

Planning Ahead



SABBATH—OCTOBER 31

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Numbers 15; 2 Corinthians 2:15, 16; Galatians 3:26–29; Ephesians 5:2; Colossians 3:11.

MEMORY VERSE: “I spoke to their children there. I said, ‘Do not follow the rules your parents gave you. Do not obey their laws. Do not pollute yourselves by worshiping their gods. I am the Lord your God. So follow my rules. Be careful to obey my laws’ ” (Ezekiel 20:18, 19, NlrV).

AT THE BEGINNING OF NUMBERS 15, the rebellion (war against God), shame, and defeat of Israel (at the hands of the Amalekites and Canaanites), are now past. The people have learned the hard lesson of suffering caused by not obeying God.

The crowds of people are now on their way back into the wilderness.¹ At this point, the Lord communicates (speaks) with Moses as the chapter opens: “ ‘Speak to the people of Israel. Say to them, “You are going to enter the land that I am giving you as a home” ’ ” (Numbers 15:2, NlrV).

The people had been disappointed. But the promise was still sure: God would bring His people into the Promised Land. Of that there was no question!

As we study chapter 15, we come across some of the special instructions for God’s chosen people. These instructions and commands are for the people of Old Israel. But we can learn and profit from the spiritual lessons and principles too.

¹. wilderness—a dry and barren (empty) land in which few people live.

SUNDAY—NOVEMBER 1**THANKFULNESS**
(Numbers 15:1–10, 18–21)

What were the purposes of the offerings in Numbers 15:1–10, 18–21? What did they mean? What was the purpose of bringing oil, drink, and grain?

The Hebrew word for “meat/grain” is *minchah*. This word means “gift” or “tribute.” It included flour, olive oil, and wine. By making this offering, the person showed thankfulness for God’s blessings on his fields and crops (read Deuteronomy 8:18).

In Numbers 15, these directions really carried a promise to the younger people of Israel. The promise was that one day they would plant fields of wheat, barley, and other grains in their new home in Canaan. They would with their own hands plant vineyards on the hills and orchards of olive trees and other fruits, such as figs and pomegranates.² These nonbloody offerings helped remind the people of the blessings that were to be theirs if they remained faithful. All these thoughts were wrapped up in their sacrifices³ to the Lord, which also reminded them day by day of the land of promise waiting for them.

According to Romans 12:1; 2 Corinthians 2:15, 16; and Ephesians 5:2, how does Paul use this idea in New Testament times?

2. pomegranates—reddish, thick-skinned fruit about the size of oranges.

3. sacrifices—gifts and offerings given to God.



The offering of oil, flour, and pure wine reminded the people that the blessings of the Promised Land would be theirs if they obeyed God.

Israel’s situation was difficult at this time. But the Lord wanted His people to develop an attitude (thought or feeling) of praise and gratitude (being thankful) for what He had done for them and what He promised to do for them in the future. Should not we do the same?

Whatever our problems are, why is it important for us to always think about God’s goodness, love, and care? How does keeping the Cross in mind help us better understand God’s love and care for us, even in the worst of times? What things can we be thankful for now, no matter what our situation is? Why is thinking about these blessings so important for us?

MONDAY—NOVEMBER 2**THE STRANGER WITHIN YOUR GATES** (Numbers 15:14–16)

Israel's attitude (feeling) toward strangers in Moses' time was quite unusual. These strangers were not part of Israel's history or their faith.

According to Numbers 15:14–16, what special commands were given to the Israelites before they settled in Canaan? How is this same principle (rule) shown in the New Testament in Galatians 3:26–29 and Colossians 3:11?

The “stranger” or foreigner would be a person who settled among the Israelites. This person also fully accepted the faith of Israel. If this stranger was a male, he usually was circumcised.⁴ Strangers were to be treated and loved as if they really were the people of Israel. “One ordinance [set of rules or practices]” or “one law . . . shall be for you, and for the stranger that sojourneth [stays] with you” (Numbers 15:16, KJV). Talk about togetherness!

