

**CALVARY PANDAN BIBLE-
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**

DHW BIBLE CLASS

LESSON 8

THE BOOK OF NUMBERS

CHAPTER 15

INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter chronicles a very sad and tragic moment in the history of God's chosen people, the Jews. The moment presented before them a tremendous opportunity that could have changed their present environment and conditions in the wilderness. The LORD had promised them that He would give them the land of Canaan, which flowed with "milk and honey." But they made a terrible mistake. They were found wanting in trusting and obeying the LORD. Instead of looking to El Shaddai, God Almighty, they looked at themselves as "grasshoppers," among the giant inhabitants of Canaan. They were fearful for their lives and adopted a defeatist attitude.

If they had listened to Caleb and Joshua and entered the land by faith and claimed their inheritance, they would be walking the length and breadth of the land instead of wandering and murmuring in the wilderness for forty years. They would be singing praises to God instead of sighing and sorrowing. They missed the chance of their lifetime.

The LORD was not pleased with their conduct. Their attitude and behaviour was tantamount to open rebellion against God. They even

wanted to stone Joshua and Caleb, who encouraged them to enter the land and trust in the LORD. God was angry and wanted to destroy all of them, but Moses pleaded in their behalf. Then the LORD pronounced His judgement upon them. They were turned away to wander in the wilderness until all the adults from twenty years old and above died. The children of these adults would enter and inherit the land. After hearing the judgement of the LORD, they again rejected God's judgement and tried to enter the land on their own. Moses warned them not to do so but they went ahead and attacked the Amalekites. They were thoroughly defeated. Has God forsaken His chosen people, the Jews?

Chapter 15 gives the answer. It reveals God's wonderful grace, mercy and patience. There are many lessons we can learn about God and about ourselves. We are no different from the Israelites. God's dealings with them will encourage us. We should respond by loving Him more, with all our heart, soul, mind and strength.

Chapter 15 falls neatly into three sections. Each section begins with the statement "And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Speak to the children of Israel, and say unto them" (v.1-2; 17-18; 37-38).

OUTLINE

A. God Gave Further Instructions On the Many Kinds of Burnt Offerings Made by the Israelites (15:1-16).

1. The LORD instructed Moses to speak to the children of Israel (vv.1-2a).
2. The LORD gave detailed instructions concerning the many

kinds of burnt offerings made by the people when they entered the land (vv.2b-13).

- a. Any kind of Burnt Offering must be accompanied by a Meat Offering (3-4).
 - b. Burnt Offering of a lamb, ram, or a bullock must be accompanied by a Meat Offering and a Drink Offering (5-13).
3. One law for both the children of Israel and the foreigner (vv. 14-16).
 - a. The foreigner who lived with them should observe the same ordinance (14-15).
 - b. One law and one manner applied to both the Israelites and the sojourner (16).

B. God Assured Productivity in the Land and Atonement for Sins Committed Unintentionally (15:22-36).

1. A special Heave Offering to be made to the LORD (vv.17-21).
 - a. When they entered the land When they ate of the first produce of the land (19a).
 - b. The instructions on the preparation of the heave offering (20-21).
2. The person who sinned unintentionally must offer a female goat for a Sin Offering (vv.27-28)
3. One law for both the Israelites and the foreigners (29).
4. The person who sinned intentionally would be “cut off” from the people (vv.30-36).
 - a. The ordinance would be applied to both the Israelites and the foreigners (30).
 - b. The reason why that person should be so punished (31).

- c. The example of an actual case of a man who deliberately broke the Sabbath law (vv.32-36).

C. The LORD Commanded the Israelites to Make Tassels on the Corners of their Garments (15:37-41).

1. The LORD commanded Moses to speak to the children of Israel (vv.37-38a).
2. The LORD instructed that the children of Israel make tassels on the corners of their garments throughout their generations (v.38b).
3. The tassels served as a reminder to the Israelites of the commandments of the LORD to prevent them from sinning (v.39).
4. The Israelites were called to be holy as God is holy (v.40).
5. The LORD reminded the Israelites that He is the LORD their God who brought them out of Egypt (v.41).

