

Numbers 15- • Chapter Study

INTRO

Most of Exodus, Leviticus, and the 1st 14 chs of Numbers cover a time span of about 3yrs.

Then Numbers 15-25 cover **37 yrs.**

The **focus** of these chs is the **new** gen that rises to take the place of the adults who came out of bondage in Egypt.

That generation never shed its slave mentality.

The new generation, raised in the wilderness learned to embrace its **freeborn sons & daughters** of God.

Ch15

¹ And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, ² “Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: ‘When you have come into the land you are to inhabit, which I am giving to you,’ ³ and you make an offering by fire to the Lord, a burnt offering or a sacrifice, to fulfill a vow or as a freewill offering or in your appointed feasts, to make a sweet aroma to the Lord, from the herd or the flock,

Vs4-13 then go on to describe **how** offerings were to be made.

These weren’t sin-sacrifices made to atone for sin.

They were offerings of **dedication & devotion.**

We have daily devotions that comprise things like reading God’s Word & praying; maybe singing some praise & worship songs.

Their devos meant a sacrifice.

¹⁴ And if a **stranger** dwells with you, or whoever *is* among you throughout your generations, and would present an offering made by fire, a sweet aroma to the Lord, just as you do, so shall he do. ¹⁵ One ordinance *shall be* for you of the assembly and for the stranger who dwells *with you*, an ordinance forever throughout your generations; as you are, so shall the stranger be before the Lord. ¹⁶ One law and one custom shall be for you and for the stranger who dwells with you.”

Many people view the **ancient** world as sectioned off into discreet regions w/lil mixing among different peoples.

That’s simply not the case.

Archaeology has made clear the role **trading** has had throughout history.

While it’s true people were more **segregated** in the ancient world than they are today, they weren’t **isolated.**

Merchants & traders were common and dispersed throughout the ancient world.

And when the economy of one area was depressed, or famine set in, people often packed up and moved where the grass was *literally* greener.

So God says when foreigners living among the tribes of Israel come to faith in Yahweh, they must worship Him in the same way the Jews do, as prescribed by God.

This provision made it clear to the people of Israel that God welcomed non-Jews into covenant with Him.

¹⁷ Again the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, ¹⁸ “Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: ‘When you come into the land to which I bring you, ¹⁹ then it will be, when you eat of the bread of the land, that you shall offer up a heave offering to the Lord. ²⁰ You shall offer up a cake of the first of your ground meal *as* a heave offering; as a heave offering of the threshing floor, so shall you offer it up. ²¹ Of the first of your ground meal you shall give to the Lord a heave offering throughout your generations.

God gives the new gen a **vision** of life in the PL.

He says, “**When**” not “*If*” “**When** you come into the land to which I bring you.”

Their offering is to be **first**, not last or of the leftovers.

Vs22-26 are instructions for dealing with **unintentional national** sin.

With the long passage of the years to come, it might happen that they’d transgress God’s law without pre-meditation or awareness.

Maybe after a few hundred years they’d lose track of when they were supposed to celebrate the every 50 yrs Jubilee.

So here was a way Israel could atone for unintentional national faux pas.

Then vs27-29 are instructions for the same kind of unintentional sin committed by an individual.

³⁰ ‘But the person who does *anything presumptuously*, whether he is native-born or a stranger, that 1 brings reproach on the Lord, and he shall be cut off from among his people. ³¹ Because he has despised the word of the Lord, and has broken His commandment, that person shall be completely cut off; his guilt *shall be* upon him.’” This isn’t for your run-of-the-mill yielding to temptation everyone deals with daily.

People weren’t executed for fibbing, gossiping, giving in to envy.

What’s referred to here is a blatant rebellion that manifests in a lifestyle that defies God.

This is the kind of arrogant sin that publicly dares anyone to judge it.

Such immorality is a spiritual cancer that if not ended will corrupt others & lead to ruin of others.

Moses then records a story of just such a rebellion ...

³² Now while the children of Israel were in the wilderness, they found a man gathering sticks on the Sabbath day.

