NUMBERS

Chapter 15

*Supplementary Offerings*

**The Lord said to Moses, 2 “Speak to the Israelites and say to them: ‘After you enter the land I am giving you as a home 3 and you present to the Lord offerings made by fire, from the herd or the flock, as an aroma pleasing to the Lord—whether burnt offerings or sacrifices, for special vows or freewill offerings or festival offerings— 4 then the one who brings his offering shall present to the Lord a grain offering of a tenth of an ephah of fine flour mixed with a quarter of a hin of oil. 5 With each lamb for the burnt offering or the sacrifice, prepare a quarter of a hin of wine as a drink offering. 6 “ ‘With a ram prepare a grain offering of two-tenths of an ephah of fine flour mixed with a third of a hin of oil, 7 and a third of a hin of wine as a drink offering. Offer it as an aroma pleasing to the Lord. 8 “ ‘When you prepare a young bull as a burnt offering or sacrifice, for a special vow or a fellowship offering to the Lord, 9 bring with the bull a grain offering of three-tenths of an ephah of fine flour mixed with half a hin of oil. 10 Also bring half a hin of wine as a drink offering. It will be an offering made by fire, an aroma pleasing to the Lord. 11 Each bull or ram, each lamb or young goat, is to be prepared in this manner. 12 Do this for each one, for as many as you prepare. 13 “ ‘Everyone who is native-born must do these things in this way when he brings an offering made by fire as an aroma pleasing to the Lord. 14 For the generations to come, whenever an alien or anyone else living among you presents an offering made by fire as an aroma pleasing to the Lord, he must do exactly as you do. 15 The community is to have the same rules for you and for the alien living among you; this is a lasting ordinance for the generations to come. You and the alien shall be the same before the Lord: 16 The same laws and regulations will apply both to you and to the alien living among you.’ ” 17 The Lord said to Moses, 18 “Speak to the Israelites and say to them: ‘When you enter the land to which I am taking you 19 and you eat the food of the land, present a portion as an offering to the Lord. 20 Present a cake from the first of your ground meal and present it as an offering from the threshing floor. 21 Throughout the generations to come you are to give this offering to the Lord from the first of your ground meal.**

**Chs 15–21** Events during the next 38 years of wandering in the wilderness. None is given a definite date. (TLSB)

**15:1–41** This chapter is divided into three units, each introduced by the phrase, “The Lord said to Moses” (vv. 1, 17, 37). The people were under terrible judgment because they had disobeyed the specific commands of the Lord. (CSB)

**15:1–21** Not long after the grumbling recorded in ch 14, the Lord assured His erring people that He did indeed abound in steadfast love (14:18). The younger generation did not have to abandon hope that they would come into the land of Canaan (vv 2, 18). Some ceremonies by which the covenant people were to enjoy communion with God were repeated. God made additions or adjustments to laws. From v 2, it appears that, in general, offerings had been suspended (cf Am 5:25; Ac 7:42; the matter of circumcision in Jsh 5:2). Travel in the wilderness, which should have been only a few months, turned into 38 years. Thankfully, the Lord sustained the people and their cattle, even sending rain to make fruitful pastures (Ps 68:7–10). Luther: “Since this life, however, cannot be without external forms of worship, God put before them all these forms and included them in his commandment in order that if they must or would do God any outward service, they might take one of these and not one they themselves had invented. They could then be doubly sure that their work was being done in obedience to God and his word. So they are prevented on every hand from following their own reason and free will in doing good and living aright. Room, place, time, person, work, and form are all more than adequately determined and prescribed, so that the people cannot complain and need not follow simply the example of alien worship” (AE 35:239–40). (TLSB)

**15:2** *After you enter the land.* The juxtaposition of this clause with the sad ending of ch. 14 is dramatic. The sins of the people were manifold; they would be judged. The grace and mercy of the Lord are magnified as he points to the ultimate realization of his ancient promise to Abraham (Ge 12:7), as well as to his continuing promise to the nation that they would indeed enter the land. (CSB)

