

## Sunday 30<sup>th</sup> August 2015 AM How firm a foundation - Numbers 9v1-23

### **Title: How firm a foundation - Numbers 9v1-23**

**Purpose:** This anniversary is one where they do the "All systems check" for before heading out and onwards- and this is also a good time for us to do a similar root and branch check.

## **INTRODUCTION**

### Anniversaries

Q. Has anyone had a significant anniversary recently? Well for Bola and myself, you may not know this, **but we are only 7 weeks away from our 30<sup>th</sup> Wedding Anniversary!!**

And I would have to say that that has **really set me thinking - I mean:**

Q. What does one do at a truly significant anniversary?

Now, obviously I want to get it right and I'm not sure it would be sending the best signals to my wife if I just:

- booked a **B&B** || took her out to **a play** || AND then simply rounded it all off with **a nice meal!!**

You have to remember that she has stayed faithfully by my side now for 30 long years since that amazing day when she said "**YES!**" to my proposal of marriage.

Well, without giving any real clues away, (as I think there has to be an odd surprise OR two somewhere along the way) - here are a few things I've come up with:

- **FIRST OFF** - there would have to be a solid note of **CELEBRATION & REJOICING** over what God has done keeping us walking at each other's side for all these years.

So on this score - I think that we would need to at least **crack open a bottle of Champagne** to mark that.

30 years back, when I proposed we had a half-bottle of champagne, so now after 30 years (taking inflation into account) we might just need to upgrade that, really break the bank, and pop open a whole bottle!! (Probably last us 2 nights anyway - but that's not the really the point).

- The **SECOND THING** I figure we'll do is to **LOOK BACK & REMEMBER** all the things the Lord did, all the hills He helped us climb, all the hurdles He moved out of the way in bringing us together.

In 30 years there's a lot of water that has gone under the bridge and a lot of things that God has, by His power, brought about.

(And this will link in very well with the note of CELEBRATION & REJOICING.)

Q. But what else should I do?

Surely there must be more than just: **REJOICING** and **REMEMBERING**.

- Well yes - **THIRDLY** we will be taking this moment to **RE-AFFIRM** our ongoing commitment, love and affection for each other.

## One thing missing - problem of wear & tear

And that does sound a pretty good set of goals - BUT FOR ONE THING (perhaps I should say for at least one thing) and that is the problem of WEAR & TEAR!!

One the day that I proposed - we went shopping, ring shopping and we were able to find a very beautiful **DIAMOND & SAPPHIRE** ring. It was very expensive and I think it used up pretty well everything I had.

Now unfortunately with constant usage over the course of 30 years one of the diamonds worked loose and was lost.

So one element that needs to sit alongside that of a **RE-AFFIRMATION** of our marriage is that of **REPAIRING** things that have over time broken down and succumbed to our own sinful tendencies.

## Martin Luther - repentance all of life

It was **Martin Luther** (that great 16th Century Reformer) who was famous for nailing his **95 THESES** to that church door:

And his very **1st thesis** said that it was: "Jesus who willed that the whole life of believers should be one of repentance."

He saw clearly that there is constant spiritual **WEAR & TEAR** and so we are those who have to do business with this reality by way of daily repentance.

For Bola & myself we will take some time to kick leaves and to take a fresh look at the foundations - to see if there has been movement, some drift from our original moorings with regard to our shared faith and trust in God and in His word.

## The title of the message this morning

The title of our message this morning is "**HOW FIRM A FOUNDATION**".

It is **an open-ended title** BECAUSE it can function in at least 3 ways:

- **EITHER** as a QUESTION - "**Q. How firm a foundation?**"
- **OR** as a DECLARATION - "**How firm a foundation!**"
- **OR** (if you combine them **BOTH**) then it can serve as a PROCESS whereby:  
=>FIRST you **RE-ASSESS** things  
=> and THEN and ONLY THEN you move onto **RE-AFFIRM** things.

## The structure

You'll be glad to hear that although Andy Madgwick said I could have up to an hour and a half, I have only got 2 points and even better than that they're both very simple:

- #1 - The pattern God wants
- #2 - The power He gives

## **1] The pattern God wants (and this is from Verse 15 to Verse 23)**

Now in order to get the full sense of what was going on at this point it will help to piece together a brief **TIMELINE**:

**Verse 15** starts by saying: "On the day the tabernacle, the Tent of Testimony, was setup,..."

Now the question that prompts us to ask is:

Q. So when was the tabernacle first set up?

And the answer is to be found right at the very end of the book of Exodus in **Chapter 40**.