³³ And those who found him gathering sticks brought him to Moses and Aaron, and to all the congregation. ³⁴

They put him under guard, because it had not been explained what should be done to him. ³⁵ Then the Lord said to Moses, “The man must surely be put to death; all the congregation shall stone him with stones outside the camp.” ³⁶ So, as the Lord commanded Moses, all the congregation brought him outside the camp and stoned him with stones, and he died.

Whoa! Executing a guy for gathering firewood? Seems overly harsh.

So let’s be clear: ***They didn’t stone him for picking up some sticks.***

They executed him for a blatant disregard for God.

This sin was ***so high-handed*** it was nothing less than ***blasphemous***.

What would you think of a guy on a business trip, who takes off his wedding & heads to a singles bar?

Back it up in time: He takes his wedding ring off during his honeymoon & goes to a singles bar?

Back it up further to his wedding reception being held at a hotel.

He takes off his ring and goes to the singles bar in the hotel, picks up a woman and takes her to one of the rooms while his bride is still at the reception.

And her lipstick is still on his lips from their kiss at the altar!!! That’s THIS GUY!!!

As a wedding ring is a symbol of the marriage covenant, the Sabbath was the symbol of Israel’s freshly made covenant with God.

This guy knew full well what he did was forbidden.

His defiance was a bold declaration of intent to ignore God in favoring of doing whatever he wanted.

Now: What would happen if they ignored him?

It would embolden more rebellion till it spread & worked great harm.

So they nipped it in the bud by executing this guy, just as vs30-31 said.

³⁷ Again the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, ³⁸ “Speak to the children of Israel: Tell them to make tassels on the corners of their garments throughout their generations, and to put a blue thread in the tassels of the corners. ³⁹ And you shall have the tassel, that you may look upon it and remember all the commandments of the Lord and do them, and that you may not follow the harlotry to which your own heart and your own eyes are inclined, ⁴⁰ and that you may remember and do all My commandments, and be holy for your God. ⁴¹ I *am* the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, to be your God: I *am* the Lord your God.”

These tassels were a part of their daily clothing.

They were to be simple but constant reminders they were in covenant with God & that covenant made them different from all others.

In Scripture, ***blue is associated with heaven.***

The idea is the sky is blue and you look ***up*** to see it.

Since the spiritual realm is ***higher*** than the physical, blue becomes the color that speaks of heaven.

The blue thread in the tassels reminded Israel that as Yahweh’s people they were ***citizens of heaven.***

Question: Should our relationship with God ***effect*** such things as ...

- What we wear?
- What we eat & drink?

- Our speech?
- Where we go?
- What we do?

Let's be clear: We are saved by grace alone thru faith alone, not works.

But once saved, once in covenant with God, our relationship with Him ought to impact our choices & HOW we live.

- We don't need to wear overtly religious garb, but we will dress *modestly*.
- We don't have a special diet manufactured in a kosher facility in Utah, but we do practice *moderation*.
- We don't speak in Old King James, but we also eschew profanity & coarse speech.
- We go most places others do, but there are some places dedicated to vice we won't go.

Some years ago when covering this passage, I devoted a sermon to these vs & talked about the principle behind this command to make & wear tassels. Ring.

Ch16

Since we covered most of this Sunday, we'll just read & summarize.

¹ Now Korah the son of Izhar, the son of Kohath, the son of Levi, with Dathan and Abiram the sons of Eliab, and On the son of Peleth, sons of Reuben, took *men*; ² and they rose up before Moses with some of the children of Israel, 250 leaders of the congregation, representatives of the congregation, men of renown. ³ They gathered together against Moses and Aaron, and said to them, "*You take* too much upon yourselves, for all the congregation *is* holy, every one of them, and the Lord *is* among them. Why then do you exalt yourselves above the assembly of the Lord?"

We know from Exo 3 & 4, Moses *did not want* the assignment of leading Israel.

When God appeared to him at the burning bush and gave him his commission, he tried hard to beg off.

But God had made His choice and Moe was the guy.

His reluctance commended him as the perfect candidate.

But now, some men, ambitious for power, decide the time is ripe to challenge Moses & Aaron.

They assume the failure to enter Canaan has weakened M&A's position & popularity.

We talked Sunday about who these guys were.

