

The Book of Numbers, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 9: Laws of Offerings and the Sabbath-Breaker

Numbers 15:1-41

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

This lesson holds together two truths that careless teaching often splits apart. First, the offerings and the Sabbath of Numbers 15 were genuinely God-given, holy, and binding on Israel under the old covenant. They mattered. God spelled out the flour and the oil and the wine because He cares how He is worshiped, and He guarded the Sabbath with the death penalty because His holiness is not negotiable. Second, these very things were shadows whose substance is Christ (Colossians 2:16-17; Hebrews 10:1-18). The grain offerings pointed to a better gift, and the Sabbath rest points to the rest we have in Jesus. We do not bind these on Christians, and we are careful never to call the Lord's Day a Christian Sabbath. The day of Christian worship is the first day of the week, taught by apostolic pattern (Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 16:2), not by carrying Sinai forward.

Doctrinally, the heart of the chapter is the contrast between unintentional sin and high-handed sin. Israel could be forgiven for what they did in ignorance, but the one who raised a defiant fist against the word of the LORD was cut off. The teacher should connect this directly to Hebrews 10:26-31, where the same gravity attaches to sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth. This guards against two errors at once: the despair that thinks any sin is unforgivable, and the presumption of once-saved-always-saved that thinks the saved can sin defiantly without peril. Personal accountability runs through the whole chapter, never inherited guilt.

Finally, the lesson should form the student, not merely inform him. The tassels were a mercy, a daily nudge to remember and obey before the heart and eyes wandered. Aim to send each person home asking what reminders are tied to the hem of his own life, what high-handed corner he has been excusing, and how Jesus, our better sacrifice and our true rest, is teaching him to walk in trusting, obedient faith. The goal is a heart that remembers God before it drifts.

Question 1

Student Question:

Numbers 15:1-2 opens with God saying, when you come into the land that I am giving you, right after the generation was sentenced to die in the wilderness. What does this promise reveal about God's faithfulness and His larger plan, even while He disciplines His people?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The placement of this chapter is no accident. Numbers 14 has just ended with the death sentence on the wilderness generation and a failed, presumptuous attempt to take the land

after God had said no. Then chapter 15 opens with a tender pivot: when you come into the land that I am giving you (15:2). The land is still coming. The plan still stands. God speaks of altars and offerings in a land the present generation will never see, which means He is talking past the dying generation to their children. Discipline did not cancel the promise.

The offerings described are the grain and drink offerings that accompanied burnt offerings and sacrifices: fine flour mixed with oil, and wine poured out, in proportions that grew with the size of the animal (15:3–12). These were given to Israel as authorized worship, a fragrance pleasing to God. The detail is the point. God does not leave worship to guesswork or mood. He specifies, because how we approach Him matters to Him.

We read this as Christians who are not bound to these offerings (Hebrews 10:1–18; Colossians 2:16–17). Yet the principle endures. God still cares how He is worshiped and still receives the considered, costly best of His people rather than the leftover and the careless. The grain offering whispers forward to a better gift, the offering of Christ, and to lives presented as living sacrifices (Romans 12:1).

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God's faithfulness: discipline on a generation does not nullify His covenant promise to bring His people into the land.
- The promises to Israel point forward and find their fullness in Christ and the church, not in a separate earthly program.
- Authorized worship: God specifies how He is to be approached, and worship is His to define rather than ours to invent.
- The offerings were given to Israel under the old covenant and are fulfilled in Christ, not bound on Christians.
- Worship today should still be our considered best, presented in trusting obedience, not our leftovers.

Discussion Prompts

- Why might God choose to talk about offerings in the land at the very moment His people are at their lowest?
- How does the care God takes with the recipe for worship challenge a casual approach to worshiping Him today?
- What does it mean for you to bring God your best rather than your leftover this week?

Question 2

Student Question:

These offerings of flour, oil, and wine were given for Israel as worship to God. When you bring your worship and your giving to God today, are you bringing Him your considered best, or only what is left over and convenient?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Each animal offering carried with it a measured gift of flour, oil, and wine (15:4–10). This was not a tax wrung out of people but a glad accompaniment to worship, a way of saying that the produce of the land and the work of their hands belonged to God too. Worship engaged the whole life, not just a ritual moment.

The proportions teach intention. A lamb required one measure, a ram another, a bull another. Worship was thought through, not thrown together. There is something to learn here about the difference between worship we plan and bring deliberately and worship we toss at God on the way out the door.

