

Notes of a Lecture Numbers 15

by John Nelson Darby

The sermon explores God's unwavering purpose for His people amidst rebellion, emphasizing the importance of worship and the significance of offerings in maintaining fellowship with Him.

Scripture: Exodus 6:7, Numbers 15:2, Numbers 15:39, Psalm 119:105, Matthew 4:4, John 14:6, Romans 5:20, Ephesians 5:2, Hebrews 10:14, 1 John 1:9

Topics: "God's Grace", "Worship and Offerings"

Description

John Nelson Darby discusses the significance of Numbers 15, emphasizing God's unwavering purpose despite Israel's rebellion and unbelief. He highlights how, even after the people's failures, God reassures them of their future in the promised land, demonstrating His grace and steadfastness. The chapter outlines the offerings to be made in the land, symbolizing worship and communion with God, and emphasizes the importance of joy and fellowship in worship. Darby also notes the provision for sin, illustrating God's grace in maintaining a relationship with His people despite their shortcomings. Ultimately, he concludes with the assurance of God's enduring presence and commitment to His people.

Transcript

This chapter comes in in a very peculiar manner.

The children of Israel had despised the pleasant land they had quarrelled with the manna, the food given to them by God (chap. 11); they had slighted the promises of God concerning the good land, though an earnest was brought to them by the spies (chaps. 13, 14); and in chapter 16 we find them in open rebellion and apostasy, failing away in the gainsaying of Korah. This was not merely failure, which brought on chastisement, but open rebellion, and God cut them off in their sins. It is between these two things this fifteenth chapter comes in.

The Book of Numbers is the putting God's people in their place and the order of their journeys. They had departed from the mount of Jehovah a three days' journey (chap. 10:33). This was the first time of their starting, and then we find Jehovah goes out of His place in grace. The people ought to have been round about, taking care of Jehovah, but "the ark of the covenant of Jehovah went before them." Moses wished Hobab to be to them instead of eyes"; but God says, I will be as eyes to you and "the ark of the covenant of Jehovah went before them in the three days' journey, to search out a resting-place for them." In this we see the actings of extraordinary grace. "It came to pass when the ark set forward, that Moses said, Rise up, Jehovah, and let thine enemies be scattered, and let them that hate thee flee before thee. And when it

rested he said, Return, O Jehovah, unto the many thousands of Israel."

The next step, as we see in chapter 11, is the working of unbelief. While God is going before them the people complain; and then come out all the various forms and progress of unbelief. In chapter 14 we see they had to wander in the wilderness forty years. Chapter 15 gives what they were to do in the land; and chapter 16 the open rebellion and apostasy closing in the forms of unbelief. But before this apostate character is developed, chapter 15 comes in, full of loveliness. Rebellion had arisen to a great height, for not only had they despised the pleasant land, but the spies had brought up an evil report of the land. Caleb and Joshua proved their faithfulness in remonstrating with the people, telling them that Jehovah could bring them in, when this awful rebellion broke out, and "all the congregation bade stone them with stones." Then, consequently, "the glory of Jehovah appeared in the tabernacle of the congregation before all the children of Israel." God interfered immediately, and tells Moses, "I will make of thee a greater nation and mightier than they." Then Moses intercedes, and here we see the devotedness of his character coming out in intercession. And then God says, "I have pardoned according to thy word," but yet I will chastise them; and to the people He says, "as ye have spoken in my ears, so will I do to you," You shall get the thing your wretched flesh desired, for you shall die in this wilderness (chap. 14:28, 29).

