

Numbers 10:17

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And the tabernacle was taken down; and the sons of Gershon and the sons of Merari set forward, bearing the tabernacle.

Analysis

The tabernacle was taken down; and the sons of Gershon and the sons of Merari set forward, bearing the tabernacle. The march order begins with the disassembly and transport of the mishkan (מִשְׁקָן, dwelling place). The Gershonites and Merarites carried the tabernacle structure—curtains, coverings, frames, and pillars—immediately after Judah's vanguard departed. This strategic positioning meant the tabernacle infrastructure would arrive mid-journey, ready for the Kohathites (who followed later with the holy objects) to install the sacred furniture.

This divine logistics demonstrated that God's presence traveled with Israel, not merely to a destination. The mishkan wasn't left behind to be retrieved—it journeyed at the assembly's heart. The Hebrew verb nasa (נָסָה, "set forward") appears repeatedly in this passage, emphasizing coordinated movement under divine command. The Levitical clans' specific assignments prevented chaos and honored the tabernacle's holiness through ordered transport.

Historical Context

This first departure from Sinai (circa 1446 BC, or 1270 BC on late-date Exodus chronology) occurred after nearly a year at the mountain (Exodus 19:1, Numbers 10:11). The Gershonites transported the ten curtains, the tent covering, the outer coverings of badger/goat skins, the tabernacle door hanging, and court hangings (Numbers 3:25-26). The Merarites carried the boards, bars, pillars, sockets, pins,

and cords—the structural framework (Numbers 3:36-37). Both clans used wagons provided by the tribal leaders (Numbers 7:3-8). This division of labor reflected the tabernacle's dual nature: sacred space (carried carefully) and physical structure (transported efficiently).

Related Passages

1 John 4:8 — God is love

1 Corinthians 13:4 – Characteristics of love

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Study Questions

1. How does the ordered, coordinated march demonstrate that corporate worship requires both individual faithfulness and communal organization?
2. What does the tabernacle traveling *with* Israel (not waiting at destinations) teach about God's commitment to presence with His people during transitions?
3. How might the Levites' specific assignments (Gershonites vs. Merarites) illustrate that different believers have different gifts for building up Christ's church?

Interlinear Text

וְהַזְכִּיר was taken down	בְּמִשְׁקָה And the tabernacle	וְנִצְעָד set forward	וְבָנָיו and the sons	גַּרְשֹׁן of Gershon
H3381	H4908	H5265	H1121	H1648

בְּמִשְׁכָּן: וְבָנָי מִרְאֵי נְשָׂא וְמִרְאֵי וְבָנָי
and the sons of Merari bearing And the tabernacle
H1121 H4847 H5375 H4908

Additional Cross-References

Numbers 1:51 (Temple): And when the tabernacle setteth forward, the Levites shall take it down: and when the tabernacle is to be pitched, the Levites shall set it up: and the stranger that cometh nigh shall be put to death.

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