⁴ So when Moses heard it, he fell on his face; ⁵ and he spoke to Korah and all his company, saying, "Tomorrow morning the Lord will show who is His and who is holy, and will cause him to come near to Him. That one whom He chooses He will cause to come near to Him. ⁶ Do this: Take censers, Korah and all your company; ⁷ put fire in them and put incense in them before the Lord tomorrow, and it shall be that the man whom the Lord chooses is the holy one. You take too much upon yourselves, you sons of Levi!"

Korah's reasoning is that since *all* Israel was holy, *all* ought to be able to serve as priests, not just Aaron and his sons.

Offering incense was something only Aaron as HP was to do.

So Moses suggests these guys go ahead and try doing something only a priest was allowed to do.

Does that remind you of anything?

How about at the dedication of the tabernacle in Lev. 10 when Nadab & Abihu, grabbed their censers & rushed forward in an attempt to horn in on God's glory?

As Aaron's sons, they WERE priests, but they *knowingly* colored outside the lines of their duties and got smoked for it.

If disobedient priests got fried, how much *more* dangerous was it for *non*-priests to *play act at it*?

⁸ Then Moses said to Korah, "Hear now, you sons of Levi: ⁹ Is it a small thing to you that the God of Israel has separated you from the congregation of Israel, to bring you near to Himself, to do the work of the tabernacle of the Lord, and to stand before the congregation to serve them; ¹⁰ and that He has brought you near to Himself, you and all your brethren, the sons of Levi, with you? And are you seeking the priesthood also? ¹¹ Therefore you and all your company are gathered together against the Lord. And what is Aaron that you complain against him?" Moses doesn't defend himself; he leaves that to God.

But he does speak up in defense of his brother Aaron.

He knew Aaron hadn't appointed himself as high priest; God assigned him that office & task.

Here's the balance on defending against attack & accusation.

We ought to leave the defense of ourselves to God.

But God often defends us by **having others** speak up on our behalf. Pro 27:2 says ...

Let another man praise you, and not your own mouth; A stranger, and not your own lips.

¹² And Moses sent to call Dathan and Abiram the sons of Eliab, but they said, "We will not come up!" ¹³ Is it a small thing that you have brought us up out of a land flowing with milk and honey, to kill us in the wilderness, that you should keep acting like a prince over us? ¹⁴ Moreover you have not brought us into a land flowing with milk and honey, nor given us inheritance of fields and vineyards. Will you put out the eyes of these men? We will not come up!"

D&A won't even answer Moses summons. But they do send a msg.

They accuse Moses of failing to keep his promise to deliver on his promise of entering Canaan and of trying to pull the wool over the eyes of the people.

But if there's any wool being pulled, it's D&A. THEY'RE the one's who'd balked at the border and refused to enter the PL.

The failure wasn't Moses, it was theirs.

¹⁵ Then Moses was very angry, and said to the Lord, "Do not respect their offering. I have not taken one donkey from them, nor have I hurt one of them."

Some great leadership lessons there we talked about Sunday.

¹⁶ And Moses said to Korah, "Tomorrow, you and all your company be present before the Lord—you and they, as well as Aaron. ¹⁷ Let each take his censer and put incense in it, and each of you bring his censer before the Lord, two hundred and fifty censers; both you and Aaron, each with his censer." ¹⁸ So every man took his censer, put fire in it, laid incense on it, and stood at the door of the tabernacle of meeting with Moses and Aaron. ¹⁹ And Korah gathered all the congregation against them at the door of the tabernacle of meeting. Then the glory of the Lord appeared to all the congregation.

Korah's rebellion has poisoned the minds of the entire nation.

They all gather in 2 parties; M&A on one side and everyone else on the other.

²⁰ And the Lord spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying, ²¹ "Separate yourselves from among this congregation, that I may consume them in a moment." ²² Then they fell on their faces, and said, "O God, the God of the spirits of all flesh, shall one man sin, and You be angry with all the congregation?"

As hurt as M&A had to be that the people rallied to Korah's groundless complaint, they knew the **real** rebels were just a few.

It wouldn't be right to wipe out **everyone** for the sin of those.

They prayed &

²³ So the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, ²⁴ "Speak to the congregation, saying, 'Get away from the tents of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram.'"

