

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 H5921	פִּי H6310	יְהוָה H3068	יָחַד ו H2583	עַל H5921	פִּי H6310
At the	commandment	of the LORD	they rested	At the	commandment
יְהוָה H3068	יָסַעוּ H5265	אֶת H853	מִשְׁמֶת H4931	יְהוָה H3068	שָׁמְרוּ H8104
of the LORD	they journeyed		the charge	of the LORD	they kept
					H5921
פִּי H6310	יְהוָה H3068	בְּיַד H3027	מֹשֶׁה: H4872		
At the	commandment	of the LORD	by the hand	of Moses	

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.