NUMBERS

Chapter 10

*The Silver Trumpets*

**The Lord said to Moses: 2 “Make two trumpets of hammered silver, and use them for calling the community together and for having the camps set out. 3 When both are sounded, the whole community is to assemble before you at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting. 4 If only one is sounded, the leaders—the heads of the clans of Israel—are to assemble before you. 5 When a trumpet blast is sounded, the tribes camping on the east are to set out. 6 At the sounding of a second blast, the camps on the south are to set out. The blast will be the signal for setting out. 7 To gather the assembly, blow the trumpets, but not with the same signal. 8 “The sons of Aaron, the priests, are to blow the trumpets. This is to be a lasting ordinance for you and the generations to come. 9 When you go into battle in your own land against an enemy who is oppressing you, sound a blast on the trumpets. Then you will be remembered by the Lord your God and rescued from your enemies. 10 Also at your times of rejoicing—your appointed feasts and New Moon festivals—you are to sound the trumpets over your burnt offerings and fellowship offerings, and they will be a memorial for you before your God. I am the Lord your God.”**

**10:2** *trumpets.* Long, straight, slender metal tubes with flared ends. They were blown for order and discipline. (CSB)

Straight metal tubes, different from the curved ram’s horn, which is also translated as “trumpet” (Ex 19:16, 19; 20:18; Lv 25:9). (TLSB)

*breaking camp*. Israel obeyed God’s commands in an orderly fashion. Like a large military unit, it was summoned to action by prearranged signals given by two silver trumpets. (TLSB)

**10:3** *sounded.* Not only for assembling but also for marching (vv. 5–6), battle (v. 9) and festivals (v. 10). Since different signals were used (v. 7), a guild of priestly musicians was developed (v. 8). See Jos 6:4 for the use of seven trumpets of rams’ horns (Hebrew *shophar*) in the battle of Jericho. (CSB)

*all the congregation shall gather*. Space for this large gathering must have been reserved east of the tabernacle. (TLSB)

**10:5** *alarm*. Specified call, perhaps long used in military or community service. (TLSB)

**10:8–9** Later, when Israel was in its land, trumpets were used in time of war and on days of gladness. (TLSB)

**10:10** *at your … appointed feasts … sound the trumpets.* As an introit to prepare the people for communion with God. Later, David expanded the instruments to include the full orchestra in the worship of the Lord (see, e.g., 1Ch 25), but he maintained the playing of the silver trumpets regularly before the ark of the covenant (1Ch 16:6). (CSB)

**10:1–10** Blasts on the silver trumpets signal the time to move, but they also serve the purpose of calling leaders of the entire community to assemble at the tent of meeting. God ordains an Israelite theocracy with Himself as King. In mercy, God leads His people toward the land promised long ago (Gn 12:7). Scripture teaches that a trumpet blast will also signal our call to heaven on the Last Day (1Th 4:16). • “Today on weary nations The heav’nly manna falls; To holy convocations The silver trumpet calls, Where Gospel light is glowing With pure and radiant beams And living water flowing With soul-refreshing streams.” Amen. (*LW* 203:3) (TLSB)

*The Israelites Leave Sinai*

**11 On the twentieth day of the second month of the second year, the cloud lifted from above the tabernacle of the Testimony. 12 Then the Israelites set out from the Desert of Sinai and traveled from place to place until the cloud came to rest in the Desert of Paran. 13 They set out, this first time, at the Lord’s command through Moses. 14 The divisions of the camp of Judah went first, under their standard. Nahshon son of Amminadab was in command. 15 Nethanel son of Zuar was over the division of the tribe of Issachar, 16 and Eliab son of Helon was over the division of the tribe of Zebulun. 17 Then the tabernacle was taken down, and the Gershonites and Merarites, who carried it, set out. 18 The divisions of the camp of Reuben went next, under their standard. Elizur son of Shedeur was in command. 19 Shelumiel son of Zurishaddai was over the division of the tribe of Simeon, 20 and Eliasaph son of Deuel was over the division of the tribe of Gad. 21 Then the Kohathites set out, carrying the holy things. The tabernacle was to be set up before they arrived. 22 The divisions of the camp of Ephraim went next, under their standard. Elishama son of Ammihud was in command. 23 Gamaliel son of Pedahzur was over the division of the tribe of Manasseh, 24 and Abidan son of Gideoni was over the division of the tribe of Benjamin. 25 Finally, as the rear guard for all the units, the divisions of the camp of Dan set out, under their standard. Ahiezer son of Ammishaddai was in command. 26 Pagiel son of Ocran was over the division of the tribe of Asher, 27 and Ahira son of Enan was over the division of the tribe of Naphtali. 28 This was the order of march for the Israelite divisions as they set out. 29 Now Moses said to Hobab son of Reuel the Midianite, Moses’ father-in-law, “We are setting out for the place about which the Lord said, ‘I will give it to you.’ Come with us and we will treat you well, for the Lord has promised good things to Israel.” 30 He answered, “No, I will not go; I am going back to my own land and my own people.” 31 But Moses said, “Please do not leave us. You know where we should camp in the desert, and you can be our eyes. 32 If you come with us, we will share with you whatever good things the Lord gives us.” 33 So they set out from the mountain of the Lord and traveled for three days. The ark of the covenant of the Lord went before them during those three days to find them a place to rest. 34 The cloud of the Lord was over them by day when they set out from the camp. 35 Whenever the ark set out, Moses said, “Rise up, O Lord! May your enemies be scattered; may your foes flee before you.” 36 Whenever it came to rest, he said, “Return, O Lord, to the countless thousands of Israel.”**