Under the new covenant we are not bound to grain and drink offerings, but the call to deliberate, generous, whole-life worship remains. Paul tells the church to give as each has purposed in his heart, not grudgingly (2 Corinthians 9:7), and to give as God has prospered, set aside on the first day of the week (1 Corinthians 16:2). The recipe changed, the heart did not.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Worship and giving are to be deliberate and considered, not accidental or grudging.
- All of life, including our work and produce, belongs to God and is brought to Him in worship.
- New covenant giving is purposed, cheerful, and as God has prospered, never coerced or merely token.
- The leftover-and-convenient mindset is a heart problem the text gently exposes.

Discussion Prompts

- What is the difference between worship you plan and bring deliberately and worship you simply throw at God?
- Where in your giving or your worship have leftovers crept in, and why?
- How would treating your daily work as something offered to God change how you do it?

Question 3

Student Question:

In Numbers 15:14–16 God says one law and one statute govern the native-born and the foreigner who lives among them, and both bring the offering the same way. What does this teach about God's character and how He receives those who come to Him?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Three times the text insists that one law governs the native-born and the foreigner who sojourns among them (15:14–16, and again in 15:29). The stranger who wanted to worship the God of Israel brought the same offering, by the same pattern, and stood on the same footing before God. There were not two recipes, one for insiders and one for outsiders.

This is a window into the heart of God. Even under a covenant given to one nation, He made room for the outsider who would come to Him on His terms. The blood of an Israelite gave no advantage; the faith and obedience that brought the offering did. This anticipates the gospel, where there is neither Jew nor Greek, for all are one in Christ (Galatians 3:28).

We should let this rebuke any tribalism in our own hearts. The Lord's church is not a club of insiders who look and sound alike. The same gospel, the same terms, the same Lord welcome everyone who comes in trusting obedience. God shows no partiality (Acts 10:34–35).

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God receives the outsider who comes to Him on His terms, showing no partiality.
- There is one law and one way of approach, not preferential treatment for insiders.
- This anticipates the gospel breaking down the wall between Jew and Gentile in Christ.
- Tribalism and favoritism have no place among God's people.

Discussion Prompts

- What does one law for native and stranger reveal about God's character?
- Where might favoritism or an insider mindset have quietly shaped how you treat newcomers?
- How does God's impartiality here prepare us for the gospel going to all nations?

Question 4

Student Question:

Numbers 15 quietly insists that worship follows God's pattern rather than human preference. Where might you be tempted to worship God on your own terms instead of His, and how do you tell the difference?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Running underneath the whole chapter is a conviction that worship is God's to define. Israel did not get to decide what counted as acceptable. The flour, the oil, the wine, the proportions, the day, all came down from God. To worship Him otherwise was not creativity; it was presumption, as the very next chapter (Korah) will show.

We are quick to assume that sincerity is enough, that God will accept whatever we bring as long as we mean well. Numbers 15 quietly says otherwise. Acceptable worship is worship offered as God has authorized it. This is not cold legalism; it is the reverence of a creature who lets the Creator set the terms.

For Christians the question is not whether we keep these old offerings, for we do not, but whether we worship by the authority of the New Testament rather than by our own taste. We

sing, pray, give, commune, and proclaim the word as the Lord has shown us, not as the culture or our preferences dictate (Colossians 3:17).

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Worship is defined by God, not invented by the worshiper.
- Sincerity alone does not make worship acceptable; it must be offered as God authorizes.
- Christians worship by the authority of the New Testament, not by personal taste or cultural trend.
- Reverence means letting the Creator set the terms of how He is approached.

Discussion Prompts

- Where are you tempted to assume that meaning well is the same as worshiping rightly?
- How do you tell the difference between worshiping God on His terms and on your own?
- What would it look like to let Scripture, rather than preference, shape your worship?

Question 5

Student Question:

Numbers 15:22-29 provides a sin offering for sins committed unintentionally, in ignorance, both for the congregation and for the individual. What does God's provision for unintentional sin teach us about how seriously He takes even the wrongs we never meant to commit?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Verses 22-29 make careful provision for sin committed unintentionally, in ignorance, whether by the whole congregation or by a single person. A young goat or a lamb was offered, the priest made atonement, and the people were forgiven. God did not pretend the sin had not happened; He provided a way to deal with it.

Notice what this teaches. Sin is sin even when we never meant to do it. Ignorance does not erase guilt before a holy God; it simply changes the category and the remedy. The God of Israel was not careless about wrongs done in the dark. He took them seriously enough to require atonement, and gracious enough to provide it.

This shadow finds its substance in Christ, whose blood cleanses us from all sin (1 John 1:7), including sins we commit without recognizing them. The walk in the light is not a claim to flawlessness but a life that keeps confessing and keeps being cleansed as the truth keeps coming to light. Responsibility is personal throughout, never inherited from Adam.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Unintentional sin is still sin and still requires atonement before a holy God.
- Ignorance changes the category and the remedy but does not erase guilt.