COMMENTARY

The Faithfulness & Grace of God

In the opening words of this chapter, God revealed that He had pardoned Israel’s sin. While the adults forfeited the claims of their inheritance of the Promised Land, God did not take back His promise to them. God declared, “When ye be come into the land or your habitations, which I give unto you,” God was assuring them that they would ultimately be settled in the land which He had promised them. Their children would inherit the land after forty years. God did not use “if.” He used “when.” That should comfort and encourage the Israelites after what had

happened to them. This shows that God's plan and purpose for His chosen people, the Israelites, could not be thwarted by the disobedience of His people. If this generation does not wish to enter, then God will choose another. And He did. The nation (all who listened to the ten spies) and the individual (the Sabbath breaker) would be punished for their sins against the LORD. Their rejection and rebellion did not nullify God's covenant promises to their forefathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. God remained faithful to His covenant promises as clearly indicated in this section. What the Israelites lost were the privilege of entering the Promised Land.

God reminded them that their worship and relationship with Him could be restored by observing the sacrificial offerings He had already taught them. When they finally occupied the land, and when they offered any kind of burnt offering, it should be accompanied by a meat (grain/cereal) offering (v.4) and the drink (fruit of the vine) offering (v.5). The bigger the animal sacrifice for the burnt offering, the greater the amount of the meat and drink offerings.¹ These supplement offerings were not required of them in their sojourn in the wilderness for obvious reason. This commandment to them reinforce God's promise to them that their children would occupy Canaan, and that God would also bless them with the produce of the land so that they could offer the sweet savour (aroma) burnt offering accompanied by the meat offering and the drink offering.

The next interesting and theologically important point is that the resident foreigner, who lived among the Israelites, was subjected to the *same*

law as the Israelites. The commandment was that there should be "one law and one manner" for both the Israelites and the resident foreigners. This requirement forbade any resident foreigner from introducing his foreign religious practices into the cultic life of the Israelites. There was no way in which the foreign resident could practise his way of worship and of offering sacrifices to the LORD. And if such foreign resident disobeyed, he would face the same penalty as an Israelite. The worship and approach to the LORD God is the same for the Israelites and the foreign residents. They were not entitled to worship their own gods in the Promised Land. This illustrates the Lord Jesus Christ's declaration in John 14:6, "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me." Paul reiterated this, "For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus" (1 Timothy 2:5).

Receiving & Thanking God

God said again that when they came into the land (the verb tense here assumes that they had already settled in the land), and when they ate of "the bread of the land" they should offer up an "heave offering unto the LORD" (v. 18, 19). In addition to the usual tithes in the Old Testament, the first-fruits ought to be given to the Lord. Hence, every first-born child belonged to God; every first-born animal, and the first-fruits of every crop must be given to God.²

¹ Measurement. One-tenth of an ephah = 1.5 litres; one quarter of a hin = 0.5 litre; one third of a hin = 0.8 litre.

² Exodus 22:29 Thou shalt not delay *to offer* the first of thy ripe fruits, and of thy liquors: the firstborn of thy sons shalt thou give unto me. 30 Likewise shalt thou do with thine oxen, *and* with thy sheep: seven days it shall be with his dam; on the eighth day thou shalt give it me.

This requirement of the Israelites assured them that God would bless them when they settle in the land. God would bless the land and its products. They would be abundantly blessed so that they could make this heave offering to the LORD. It was an acknowledgement that the fruits of the land, just like the land itself, belonged to God, and the fruits therein were His gracious gift to them. So before they eat of the fruit of the land, they ought to offer this heave offering as a token of their praise and thanksgiving to the LORD.

Inadvertent & Presumptuous Sins

It is a true saying that people cannot avoid sinning unintentionally or in ignorance. Did not our Lord Jesus Christ pray on the cross, "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do (Luke 23:34). Paul also himself confessed, "I was shown mercy because I acted in ignorance and unbelief" (1 Timothy 1:13). However, the sin of ignorance is still culpable. Atonement must also be made for the congregation as a whole and they would be forgiven. This sin offering should be offered together with a burnt offering, a meat offering and a drink offering (v.24). As for the individual, who sinned inadvertently, the priest would make an atonement for him by offering a year old female goat for sin (purification) offering. These laws apply both to the Israelites as well as the foreign residents.

In the case of a person, who sinned "presumptuously", the law did not allow any sacrificial atonement for such sins. This sin is described as "lifting one's hand up." Literally, it means that

the person raised his hands up in defiance against God by breaking his law openly, knowingly, deliberately and defiantly. Such a person has no fear of God and treats God as unworthy of being obeyed and worshipped. It is premeditated, and like the sin of murder, there is no escape but the death penalty.

