NUMBERS

Chapter 9

*The Passover*

**The Lord spoke to Moses in the Desert of Sinai in the first month of the second year after they came out of Egypt. He said, 2 “Have the Israelites celebrate the Passover at the appointed time. 3 Celebrate it at the appointed time, at twilight on the fourteenth day of this month, in accordance with all its rules and regulations.” 4 So Moses told the Israelites to celebrate the Passover, 5 and they did so in the Desert of Sinai at twilight on the fourteenth day of the first month. The Israelites did everything just as the Lord commanded Moses. 6 But some of them could not celebrate the Passover on that day because they were ceremonially unclean on account of a dead body. So they came to Moses and Aaron that same day 7 and said to Moses, “We have become unclean because of a dead body, but why should we be kept from presenting the Lord’s offering with the other Israelites at the appointed time?” 8 Moses answered them, “Wait until I find out what the Lord commands concerning you.” 9 Then the Lord said to Moses, 10 “Tell the Israelites: ‘When any of you or your descendants are unclean because of a dead body or are away on a journey, they may still celebrate the Lord’s Passover. 11 They are to celebrate it on the fourteenth day of the second month at twilight. They are to eat the lamb, together with unleavened bread and bitter herbs. 12 They must not leave any of it till morning or break any of its bones. When they celebrate the Passover, they must follow all the regulations. 13 But if a man who is ceremonially clean and not on a journey fails to celebrate the Passover, that person must be cut off from his people because he did not present the Lord’s offering at the appointed time. That man will bear the consequences of his sin. 14 “ ‘An alien living among you who wants to celebrate the Lord’s Passover must do so in accordance with its rules and regulations. You must have the same regulations for the alien and the native-born.’ ”**

**Ch 9** The census, instructions, and consecrations of chs 1–8 took place over c two weeks in 1446 BC. Israel would now observe its second Passover before leaving Sinai. (TLSB)

**9:1–14** This unit is in four parts: (1) the command to keep the Passover (vv. 1–5); (2) the question concerning those ceremonially clean (vv. 6–8); (3) the response of the Lord—giving permission for legitimate delay, but judgment for willful neglect (vv. 9–13); (4) the rights of the alien at Passover (v. 14). The first Passover was held in Egypt (see Ex 12). The second is here at Sinai a year later. Because of Israel’s rebellion and God’s judgment on her (ch. 14), Israel would not celebrate the Passover again until she entered the promised land (see Jos 5:10). (CSB)

**9:1** *first month of the second year.* The events of this chapter preceded the beginning of the census in ch. 1 (see 1:1). (CSB)

Nisan (Apr/May) 1446 BC. (TLSB)

**9:2** *Passover at its appointed time*. One who had not kept the Passover was to “be cut off from his people” (v 13). Some Israelites were unclean, thus excluded from participating in the Passover when it was observed on its regular day, the 14th day of the first month. Their dilemma was presented to the Lord (v 8). (TLSB)

**9:3** *twilight.* Traditional Jewish practice regards this period as the end of one day and the beginning of the next. (CSB)

**9:7** *why should we be kept from presenting the Lord’s offering … ?* Those with ceremonial uncleanness had a keen desire to worship the Lord with the other Israelites. (CSB)

**9:9–11** The Lord commanded the unclean to observe the Passover two weeks later, thus permitting all Israelites to undertake the journey into the wilderness, which began six days later. This special provision applied also when their descendants in the desert had strayed “on a long journey” (lit, “on a distant way”). However, the basic requirements of the Passover were not changed (vv 11–12). (TLSB)

**9:10** *they may still celebrate.* God’s gracious provision for these people was an alternative day one month later (v. 11) so that they would not be excluded totally from the Passover celebration. The Lord thus demonstrates the reality of the distance that ceremonial uncleanness brings between a believer and his (or her) participation in the worship of the community, but he also provides a merciful alternative. (CSB)

**9:12** *not … break any of its bones.* When Jesus (“our Passover lamb,” 1Co 5:7; cf. Jn 1:29) was crucified, it was reported that none of his bones was broken, in fulfillment of Scripture (Jn 19:36). See also Ex 12:46; Ps 34:20. (CSB)