- God graciously provides the means of forgiveness; He does not leave sin unaddressed.
- The shadow finds its substance in the cleansing blood of Christ (1 John 1:7).
- Guilt is personal, by our own sin, not inherited from Adam.

Discussion Prompts

- Why does God treat even unintentional sin as something that needs atonement?
- How does this guard us from both carelessness about sin and despair over it?
- When you discover a sin you did not know you were committing, what is the right response?

Question 6

Student Question:

Think of a time you sinned without realizing it until later. When the truth dawned on you, did you make it right before God, or did you reason that ignorance excused you?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The provision for unintentional sin presses a personal question. When the light finally dawns and we see a wrong we had not seen before, what do we do? The temptation is to file it under I did not know and move on. But Israel's pattern was to bring it to God, to name it, to make it right.

There is a quiet honesty God is cultivating here. The person who keeps short accounts with God, who deals with sin as soon as it comes to light, is being formed into someone tender toward holiness. The person who reaches for the excuse of ignorance every time slowly grows calloused.

For us this looks like a willingness to be corrected, to receive the truth of Scripture even when it indicts something we had been comfortable with, and to repent rather than rationalize. Walking in the light means we keep letting God show us things, and we keep responding (1 John 1:7–9).

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Discovering a sin calls for confession and correction, not the shrug of ignorance.
- Keeping short accounts with God forms a heart tender toward holiness.
- Habitual excuse-making slowly hardens the conscience.
- Walking in the light means staying open to correction from Scripture.

Discussion Prompts

- When you realize you have been wrong about something, what is your honest first reaction?
- Is there a sin you have quietly excused because you did not know any better at first?
- What would it look like this week to keep short accounts with God?

Question 7

Student Question:

Numbers 15:30–31 describes the soul who sins with a high hand, despising the word of the LORD, and that person is cut off. Reading this beside Hebrews 10:26–31, what is the difference between weakness and defiance, and why does defiance fall under such severe judgment?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Verses 30–31 turn to a darker possibility: the soul who sins with a high hand, presumptuously, whether native or stranger. This person despises the word of the LORD and breaks His commandment with a raised fist, and he is cut off, his guilt remaining on him. This is not the stumble of the weak; it is the defiance of the rebel.

Hebrews 10:26–31 carries this exact distinction into the new covenant. If we go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there remains no more sacrifice for sins, only a fearful expectation of judgment. The point is not that a moment of weakness damns us, but that a settled, defiant rejection of God leaves us outside His mercy because we have trampled it underfoot.

This is a vital corrective to the idea that a saved person can sin however he pleases with no danger, the error of once-saved-always-saved. God's grace is real and deep, but it is not a license for defiance. The high-handed sinner has not lost his way; he has set his face against God. The mercy is always there for the one who will turn back, but it cannot be claimed by the one who refuses to turn.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Scripture distinguishes the weakness of stumbling from the defiance of high-handed sin.
- High-handed sin despises the word of the LORD and carries severe judgment (Hebrews 10:26–31).
- Grace is not a license for defiant, willful sin; presumption forfeits mercy.
- This refutes once-saved-always-saved: a saved person can fall away through defiance.
- Mercy remains for the one who turns back, but cannot be claimed while refusing to turn.

Discussion Prompts

- What is the real difference between sinning in weakness and sinning with a high hand?
- How does Hebrews 10:26–31 deepen our understanding of this Old Testament warning?
- Why is defiance, rather than weakness, what places a person outside God's mercy?

Question 8

Student Question:

Is there an area where you already know God's will and have quietly decided to keep doing what you want anyway? What would genuine repentance, rather than excuse-making, look like there?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The high-handed sin is not only a doctrine to understand; it is a mirror to look into. Most of us are not in danger of dramatic, open rebellion. The danger is subtler: a small area we have walled off, a habit we know is wrong and have quietly decided to keep, a place where we have heard God's word and chosen our own way.

The defiant fist does not always look like a clenched hand raised to heaven. Sometimes it looks like a polite, persistent no, repeated long enough to become a settled refusal. The first step out of that danger is brutal honesty about where it exists.

Genuine repentance is not feeling bad while keeping the sin. It is turning, surrendering the thing we have been protecting, and submitting it to the lordship of Jesus. The question is whether there is any corner of life where we have stopped letting Him be Lord.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- High-handed sin in our lives is usually a quiet, settled refusal rather than dramatic rebellion.
- Walling off an area from God's lordship is a form of defiance.
- Repentance is turning and surrendering, not merely feeling bad.
- The lordship of Jesus must extend to every corner of life.