**15:3–12** Grain and wine offerings were to accompany the offerings by fire; the grain was to be mixed with oil. The offerings increased in amounts with the increase of size of the sacrificial animal (vv. 6–12). These passages are the first to indicate that wine offerings must accompany all burnt and fellowship offerings. (CSB)

**15:4–6** *grain offering*. Quantities of flour, wine, and oil to accompany various animal sacrifices. (TLSB)

**15:14** *alien.* As in the case of the celebration of the Passover (see note on 9:14), the alien had the same regulations as the native-born Israelite. The commonwealth of Israel would always be open to proselytes. Indeed, the charter of Israel’s faith embraces all peoples of the earth (Ge 12:3). (CSB)

**15:20** *Present a cake from the first.* This law also looks forward to the time when the Israelites would be in the land. The first of the threshed grain was to be made into a cake and presented to the Lord. This concept of the firstfruits is a symbol that all blessing is from the Lord and all produce belongs to him. (CSB)

Cake made of the first grain that came from the threshing floor, part of the offering of firstfruits.

**15:1–21** God reassures the people that after the older generation has passed away, He will fulfill His promise to the younger generation. To those older than 20, this pronouncement from Moses is both punishment and promise. They will not inherit the land, but God will have mercy on their children and their children’s children. After the cloud of punishment comes the rainbow of God’s grace. For the whole community, He also preserves the sacrifices, which are His chosen means of atonement. • “You are the great High Priest; You have prepared the feast Of holy love; And in our mortal pain None calls on You in vain; Our plea do not disdain; Help from above.” Amen. (*LSB* 864:3) (TLSB)

*Offerings for Unintentional Sins*

**22 “ ‘Now if you unintentionally fail to keep any of these commands the Lord gave Moses— 23 any of the Lord’s commands to you through him, from the day the Lord gave them and continuing through the generations to come— 24 and if this is done unintentionally without the community being aware of it, then the whole community is to offer a young bull for a burnt offering as an aroma pleasing to the Lord, along with its prescribed grain offering and drink offering, and a male goat for a sin offering. 25 The priest is to make atonement for the whole Israelite community, and they will be forgiven, for it was not intentional and they have brought to the Lord for their wrong an offering made by fire and a sin offering. 26 The whole Israelite community and the aliens living among them will be forgiven, because all the people were involved in the unintentional wrong. 27 “ ‘But if just one person sins unintentionally, he must bring a year-old female goat for a sin offering. 28 The priest is to make atonement before the Lord for the one who erred by sinning unintentionally, and when atonement has been made for him, he will be forgiven. 29 One and the same law applies to everyone who sins unintentionally, whether he is a native-born Israelite or an alien. 30 “ ‘But anyone who sins defiantly, whether native-born or alien, blasphemes the Lord, and that person must be cut off from his people. 31 Because he has despised the Lord’s word and broken his commands, that person must surely be cut off; his guilt remains on him.’ ”**

**15:22** *unintentionally fail.* Sins may be unintentional, but they still need to be dealt with (see note on Lev 4:2). Such unintentional sins may be committed by the people as a whole (vv. 22–26) or by an individual (vv. 27–29). (CSB)

The whole nation had been punished for its disobedience, and 10 of the spies had “died by plague before the Lord” (14:37). The people were to have no fear that the Lord had changed His covenant regarding sin done unwittingly, whether by the whole congregation (vv 23–26) or by an individual (vv 27–31). (TLSB)

**15:30** *defiantly.* Lit. “with a high hand.” Unlike unintentional sins, for which there are provisions of God’s mercy, one who sets his hand defiantly to despise the word of God and to blaspheme his name must be punished. This was the experience of the nation in ch. 14, and it is described in the case of an individual here in vv. 32–36. (CSB)

The person who committed sins in defiance of God, and with intention and malice, removed himself from God’s covenant grace and forgiveness. Cf Mk 3:28–30; 1Jn 5:16–17. (TLSB)

*cut off from his people.* See note on Ex 12:15. (CSB)

Parallels the practice of excommunication today. (TLSB)

