

Adult Bible Class

The Book of Numbers

Lesson #9, Chapter 15

A Quick Review

In our last lesson the Israelites came to the edge of Canaan's land at Kadesh-Barnea. When we mention Kadesh, we think of the Israelites encamped there, sending out twelve spies (Numbers 13). Unfortunately, we also think of their unbelief and rebellion because of the evil report by ten of the spies (Numbers 14). To people who study the Bible, the name "Kadesh" brings to mind unbelief, disobedience, and failure. It is the sad story of God's people rejecting faith in their faithful God and practicing unbelief.

All of Genesis 12 to Numbers 13 led to this point - where Israel had the opportunity to enter the Promised Land and take it as their own. God had promised it to them for generations, but when it came time, they disbelieved God and failed.

The ten spies (and then the Israelites) said that they were unable to take the land. They exaggerated the difficulties in Canaan. They wanted to go back to Egypt and spoke of it as if it was a glory land. Because of their complete failure to believe God, the Lord was going to destroy them all and begin again with Moses. However, Moses interceded for the people.

The Lord destroyed the ten spies who were unbelieving and spread their unbelief to the rest of the camp. He then declared that the Israelites would wander in the desert for forty years - one year for each day the spies looked over the land of Canaan. Those age twenty and older would die in the wilderness and never see the Promised Land. It was a terrible defeat - one of the worst moments in the history of the people of Israel.

The next chapter leaves that story and reminds the people of Israel about the offerings and sacrifices they are to give to God. We've seen this before - when Israel fails, then God gives them a repeat lesson about their duties to Him.

Numbers Chapter 15

Numbers 15:1 (NLT) Then the Lord told Moses, **2** "Give the following instructions to the people of Israel.

"When you finally settle in the land I am giving you...

Scripture gives very little information about what happened during those forty years. The Israelites were marking time - waiting for the older generation to pass away.

The time of the wilderness wandering was not a time for the people to practice their religion fully (in fact, not much at all). It was a time of waiting. Israel had been

given the law from God, but they were not yet putting it all into practice. They needed the land to practice their religion fully. For instance, for now they could keep the Sabbath, but they could not offer their sacrifices correctly because they needed the “fruit of the land” to complete their sacrifices and perform the Tabernacle service as God commanded, as we will read today in chapter 15. Moses’ account in Deuteronomy gives insight:

Deuteronomy 12:1 (NLT) “These are the decrees and regulations you must be careful to obey when you live in the land that the Lord, the God of your ancestors, is giving you...

8 “Your pattern of worship will change. Today all of you are doing as you please, **9** because you have not yet arrived at the place of rest, the land the Lord your God is giving you as your special possession. **10** But you will soon cross the Jordan River and live in the land the Lord your God is giving you...

Canaan’s Land is a picture to New Testament Christians of victorious Christian living. Canaan’s Land is the “kingdom of heaven” where the “fruit of the Spirit” is grown and the “gifts of the Spirit” operate.

In Canaan’s land we find spiritual rest - that place of holy joy and peace as we have faith in what Jesus has done for us (although in this life we realize it is imperfect - there are battles to fight and enemies to conquer). Canaan’s land speaks of that overcoming Christian life that goes beyond a normal life of self-centeredness and fear. For instance:

Matthew 16:24 (NKJV) Then Jesus said to His disciples, “If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. **25** For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it.

Philippians 2:3 Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. **4** Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.

1 Timothy 6:6 Now godliness with contentment is great gain... **11** But you, O man of God, flee these things [foolish and harmful lusts] and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, gentleness. **12** Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, to which you were also called...

Christians who are still “wandering in the wilderness” do not live overcoming lives. Their minds are not fully made up. They are “double minded and unstable.” They do not fight those things that war against the soul (James 1:6-8). They have not yet decided to live a life of faith. They are not fully living the Christian life.

