

Numbers 9:23

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

At the commandment of the LORD they rested in the tents, and at the commandment of the LORD they journeyed: they kept the charge of the LORD, at the commandment of the LORD by the hand of Moses.

Analysis

This verse concludes the passage about the cloud guiding Israel's movements, emphasizing absolute obedience to divine direction. The phrase 'At the commandment of the LORD' (Hebrew: 'al-pi YHWH', literally 'at the mouth of the LORD') appears three times, creating rhythmic emphasis on God's sovereign control. The cloud's movements determined when Israel camped and when they journeyed—not convenience, not preference, not strategic planning, but divine command alone. The phrase 'they kept the charge of the LORD' uses 'shamar' (שָׁמַר), meaning to guard, observe, give heed—suggesting watchful, attentive obedience. This wasn't passive compliance but active vigilance to discern and follow God's leading. The concluding phrase 'by the hand of Moses' establishes Moses as the mediator through whom God's will was communicated, prefiguring Christ our ultimate Mediator. This verse teaches that sanctified living requires moment-by-moment responsiveness to God's guidance, not predetermined plans that ignore His present direction.

Historical Context

Numbers 9:15-23 describes the cloud that guided Israel throughout their wilderness wandering (1446-1406 BC). This theophanic cloud represented God's manifest presence dwelling among His people—it covered the tabernacle by day

and appeared as fire by night (Exodus 40:34-38). The cloud's movements determined all Israel's travel—sometimes they stayed in one location for days, months, or even years; other times the cloud moved after only a single night. This required constant readiness and surrender of self-determination. No other ancient Near Eastern nation claimed such direct, visible divine guidance. The cloud demonstrated God's intimate involvement with His people and His sovereignty over their journey toward the Promised Land.

Related Passages

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Study Questions

1. How does Israel's dependence on the cloud's movement challenge our tendency toward self-directed planning?
2. What does it mean to 'keep the charge of the LORD' in seasons when He seems to keep us stationary?
3. How can we cultivate the spiritual attentiveness necessary to discern God's guidance in our lives?
4. In what ways does Moses' mediating role foreshadow Christ's superior mediation?
5. What 'clouds and pillars of fire' has God used to guide you, and how have you responded?

Interlinear Text

עַל	גַּם	יְהִי	יָמִן	עַל	גַּם	
H5921	At the commandment		of the LORD	they rested	H5921	At the commandment
	H6310		H3068	H2583		H6310
הָיָה	יְמִינָה	מְשֻׁמָּדָה	יְהִי	שָׁמֶן	עַל	
of the LORD	they journeyed	the charge	of the LORD	they kept	H5921	
H3068	H5265	H853	H4931	H3068	H8104	
בְּיַד	מְשֻׁהָ					
At the commandment	of the LORD	by the hand	of Moses			
H6310	H3068	H3027	H4872			

Additional Cross-References

Joshua 22:3 (Word): Ye have not left your brethren these many days unto this day, but have kept the charge of the commandment of the LORD your God.

Numbers 9:19 (References Lord): And when the cloud tarried long upon the tabernacle many days, then the children of Israel kept the charge of the LORD, and journeyed not.