

Numbers 15 | Entering the Promised Land

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I. Introduction

Many Old Testament scholars are perplexed by the so-called "insertion" of Numbers 15 into the Biblical narrative. It doesn't seem to fit with the immediate storyline. According to these learned men and women, the account of the people of Israel wandering in the wilderness takes an unexpected path, a rabbit trail, if you will, into the law. In their opinion, its inclusion seems so out of place that they felt a need to assign its authorship to an unknown source, referred to only by the letter "P."

While subtle, this view of scripture confronts the sovereignty of God. If we see God as sovereign over everything, including His Word, then there is intention behind its inclusion here, not a later addition from an unknown source. It is meaningful and purposeful. Chapter 15 is not a rabbit trail; it is the very axis upon which salvation is to be provided for God's people. Without this chapter, the people of Israel do not get into the Promised Land!

It is also a picture, a foreshadowing of our salvation in Christ.

II. The Sin of Unbelief

By the time we get to Numbers chapter 15 we know the following:

The children of Israel had hardened their hearts against God, lived in unbelief, and continually put God to the test.

The children of Israel allowed their circumstances to dictate whether or not they believed God, whether they trusted Him, and whether they obeyed Him.

1. Exodus 17:7

After leaving Egypt the people came to Rephidim, their first campsite, and began complaining to Moses about a lack of water. But their quarreling was ultimately against God. "And he [Moses] called the name of the place Massah and Meribah, because of the quarreling of the people of Israel, and because they tested the LORD by saying, 'Is the LORD among us or not?'"

They are calling out God!

2. Psalms 95:7-10

"Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts, as at Meribah, as on the day at Massah in the wilderness, when your fathers **put me to the test and put me to the proof**, though they had seen my work. For forty years I *loathed* that generation and said, 'They are a people who go astray in their heart, and they have not known my ways. Therefore I swore in my wrath, 'They shall not enter my rest.'"

3. Hebrews 3:7-11

"Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion, on the day of testing in the wilderness, where your fathers put me to the test **and saw my works for forty years**. Therefore I was provoked with that generation, and said, 'They always go astray in their heart; they have not known my ways. As I swore in my wrath, they shall not enter my rest.'"

At the very first campsite the people began grumbling due to a lack of water. They took their complaint to Moses. After all God had done to lead them out of Egypt, they question whether God is among them or not. It was at this time God declared that he would destroy them and start over with Moses. God relented when Moses prayed and asked God to spare them for His names' sake.

The children of Israel had a **heart condition: they did not believe God, they questioned Him, they tested Him, they doubted Him, and they murmured to others about Him; and they paid the price.**

III. Entering the Promised Land

None of the people of Israel deserved to enter the Promised Land. God did not owe them! Not even Moses, who would be ultimately denied entrance.

It is important to see that God determined who entered the Promised Land. **By God's grace, He allowed some to enter.**

The old and young alike had sinned, but by His sovereign choice, God only allowed the new generation to enter. Israel would spend 40 years wandering in the desert; one year for every day spent spying out the land. The older generation waited to die, while the younger generation waited for the fulfillment of the promise to enter the land of Canaan.

1. The Promise of Salvation

About a year after Israel had left Egypt, God spoke to Moses:

“The LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ‘Speak to the people of Israel and say to them, “When you come into the land you are to inhabit, which I am giving you”...””

By God’s grace, He promised the children of Israel that they would one day enter the Promised Land. He did not have to do it, but He did.

- a. “When you come into” this is a statement of fact; it will happen.
- b. “...which I am giving you” this is a work of God, not man. They are doing nothing to get it.

He also gave them instructions for what they are to do after they arrive in Canaan.

The children of Israel entering the land of Canaan is a picture of salvation in Christ.

2. Revisiting the Law

Verses 1-21

The first 21 verses of Numbers 15 restate a number of the laws outlined in Leviticus. Not every law from Leviticus is repeated, only a select few. They are all “free-will offerings.”

- a. Burnt Offering - worship
- b. Food Offering - thankfulness
- c. Sacrifice – free will offering

When the people of Israel enter the Promised Land, God instructs them how they are to offer worship and give thanks.

We come to God on His terms, not our own.

Verses 22-31

- d. Forgiveness for Unintentional Sins
 - i. for the congregation and sojourners – one bull for all
 - ii. for individuals and sojourners – one female goatThere is one sacrifice for all; just like Jesus died once for all.
- e. No Forgiveness for Intentional Sins

- i. When one sins intentionally, there is no forgiveness. He is to be cut off.
- ii. The man picking up sticks on a Sabbath was stoned
- iii. God was showing them they have a heart condition. This sin was intentional.

Verses 37-41

- f. Tassels on the corners of their garments
 - i. to remind them to obey the commandments
 - ii. today, God has written the law on our hearts