**Exodus 40 Verse 1** "Then the LORD said to Moses: 'Set up the tabernacle, the Tent of Meeting, on **the first day of the first month.**'"

### The build up

Now we know that this **1st ANNIVERSARY** that is going to be centred around the celebration of the Passover (which is scheduled for twilight on **DAY 14** of this first month in the second year).

However what you also see is that for 2 WHOLE WEEKS there is actually going to be a MASSIVE BUILD UP.

If you fill in the details from **Leviticus** it tells us that the Priests (Aaron and his sons) had to get themselves ORDAINED and this is with IMMEDIATE EFFECT and begins on **DAY 1**.

Q. Will this procedure be done in a day? Well:

**Leviticus 8 Verse 33** reads: "Do not leave the entrance to the Tent of Meeting **for seven days**, until the days of your ordination are completed".

Even now things are not quite done - **Leviticus 9** speaks about gathering everybody together at the Tabernacle entrance on **DAY 8** of the month to witness the first service of the priests on their behalf.

And it is here that something very dramatic takes place:

**Leviticus 9 Verse 22-24** "Then Aaron lifted his hands towards the people and blessed them. And having sacrificed the sin offering, the burnt offering and the fellowship offering, he stepped down. Moses and Aaron then went into the tent of meeting. When they came out, they blessed the people; and the glory of the LORD appeared to all the people.

**Fire came out from the presence of the LORD and consumed the burnt offering and the fat portions on the altar. And when all the people saw it, they shouted for joy and fell face down".**

Now according to the rules of the Passover (which you can find in **Exodus 12**) on **DAY 10** of the month all the families have to select a Passover animal to be kept for 4 days until twilight on **DAY 14** of the month when Passover proper will begin.

So all in all - since **DAY 1** of the month - **THINGS HAVE BEEN RAMPING UP PRETTY DRAMATICALLY.** There has been virtually no day when there hasn't been some **frenzy of preparation and activity.**

### Our passage (Verses 17-23)

So we've filled in what isn't stated - and in a sense that's the HARD BIT BECAUSE the rest - our verses from 17-23 - LAY DOWN A SOMEWHAT OBVIOUS MESSAGE.

So let me just read the relevant verses once again and just see if you can kind of get in tune with the MELODIC LINE of what is being said:

**Numbers 9 Verse 17-23** " Whenever the cloud lifted from above the Tent, the Israelites set out; wherever the cloud

settled, the Israelites encamped. <sup>18</sup> 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. <sup>19</sup> When the cloud remained over the tabernacle a long time, the Israelites obeyed the LORD's order and did not set out. <sup>20</sup> 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. <sup>21</sup> 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. <sup>22</sup> 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. <sup>23</sup> 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."

- It's \*not\* exactly **poetry** BUT EQUALLY it's \*not\* really just **prose** - to do it justice you would have to call "**EXALTED PROSE**"
- No less than 15 times it speaks of either BREAKING CAMP or MAKING CAMP - but even that is not really the most important thing - that is, if you like, **the THEME** - but the question still remains: **Q. So what then is the THRUST?**

Well this is where **the REFRAIN** comes in - perhaps you noticed it - **no less than 9 times** we get the words "**at the LORD's command**" (or something rather similar).

**One writer** has this to say about this section: (**Adrian Reynolds - Teaching Numbers p. 107**)

He writes: "Some commentators even think this is a form of **EARLY HYMN or TRAVELLING SONG** - just as English sailors would sing **SHANTIES** as they weighed anchor or prepared for battle, so here is the Israelites' **CAMPING SONG** -> "**At the LORD's Command**".

Setting this to music - Prokofiev - Dance of the Knights (Montagues & Capulets)

Now I know that amongst our number here we have quite a few musicians - and so I was thinking to myself:

"If I was to set this piece of Scripture (this piece of 'exalted prose') to music: **Q. What piece would I choose?**"

So I've chosen one - and you can award yourself **ONE POINT** if you know **the composer** and **AN EXTRA POINT** if you know the name of the piece of music.