284 But in the midst of all this comes in chapter 15, in which we learn that God goes on in His purpose as calmly and quietly as if there never had been the despising of the land. For, in the second verse, He says, "When ye be come into the land of your habitations, which I give unto you." His purpose is as settled as if there had been no rebellion at all. He speaks in the calmness of His own purpose. After telling them of chastisement, He says, Ye shall come into the land; it is settled with Me; I go on in the steadfastness of My own counsels. "I am Jehovah your God." It is blessed to see, not that Jehovah will not chastise in the way of government, for He says, "As truly as I live, as ye have spoken in mine ears so will I do to you." But that He never relinquishes His purpose, though He deals with the heart according to its unbelief. We see this in verse 45. The Amalekites and Canaanites discomfited them to Hormah (and Hormah means destruction); but then the heart can always return to the steadfastness of His purpose, which remains in its very nature the same. We see joy shining out in this chapter; a provision for grace and warning. He tells them what to do in the land. "When ye be come into the land of your habitations, Which I give unto you, and will make an offering by fire unto Jehovah, a burnt-offering, or a sacrifice in performing a vow, or in a freewill-offering, or in your solemn feasts, to make a sweet savour unto Jehovah, of the herd, or of the flock: then shall he that offereth his offering unto Jehovah bring a meat-offering of a tenth deal of flour mingled with the fourth part of an hin of oil. And the fourth part of an hin of wine for a drink-offering shalt thou prepare with the burnt-offering or sacrifice, for one lamb. Or for a ram, thou shalt prepare for a meat offering two tenths deals of flour mingled with the third part of an hin of oil. And for a drink offering thou shalt offer the third part of an hin of wine for a sweet savour into Jehovah. And when thou preparest a bullock for a burnt-offering, or for a sacrifice in performing a vow, or peace-offerings unto Jehovah: then shall he bring with a bullock a meat-offering of three tenths deals of flour mingled with half an hin of oil. And thou shalt bring for a drink-offering half a hin of wine, for an offering made by fire, of a sweet savour unto Jehovah." 'Your rebellions would have sinned away the land, but I have given it you. It is not a sin-offering you are to bring but a burnt-offering. You are accepted, and are going to worship Me there.'

285 Christ is represented by the burnt-offering - the voluntary offering up of His life to God as a sweet savour. "Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children; and walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savour." When divine love comes down here, it always returns up in the character of self-sacrifice. God acts in love; Christ

walked in love; and divine love acting in man offers itself a sweet savour unto God.

Then they were to bring oil and wine. The oil shewing the joy and gladness, and wine the fellowship in communion. When you have got rest in God, and worship comes out, it must be in joy and gladness of heart and fellowship with God. And He would have us return to Him thus. But we shall not be able to be "followers of God" unless we dwell in this comfort and joy of His thoughts about us.

And further, observe God's actings and givings. "According to the number that ye shall prepare, so shall ye do to every one according to their number. All that are born of the country shall do these things after this manner, in offering an offering made by fire, of a sweet savour unto Jehovah. And if a stranger sojourn with you, or whosoever be among you in your generations, and will offer an offering made by fire, of a sweet savour unto Jehovah; as ye do, so he shall do. One ordinance shall be both for you of the congregation, and also for the stranger that sojourneth with you, an ordinance for ever in your generations: as ye are, so shall the stranger be before the Lord. One law and one manner shall be for you, and for the stranger that sojourneth with you." See how "the branches run over the wall," in God's heart running out, as in verse 14, to the stranger. Christ said He was only sent to the lost sheep of the house of Israel; but when the poor Gentile woman appealed to the nature of God as a giver, He could not deny her, because He could not deny what He was. Here God is saying, I cannot have a person in my land, and not a worshipper, not enjoying God. All must be happy there. If any person is in the land of God, he must know the mind and temper of the God of the land. There is one law for all. God will be Himself, and make Himself known. While this is the case in the land, there would be offering connected with evil and failure, as in verse 22. God says, There may be failure, therefore I will make provision for sin in grace. And here comes in the sin-offering - that when man fails, God may still maintain and keep him in the place of blessing.

286 Verse 30. The soul that sinneth presumptuously (the case of one who has no life in him), he shall be cut off - "his iniquity shall be upon him." The presumptuous sinner under the law was to be treated with the rigour of the law. No mercy; but "stone him with stones without the camp." Being brought into this condition provision is made for keeping them mindful of where they were brought. Upon the fringes was to be "a riband of blue," signifying a heavenly character (v. 38). The fringes of the garments reached to the earth, and might come in contact with defilement. God's precepts and directions alone can keep us walking after Him. Jesus said, "Man shall not live by bread alone." The precepts of the gospel are like fringes to our garments, attached to those things where sin can touch us. And in this way man does not live by bread alone, "but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God"; living every instant so as not to be touched by Satan. The "riband of blue," the heavenly mind that calls the precepts and words of the Lord to remembrance. If I were spiritual, and walking in fellowship with God, I should not need precepts; but, in my folly and fleshliness, I need God's precepts to keep my soul mindful of Him. Satan said, "Command that these stones be made bread." There was no harm in satisfying hunger; but Jesus came to do the will of His Father; and this would have been doing His own will. If we walk in a godly manner in the details of life, in the character of "blue," that is, heavenly, we shall remember the words of our Lord, and not do our own wills. All this is the provision of grace in the land. It is sweet to find at the close of all this failure, God returning to bless - giving out His own thoughts of peace, and not of evil, as nothing can weaken or enfeeble the blessedness of God's thoughts concerning us: and therefore closes it by saying, "I am Jehovah your God, which brought you out of the land of Egypt, to be your God: I am Jehovah your God."

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