

NUMBERS

Chapter 15

Laws About Sacrifices

The LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 2 “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, 3 and you offer to the LORD from the herd or from the flock a food offering[a] or a burnt offering or a sacrifice, to fulfill a vow or as a freewill offering or at your appointed feasts, to make a pleasing aroma to the LORD, 4 then he who brings his offering shall offer to the LORD a grain offering of a tenth of an ephah[b] of fine flour, mixed with a quarter of a hin[c] of oil; 5 and you shall offer with the burnt offering, or for the sacrifice, a quarter of a hin of wine for the drink offering for each lamb. 6 Or for a ram, you shall offer for a grain offering two tenths of an ephah of fine flour mixed with a third of a hin of oil. 7 And for the drink offering you shall offer a third of a hin of wine, a pleasing aroma to the LORD. 8 And when you offer a bull as a burnt offering or sacrifice, to fulfill a vow or for peace offerings to the LORD, 9 then one shall offer with the bull a grain offering of three tenths of an ephah of fine flour, mixed with half a hin of oil. 10 And you shall offer for the drink offering half a hin of wine, as a food offering, a pleasing aroma to the LORD. 11 “Thus it shall be done for each bull or ram, or for each lamb or young goat. 12 As many as you offer, so shall you do with each one, as many as there are. 13 Every native Israelite shall do these things in this way, in offering a food offering, with a pleasing aroma to the LORD. 14 And if a stranger is sojourning with you, or anyone is living permanently among you, and he wishes to offer a food offering, with a pleasing aroma to the LORD, he shall do as you do. 15 For the assembly, there shall be one statute for you and for the stranger who sojourns with you, a statute forever throughout your generations. You and the sojourner shall be alike before the LORD. 16 One law and one rule shall be for you and for the stranger who sojourns with you.” 17 The LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 18 “Speak to the people of Israel and say to them, When you come into the land to which I bring you 19 and when you eat of the bread of the land, you shall present a contribution to the LORD. 20 Of the first of your dough you shall present a loaf as a contribution; like a contribution from the threshing floor, so shall you present it. 21 Some of the first of your dough you shall give to the LORD as a contribution throughout your generations.

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 *when you come into 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 *stranger.* As in the case of the celebration of the Passover, 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 loaf as a contribution.* 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)

Laws About Unintentional Sins

22 “But if you sin unintentionally, and do not observe all these commandments that the LORD has spoken to Moses, **23** all that the LORD has commanded you by Moses, from the day that the LORD gave commandment, and onward throughout your generations, **24** then if it was done unintentionally without the knowledge of the congregation, all the congregation shall offer one bull from the herd for a burnt offering, a pleasing aroma to the LORD, with its grain offering and its drink offering, according to the rule, and one male goat for a sin offering. **25** And the priest shall make atonement for all the congregation of the people of Israel, and they shall be forgiven, because it was a mistake, and they have brought their offering, a food offering to the LORD, and their sin offering before the LORD for their mistake. **26** And all the congregation of the people of Israel shall be forgiven, and the stranger who sojourns among them, because the whole population was involved in the mistake. **27** “If one person sins unintentionally, he shall offer a female goat a year old for a sin offering. **28** And the priest shall make atonement before the LORD for the person who makes a mistake, when he sins unintentionally, to make atonement for him, and he shall be forgiven. **29** You shall have one law for him who does anything unintentionally, for him who is

native among the people of Israel and for the stranger who sojourns among them. 30 But the person who does anything with a high hand, whether he is native or a sojourner, reviles the LORD, and that person 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 utterly cut off; his iniquity shall be on him.”

15:22 *if you sin unintentionally.* 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). (CSB)

15:30 *with a high hand.* 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. *cut off.* See note, Lv 17:4. Parallels the practice of excommunication today. (CSB)

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)

A Sabbathbreaker Executed

32 While the people 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 in custody, because it had not been made clear what should be done to him. 35 And the LORD said to Moses, “The man shall be put to death; all the congregation shall stone him with stones outside the camp.” 36 And all the congregation brought him outside the camp and stoned him to death with stones, 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 sticks 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 people of Israel, and tell them to make tassels on the corners of their garments throughout their generations, and to put a cord of blue on the tassel of each corner. 39 And it shall be a tassel for you to look at and remember all the commandments of the LORD, to do them, not to follow after your own heart and your own eyes, which you are inclined to whore after. 40 So you shall remember and do all my commandments, and be holy to 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.”

15:38 *tassels on the corners of their 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)