God wants to accomplish much *in us* and *through us*, but He can only do so when we “enter into that land” that is a good land, the place that God has ordained for His people to worship Him and live for Him. It is that place of complete rest in Him through faith. We have received the Spirit of God, but are we walking in the Spirit? Are we allowing the Spirit to lead us? Are we listening to the Spirit of God?

1 Corinthians 2:14 (NLT) But people who aren’t spiritual can’t receive these truths from God’s Spirit. It all sounds foolish to them and they can’t understand it, for only those who are spiritual can understand what the Spirit means. **15** Those who are spiritual can evaluate all things, but they themselves cannot be evaluated by others. **16** For,

“Who can know the Lord’s thoughts?
Who knows enough to teach him?”

But we understand these things, for we have the mind of Christ.

Philippians 1:6 (NLT) And I am certain that God, who began the good work within you, will continue his work until it is finally finished on the day when Christ Jesus returns... **9** I pray that your love will overflow more and more, and that you will keep on growing in knowledge and understanding. **10** For I want you to understand what really matters, so that you may live pure and blameless lives until the day of Christ’s return.

Hebrews 4:6 So God’s rest is there for people to enter, but those who first heard this good news failed to enter because they disobeyed God. **7** So God set another time for entering his rest, and that time is today... **10** For all who have entered into God’s rest have rested from their labors, just as God did after creating the world. **11** So let us do our best to enter that rest. But if we disobey God, as the people of Israel did, we will fall.

Let’s continue in Numbers 15:

Numbers 15:2b (NLT) “When you finally settle in the land I am giving you **3** you will offer special gifts as a pleasing aroma to the Lord. These gifts may take the form of a burnt offering, a sacrifice to fulfill a vow, a voluntary offering, or an offering at any of your annual festivals, and they may be taken from your herds of cattle or your flocks of sheep and goats.

These offerings are burnt offerings and peace offerings (both are free-will offerings and are a sweet aroma to the Lord). We studied them in Leviticus chapters 1 and 3. If you remember, the burnt offering is the foundational offering for all of the other offerings to God. When they occupied their land, the priests were to place a burnt offering on the altar each morning and evening, and then the other offerings were placed on top of it. Individuals could also bring burnt offerings to the Tabernacle. The burnt offering, or “whole burnt offering” as it is sometimes called, speaks to us of *total devotion to God*, since all of the animal is given to God. The burnt offering speaks to us of serious commitment and surrender. This was seen first in the man Christ Jesus as He committed Himself fully to God when He lived on this earth and gave Himself as a sacrifice for sin, but it is also seen in His followers. The grain offering and the fat from other offerings are placed on the burnt offering. For us, all of our “offerings” to God must be based on a foundation of giving ourselves totally to God.

The other offering mentioned above is the peace offering, which was also called a fellowship offering. The peace offering was given to fulfill a vow to God, or as an offering of thanksgiving, or at a festival. This offering was not wholly given on the altar like the burnt offering. Only the fat from the animal was given on the altar to God. An important principle regarding peace offerings is that “*the fat belongs to the Lord*” (Lev. 3:16). This was considered the best part of the animal. The peace offering was also called a fellowship offering because the meat from it was eaten by the offerer and his family and also by the priest and his family. There was fellowship and feasting with the peace offering. And - God received His portion (the fat).

Jesus Christ is seen in the peace offering for through His sacrifice we can have peace and fellowship with both God and man. For us, the peace offering speaks of fellowship with God and man.

In Numbers 15, we are given some information regarding the burnt offering and the peace offering that we are not given in Leviticus. God expected them to offer a grain offering (KJV calls it a “meat offering,”) and a drink offering with these offerings.

Numbers 15:4 When you present these offerings, you must also give the Lord a grain offering of two quarts of choice flour mixed with one quart of olive oil. **5** For each lamb offered as a burnt offering or a special sacrifice, you must also present one quart of wine as a liquid offering.

