

Further Old Testament Laws

Numbers 15

Numbers 15 - "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, ⁴ then he who presents his offering to the LORD shall bring a grain offering of one-tenth of an ephah of fine flour mixed with one-fourth of a hin of oil; 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. ⁶ Or for a ram you shall prepare as a grain offering two-tenths of an ephah of fine flour mixed with one-third of a hin of oil; ⁷ and as a drink offering you shall offer one-third of a hin of wine as a sweet aroma to the LORD. ⁸ And when you prepare a young bull as a burnt offering, or as a sacrifice to fulfill a vow, or as a peace offering to the LORD, ⁹ then shall be offered with the young bull a grain offering of three-tenths of an ephah of fine flour mixed with half a hin of oil; ¹⁰ and you shall bring as the drink offering half a hin of wine as an offering made by fire, a sweet aroma to the LORD.

¹¹ 'Thus it shall be done for each young bull, for each ram, or for each lamb or young goat. ¹² According to the number that you prepare, so you shall do with everyone according to their number. ¹³ All who are native-born shall do these things in this manner, in presenting an offering made by fire, a sweet aroma to the LORD. 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.'"^[a]

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.

²² 'If you sin unintentionally, and do not observe all these commandments which the LORD has spoken to Moses— ²³ all that the LORD has commanded you by the hand of Moses, from the day the LORD gave commandment and onward throughout your generations— ²⁴ then it will be, if it is unintentionally committed, without the knowledge of the congregation, that the whole congregation shall offer one young bull as a burnt offering, as a sweet aroma to the LORD, with its grain offering and its drink offering, according to the ordinance, and one kid of the goats as a sin offering.

²⁵ So the priest shall make atonement for the whole congregation of the children of Israel, and it shall be forgiven them, for it was unintentional; they shall bring their offering, an offering made by fire to the LORD, and their sin offering before the LORD, for their unintended sin. ²⁶ It shall be forgiven the whole congregation of the children of Israel and the stranger

who dwells among them, because all the people did it unintentionally.

²⁷ 'And if a person sins unintentionally, then he shall bring a female goat in its first year as a sin offering. ²⁸ So the priest shall make atonement for the person who sins unintentionally, when he sins unintentionally before the LORD, to make atonement for him; and it shall be forgiven him. ²⁹ You shall have one law for him who sins unintentionally, for him who is native-born among the children of Israel and for the stranger who dwells among them.

³⁰ '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. 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.'"

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.

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."

Background Notes

When the Law was given at Mount Sinai, instructions concerning the various offerings were given. When they entered the Promised Land, supplementary grain and drink offerings were to be made, along with the burnt offerings and peace offerings. These offerings would express gratitude for the grain and the grapes of the good Land that God was giving them.

The recurring phrase "sweet (or soothing) aroma" emphasizes that these offerings are an act of worship that was pleasing to the Lord. These offerings certainly picture the perfect sacrifice of Christ, don't they? These laws of sacrifice applied not only to Israel, but also to the Gentiles among them (v14-16). The spiritual lesson is that there's only **one basis of salvation** for **everyone**, whether Jew or Gentile - the **sacrifice of Christ**. Jesus Christ died on the cross for the sins of the **world**. All of the Old Testament sacrifices picture the Person and work of Christ in some way.

Verses 17-21 give the regulation about the "first fruits of the harvest," when Israel came into the Land. They were to make a cake or a loaf of bread from the first cutting of grain, and offer it to the Lord. This offering was called a "heave" or "uplifted" offering, because the offering was lifted up and presented before the Lord. There's a lesson for us in this

offering of the first fruits. What are we giving to the Lord? Are we giving Him the **first** of our time, or our money, or our talent? Or does the Lord just get our “leftovers” - token, “spare change” amounts?

Doctrinal Points

1. God deals graciously with the unintentional sins of His people.

Notice that we have unintentional sins of the congregation in verses 22-26, and unintentional sins for the individual in verses 27-29. Unintentional sins are also mentioned in Leviticus 4, but Leviticus 4 covers unintentional sins of **commission**. Numbers 15 covers unintentional sins of **omission**. Suppose you unintentionally brought the wrong sacrifice for a burnt offering? That would be an unintentional sin of commission. Suppose you unintentionally forgot to attend a required feast or ceremony? That would be an unintentional sin of omission.

What should we do when we neglect to do something we should do? We should confess our sin of omission to the Lord, and we should do what we can to correct the situation. God deals graciously with the unintentional sins of His people.

2. God deals justly with the defiant sins of His people.

Verses 30-36 give the law for defiant or presumptuous sins. Here's an illustration that will help us to distinguish between “unintentional” and “defiant” sins. When a child spills a glass of milk, it can either be a mistake (unintentional) or deliberate (defiant). If it's a mistake, and unintentional, we ask the child to be more careful - and maybe ask the child to help clean up the mess. But if the child is defiant, and deliberately knocked over the glass of milk, righteous discipline is required. This is the way God deals with His people. He graciously forgives unintentional sins, but defiance is rebellion, and He must deal severely with defiant and rebellious attitudes and sins.

In verses 32-36, an example is given of a man who deliberately worked on the Sabbath. The man who gathered wood on the Sabbath was committing a defiant sin, because God's Law clearly declared that no work was to be done on the Sabbath. The man knew God's Law, but yet he defiantly disobeyed God's Law. The man was stoned to death. God must discipline defiant sin severely - then and today. This was not unfair or harsh discipline. God is always just in His discipline, and this was “just” discipline.

Today, God's just discipline may allow a defiant, disobedient believer to become very ill, or to suffer a serious injury. Perhaps God may even take a defiant believer to heaven early (as He did with Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5). This discipline is just. God is not to be “blamed.” This discipline is just.

Praise the Lord that a believer's sins are all eternally forgiven because of Christ's death on the cross – but as our heavenly Father, God must discipline sin in His family. God deals justly with the defiant sins of His people.

Practical Application

Do whatever it takes to remember God's Word!

Verses 38-39: "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..."

The Jewish people were to sew tassels on the hems of their garments. The tassels would remind them of the Lord's commands and their responsibility to follow these commands. The blue cord or thread symbolized the heavenly origin of God's Law. This "tassel law" might sound like a silly or "token" idea - but it wasn't silly from God's point of view! Those tassels were always visible, and they were a constant reminder to **remember and obey God's Word**.

In the same way, we should do whatever it takes to remember God's Word. For example: do you have a program for memorizing Bible verses? Here's an idea. What about saying or reading a verse of Scripture before every meal, and you can't repeat the same verse for a whole month! Or perhaps you could repeat the same verse until you've memorized it. You'd memorize a lot of God's Word, wouldn't you? Maybe some of you can share other ideas to help us remember God's Word.

"...remember all the commandments of the LORD and do them..." The Lord wants us to know His Word – **and he wants us to obey it!** James 1:22 tells us, *"Don't just listen to God's word. You must do what it says."*

We should do whatever it takes to know and remember God's Word – and then do what it tells us to do! What a blessing that would be!