**15:22–31** God restates the rules for dealing with unintentional sin through sin offerings (Lv 4). God prepares the younger Israelites in His holy ways. Today, in Confession and Absolution, God provides us forgiveness for our unintentional sin. Here we meet our merciful God and hear anew that we are freed from our sin by Christ’s sacrifice. • “I lay my sins on Jesus, The spotless Lamb of God; He bears them all and frees us From the accursed load. I bring my guilt to Jesus To wash my crimson stains Clean in His blood most precious Till not a spot remains.” Amen. (*LSB* 606:1) (TLSB)

*The Sabbath-Breaker Put to Death*

**32 While the Israelites were in the desert, a man was found gathering wood on the Sabbath day. 33 Those who found him gathering wood brought him to Moses and Aaron and the whole assembly, 34 and they kept him in custody, because it was not clear what should be done to him. 35 Then the Lord said to Moses, “The man must die. The whole assembly must stone him outside the camp.” 36 So the assembly took him outside the camp and stoned him to death, as the Lord commanded Moses.**

**15:32–36** After the discipline of ch 14 and reinforcement of teaching in ch 15, the people grew more diligent in observing the Law. (TLSB)

**15:32** *gathering wood on the Sabbath day.* The penalty for breaking the Sabbath was death (v. 36; Ex 31:15; 35:2). As in the case of the willful blasphemer (Lev 24:10–16), the Sabbath-breaker was guilty of high-handed rebellion (see note on v. 30) and was judged with death. By the time of Christ, Sabbath-keeping had become distorted to the point that its regulations were regarded as more important than the needs of people. Jesus confronted the Pharisees on this issue on several occasions (see, e.g., Mt 12:1–14). From their point of view, these regulations (vv. 32–36) gave them reasons to seek his death (Mt 12:14). (CSB)

**15:35** *put to death*. As a warning against willful sinning, a breaker of the Sabbath law was executed. The mode of execution had not been specified in Ex. Moses and Aaron carry out God’s explicit direction. Cf Lv 24:12. (TLSB)

**15:32–36** The Sabbath is God’s gift to Israel (Ex 20:8–10), that they might devote the day to worship by learning God’s Word. The man gathering wood shows contempt for God’s Word. God considers this blasphemous because the man’s act follows on the heels of God’s restatement about deliberate sin (vv 22–31). Still today, willful sin and despising of God’s Word have damnable consequences. Jesus, Lord of the Sabbath, has fulfilled all the requirements of the Law for our sake (Mt 5:17). Yet how great is our need for His precious Word, which leads us in repentance and grants pardon, faith, and everlasting rest. • Lord, let us never despise Your Word and refuse to hear it; give us life according to Your Word. Amen. (TLSB)

*Tassels on Garments*

**37 The Lord said to Moses, 38 “Speak to the Israelites and say to them: ‘Throughout the generations to come you are to make tassels on the corners of your garments, with a blue cord on each tassel. 39 You will have these tassels to look at and so you will remember all the commands of the Lord, that you may obey them and not prostitute yourselves by going after the lusts of your own hearts and eyes. 40 Then you will remember to obey all my commands and will be consecrated to your God. 41 I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt to be your God. I am the Lord your God.’ ”**

**15:38** *tassels on the corners of your garments.* As one would walk along, the tassels would swirl about at the edge of his garment (cf. v. 39), serving as excellent memory prods to obey God’s commands (cf. Dt 6:4–9). (CSB)

Fringes fastened with a blue cord on the “corners” (lit, “wings”) of the upper garment. These visuals helped Israel remember the Lord’s commands (v 39). This outward means to help them “be holy” (v 40) was, like all others, later abused and became a means of parading empty piety. Cf Mt 6:1. (TLSB)

**15:41** *I am the Lord your God, who brought you out.* The demands that God made upon his people were grounded in his act of redemption (see Ex 20:2 and note). (CSB)

**15:37–41** God provides a visible reminder for the Israelites of His Word and His presence among them. Today, in the cross of God’s Son, we witness the ultimate reminder of God’s Law and Gospel, His wrath and grace. • “God’s Word is our great heritage And shall be ours forever; To spread its light from age to age Shall be our chief endeavor. Through life it guides our way, In death it is our stay. Lord, grant, while worlds endure, We keep its teachings pure Throughout all generations.” Amen. (*LSB* 582) (TLSB)