Discussion Prompts

- Is there an area where you already know God's will and have decided to do otherwise?
- How can a settled, polite no to God be just as defiant as open rebellion?
- What would genuine repentance, not excuse-making, look like in that area?

Question 9

Student Question:

The Sabbath-breaker in Numbers 15:32–36 is stoned, yet the Sabbath itself was a shadow given to Israel under the old covenant and is fulfilled in Christ (Colossians 2:16–17; Hebrews 4:9–10), and Christians gather on the first day of the week by apostolic pattern (Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 16:2). How do we honor both God's deadly seriousness about His holiness here and the truth that we are not under the Sabbath law today?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The narrative of the Sabbath-breaker (15:32–36) is jarring. A man is found gathering sticks on the Sabbath. He is held in custody while Moses inquires of the LORD, and then, at God's word, the congregation stones him outside the camp. We must not soften the scene or rush past it.

God was teaching a young nation, with unforgettable severity, that His holiness and His covenant were not optional.

Yet we must read it as Christians, with the whole counsel of God. The Sabbath was a sign given specifically to Israel under the old covenant (Exodus 31:13–17), and it belongs to the shadows that have passed away in Christ. Colossians 2:16–17 expressly tells us to let no one judge us regarding a Sabbath, for these were a shadow whose substance is Christ. Hebrews 4:9–10 teaches that the true Sabbath rest is found in ceasing from our own works and resting in Him. We are not under the Sabbath law and must never call the Lord's Day a Christian Sabbath.

The day of Christian worship is the first day of the week, established by apostolic pattern, when the disciples gathered to break bread (Acts 20:7) and were taught to set aside their giving (1 Corinthians 16:2). So we hold two things together. We take God's deadly seriousness about His holiness with full weight, and we recognize that the specific Sabbath command is fulfilled and not binding. Christ kept the law perfectly and nailed its handwriting to the cross (Colossians 2:14), so that what was a shadow now finds its substance in Him.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God dealt with the Sabbath-breaker severely to teach Israel His holiness was not optional.
- The Sabbath was a sign given to Israel under the old covenant (Exodus 31:13–17).
- The Sabbath is a shadow fulfilled in Christ and not binding on Christians (Colossians 2:16–17; Hebrews 4:9–10).
- The Lord's Day, the first day of the week, is the day of Christian worship by apostolic pattern (Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 16:2).
- We must never call the Lord's Day a Christian Sabbath; the substance of the shadow is Christ.
- God's holiness is to be taken with full seriousness even as the specific command is fulfilled.

Discussion Prompts

- How do we take this severe scene seriously without binding the Sabbath on Christians today?
- Why is it important to distinguish the Lord's Day from a so-called Christian Sabbath?
- What does it mean that the substance of the Sabbath shadow is found in Christ?

Question 10

Student Question:

The tassels were meant to make Israel remember and obey before they wandered after their own heart and eyes. Name one specific way the Lord Jesus is teaching you to remember and obey Him this week instead of following whatever your eyes find attractive.

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The chapter closes with a gift of thread (15:37–41). Israel is to make tassels on the corners of their garments, with a cord of blue, so that when they look at them they will remember all the commandments of the LORD and do them, and not follow after their own heart and their own eyes, which lead them to wander. The tassel was a string tied around the finger of a whole nation, a daily mercy against forgetfulness.

Notice the diagnosis of the human heart. We wander after our own heart and our own eyes. The eyes see what is attractive, the heart wants it, and off we go, just as the spies saw the giants and the people followed their fear. God knew His people would drift, so He gave them something to glance at all day long that would call them back before they wandered too far.

We are not bound to wear tassels, but the heart issue is timeless and it is fulfilled and deepened in Christ. The Lord Jesus calls us to abide in His word, to set our minds on things above (Colossians 3:1–2), and to remember Him each first day at His table. The question for us is the same one the tassel asked Israel: what calls you back to your God before your heart and eyes carry you off? Naming one concrete reminder, and letting Jesus form the habit of remembering, is how we walk in trusting, obedient faith.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The tassels were a God-given aid to memory and obedience, a mercy against forgetfulness.
- The human heart wanders after the eyes and the desires; we drift unless called back.
- We are not bound to wear tassels, but the heart issue of remembering and obeying is timeless.
- In Christ we remember through His word, the assembly, and His table on the first day of the week.
- Spiritual formation involves concrete habits that call us back to God before we drift.

Discussion Prompts

- What does the tassel reveal about how God understands the way the human heart drifts?
- What practical reminder could call you back to the Lord before your eyes and heart carry you off?
- Name one specific way Jesus is teaching you to remember and obey Him this week.