

The Book of Numbers

Lesson 9: Laws of Offerings and the Sabbath-Breaker -- Numbers 15:1-41

Picture the camp of Israel just after the worst day of their journey. The spies have come back, the people have wept the night away, and a whole generation has just heard the verdict: forty years in the wilderness, the carcasses of grown men falling one by one in the sand. The dream of milk and honey now feels impossibly far away. And then, into that gray morning of disappointment, God speaks again. You might expect Him to fall silent, or to thunder. Instead He says, in effect, when you come into the land I am giving you. Not if. When. The very first words of Numbers 15 are a quiet, stubborn promise that the land is still coming, that God has not abandoned His plan, and that there will indeed be altars and offerings and a settled people one day. Grace whispers in the middle of judgment.

Then the chapter does something that surprises us. It gets practical. It talks about flour and oil and wine, about how much grain goes with a lamb and how much with a bull, about the gift that the native-born and the foreigner both bring with the same recipe. It can feel, at first, like reading an old cookbook. But look closer and you will see a God who cares about the details of worship, who refuses to let His people improvise their way to Him, and who wants every offering to carry the same fragrance whether it comes from a wealthy herdsman or a poor stranger passing through. There is dignity here, and order, and a tender insistence that worship is not whatever we feel like bringing.

And then the tone darkens. The chapter draws a hard line between the person who sins without meaning to and the soul that sins with a high hand, the fist raised against heaven. A congregation can be forgiven for a mistake made in ignorance, and a sin offering covers it. But the defiant sinner, the one who looks God in the face and says no, is cut off. To make the point unforgettable, a man is found gathering sticks on the Sabbath, and after careful inquiry he is stoned outside the camp. It is a sobering scene, and we are not meant to skip past it. God is teaching a young nation, in letters they cannot ignore, that His holiness is not a suggestion.

But the chapter does not end in fear. It ends with thread and color. God tells every Israelite to put tassels on the corners of their garments, with a cord of blue, so that every time they glance down at the hem of their robe they will remember the commandments and obey them instead of chasing after their own hearts and their own eyes. It is a gift, really, a string tied around the finger of a whole nation. And it presses a question into our own lives today. We live under a better covenant, not bound to these offerings or this Sabbath, yet the same heart still beats in us, the heart that drifts, that forgets, that wants to wander after what our eyes find pretty. What is tied to the hem of your life to call you back to your God before you drift too far?

Group Discussion: When God tells a heartbroken, condemned generation about offerings they will bring once they are in the land, what does that say about how He works even in the middle of discipline, and where have you seen Him keep speaking promises into a hard season?

Personal Reflection: Numbers 15 ends with tassels meant to make Israel remember and obey before they wandered after their own hearts and eyes. What practical reminder could you tie to the hem of your daily life so that you remember the Lord before you drift?

Read Numbers 15:1–41

Study Questions

1. 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?
2. 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?
3. 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?
4. 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?

5. 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?
6. 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?
7. 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?
8. 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?
9. 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?

10. 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.

Digging Deeper

Reflect on these passages: Hebrews 10:1–18, the law was a shadow of good things to come, and Christ's one offering perfects forever those being sanctified; Colossians 2:13–17, the handwriting of ordinances nailed to the cross, with festivals, new moons, and Sabbaths as shadows whose substance is Christ; Hebrews 10:26–31, the danger of sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, the high-handed sin under the new covenant; Acts 20:7 and 1 Corinthians 16:2, the disciples gathering on the first day of the week to break bread and to give as God prospered them; 1 Corinthians 10:11, these things happened to them as examples and were written for our instruction

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