God agreed to judge only the source of rebellion.

But the judgment would take such form that those NOT identifying with them needed to get away.

²⁵ Then Moses rose and went to Dathan and Abiram, and the elders of Israel followed him. ²⁶ And he spoke to the congregation, saying, "Depart now from the tents of these wicked men! Touch nothing of theirs, lest you be consumed in all their sins." ²⁷ So they got away from around the tents of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram; and Dathan and Abiram came out and stood at the door of their tents, with their wives, their sons, and their little children.

D&A refused to go to Moses, so he went to them.

With him are the 70 elders of Israel, mentioned in ch11.

Standing at Moses back, they're **proof** the charge Moe was hoarding leadership was silly.

Moses had delegated authority to them to help lead the nation.

Korah & crew are just upset **they** weren't part of that group.

But their behavior **proves** why they **weren't** picked.

So, the warning is issued: Get away from the rebels.

Hey: That's good advice! // In Titus 3:10-11 we read ...

Reject a divisive man after the 1st & 2nd admonition, knowing such a person is warped & sinning, being self-condemned.

In Rom 16:17-18 Paul says . . .

Now I urge you, brethren, note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them. For those who are such do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly, and by smooth words and flattering speech deceive the hearts of the simple.

The divisive & contentious never admit to being divisive & contentious.

They regard their work a **noble cause**.

Use discernment! Look at what they're **doing**, not just at what they're saying.

And there's something else to see here that's subtle but important . . .

Note that in v1, 4 names are given; K, D, A, & a guy named **On**, also a prince of the tribe of Reuben.

But after On's mention there, he drops out of the story.

In light of the careful accounting of names in the rest of the ch, it's safe to assume Moses' response to the rebels disabuses On of his reason for sticking with it.

He got caught up in the initial grousing of K,D&A, but after more input & some reflection, he decides the rebels are fools and backs away.

It's easy for us to hear **one** side of a tale, **one** take on a story, and assume the speaker is legit & only telling the truth. So we get caught up in their cause.

Then we hear the other side & say, "Oh: Well that moves me to a much different conclusion."

Pro 18:17 The first **one** to plead his cause *seems* right, until his neighbor comes and examines him.

²⁸ And Moses said: "By this you shall know that the Lord has sent me to do all these works, for I have not done them of my own will. ²⁹ If these men die naturally like all men, or if they are visited by the common fate of all men, then the Lord has not sent me. ³⁰ But if the Lord creates a new thing, and the earth opens its mouth and swallows them up with all that belongs to them, and they go down alive into the pit, then you will understand that these men have rejected the Lord."

Moses says, "If nothing special happens and these guys go forth from this day to live normal lives, then they're right & I'm a jerk. BUT: If the ground opens and swallows them, well, figure it out."

³¹ Now it came to pass, as he finished speaking all these words, that the ground split apart under them, ³² and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them up, with their households and all the men with Korah, with all their goods. ³³ So they and all those with them went down alive into the pit; the earth closed over them, and they perished from among the assembly. ³⁴ Then all Israel who were around them fled at their cry, for they said, "Lest the earth swallow us up also!"

When we read this, the common response is, "Why did their households all die?"

Are we to assume the wives & kids perished too?

The answer to that is two-fold:

1) First, remember that Moses warned any & all what was coming & to get away from the rebels.

In Num. 26 we're told Korah's kids were saved from the destruction. (v11)

Raised in his home, they knew him for the pretentious fool he was & bailed at Moses' warning.

D&A's families stayed & were lost.

When we read that, we assume their children were innocent little ones who didn't know what was going on.

That's not likely since D&A were elders and leaders of the tribe of Reuben.

Their children were most likely at least young adults.

They knew full-well what they were doing and chose to side with their rebel-dads.

BUT – and this leads to the second thing

2) There's a deep-seated cultural reality at play here.

In these middle Eastern peoples, the idea of family-legacy & loyalty was part of the warp & woof of their identity.

People had a profound sense of being part of a line & succession of generations.

You were the product of many generations of ancestors and the ancestor to many generations of descendants.

