

# Numbers 15

After Israel failed to enter the land the wilderness wandering a began. Very few details are given regarding these 37 years.

Deuteronomy 2:1 declares

*"Then we turned and journeyed into the wilderness of the Way of the Red Sea, as the Lord spoke to me, and we skirted Mount Seir for many days."*

The only details of their "Skirting the mountain" are found from Numbers chapters 15-20

Numbers 15:2

*"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,*

Immediately following Israel's failure God makes promises regarding entering the Land

Numbers 15:1-16 remind Israel that the sacrifices were to be accompanied by a grain offering and a drink offering and would be considered a sweet aroma to the Lord.

According to Numbers 15 the burnt offering and the peace offering were to be accompanied by grain and wine. The amount of grain and wine depended on the type of animal being offered: the larger the species, the more grain and wine

In Gen. 27:28; grain and wine are used to represent the entire yield of the land. Offering grain and wine was a symbolic way of showing thanks for all the land produced. During the forty years of wandering grain would have been quite scarce. This made grain offerings costly and precious. Giving a grain offering in those circumstances represented the Israelites' complete dependence on God to provide for their needs each day.

## The grain offering

Leviticus 2 and 6 give the rules regulating the grain offerings

Leviticus 6:14-15

*'This is the law of the grain offering: The sons of Aaron shall offer it on the altar before the Lord. He shall take from it his handful of the fine flour of the grain offering, with its oil, and all the frankincense which is on the grain offering, and shall burn it on the altar for a sweet aroma, as a memorial to the Lord.*

- The grain offerings were to be offered in conjunction with the burnt offering, sacrifices or free will offerings (Numbers 15:3-4)
- It was to be offered every morning and every evening (Lev 6:20 & Num 28:7-8)
- It was to be seasoned with oil and frankincense (Lev 2:2)
- It was to be divided; a portion was burned on the altar and a portion was given to the priests (Lev 2:2-3)
- If it were baked it was to be unleavened (Lev 2:4)
- Like all offering it was to be seasoned with salt (Lev26:13)

The grain offering also had a special application when addressing marital issues especially jealousy or infidelity

Numbers 5:25-26

*Then the priest shall take the grain offering of jealousy from the woman's hand, shall wave the offering before the Lord, and bring it to the altar; and the priest shall take a handful of the offering, as its memorial portion, burn it on the altar, and afterward make the woman drink the water.*

It was also during the grain offering that water was miraculously supplied for Israel

2 Kings 3:20

*Now it happened in the morning, when the grain offering was offered, that suddenly water came by way of Edom, and the land was filled with water.*

When David purchased the threshing floor of Ornan, which became the site of the Temple, Ornan offered to provide him with the necessary oxen and grain for the burnt and grain offerings

When Nehemiah rebuilt he ensured that the temple was ready for the grain offerings

Nehemiah 13:9

*Then I commanded them to cleanse the rooms; and I brought back into them the articles of the house of God, with the grain offering and the frankincense.*

Grain offerings would often be presented after burnt offering which was an animal sacrifice God required for the atonement of sin. Since blood had to be shed for the remission of sins a grain offering would not serve the same purpose as a burnt offering. Instead, the grain offering was a way to worship God by acknowledge His provision. The grain offering was given out of a person's free will, just as our worship is a free will offering. Although in the case of the extremely poor, grain could be offered as a sin offering

Leviticus 5:11-13

*'But if he is not able to bring two turtledoves or two young pigeons, then he who sinned shall bring for his offering one-tenth of an ephah of fine flour as a sin offering. He shall put no oil on it, nor shall he put frankincense on it, for it is a sin offering. Then he shall bring it to the priest, and the priest shall take his handful of it as a memorial portion, and burn it on the altar according to the offerings made by fire to the Lord. It is a sin offering. The priest shall make atonement for him, for his sin that he has committed in any of these matters; and it shall be forgiven him. The rest shall be the priest's as a grain offering.'* ”

## The Drink Offering

Numbers 15:5

*and one-fourth of a hin of wine as a drink offering you shall prepare with the burnt offering or the sacrifice, for each lamb.*

The wine offering served a similar purpose to that of the grain offering and was an accompaniment to the burnt and sin offerings. It seems that the propose was twofold. First the wine offering served to reflect thanks for the provision of God (grain may have represented essentials or the staples of life while wine represented the excess God supplies). Second the wine offering enhanced the animal sacrifice. It would add to the sweet aroma that arose to heaven. A wine offering made the other offerings sweeter.

It seems that this is what Paul alludes to with the only NT references to the drink offering.

