

November 8, 2020

A New Generation Learns the Rules

Numbers 15-19

BIBLE IN A YEAR READING PLAN

Nov 1	Luke 19-20	Nov 5	John 3-4
Nov 2	Luke 21-22	Nov 6	John 5-6
Nov 3	Luke 23-24	Nov 7	John 7-8
Nov 4	John 1-2	Nov 8	John 9-10

Overview of Numbers 15-19

Numbers 15 Laws for entering the land and Dealing with a Sabbath breaker

Numbers 16 Rebellion of Korah, Dathan and Abiram

*30 But if the Lord brings about an entirely new thing and the ground opens its mouth and swallows them up with all that is theirs, and they descend alive into Sheol, then you will understand that **these men have spurned the Lord.***

31 As he finished speaking all these words, the ground that was under them split open; 32 and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them up, and their households, and all the men who belonged to Korah with their possessions.

Numbers 17 Aaron's Rod buds to affirm His priesthood

Numbers 18 Responsibilities of the Levites and

Provision for the Priests -- Key verse:

*20 Then the LORD said to Aaron, "You shall have no inheritance in their land nor own any portion among them; **I am your portion** and your inheritance among the sons of Israel."*

Numbers 19 Ordinance of the Red Heifer and the Water to Cleanse Impurity

Lesson Idea: We should honor the Lord with our gifts, our repentance, and our obedience.

Background:

At the end of Numbers 14, God told Israel that they would spend the next 40 years in the wilderness because of their failure to trust Him and conquer the promised land. But chapter 15 begins with God instructing Moses to tell the sons of Israel: "*When you enter the land where you are to live, which I am giving you, then make an offering by fire to the Lord...*" In other words, between the last verse of chapter 14 and the first verse of chapter 15, almost 40 years must have passed, because Moses was instructing the next generation about how to live in

the land. He gave them additional laws for offerings and sacrifices and included instructions concerning foreigners who lived among them. All of these laws were directed by a Holy God calling for His people to be Holy. He demanded that they be obedient to Him and seek His forgiveness when they forgot to be.

Numbers 15:17-21 When You Enter the Land, Give Back

Questions to Ponder:

- Why does Numbers continually repeat: "*Then the Lord spoke to Moses*"?
- What promises lie behind verse 18-19?
- Why were they to offer up the first of their dough to the Lord?
- Why does verse 21 emphasize that they were to do this "*throughout your generations*"?

*17 Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, 18 "Speak to the sons of Israel and say to them, 'When you enter the land where I am bringing you, 19 then it shall be, that when you eat from the food of the land, you shall **lift up an offering to the Lord.** 20 Of the first of your dough you shall lift up a loaf as an offering; as an offering of the threshing floor, so you shall lift it up. 21 From the **first of your dough you shall give to the Lord an offering throughout your generations.***

NOTES:

As we see the continuous repetition in Numbers, "*Then the Lord spoke,*" it reminds us of that our God is a God of revelation. We could know nothing of God, if He did not give us His Word. But because He has revealed Himself, we are responsible to listen to Him and obey.

God's voice emphasized His promises to bring the people into the Promised Land in verses 18-19. There is an implied assumption that they would enter the land and be able to eat from the fruit of the land. In fact the land would be so fruitful that they should offer the first of the dough as an offering to the Lord. Their gifts would also help provide for the priests who served in the Tabernacle. The Hebrew word "offering" in v 19-20 is "a technical term for a portion given to the priest (cf. Lev. 7:32; Num. 18:8)." (G. Wenham, *Tyndale Commentary on Numbers*)

God told them to make this a perpetual offering "*throughout your generations*" (v 21). This implied that God was going to make them secure them in the land for a vast number of years. The Lord had promised to protect them and establish them, if they would be obedient to His commands. (The rest of the book of Numbers will demonstrate that this new generation of

Israelites would struggle with trust and obedience just as much as their fathers did.)

This command of the Lord should remind us to prioritize the giving of our offerings to the Lord. We give to His work because He is the One who has blessed us with all that we have and makes it possible for us to be fruitful. As believers, we are free from the Law through grace, but Paul reminds us we should give back to the Lord out of gratitude:

7 Each one must do just as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. 8 And God is able to make all grace overflow to you, so that, always having all sufficiency in everything, you may have an abundance for every good deed. (2 Corinthians 9:7-8; see also Leviticus 27:30; Deuteronomy 8:18; Malachi 3:10; Luke 6:38; 2 Corinthians 9:10; Hebrews 13:16).