It was the **sacred duty of each generation** to add to the honor, wealth, & power of the family. So, if someone slighted or harmed your family in the past, it was **your** duty to get even with that person's descendants in your generation.

This is the cause of generational feuds that go on for decades, and even centuries.

It's the cause of the intractable troubles of the Middle East to this day.

So, D&A young & innocent children wouldn't stay that way.

They'd grow up; with the duty of vendetta against Moses & Aaron being the central & defining issue of their lives.

This is why when Israel entered Canaan, they were told to utterly wipe out the Canaanites.

The rules of the time meant survivors were duty bound to not only exact revenge, but to cling to allegiance to the corrupt Canaanite deities that resulted in the annihilation of their societies.

³⁵ And a fire came out from the Lord and consumed the 250 men who were offering incense.

These poser-priests were standing at the door of the tabernacle waving their censers back & forth waiting to see what sign God would give indicating His choice of who **should** be priest. And here it was!

³⁶ Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying: ³⁷ "Tell Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, to pick up the censers out of the blaze, for they are holy, and scatter the fire some distance away. ³⁸ The censers of these men who sinned against their own souls, let them be made into hammered plates as a covering for the altar. Because they presented them before the Lord, therefore they are holy; and they shall be a sign to the children of Israel." Aaron's son Eleazar was told to gather the 250 censers out of the smoking remains of the rebels & empty their coals & incense outside the camp.

Then he was to fashion them into bronze plates to cover the altar as an perpetual reminder how serious rebellion is.

³⁹ So Eleazar the priest took the bronze censers, which those who were burned up had presented, and they were hammered out as a covering on the altar, ⁴⁰ to be a memorial to the children of Israel that no outsider, who is not a descendant of Aaron, should come near to offer incense before the Lord, that he might not become like Korah and his companions, just as the Lord had said to him through Moses.

The lesson of the rebellion of Korah is clear God appoints leaders for His work.

Ambition is dangerous when it's not for God's glory.

With the dramatic execution of K,D,A & the 250, that's the end of rebellion, right?

⁴¹ On the next day all the congregation of the children of Israel complained against Moses and Aaron, saying, "**You** have killed the people of the Lord."

As absurd as this is, let's not miss the lesson

These people had been **infected** with **discontent** by Korah.

Even with Korah being dramatically proven wrong; the discontent lives on.

And that is why we ought not tolerate **rebellion** or allow **rebels** to spill their poisonous lies.

⁴² Now it happened, when the congregation had gathered against Moses & Aaron, that they turned toward the tabernacle of meeting; and suddenly the cloud covered it, & the glory of the Lord appeared. ⁴³ Then Moses & Aaron came before the tabernacle of meeting. ⁴⁴ And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, ⁴⁵ "Get away from among this congregation, that I may consume them in a moment."

Sound familiar? So then, we ought not find M&A's reaction surprising . . .

And they fell on their faces.

3X's in this ch M&A are on their faces staying God's judgment.

I wonder oif they both had flat noses; form all the time they spent facedown.

⁴⁶ So Moses said to Aaron, "Take a censer and put fire in it from the altar, put incense on it, and take it quickly to the congregation and make atonement for them; for wrath has gone out from the Lord. The plague has begun." ⁴⁷ Then Aaron took it as Moses commanded, and ran into the midst of the assembly; and already the plague had begun among the people. So he put in the incense and made atonement for the people. ⁴⁸ And he stood between

the dead and the living; so the plague was stopped.⁴⁹ Now those who died in the plague were 14,700, besides those who died in the Korah incident.⁵⁰ So Aaron returned to Moses at the door of the tabernacle of meeting, for the plague had stopped.

While praying Moses realized judgment in the form of plague had already begun.

So he told Aaron to hurry & go do his priestly thing.

That censer in Aaron's hand was the **symbol** of his office as HP.

The 250 rebels w/**their** censers availed nothing in staying judgment.

But when Aaron did his duty, the plague stopped.

This was yet another sign of God's call on Aaron.

Implied but not stated is that these 14,700 who died were the chief trouble-makers calling for M&As' ouster.

Aaron is a wonderful picture of intercession.

Note that in v47 it says he **RAN** amongst the people to stall the plague.