**9:13** *fails to celebrate … cut off.* The NT also issues grave warnings concerning the abuse or misuse of the celebration of the Lord’s Supper (1Co 11:28–30). See note on Ex 12:15. (CSB)

Judged guilty and subject to punishment. (TLSB)

**9:14** *alien.* Must first be circumcised before participating in the Passover celebration (Ex 12:48). (CSB)

**9:1–14** God commands Moses to celebrate Passover anew as a memorial of His great deliverance. All people were to participate, even if they could not observe the event on the same dates. God reveals His grace in the Passover and in the exceptions He allows for its observance. Just as He continually sought the good and unity of Israel, He seeks our good and unity in the services of His precious Word, which describes our creation, redemption, and sanctification as His people through faith in Christ, our Passover Lamb. • Lord, we deserve death because of our sins. Yet Your Son’s blood covers our sins and grants eternal life. Unite our hearts in the confession of this faith. Amen. (TLSB)

*The Cloud Above the Tabernacle*

**15 On the day the tabernacle, the Tent of the Testimony, was set up, the cloud covered it. From evening till morning the cloud above the tabernacle looked like fire. 16 That is how it continued to be; the cloud covered it, and at night it looked like fire. 17 Whenever the cloud lifted from above the Tent, the Israelites set out; wherever the cloud settled, the Israelites encamped. 18 At the Lord’s command the Israelites set out, and at his command they encamped. As long as the cloud stayed over the tabernacle, they remained in camp. 19 When the cloud remained over the tabernacle a long time, the Israelites obeyed the Lord’s order and did not set out. 20 Sometimes the cloud was over the tabernacle only a few days; at the Lord’s command they would encamp, and then at his command they would set out. 21 Sometimes the cloud stayed only from evening till morning, and when it lifted in the morning, they set out. Whether by day or by night, whenever the cloud lifted, they set out. 22 Whether the cloud stayed over the tabernacle for two days or a month or a year, the Israelites would remain in camp and not set out; but when it lifted, they would set out. 23 At the Lord’s command they encamped, and at the Lord’s command they set out. They obeyed the Lord’s order, in accordance with his command through Moses.**

**9:15** *cloud covered it.* See notes on Ex 13:21; 40:34. The cloud was the visible symbol of the Lord’s presence hovering above the tabernacle. That this was no ordinary cloud is attested not only by its spontaneous appearance at the completion of the setting up of the tabernacle, but also by the fact that at night it had the appearance of fire. The Lord also directed the movements of his people by means of the cloud (vv. 17–18). (CSB)

**9:17** *set out* … *camped*. The final directive for the departure from Sinai and the journey in the wilderness gave explicit marching orders. The first of these came from God in the form of a cloud that had guided Israel on its way out of Egypt (Ex 13:21–22; 14:19–20). The cloud rested over the tabernacle after its completion, and now its future purpose is explained: to signal the breaking and making of camp (v 15; Ex 40:34–38). This function is here repeated and explained in greater detail because God, by this means, was about to lead His people to the Promised Land. (TLSB)

**9:18** *At the Lord’s command.* The lifting and settling of the cloud are identified with the Lord’s command. (CSB)

**9:23** *obeyed the Lord’s order.* The repetitious nature of vv. 15–23 enhances the expectation of continued complete obedience to the Lord’s direction of Israel’s movements through the desert. The role of Moses is mentioned for balance: Moses was the Lord’s agent, who interpreted the movement of the cloud as signaling the movement of the people. The tragedy of their subsequent disobedience (ch. 11) is heightened by this paragraph on their obedience. (CSB)

Israel showed its trust in God’s direction by obeying Him, even when He delayed their journey for a month or longer (vv 17–22; cf Ps 16:11; 27:11; 119:105; 139:3; 142:3). (TLSB)

**9:15–23** At God’s directive, the Israelites move away from Mount Sinai. God’s providential care is evident. The pillar of cloud/fire symbolizes His gracious hand over His covenant community. Today, God continues to care for His people, sustaining them on the journey of faith through His means of grace. • “Open now the crystal fountain Whence the healing stream doth flow; Let the fiery, cloudy pillar Lead me all my journey through. Strong deliv’rer, strong deliv’rer, Be Thou still my strength and shield; Be Thou still my strength and shield.” Amen. (*LSB* 918:2) (TLSB)