I've knocked it up in **the form of a VIDEO** SIMPLY BECAUSE **you can almost guess the piece of music from looking at THE AUDIO FINGERPRINT alone!!**:

**\*\*\* PLAY VIDEO - Numbers 9 - A Marching Song \*\*\***

The point, you see that Scripture is emphasizing is that:

**\*\*\* GOD IS THE ONE WHO IS CALLING THE SHOTS and THE PATTERN HE WANTS IS ONE OF LOVING OBEDIENCE \*\*\***

The question is:

**Q. Does your life reflect such a clear SPIRITUAL FINGERPRINT of UNVARYING LOVING OBEDIENCE?**

**Q. Has your life been clearly marked by a loving obedience to all that you find in His Word?**

For all the **key decisions of life**:

- God leads us into them **AND** God alone must lead us out from them

I'm very sure that they must have found that Verse 21 scenario difficult at times:

"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."

They wanted to stop - the place looked inviting - the opportunities felt promising - **BUT God said MOVE ON.**

I'm sure they found the Verse 22 scenario just as hard - where God would have them stay maybe a year, long time and the people were **not** as enthusiastic - perhaps they longed for some of the other places they'd been which somehow seemed nicer, easier - **BUT again God said STAY PUT.**

### Our repentance

Perhaps this morning you need to come and repent before God that your life no longer has the chapter beginnings and chapter endings that God Himself has wanted to put there.

Moving on swiftly #1 - The pattern God wants #2:

## **2] The power He gives (Verses 1 to 14)**

### All spick and span - Freshbrook's opening service

Thinking back 25 years to that opening day, I can remember that great flurry of activity - that we only just made it - (I remember rightly the carpet at the back of the auditorium was still being laid down in the morning).

But finally everything was **beautiful** - it was **all spick and span**.

And **on that day** - in a sense **it was easy** - everyone was on their **BEST BEHAVIOUR**.

You get the same sense here in Numbers 9 where they reach this 1<sup>st</sup> Passover Anniversary:

Verse 5 "The Israelites did everything just as the LORD commanded Moses."

Verse 23 "They obeyed the LORD's order, in accordance with his command through Moses."

### We shouldn't be fooled

Do you ever ask yourself: Q. I wonder how long their BEST BEHAVIOUR lasted?

Well the truth is that this anniversary mirrored how things began just a little bit too closely - you see **after just three days of being on the road** we read in:

Numbers 11 Verse 1 "Now the people complained about their hardships in the hearing of the Lord, and when he heard them his anger was aroused. Then fire from the Lord burned among them..."

But the truth is that following God in the nitty gritty of life is *\*not\** the same thing as watching out for God's will in the various big decisions of life.

Putting this another way:

- God wants to write the HEADLINES of our lives - if you like - to put in the CHAPTER MARKERS
- BUT HE ALSO wants to write things at the detail level - if you like - to speak at VERSE level as well

## Martin Luther - Diet of Worms 1521

We mentioned Martin Luther and his 95 theses - well when he was tried before the Holy Roman Emperor Charles the V:

These were his words: "... my conscience is **captive to the Word of God**.  
I cannot and I will not recant anything - for **to go against conscience is neither right nor safe.**"

### Challenge to Christians

Q. Are you still **captive to the Word of God**?

Back at the church at Thatcham we have a 3 part statement right on the front page of our website.  
It is intended to show: **WHO WE ARE & HOW WE TICK**: it has 3 simple sections #1

### Every Word

We believe that every word of God, as we find it in the Bible, is to be taken seriously. The Bible is inspired of God and is needful for living in obedience to God.

### 2 Everywhere

The Word of God, as we find it in the pages of Scripture, has to be allowed to have access to every part of our lives. We don't pick and choose which area of our lives in which to be obedient.

### 3 Every Day

Applying God's Word every single day and not just on Sundays. This is what Christian living is really all about.

Q. Are you still captive to the Word of God? Q. Is it still EVERY WORD, EVERYWHERE, EVERY DAY?

### Thoughts for Non-Christians

It maybe this morning you are still weighing up the claims of Christian faith. And I can imagine, that the sound of One who "sets the rules" may not appear as something very attractive.

You read sections, like in Verse 3, where it speaks of "doing things in accordance with the rules and regulations." and you say to yourself -> Well this is exactly why I am sceptical about faith!!

### Thoughts for Christians

It maybe that you have been a Christian for some time and YET you struggle for your life to reflect a consistent pattern of loving obedience.