In his prayer at the opening of the first temple, what did Solomon ask God about non-Israelites, according to 1 Kings 8:41–43? What does Isaiah have to say about the strangers who wanted to worship at the temple? Read Isaiah 56:6, 7.

When one knows of God's purpose in calling out His people and welcoming them into the Promised Land, these verses make perfect

sense. Israel needed to protect their special teaching and truths. Their teaching and truth made them God's special witnesses to the world. But at the same time, the people of Israel needed to be open to the pagans⁵ who wanted to learn about their God and follow Him.

In many ways, our church today must do that same thing. We have special truths to teach the world. We need to guard and protect these truths. But at the same time, we have to be willing to accept those who want to know the Lord and His message for this time.

In what ways is it so easy to be clannish (staying within your group) and judgmental against people who do not believe as we do? How can we avoid that attitude but protect the truths we have been given?

TUESDAY—NOVEMBER 3

SINNING AND NOT KNOWING IT (Numbers 15:22–27)

We must keep in mind that the younger group of people in this chapter (Numbers 15) was born in slavery in Egypt. They had been influenced by⁶ the Egyptian way of life around them. And their parents, as slaves, also were influenced by that same culture, or way of life. So, this younger group of Israelites had a lot of bad

4. circumcised—the cutting away of the foreskin of the penis, or a man's sexual organ.

5. pagans—people who do not believe in God. In the ancient (old-time) world, pagans believed in many gods and often worshiped the sun.

6. influenced by—to be affected or changed by the power of another person or thing.

things to unlearn and a lot of new and good things to learn.

According to Numbers 15:22–27, if the group learned they had strayed from the Lord’s commandments, what were they to do? Why did they have to bring a sin offering to the Lord for things they had done wrong without knowing it? Read Numbers 15:22–27.

The sin offering forgave their sin. The burnt offering represented (showed) the group’s desire to serve God again with their whole heart, soul, mind, and body. How interesting that the Lord would make a difference between things done wrong without knowing it and things that were done wrong on purpose. But, even the things done wrong without knowing they were wrong were recognized as sin. These sins still needed to be forgiven with an offering.

How did a person get forgiveness for the things done wrong that he or she did not know were wrong? According to Numbers 15:27–29, how was this forgiveness for one person different from forgiveness for the whole group?

“There are people who have known the forgiving love of Christ and really want to be children of God. But they also understand that their characters⁷ are not perfect. They know they have made many mistakes in life. They

are ready to doubt whether their hearts have been renewed by the Holy Spirit. To such people I would say, Do not give up without any hope. We often shall have to bow down and weep at the feet of Jesus because of our weaknesses and mistakes. But we are not to be discouraged. Even if we are overcome by the enemy, we are not forgotten nor turned away by God. No! Christ is at the right hand of God. He is also our Advocate.⁸ The beloved John said, ‘I am writing this to you so that you will not sin. But suppose someone does sin. Then we have one who speaks to the Father for us. He stands for us. He is Jesus Christ, the Blameless One.’ 1 John 2:1.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, page 64.



We often shall have to bow down and weep at the feet of Jesus because of our weaknesses and mistakes.

How often do you feel like doubting whether you truly have been renewed by the Holy Spirit?

7. characters—who people are; all that people do, feel, and think are what people are made of.

8. advocate—a person, or lawyer, who defends you. In this case, the Advocate is Jesus Christ.

According to Romans 5:6–8, what happened at the cross that should give you the courage to continue, even when you are filled with doubt about being saved?

WEDNESDAY—NOVEMBER 4

SINS OF BEING STUBBORN AND REBELLIOUS⁹ (Numbers 15:30, 31)

What is happening in Numbers 15:30, 31, and what lessons can we learn from these verses? Why does the punishment¹⁰ seem so tough? Where is grace¹¹ in all this situation?

The wording in the Hebrew is “with a high hand.” This wording shows willful stubbornness and rebellion (acting against God). Israel truly sinned “with a high hand” against the Lord at Kadesh. But God changed the death sentence and exiled (sent away) Israel to live in the wilderness for 40 years. The important point is that sins were taken very seriously by the Lord. Often those who afterward say that they are sorry for sins are sorry only because they got caught. They were not really sorry for the sins themselves. Against such hardness of heart, what can the Lord do? People must truly repent¹² of sin before they can be forgiven.