**10:11–28** The structure of this section is: (1) v. 11, time frame; (2) vv. 12–13, introductory summary of setting out; (3) vv. 14–17, setting out of the tribes led by Judah (see 2:3–9); (4) vv. 18–21, setting out of the tribes led by Reuben (see 2:10–16); (5) vv. 22–24, setting out of the tribes led by Ephraim (see 2:18–24); (6) vv. 25–27, setting out of the tribes led by Dan (see 2:25–31); (7) v. 28, concluding summary of the line of march. (CSB)

**10:11** *twentieth day of the second month.* After 11 months in the region of Mount Sinai, the people set out for the promised land, led by the cloud. This verse begins the second great section of the book of Numbers (10:11–22:1). Israel leaves on a journey that in a few months should have led to the conquest of Canaan. (CSB)

**10:12** *by stages*. Israel broke camp from Mount Sinai according to prearranged orders. By recording the sequence of the tribal groups and once more listing the leaders, Moses showed that the people followed God’s commands. The next chapters (10:11–21:35) explain why it took 38 more years before Israel arrived in “the plains of Moab” (22:1), opposite the Jordan River.

*Paran*. Wilderness where the tribes settled on signal, after moving in a northeasterly direction. Perhaps a name for the general Sinai Peninsula. The northern reaches of Paran are called the wilderness of Zin (cf 20:1). From there, the borders of the Promised Land could have been reached in a short time. (TLSB)

**10:13** *first time*. Departing from Sinai. (TLSB)

**10:14–27** The names of the leaders of the 12 tribes are given for the fourth time in the book (see 1:5–15; 2:3–31; 7:12–83). The order of the line of march is essentially the same as that in ch. 2. The new details are that the Gershonites and Merarites, who carry the tabernacle, follow the triad of the Judah tribes (v. 17), and the Kohathites, who carry the holy things, follow the triad of the Reuben tribes (v. 21) (see diagram of “Encampment of the Tribes of Israel”). (CSB)

**10:14** *standard.* As in 2:3, 10, 18, 25, each of the four triads of tribes had a standard or banner for rallying and organization. (CSB)

*the son of*. The father’s name was given as we use a surname to help identify families and to distinguish people with the same first name. (TLSB)

**10:17–28** Levites who carried the structural parts of the tabernacle set out with the first contingent of three tribes. Kohathites, “carrying the holy things” (v 21) and thus constituting “the midst of the camps” (2:17), followed with the next three standards. (TLSB)

**10:29** *Hobab son of Reuel.* Thus Hobab was Moses’ brother-in-law. (CSB)

*Reuel.* Jethro (see Ex 2:18; 3:1). (CSB)

Hobab, Midianite brother-in-law of Moses, is called his “father-in-law” in Jgs 4:11. Perhaps Hobab had become the head of his family. Although God was directing the march of the Israelites, they could use help from an experienced man in the ordinary tasks of setting up a camp. (TLSB)

**10:31** *be our eyes.* Jdg 1:16 indicates that Hobab acceded to Moses’ request. (CSB)

**10:33** *the ark* … *before them*. If taken literally, this sentence would say that the ark of the covenant was carried in advance of the entire marching group, contrary to the general rule that it was to be “in the midst of the camps” (2:17). It is possible that such a deviation from general practice was decreed for the first three days of the journey or for special occasions (cf Jsh 3:6). But the reference to the ark may merely emphasize the fact that the real guide of Israel was not Hobab but the Lord, who dwelled above the mercy seat of the ark. He directed the course of the march through the cloud (v 34). (TLSB)

*three days.* Because of the huge numbers of people in the tribes of Israel, and because this was their first organized march, it is not likely that this first journey covered much territory. (CSB)

**10:35–36** Reinforces the portrayal of Israel as the Lord’s army on the march, with the Lord in the vanguard. (CSB)

Liturgical responses to the Lord’s leadership, expressed as prayers. The community would be more vulnerable during travel, but the Lord was ever vigilant in His care, as Moses confidently expresses. (TLSB)

**10:35** Later used in the opening words of a psalm celebrating God’s triumphal march from Sinai to Jerusalem (see Ps 68:1). (CSB)

**10:11–36** The Israelites march to the Promised Land; the ark of the covenant leads the way (v 33). The Lord deals gently with His people by providing constant guidance and sound leadership. Today, pray for your leaders, that the Lord would bless and keep them and guide them in thoughtful service to His people, whom Christ redeemed with His precious blood. • “Arise, O Lord, and let Your enemies be scattered, and let those who hate You flee before You” (v 35) Amen. (TLSB)