Numbers 15:22-29 Atonement for Unintentional Sin

Questions to Ponder:

- **Why must unintentional wrongs be considered?**
- **Why must the priest make atonement for the congregation's unintentional sins?**
- **Why was both national and individual forgiveness so important?**

*22 'But when you **unintentionally do wrong** and fail to comply with all these commandments which the Lord has spoken to Moses, 23 that is, all that the Lord has commanded you through Moses from the day that the Lord gave commandments and onward, throughout your generations, 24 then it shall be, **if it is done unintentionally**, without the knowledge of the congregation, that all the congregation shall offer one bull as a burnt offering, as a soothing aroma to the Lord, with its grain offering and its drink offering, according to the ordinance, and one male goat as a sin offering. 25 Then **the priest shall make atonement for all the congregation** of the sons of Israel, and they will be forgiven; for it was an unintentional wrong, and they have brought their offering, an offering by fire to the Lord, and their sin offering before the Lord, for their unintentional wrong. 26 **So all the congregation of the sons of Israel will be forgiven**, as well as the stranger who resides among them, for guilt was attributed to all the people through an unintentional wrong.*

*27 'Also, **if one person sins unintentionally**, then he shall offer a one-year-old female goat as a sin offering. 28 And the priest shall make atonement before the Lord for the person who goes astray by an unintentional sin, **making***

***atonement for him so that he may be forgiven.** 29 You shall have one law for the native among the sons of Israel and for the stranger who resides among them, for one who does anything wrong unintentionally.*

NOTES:

The Lord knows the hearts of people and their tendency to neglect or forget things of importance; so He provided a way to offer forgiveness for unintentional sin. God made provisions for both national and individual sins to be forgiven. But all of these sins were classified as “unintentional” or “inadvertent.” The word means *to stray, to mistake, or to transgress*. The *Pulpit Commentary* explains:

Provision is here made for the forgiveness of sins due to ignorance and oversight - a provision which was sorely needed, considering the great complexity of the Law, and the bad training they had for the accurate observance of it ([Deuteronomy 12:8](#)). A similar provision had been made in [Leviticus 4](#). The two, however, differ, inasmuch as **Leviticus 4** contemplates sins of *commission*, while **Numbers 15** contemplates sins of *omission*. (<https://biblehub.com/numbers/15-22.htm>)

Even though God promised to provide for their forgiveness, the people would have to realize where they had sinned and take action to rectify it by making an offering to the Lord (v 24). The offering would have to be given to the priest who would make atonement for them (v 25). We saw this same pattern earlier this year in our study of Leviticus (especially our lesson on sin and guilt offerings in Leviticus 4). God would only grant forgiveness when the sacrifices were offered by the priests. This foreshadowed the work of Jesus Christ as our great High Priest. The New Testament writers remind us that He made final atonement for our sins by His death on the cross. Hebrews 2:17-18 remind us:

17 Therefore, in all things He had to be made like His brothers so that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. 18 For since He Himself was tempted in that which He has suffered, He is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted.

God desired both the nation and the individuals in that nation to be right with Him. He provided for a means of forgiveness for the individual's unintentional sins, but it would have to be brought through the priest as well. God also made provision for foreigners who lived among them to receive the same forgiveness.

Even though the sacrificial system has been replaced by the one perfect sacrifice of Christ, God still calls us to come before Him for Him to deal with our sin. The

principle is the same. We need to recognize our sin and bring it to our great High Priest to make atonement for us. 1 John 1:6-10 teaches us to confess our sins to the Only One who can grant our forgiveness:

6 If we say that we have fellowship with Him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth; 7 but if we walk in the Light as He Himself is in the Light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin. 8 If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us. 9 If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous, so that He will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. 10 If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar and His word is not in us.

Thankfully, 1 John 2:1-2 remind us that Jesus is for us and not against us:

*1 My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have **an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous;** 2 and He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.*

Numbers 15:30-41 Cutting Off the Defiant

Questions to Ponder:

- What does it mean to do “wrong defiantly?”
- Why would God call for this person to be “cut off” from His people?
- What does “his guilt will be on him” mean?
- How do verses 30-31 apply to the man gathering wood on the Sabbath?
- What was the purpose of the tassels in verses 37-39?

30 But the person who does wrong defiantly, whether he is a native or a stranger, that one is blaspheming the Lord; and that person shall be cut off from among his people. 31 Since he has despised the word of the Lord and has broken His commandment, that person shall be completely cut off; his guilt will be on him.”

³² Now while the sons of Israel were in the wilderness, they found **a man gathering wood on the sabbath day.**

³³ Those who found him gathering wood brought him to Moses and Aaron and to all the congregation; ³⁴ and they put him in custody because it had not been declared what should be done to him. ³⁵ **Then the Lord said to Moses, “The man shall surely be put to death; all the congregation shall stone him with stones outside the**

camp.”³⁶ *So all the congregation brought him outside the camp and stoned him to death with stones, **just as the Lord had commanded Moses.***

NOTES:

“**Doing wrong defiantly**” means sinning deliberately or acting presumptuously against the commands of the Lord. Verses 30-31 indicate that it involves “**blaspheming the Lord**” and “**despising the word of the Lord.**” It represents a person who flaunts their sin and rebellion against the Lord without caring what God thinks or says. God called for that person to be “**cut off from among his people.**” An example of a defiant person is found in verses 32-36 as a man is caught gathering wood on the Sabbath. Apparently this was a defiant act, because the Lord commanded he be stoned to death by the congregation (in accordance to the commandments given in Exodus 31:15; 35:2-3). Although this seems harsh to the modern reader, verse 31 reminds us that he bears his own guilt.