6 “If the sacrifice is a ram, give a grain offering of four quarts of choice flour mixed with a third of a gallon of olive oil, **7** and give a third of a gallon of wine as a liquid offering. This will be a pleasing aroma to the Lord.

8 “When you present a young bull as a burnt offering or as a sacrifice to fulfill a vow or as a peace offering to the Lord, **9** you must also give a grain offering of six quarts of choice flour mixed with two quarts of olive oil, **10** and give two quarts of wine as a liquid offering. This will be a special gift, a pleasing aroma to the Lord.

11 “Each sacrifice of a bull, ram, lamb, or young goat should be prepared in this way. **12** Follow these instructions with each offering you present. **13** All of you native-born Israelites must follow these instructions when you offer a special gift as a pleasing aroma to the Lord. **14** And if any foreigners visit you or live among you and want to present a special gift as a pleasing aroma to the Lord, they must follow these same procedures. **15** Native-born Israelites and foreigners are equal before the Lord and are subject to the same decrees. This is a permanent law for you, to be observed from generation to generation. **16** The same instructions and regulations will apply both to you and to the foreigners living among you.”

The above laws were given as “*a permanent law...to be observed from generation to generation.*” However, these laws are no longer observed by modern Jews. Even though Jewish people have returned to their own land since Israel became a nation in 1948, they have not yet rebuilt their Temple, so Old Testament sacrifices have not been offered since the Temple’s destruction in 70 A.D. But when the Scripture tells us that an ordinance is “permanent” or “established forever,” we can be assured that there is a spiritual principle that continues into the New Testament age.

The sacrifice of Jesus Christ is foundational - all other sacrifices are placed on it to have true meaning. The grain offering and the drink offering speak of human elements - both are made with human hands from fruits of the Promised Land (wheat, olives, grapes, etc). The gifts that we have only have meaning when they are fashioned by our hands into useful things (bread, olive oil, wine). Further, these gifts that we fashion only have meaning when they are placed beside the sacrifice of Christ. These bloodless offerings were commanded by God to be offered *together* with the blood sacrifice. The grain offering speaks to us of our service to God, and the drink offering speaks of our service being poured out for the Lord. The drink offering can also refer to accomplishing our service to God with joy.

James 2:17 So you see, faith by itself isn’t enough. Unless it produces good deeds, it is dead and useless... **26** Just as the body is dead without breath, so also faith is dead without good works.

Paul used the symbol of the “drink offering” when referring to his labor among the church in Philippi:

Philippians 2:14 (NKJV) Do all things without complaining and disputing, **15** that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, **16** holding fast the word of life, so that I may rejoice in the day of Christ that I have not run in vain or labored in vain.

17 Yes, and if I am being poured out as a drink offering on the sacrifice and service of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you all.

Back to Numbers:

Numbers 15:17 Then the Lord said to Moses, **18** "Give the following instructions to the people of Israel.

"When you arrive in the land where I am taking you, 19 and you eat the crops that grow there, you must set some aside as a sacred offering to the Lord. 20 Present a cake from the first of the flour you grind, and set it aside as a sacred offering, as you do with the first grain from the threshing floor. 21 Throughout the generations to come, you are to present a sacred offering to the Lord each year from the first of your ground flour.

22 "But suppose you unintentionally fail to carry out all these commands that the Lord has given you through Moses. **23** And suppose your descendants in the future fail to do everything the Lord has commanded through Moses. **24** If the mistake was made unintentionally, and the community was unaware of it, the whole community must present a young bull for a burnt offering as a pleasing aroma to the Lord. It must be offered along with its prescribed grain offering and liquid offering and with one male goat for a sin offering. 25 With it the priest will purify the whole community of Israel, making them right with the Lord, and they will be forgiven. For it was an unintentional sin, and they have corrected it with their offerings to the Lord—the special gift and the sin offering. **26** The whole community of Israel will be forgiven, including the foreigners living among you, for all the people were involved in the sin.

