

Numbers 10:33-36

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/num/num-10/numbers-1033-36/>

Verses 33 – 36 give an account of the first leg of the journey from Mount Sinai. It was a three-day trek. The ark led the way on their journey. The cloud guided them as to when they were to move during the day and when they needed to camp for the night. Moses also composed two prayers, one for when they departed from a place and another for when they camped.

Finally, *they set out from the mount of the Lord three days' journey* (v. 33). After almost a year at the *mount of the LORD* (Mount Sinai) it was time to move on toward the Promised Land of Canaan. They departed in an orderly fashion, *with the ark of the covenant of the Lord journeying in front of them*. The ark, probably with the cloud hovering over it, was a visible reminder to the people that the LORD was present among them and that He was their Leader and Guide.

This first part of the journey lasted *for the three days*. The ark went before them *to seek out a resting place for them*.

To summarize their departure, Moses stated that *the cloud of the Lord was over them by day when they set out from the camp* (v. 34). As stated earlier, the cloud was the visible representation of the LORD's presence. Through it the LORD guided, protected, and (at night) illuminated the camp.

Verse 35 describes the prayer of Moses when *it came about when the ark set out* (v. 35). What *Moses said* at this time was something resembling a call to arms. He cried out *rise up, O Lord!* This was a request for the LORD to defend His people. He proclaimed that, as a result of the LORD rising up, that His *enemies be scattered* and, using synonymous parallelism, wished for *those who hate You flee before You*.

This seems to be a harbinger of things to come. Later in the book of Numbers, enemies arose to block the Israelites' path to Canaan. They needed to be defeated, and Moses was asking the LORD to ensure victory for His people. Some have called this the "battle cry of Moses."

The occasion for the second prayer of Moses was *when it came to rest* (v. 36). That is, when the Israelites set up camp, *he said, "Return, O Lord, To the myriad thousands of Israel."* The phrase *myriad thousands* is literally "tens of thousands of thousands" in the Hebrew text. This hyperbole was meant to include all of the people in the camp, no matter how many there were. In this prayer, Moses was asking the LORD to abide among His people during the night in order to watch over them and protect them from harm.

There is an interesting fact about Moses's prayer that attended the movement of the ark in verses 35-36. This is the only place in the Hebrew scripture that has an inverted (upside down and backward) Hebrew letter "nun" before and after, like a parenthesis in English. Jewish tradition holds that this is a signal that this prayer is out of chronological order, and is there to provide a

break prior to the very negative incident we will see in chapter 11. This prayer expressing confidence in God does, at a minimum, provide a stark contrast with Israel's behavior in chapter 11, where the people will complain that God isn't doing enough for them.

To sum up, the first prayer contains Moses asking for the LORD's presence during the day to lead His people in battle, thus ensuring their victory. The second prayer was a request by Moses for the LORD to dwell among His people through the night. Put together, Moses was entreating the LORD to maintain His presence with them all of the time (day and night).

Biblical Text

³³ Thus they set out from the mount of the Lord three days' journey, with the ark of the covenant of the Lord journeying in front of them for the three days, to seek out a resting place for them. ³⁴ The cloud of the Lord was over them by day when they set out from the camp.

³⁵ Then it came about when the ark set out that Moses said,

"Rise up, O Lord!

And let Your enemies be scattered,

And let those who hate You flee before You."

³⁶ When it came to rest, he said,

"Return, O Lord,

To the myriad thousands of Israel."