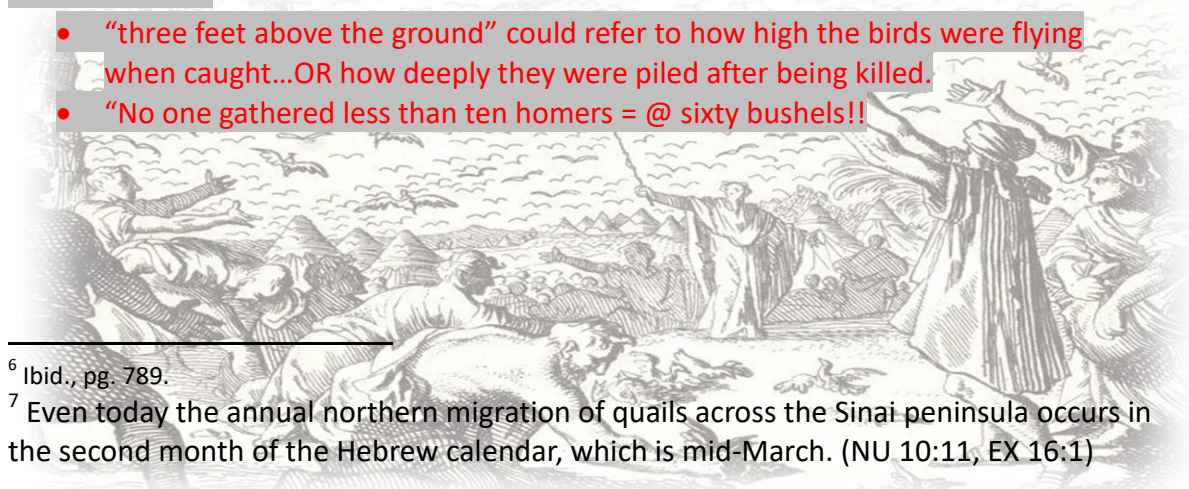
A modern comparison might be this: After a person has made a commitment to follow Christ, he then says, "I wish you had not died for me! Leave me alone!"

11:26-30 tells of two of the seventy elders hand-picked by Moses, Eldad and Medad. They did not go to the Tent of the Meeting as instructed; instead, they remained with the people in camp. Yet, the Spirit of God came upon both the main group of elders and these two as they prophesied. How did Moses respond to these two renegades? (see v. 29)

11:31-34 The plague of the quails.⁷

READ 11:31-32.

- "three feet above the ground" could refer to how high the birds were flying when caught...OR how deeply they were piled after being killed.
- "No one gathered less than ten homers = @ sixty bushels!!



⁶ Ibid., pg. 789.

⁷ Even today the annual northern migration of quails across the Sinai peninsula occurs in the second month of the Hebrew calendar, which is mid-March. (NU 10:11, EX 16:1)

But soon a plague broke out (v.33) and killed a good number. These greedy people were buried here and the location was named Kibroth Hattaavah, meaning *graves of craving*. Moses and his remaining company then moved from this place of death to Hazeroth.

Chapter 12

Miriam and Aaron start to bad-mouth Moses “because of his Cushite wife.” But shaming Zipporah⁸, Moses’ wife, was only a smoke screen for the real issue: jealousy. Miriam was Moses’ sister; Aaron was his brother and his right-hand man.

v. 3 is probably a later addition, since it would be improper for the author, Moses, to exalt himself. However, the Hebrew word *anav* can sometimes mean “depressed” or “miserable.” Such a meaning better suits Moses’ situation, and therefore, this verse may very well be that of Moses.

12:4-12---God rebukes Miriam and Aaron in poetic form. **READ 12:6-9**

Miriam, but not Aaron, is cursed with an instant case of leprosy. This was probably due to her being the instigator of this rebellion against Moses.

As proof:

1. In 12:1 Miriam’s name appears before Aaron’s. In this ancient male-dominated culture such a thing would be considered very unusual unless the primary character in this sentence were female.

➤ Add to this that the verb in Hebrew is in the feminine singular context, which confirms her leadership in this conspiracy.

➤ Only Miriam gets leprosy, not

Aaron.

2. Just as in the golden calf incident (Ex 32:1-6), Aaron shows a lack of spiritual backbone, despite his role as high priest.

⁸ Had Zipporah died and Moses been remarried to a Cushite? The language of 12:1, with its double emphasis on Cushite, strongly suggests a recent re-marriage.



Aaron is a tag-along dominated by his sister.

“Leprosy” was a common term in ancient times for various skin ailments.⁹ Based upon the description as her being “like snow” suggests a form of psoriasis, and chronic leprosy is never white. In any case, Miriam would be excluded from the community and from worship—crushing news! She is now a pariah, an outcast.

12:13-15---At Aaron’s pleading, Moses cries to God to remove this skin curse from Miriam. She still must suffer public rebuke for seven days, as prescribed in Leviticus 13-14, but this was probably the lightest sentence for such shame. (It was also the standard punishment for anyone touching a dead body.)

v. 14--The reader would understand the motive of any parent who spit into his/her child’s face. It was a sign of humiliation, disgust, and shame.

12:16---**Time to move on! The Desert of Paran will be the staging area for the long-awaited attack upon the land of Canaan.**



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⁹ “True leprosy (Hansen’s disease) did not reach the Middle East until New Testament times at the earliest.” (Wenham, pg. 113.)

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