27 "If one individual commits an unintentional sin, the guilty person must bring a one-year-old female goat for a sin offering. 28 The priest will sacrifice it to purify the guilty person before the Lord, and that person will be forgiven. **29** These same instructions apply both to native-born Israelites and to the foreigners living among you.

30 "But those who brazenly violate the Lord's will, whether native-born Israelites or foreigners, have blasphemed the Lord, and they must be cut off from the community. 31 Since they have treated the Lord's word with contempt and deliberately disobeyed his command, they must be completely cut off and suffer the punishment for their guilt."

Neither the Old nor New Testament give place to willful, presumptuous sin by the believer. When Jesus forgave the woman caught in the act of adultery, he told her, "*Neither do I condemn thee. Go and sin no more.*" Initial salvation should be followed by a life lived to please God.

The New Testament book of Hebrews is very helpful to us as we study the Old Testament Law. Hebrews relates the Law to our life in Christ, and this theme of willful sin is discussed:

Hebrews 10:26 (NIV) If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left... **28** Anyone who rejected the law of Moses died without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. **29** How much more severely do you think someone deserves to be punished who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, who has treated as an unholy thing the blood of the covenant that sanctified them, and who has insulted the Spirit of grace?... **36** You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised... **39** But we do not belong to those who shrink back and are destroyed, but to those who have faith and are saved.

After a person has experienced initial salvation (Passover Lamb, Red Sea, pillar of cloud and fire), He should receive God's law in His heart through the Holy Spirit of God (Mt. Sinai - Romans 8:1-2) and then enter the life of faith and victorious living in Christ (Canaan's Land). He can hold on to the offering of Jesus Christ. This offering is available any time to take care of his faults, failures, unintentional sins, and mistakes that he commits along life's way. As long as the Christian does not reject the commandments of God and willfully practice sin, he is covered by the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. We should claim this and be thankful for it.

The Apostle John wrote about unintentional sin and also presumptuous sin:

1 John 1:5 (NLT) This is the message we heard from Jesus and now declare to you: God is light, and there is no darkness in him at all... **7** ...if we are living in the light, as God is in the light, then we have fellowship with each other, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, cleanses us from all sin.

8 If we claim we have no sin, we are only fooling ourselves and not living in the truth. **9** But if we confess our sins to him, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all wickedness... **2:1** My dear children, I am writing this to you so that you will not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate who pleads our case before the Father. He is Jesus Christ, the one who is truly righteous. **2** He himself is the sacrifice that atones for our sins...

1 John 3:4 (NLT) Everyone who sins is breaking God's law, for all sin is contrary to the law of God. **5** And you know that Jesus came to take away our sins, and there is no sin in him. **6** Anyone who continues to live in him will not sin. But anyone who keeps on sinning does not know him or understand who he is.

7 Dear children, don't let anyone deceive you about this: When people do what is right, it shows that they are righteous, even as Christ is righteous. **8** But when people keep on sinning, it shows that they belong to the devil, who has been sinning since the beginning. But the Son of God came to destroy the works of the devil. **9** Those who have been born into God's family do not make a practice of sinning, because God's life is in them. So they can't keep on sinning, because they are children of God. **10** So now we can tell who are children of God and who are children of the devil. Anyone who does not live righteously and does not love other believers does not belong to God.

An Example of Willful, Presumptuous Sin

Numbers 15:32 (NLT) One day while the people of Israel were in the wilderness, they discovered a man gathering wood on the Sabbath day. **33** The people who found him doing this took him before Moses, Aaron, and the rest of the community. **34** They held him in custody because they did not know what to do with him. **35** Then the Lord said to Moses, "The man must be put to death! The whole community must stone him outside the camp." **36** So the whole community took the man outside the camp and stoned him to death, just as the Lord had commanded Moses.