Deuteronomy 17:12 speaks to the same kind of sinful attitude and says:

But the man who acts presumptuously, refusing to listen either to the priest who stands there to serve the LORD your God, or to the judge, must be put to death.

*You must **purge the evil from Israel.***

In the Old testament, many sins carried the death penalty. According to these verses, willful sin was a capital offense, because God did not want sin to permeate His people. The death of the defiant would “**purge the evil from Israel.**” They were cut off from the people to not affect the rest of them with their defiance. In 1 Corinthians 5 Paul tells the church of Corinth to expel an immoral brother, so that his sin wouldn’t influence the entire body. “*Do you not know a little leaven leavens the whole lump*” (1 Corinthians 5:6).

God is not less demanding about sin in the New Testament. **Hebrews 10:26-31** says:

26 If we deliberately go on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no further sacrifice for sins remains, 27 but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume all adversaries. 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 one deserves to be punished who has trampled on the Son of God, profaned the blood of the covenant that sanctified him, and insulted the Spirit of grace? 30 For we know Him who said, “Vengeance is Mine; I will repay,” and again, “The Lord will judge His people.” 31 It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

Numbers 15:37-41 Remember to Be Holy**Questions to Ponder:**

- **What was the purpose of the tassels in verses 37-39?**
- **How do people follow after their own heart and eyes? And how does that keep them from following after the Lord?**
- **Why does God remind them about who He is in v 40?**

³⁷ **The Lord also spoke to Moses, saying,** ³⁸ *“Speak to the sons of Israel, and tell them that they shall make for themselves tassels on the corners of their garments throughout their generations, and that they shall put on the tassel of each corner a cord of blue.* ³⁹ *It shall be a tassel for you to **look at and remember all the commandments of the Lord, so as to do them and not follow after your own heart and your own eyes, after which you played the harlot,*** ⁴⁰ *so that you may **remember to do all My commandments and be holy to your God.*** ⁴¹ ***I am the Lord your God who brought you out from the land of Egypt to be your God; I am the Lord your God.”***

NOTES:

The Lord realized that men need reminders, so he had them sew tassels onto the hem of their garments. Every time they saw the tassels they were to remember the commandments of the Lord and their need to be obedient to Him. He advises them not to **follow after** their own hearts and eyes. The Apostle John reminded the church:

15 Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. 16 For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world. 17 The world is passing away and also its lusts; but the one who does the will of God continues to live forever. (1 John 2:15-17)

James 4:4 tells us that “friendship with the world” makes us enemies of God. We cannot follow God if we choose to follow our own hearts and eyes. God reminded them that He was the Lord who rescued them from Egypt. The former generation failed to go into the Promised Land, because they followed their own hearts of fear and trusted their eyes which told them it was impossible. God doesn’t want this generation to fall into the same traps.

Unfortunately, the next couple of chapters demonstrate that they still sought their own ways. Even some of their leading Levites rebelled against the authority of Moses and questioned the right of Aaron to the priesthood (Numbers 16-17). These were roles that God had given to them, so they should not have been questioned. But not only did Korah, Dathan, and Abiram seek to undermine Moses and Aaron, they led many of their countrymen to do the same (Numbers 16:1-3). We don’t know exactly why they rebelled. Maybe they thought Moses and Aaron wielded too much power (Numbers 16:3). They may have had unmet expectations (Numbers 16:12-14). They may have objected to killing the man who broke the Sabbath regulations (Numbers 16:3). But Moses made it clear that their rebellion was not really against Moses and Aaron, but against the Lord Himself (Numbers 16:11). God did not want this chaos to spread in His people, so the ground opened up and swallowed up the rebellious leaders who had “*spurned the Lord*” (Numbers 16:30).

We could learn a lesson about submitting ourselves to the Lord from this incident. We need to honor those He places in authority and accept the roles in life He chooses for us. This is especially fitting during this week when we vote on a new President for the United States. Whoever wins, God tells us to render honor and submission, as we pray for all those in power to seek the Lord’s righteousness for our nation (see Romans 13:1-7; 1 Peter 2:13-17). And just as the Levites should have been satisfied in being set apart to help in the worship of the Lord, we need to recognize that our prime directive is to represent the Lord Jesus Christ as salt and light for our communities (see Matthew 5:13-16; Matthew 28:19-20; Acts 1:8; 2 Corinthians 5:20; 1 Peter 2:11-12)

Foundational Truths from this Lesson:

- **We should faithfully and generously give to the work of the Lord.**
- **We should faithfully obey the Lord and heed His Word.**
- **Jesus Christ is our great High Priest who makes atonement for our sins.**
- **We should not willfully sin nor blaspheme God.**
- **We should constantly remember the Lord and His Word, because He is the God who rescues us.**
- **Honor the Lord wherever He places you.**