Philippians 2:17

*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.*

2 Timothy 4:6

*For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure is at hand.*

The Philippians believers as well as Timothy had offered themselves as living sacrifices and were living for and serving Christ. Paul saw his ministry as an accompaniment to their offering. He gave himself to the Lord and to them in order to help them effectively walk with Christ. We see other expressions of this throughout his ministry.

Acts 18:23

*After he had spent some time there, he departed and went over the region of Galatia and Phrygia in order, strengthening all the disciples.*

Romans 1:11-12

*For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift, so that you may be established— that is, that I may be encouraged together with you by the mutual faith both of you and me.*

1 Thessalonians 2:8

*So, affectionately longing for you, we were well pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God, but also our own lives, because you had become dear to us.*

This is a vivid and accurate picture of ministry. The child of God who seeks to assist others in walking with Christ is like a drink offering given to help them become a sweeter living sacrifice being glory to God.

Returning to Numbers 15 Moses continues to address the offering Israel will present once they enter Canaan.

## The Heave offering

Numbers 15:17-21

*Again the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, "Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: 'When you come into the land to which I bring you, then it will be, when you eat of the bread of the land, that you shall offer up a heave offering to the Lord. 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. Of the first of your ground meal you shall give to the Lord a heave offering throughout your generations.*

Israel was to take the first fruits of their crops as an offering to the Lord. As a way to give thanks for the provision of God.

The offering was presented by symbolically waving the fruit of the fields before the Lord. With their hands raised and arms waving before the Lord this would look much like a modern worship service.

Notice that this would begin after crossing the threshold of the Jordan and entering the promised land. Joshua 5 records Israel's first greening from the fields of Canaan. Once they crossed the Jordan the supply of manna ceased and Israel are crops from the promised land for the first time. It would be then and there that they would symbolically hold up a portion of the crops and wave them before the Lord in an expression of praise. This illustrates one of the purposes of worship. Looking back at what God has done and forward to what He promises to do the child of God should raise up holy hands offering himself and his life to Christ.

Numbers 15:22-31 addresses the problem of sin. In this text sin is divided into two distinct categories.

## Unintentional Sin

One definition of sin is to miss the mark. It carries the idea of attempting to live in obedience to God and failing. It would include sins of commission and omission and might be illustrated by Peter's failure in the courtyard of the Priest. He had devoted himself to Christ and expressed his great desire to remain faithful to Him even if his companions chose to walk away. Unfortunately it was only a matter of time before Peter fell hard by denying Christ. It is clear from the context that Peter did not set out to deny Christ. His desire was to please Him but he lacked the strength to withstand temptation.

When Israel committed unintentional sin they were to bring a burnt offering signifying recommitment to the Lord (This was accompanied with grain and drink offerings) and a sin offering to provide atonement for their trespass. More specific details for this are given in Leviticus 4. Under the New Covenant provision has been given for unintentional sin.

1 John 1:8-9

*If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*

## Intentional sin

Sadly not all sin is unintentional. There are times when we set out to sin. We choose to ignore the clear commands of Scripture, step over the conviction of the Spirit and the road blocks we have set up to keep us from falling and trespass into forbidden ground. We have numerous examples of this within Scripture and from our personal experience. Perhaps one of the more striking examples is that of David with Bathsheba. Any person reading the narrative of 1-2Samuel for the first time would be stunned to read 2Samuel 11 and follow David as he crosses the line into adultery and murder. Here in Numbers 15 we are given instruction regarding the sins of the will. We are given insight into the cause and the consequences of those sins

Numbers 15:30-31

*'But the person who does anything presumptuously, whether he is native-born or a stranger, that one brings reproach on the Lord, and he shall be cut off from among his people. 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.'* "

## The cause

"Because he has despised the word of the Lord"

**Despise** - this same word was used of Esau who cast off his birthright. To despise the word is to ignore its warnings and admonitions while we pursue what we know is forbidden. Sometimes the sin happens long after we cast aside the Word. Daily intake of Scripture will guard you against the presumptuous sins lying wait in your future. Using New Covenant terminology we know that David stopped abiding in Christ long before he stepped into sin.

## The consequence

This passage paints a bleak picture for those committing intentional sin. We read that they will bear the guilt of their sin and be cut off from the people. It is important to keep in mind that this passage alone does not complete the Biblical doctrine of sin. Even under the Old Covenant provision was given for willful sin. We know that David suffered consequences for his sin but he did not bear its guilt to the grave nor was he banished from the congregation.