Not long after the Red Sea crossing, God began to feed the Israelites with manna from heaven. God's people were commanded to gather what they needed daily. On the sixth day God commanded them to gather enough for two days - for that day and also for the seventh day which was to be a Sabbath rest for them - *no work was to be done* (Exodus 16:21-26). God reminded them of the importance of the Sabbath rest several more times before Kadesh (Exodus 20:8-11, 31:12-16, 35:1-3, Lev. 19:3, 30, Lev. 23:3). The fact that the manna did not come to them on the seventh day was also a weekly reminder from heaven that the Sabbath was important to God and must be revered.

By the time we get to the story of the man who picked up sticks on the Sabbath, the Israelites had known about and practiced the Sabbath rest for quite some time. We do not know how many months or even years after the rebellion at Kadesh that this took place, but there had already been about sixteen months of Sabbaths by the time the Israelites left Kadesh - and this could have been years after that.

What should we learn from this well-known story from the Old Testament? Is the lesson, "Do not pick up firewood on the Sabbath day?" There is more to this than that. The man who did this acted brazenly, with presumption, for the law of the Sabbath was well-known by that time. Furthermore, this was one of the capital crimes of the nation of Israel. The man had no fear of breaking the holy law of God:

Exodus 31:12 (NLT) The Lord then gave these instructions to Moses: **13** "Tell the people of Israel: 'Be careful to keep my Sabbath day, for the Sabbath is a sign of the covenant between me and you from generation to generation. It is given so you may know that I am the Lord, who makes you holy. **14** You must keep the Sabbath day, for it is a holy day for you. Anyone who desecrates it must be put to death; anyone who works on that day will be cut off from the community. **15** You have six days each week for your ordinary work, but the seventh day must be a Sabbath day of complete rest, a holy day dedicated to the Lord. Anyone who works on the Sabbath must be put to death. **16** The people of Israel must keep the Sabbath day by observing it from generation to generation. This is a covenant obligation for all time. **17** It is a permanent sign of my covenant with the people of Israel. For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, but on the seventh day he stopped working and was refreshed.'"

The ordinance of the Sabbath day rest was to be kept "*for all time.*" This tells us that *the meaning* goes on into the New Testament age (Hebrews 4). For the Christian, the Sabbath is a spiritual one, for we are to cease from our own works and experience the spiritual rest in the Spirit. There is spiritual rest in this life and "rest" in the life to come.

But the man who picked up sticks committed a willful, presumptuous sin. For this transgression, he lost his life. We humans think, "What severity for such a little offense!" But God says, "What trifling for such a serious law of God." As humans we see someone picking up sticks, but God sees someone who with all brazenness disregards the great law of God and acts selfishly. Attitude is everything. One thinks of Esau who sold his birthright for a bowl of bean soup, or Judas Iscariot who sold out the Lord Jesus for a bag of silver. The man in Numbers 15 sold out the God's rest for a few sticks!

King David wrote of both unintentional and intentional sins.

Psalm 19:12 (NKJV) Who can understand *his* errors?

Cleanse me from secret faults.

13 Keep back Your servant also from presumptuous sins;

Let them not have dominion over me.

Then I shall be blameless,

And I shall be innocent of great transgression.

14 Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart

Be acceptable in Your sight,

O Lord, my strength and my Redeemer.

Finishing Numbers chapter 15:

Tassels on Clothing

Numbers 15:37 (NLT) Then the Lord said to Moses, **38** "Give the following instructions to the people of Israel: Throughout the generations to come you must make tassels for the hems of your clothing and attach them with a blue cord. **39** When you see the tassels, you will remember and obey all the commands of the Lord instead of following your own desires and defiling yourselves, as you are prone to do. **40** The tassels will help you remember that you must obey all my commands and be holy to your God. **41** I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt that I might be your God. I am the Lord your God!"

God knew that His people needed a daily reminder that they were His. The tassels (which they saw many times a day) would remind them that they needed to obey God's laws, not their own lusts.

The blue color of the cord speaks of heavenly things (the sky is blue). When they saw the blue cord, they remembered that they were to obey God's commandments.