An example is given as an illustration. A man was found breaking the Sabbath. The law stipulated that any one who broke the Sabbath law faced the death penalty.³ This man was caught and was handed to Moses. The law did not mention how the person was to be put to death. Moses consulted the LORD. The LORD prescribed death by stoning by all the congregation.

One should not think that such a penalty is too harsh. If people think that it is too harsh, they fail to see the Holiness of God, and to understand the nature and consequence of sin. God is absolutely holy and God could not tolerate the sin that was done in open defiance against God's Word. Secondly, like cancer, sin is not only deadly but it has pandemic proportions. In order to prevent many from following in his sinful footsteps, the sinner had to be severely dealt with. Did not Satan tell Eve that "she will not surely die" when tempting her to eat the forbidden fruit. Suppose this presumptuous sin was allowed to pass through unpunished, what reason

Exodus 23:19 The first of the firstfruits of thy land thou shalt bring into the house of the LORD thy God. Thou shalt not seethe a kid in his mother's milk.

³Exodus 31:15 Six days may work be done; but in the seventh *is* the sabbath of rest, holy to the LORD: whosoever doeth *any* work in the sabbath day, he shall surely be put to death.

Exodus 35:2 Six days shall work be done, but on the seventh day there shall be to you an holy day, a sabbath of rest to the LORD: whosoever doeth work therein shall be put to death. 3 Ye shall kindle no fire throughout your habitations upon the sabbath day.

can one give that other God-given laws when broken would be punished? What would happen to the discipline and order of the community?

The Israelites must learn that God would not tolerate high-handed rebellion by His people, and that Israel as a nation must remain holy, as God is holy to avoid every contamination of sin and evil. This is the only way Israel could be and continue to be a testimony to the Gentile nations that peace with God can only come by dealing with sins the biblical way.

Prevention Is Better Than Cure

God is understanding and gracious. He commanded Moses to instruct the Israelites that they made blue tassels attached to the corners of their outer garments. The purpose of having these tassels is explained. When the children of Israel saw these tassels, they would be reminded of the commandments of the LORD to do them. It was a preventive measure so that they would not do things according to their own heart's desire, and sin against God. They should remember that God is holy and they must remain holy. They should know that it is the LORD their God who brought them out of the bondage in Egypt.

SUMMARY

In this chapter, God reveals Himself as a faithful God who will always keep His promises. What He has said and promised, He will surely do. There is no question about it. Man may be disobedient to Him and incur His wrath, but man cannot thwart His Word, His plan and His purpose. What He has said it will certainly be accomplished. And so Israel is not rejected by God for

their disobedience. They had sinned. They had to accept the penalty of sin. Another example of God's instant judgement upon a couple that sinned deliberately was Ananias and his wife Sapphira. They had lied to God. It was premeditated. They were struck dead. Since then, many Christians, who have lied, have not been struck dead instantly! If God had continued this instant judgement on His people, who knowingly sin against Him, it would be a very tragic situation. But God has not dealt with us according to our sins. As it is written, if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9). The grace of God today should not make Christians think that sin is less serious. Christians should learn to abhor and hate sin as much as their Heavenly Father.

An important thing that God instructed the people to do was that they should offer the first fruits of the produce of the land as a "heave offering", a thanksgiving offering to the LORD. It is an acknowledgement of God's kind provision. King David was blessing the LORD and he said (1 Chronicles 29:11, 14),

*Thine, O LORD, is the greatness, and the power, and the glory, and the victory, and the majesty: **for all that is in the heaven and in the earth is thine; thine is the kingdom, O LORD, and thou art exalted as head above all. . . . But who am I, and what is my people, that we should be able to offer so willingly after this sort? for all things come of thee, and of thine own have we given thee.***

It pleases the LORD our God when we present our "first fruits" to Him for all that we have are His!

By the fact of our Lord Jesus Christ being the first-fruit of the resurrection, we too are assured of our own resurrection or rapture.

Numbers 15 is a chapter of comfort and encouragement to Christians that are now experiencing moments of despair and distress.

AMEN

DAILY READINGS & DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Daily Readings

Monday: Numbers 15:1-13; Ezekiel 16:59-62; Romans 11:26-27.

Tuesday: Numbers 15:14-16; 1 Timothy 2:1-8.