Seeing that they were complaining about him, if it was me, I'd probably have taken my time.

Oh look, my censer is tarnished, better polish that first.

Think I change my shoes.

And I should wash those dishes, take out the trash, water the lawn.

Aaron **made haste** to intercede for his critics because they were DYING!

He stood in the gap between the dead & living.

That's what we're called to do as we pray for the lost; to plead God's mercy on the doomed, seeing them turned from death to life by faith in Christ.

Ch17

As dramatic as the events of ch16 have been and as much as we might think this would forever settle the issue of God's choice of M&A, God sees into hearts & decides to deal with any lingering questions some have about who's supposed to lead.

¹ And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying: ² "Speak to the children of Israel, and get from them a rod [**staff**] from each father's house, all their leaders according to their fathers' houses— 12 rods. Write each man's name on his rod. ³ And you shall write Aaron's name on the rod of Levi. For there shall be 1 rod for the head of *each* father's house. ⁴ Then you shall place them in the tabernacle of meeting before the Testimony, where I meet with you.

⁵ And it shall be *that* the rod of the man whom I choose will blossom; thus I will rid Myself of the complaints of the children of Israel, which they make against you."

Though the Jews were slaves in Egypt & a portion of them worked construction projects, the vast majority were shepherds.

All the men had staves.

The leader of each family received the staff of the previous patriarch upon his death.

So, the staff became a symbol of leadership.

God calls each of the 12 tribal elders to write his name on his staff.

Then they're placed in the tabernacle overnight.

Which staff sends forth shoots & blossoms would indicate God's choice as HP.

Now, of course, in the minds of all these people, there's no way such staff's can bud.

They're dead n have been for yrs.

V5, God says, "I will rid Myself of their complaints."

Even though the complaints were directed at M&A, God took them personally.

⁶ So Moses spoke to the children of Israel, and each of their leaders gave him a rod apiece, for each leader according to their fathers' houses, twelve rods; and the rod of Aaron *was* among their rods. ⁷ And Moses placed the rods before the Lord in the tabernacle of witness. ⁸ Now it came to pass on the next day that Moses went into the tabernacle of witness, and behold, the rod of Aaron, of the house of Levi, had sprouted and put forth buds, had produced blossoms and yielded ripe almonds. ⁹ Then Moses brought out all the rods from before the Lord to all the children of Israel; and they looked, and each man took his rod.

This was a miracle of regeneration.

Aaron's rod didn't just **sprout**, it produced a month's worth of growth in a single night!

God's choice was clear; Aaron was HP.

¹⁰ And the Lord said to Moses, “Bring Aaron’s rod back before the Testimony, to be kept as a sign against the rebels, that you may put their complaints away from Me, lest they die.” ¹¹ Thus did Moses; just as the Lord had commanded him, so he did.

God told Moses to put Aaron’s rod in the Ark of the Covenant.

Already in it were the 2 rock tablets with the 10 Commandments and a pot of manna.

The Commandments represent God’s righteousness.

The Manna spoke of His gracious provision and faithfulness.

The Staff pointed to God’s authority and leadership.

This story provides a great way to gauge a leader’s ministry Does it produce fruit?

Just as Aaron’s staff blossomed, God shows His favor by bringing forth fruit, even when the instrument seems incapable of it!

¹² So the children of Israel spoke to Moses, saying, “Surely we die, we perish, we all perish! ¹³ Whoever even comes near the tabernacle of the Lord must die. Shall we all utterly die?”

Their reaction to all that’s happened is overblown.

If God intended to wipe them all out, it would have happened already!!!

What this statement does make clear is that they are finally getting serious about God’s holiness and the kind of reverence they need toward Him.

Ch18

This ch is easy to review as it’s a set of special instructions for the priests & Levites.

In light of the near collision some of the Kohathites have had, God spells out the details of the relationship btwn the Priests & Levites.

Vs1-7 make it clear Aaron & his sons are the priests while the Levites are assigned the duty of taking care of the tabernacle and assisting the priests.

Vs8-20 are the offerings the people made the priests were to take as support.

Vs21-24, are the tithes to support the Levites.

Then in vs25-32 is the tithe the Levites were then to make to make.