Q. What can you do?

### Returning to the drawing board

Well as with all things in life - whenever you come upon fundamental problems - the answer is usually to be found by going back to the drawing board - and that is what is supplied for us here in the PASSOVER CELEBRATION.

It will never be any good to expect the **"THROBBING BASELINE" of LOVING OBEDIENCE**  
if we don't have the **"GOD-ENTRANCED MELODY" of HIS REDEEMING LOVE**

### The Gospel of Passover

Q. So what should we notice about this Passover celebration? Well let me point out **A FEW KEY THINGS**:

- **FIRSTLY - the NT connection.**

The only reason that the people of Israel were finally released from their slavery to sin (as pictured in their captivity as slaves in Egypt) was the fact that a perfect lamb was taken for every single household without exception and that a sacrifice was made.

It was as simple as **A LAMB FOR A MAN** -> if a family did not kill a lamb then there would be a death in that house. As the NT tells us it was also **A MAN FOR A LAMB** -> John the Baptist identifies Jesus as "the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world."

Paul similarly says 1 Corinthians 5 verse 7 "For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed."

- **SECONDLY - the problem that arose.**

As Verse 6 tells us there were people who could not participate in the Passover celebration on that day because they had become unclean through contact with death (perhaps one of their parents, or a sibling had passed away).

And see how God doesn't simply say - "Well that's just too bad - tough luck!" - No - He sets up what might be called a SUPPLEMENTAL or SECOND-CHANCE PASSOVER celebration.

And this will take place precisely one month later.

What is interesting to note is that the people will not march off on their journey UNTIL this second Passover has been done.

In this we can see the WIDENESS OF THE GRACE OF GOD. If you think that God is only about "Rules & Regulations" bear in mind that in God's economy there is never a rule without a reason.

The second thing to notice is that the JOURNEY CANNOT START until this SECOND PASSOVER has been done.

Q. Why? Because you have no resources without the good news of what God has done for you.

Unless you know clearly what God has done for you - that He has given up His One and Only Son as that perfect spotless Lamb of God who has single-handedly taken away your sin and hurled it into the depths of the Red Sea. Then you have no real basis for any journey of consistent loving obedience.

- **THIRDLY - personal expedience** - playing fast and loose with God's provision - **is out.**

Having put the journey on hold for a month and setup this SECOND-CHANCE PASSOVER - God makes it clear that He is not giving the people a license to do as they please.

The grace of God is a gift of His making and we are \*not\* to graft our own **personal expedience** on the back of GOD'S GREAT MERCY. (You can see it spelled out in Verse 13)

- **LASTLY - the Passover was open to all and sundry.**

Despite the fact that there is only one way, only one Lamb of God that has taken away the sin of the world there at Calvary - the tremendous point that we ABSOLUTELY MUSTN'T MISS is that anyone could partake of it.

So long as they would bind themselves to God and His covenant word, as long as they would come into relationship with Him - then they would be no different from the native-born Jew.

To put that in NT clothes - (Gal 3v26-29) "You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise."

## CONCLUSION

This morning, returning to our title - "How firm a foundation" - I want to lead us in few moments of quiet response:

Let's pray

Perhaps you've notched up many years as a Christian:

- so easy to lose ground and not really notice that the heartbeat is not as it was
- that DAILY SPIRITUAL WALK is no longer that **"THROBBING BASELINE" of a LOVING OBEDIENCE**
- know that each day is one of repentance and that we can return to **THE PATTERN GOD WANTS** because you see again **THE POWER HE GIVES** - return once again to **the Cross & draw fresh strength for journey onward.**

Perhaps you are not as yet on the journey - you are considering it - considering the claims of faith:

- God is the God of the SECOND CHANCE, there is a wideness in His Grace - and that is Good News
- BUT MAYBE - you have all you need - there are no obstacles left - you need to stop procrastinating and get on the journey with everybody else.

If that is you perhaps you can pray quietly these words - make them your own as I pray them:

Lord Jesus - I've heard the sweet melody of the Cross - you in my place, your Righteousness for my sinfulness - and when you cried out that most definite of declarations "It is finished" you WERE NOT KIDDING.

So all is done - there is nothing to be added - so now I simply receive by faith that SACRIFICE ON MY BEHALF.

Help me henceforth to FALL INTO STEP with a life of LOVING OBEDIENCE.

Thank you Lord Jesus - receive my prayer.

AMEN.