Wednesday: Numbers 15:17-26; 1 Corinthians 15:20-23.

Thursday: Numbers 15:27-36; Luke 23:34; 1 Timothy 1:13; Hebrews 10:28-29.

Friday: Numbers 15:37-41; Colossians 3:1-17.

Discussion Questions

1. Show from the text that God did not nullify His covenant promises with Israel?

2. In view of the events in chapter 14, what was the purpose of reminding the Israelites about the burnt offerings and sin (purification) offerings?

3. Why was it required of the foreign resident to observe the same procedures for all the religious sacrifices?

4. What is the purpose of giving the "first of your dough" to God? What does it teach?

5. Could an Israelite be excused for committing a sin in ignorance?

6. When an Israelite sinned knowingly and deliberately, what does his action show about him?

7. What was the punishment for an Israelite who sinned presumptuously?

8. What would happen to the community of Israel if the offender had not been dealt with according to the Law?

9. In modern times, Christians are not punished like the Israelites in the

Old Testament and like some believers in the early days of the Church. Does this mean that it is not wrong to break the law or sin?

12. What have you learned most in this chapter?

10. What benefit could be gained by having the whole community to carry out the punishment on the lawbreaker?

11. What aspect of God's character and personality can we learn from verses 40-41?

DAILY READINGS SUPPLEMENT

MONDAY

Ezekiel 16:59 For thus saith the Lord GOD; I will even deal with thee as thou hast done, which hast despised the oath in breaking the covenant. 60 Nevertheless I will remember my covenant with thee in the days of thy youth, and I will establish unto thee an everlasting covenant. 61 Then thou shalt remember thy ways, and be ashamed, when thou shalt receive thy sisters, thine elder and thy younger: and I will give them unto thee for daughters, but not by thy covenant. 62 And I will establish my covenant with thee; and thou shalt know that I *am* the LORD:

Romans 11:26 And so all Israel shall be saved: as it is written, There shall come out of Zion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob: 27 For this *is* my covenant unto them, when I shall take away their sins.

TUESDAY

1 Timothy 2:1 I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, *and* giving of thanks, be made for all men; 2 For kings, and *for* all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness

and honesty. 3 For this *is* good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour; 4 Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth. 5 For *there is* one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; 6 Who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time. 7 Whereunto I am ordained a preacher, and an apostle, (I speak the truth in Christ, *and* lie not;) a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and verity. 8 I will therefore that men pray every where, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting.

WEDNESDAY

1 Corinthians 15:20 But now is Christ risen from the dead, *and* become the firstfruits of them that slept. 21 For since by man *came* death, by man *came* also the resurrection of the dead. 22 For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. 23 But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming.

THURSDAY

Luke 23:34 Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do. And they parted his raiment, and cast lots.

1 Timothy 1:13 Who was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious: but I obtained mercy, because I did *it* ignorantly in unbelief.

Hebrews 10:28 He that despised Moses' law died without mercy under two or three witnesses: 29 Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he

was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace?

FRIDAY

Colossians 3:1 If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. 2 Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. 3 For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God. 4 When Christ, *who is* our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory. 5 Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry: 6 For which things' sake the wrath of God cometh on the children of disobedience: 7 In the which ye also walked some time, when ye lived in them. 8 But now ye also put off all these; anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication out of your mouth. 9 Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds; 10 And have put on the new *man*, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him: 11 Where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond *nor* free: but Christ *is* all, and in all. 12 Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering; 13 Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also *do* ye. 14 And above all these things *put on* charity, which is the bond of perfectness. 15 And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body; and be ye thankful. 16 Let the word of Christ

dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. 17 And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, *do* all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him.

Him. Read the Scriptures and know His will.

LESSON APPLICATION

1. The faithfulness and grace of God is expressed in the fact that Israel would ultimately enter the land and enjoy the fruit of it.
2. That there is only one way for all men to be reconciled to God. That one way is through the Lord Jesus Christ.
3. That ignorance is no excuse. Sins of ignorance must also be atoned for. A person is condemned to the Lake of fire not based on whether he has heard the gospel and rejected it, or if he has not heard he is all right. The truth is that a person is condemned to the Lake of fire is because he is a sinner.
4. God takes a very serious view of presumptuous sin. Christians must beware of sinning against God knowingly and deliberately.
5. Read the Scriptures daily so that we are reminded of things that we should do so as to please God and not to do those things that displease