Speaking regarding Absalom the woman of Tekoa said

2 Samuel 14:14

*For we will surely die and become like water spilled on the ground, which cannot be gathered up again. Yet God does not take away a life; but He devises means, so that His banished ones are not expelled from Him.*

What a joy to know that the cross provides atonement for even the most presumptuous of sins. If you have crossed the line, committed sin and are suffering its consequences cry out to the Lord, confessing and forsaking your sin and allow Him to restore you back into sweet fellowship with God.

That being said it is also true that intentional sin has permanent affects

The New American commentary

*"The nation's defiance was an example of a sin of "a high hand" in that they had symbolically raised their fists in defiance of God, and for this there was no means of sacrifice that could deliver them from judgment."*

Numbers 15:32-36 give us an example of one such presumptuous sin committed within the camp.

## Sabbath Breaker

Numbers 15:32-36

*Now while the children of Israel were in the wilderness, they found a man gathering sticks on the Sabbath day. And those who found him gathering sticks brought him to Moses and Aaron, and to all the congregation. They put him under guard, because it had not been explained what should be done to him.*

*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." So, as the Lord commanded Moses, all the congregation brought him outside the camp and stoned him with stones, and he died.*

The Bible Knowledge Commentary states

*"This anecdote clearly interprets what was meant by defiant sin and being "cut off" from the community."*



We cannot determine the exact date of this event for Moses declares "While in the wilderness..." But we are certain what the trespass was. A man was gathering sticks on the sabbath presumably to build a fire and cook his meal. Since the Word clearly forbid work this man's actions were brought to Israel's leaders to determine what should be done. He was placed under guard while Moses and Aaron took time to seek the Lord. The Law simply forbid work on the sabbath giving the consequences for the one who violates this law.

Exodus 35:2

*2 Six days work shall be done, but on the seventh day you shall have a Sabbath of solemn rest, holy to the Lord. Whoever does any work on it shall be put to death.*

Deuteronomy 5:13-14

*Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord your God. In it you shall do no work: you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your male servant, nor your female servant, nor your ox, nor your donkey, nor any of your cattle, nor your stranger who is within your gates, that your male servant and your female servant may rest as well as you.*

They must determine whether his actions violate the law and if so what should be done with him. They kept him in custody, like the blasphemer in Lev. 24:12, because it had not yet been determined what was to be done to him

Much like the New Testament account of Ananias and Sapphira God took a strong stand against this sin. The man was executed for his trespass. It seems likely that this was done to set a precedence so Israel would keep a high regard for the Word and Holiness of God. It might also be important to keep in mind that while his actions had grave consequences they do not require that his eternal destiny was in jeopardy.

Numbers 15:37-41

*Again the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, "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. 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, and that you may remember and do all My commandments, and be holy for your God. 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."*

The chapter closes by addressing the attire of the people of God. Under both the old and new covenants God is particularly interested in the attire of His people. The priests wore special garments designed to reflect the nature and attributes of God. The same is true of the New Testament believer. Paul declared that we should cast off certain behaviors and replace them with others that reflect that we are children of God. Jesus spoke of us being clothed with the power of God as we step into service

It is also noteworthy that the Lord is into symbolism. Israel was to line the hem of their garments with tassels designed to remind them of the promises found in the Word. Daily as they dressed they would be reminded that they were to live differently from the nation's that surrounded them. Sadly it is the nature of man to turn symbols designed to bring us to the Lord into religious observances. It would not take long for the tassel itself to become the focus and for the people to lose sight of the promises it was designed to reflect.

Matthew 23:5

*But all their works they do to be seen by men. They make their phylacteries broad and enlarge the borders of their garments.*

Religious observances are no replacement for true relationship with God

There is an interesting reference to the hem of Saul's garment. While David was hiding in the caves of Engedi Saul entered to relieve himself. David's men saw this as an opportunity to kill Saul and take the kingdom, David simply cut a portion from the hem of Saul's garment. It is possible that this piece of cloth contained a tassel that should remind Saul of the covenants of God. While David was convicted for touching the Lord's anointed, Saul should have been equally as convicted of violating the covenant. If the hem had served its purpose Saul should have obediently acquiesced to David rule.

On one occasion we are drawn to the hem of Jesus garment. There is no mention of tassels but we do find a woman reaching out in faith and grabbing ahold of his garment. If we draw from this text we learn that the hem was a symbol of the Word. We can follow the example of this woman by reaching out and grabbing hold of the promises found in the pages of Scripture.

The command to wear Tassels on the Edge of the Upper Garment appears to have been occasioned by the death of the sabbath breaker. Having daily reminders of the promises of God will help keep the child of God away from sin