The wording for rebellion in the Hebrew means “with a high hand.”

Why do you think the Lord had the whole group take part in the killing in Numbers 15:32–36? What spiritual lesson can we learn from what happened?

It must have been a difficult thing for a group of Israelites to stone one of their members to death. Clearly, God tried to show His people how serious sin is. “The wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23, KJV). Perhaps, too, God wanted to show them that what they did influenced¹³ others around them. What each person did still influenced the welfare of the people as a group. After all, the complaining of some people caused the whole camp to suffer by remaining in the wilderness.

As Christians, we need to know that our actions, good or evil, influence¹⁴ others and ourselves too.

Meanwhile, in God-governed Israel, death often came quickly. But we

9. rebellious—sinful and not obedient.

10. punishment—a penalty (price to be paid) for, or the result of, doing something wrong; when someone must suffer loss or pain for doing something bad, wrong, or against the law.

11. grace—God’s gift of forgiveness and mercy that He freely gives us to take away our sins.

12. repent—to say you are sorry for sinning and to turn away from sin with the help of the Holy Spirit.

13. influenced—to have power, or an effect, over persons or things.

14. influence—the power to affect or change persons or things.

should not be fooled. Even though we are not quickly stoned to death for our rebellion, that does not mean we will not have to answer to God for how we have lived our lives.

How ready and willing are you to repent and admit your sins to God? But how often do you find yourself making excuses for your sins for one reason or another? Why is that so dangerous to your soul?

THURSDAY—NOVEMBER 5

TASSELS¹⁵ OF BLUE (Numbers 15:38–41)

If you have ever seen Orthodox¹⁶ Jews, you might have noticed them wearing something under their shirts with white tassels on it. Its beginnings are found in the Bible.

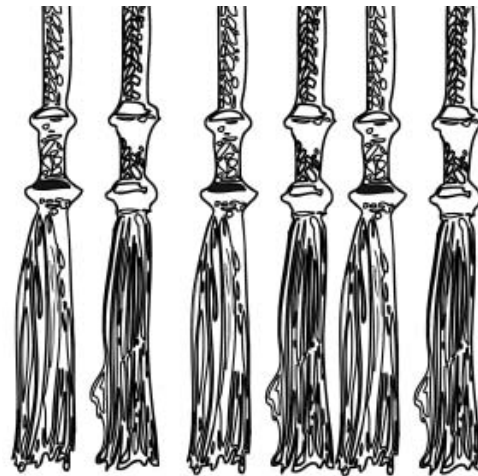
According to Numbers 15:38, what did the Lord direct Moses to instruct every Israelite to attach to their robes?

Attaching tassels of different colors was a common practice among the peoples of the Near East at that time. And God adopted the practice. A tassel was attached to each of the four corners of the outer robe, with a thread (“ribband,” KJV) of blue on each tassel. The modern “prayer shawl” has four tassels—one on each corner, tied in a knot with white and blue threads.

According to Numbers 15:39–41, what reason was given for wearing tassels? What special things did God want the Israelites to remember?

The word *remember* stands out two times in these verses. Every time an Israelite saw the tassels, he or she was to “remember, and do all my commandments, and be holy unto your God” (Numbers 15:40, KJV). When a person was tempted to go after other gods (spiritual adultery), the blue in the tassels would call him or her back to God. The tassels reminded Israel that God brought the nation out of Egyptian slavery (verse 41).

True, God was among His people in a very clear way in the pillar of cloud and fire. But the tassels were one more way God used to help Israel remember to be loyal to Him.



When a person was tempted to serve other gods, the blue in the tassels would call him or her back to God.

15. tassels—decorative pieces of cord attached to clothes; for example, a tassel hangs from a graduation mortar board (cap).

16. Orthodox—conservative; traditional. Orthodox Jews believe strictly in the Torah (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy) and the Talmud (Jewish tradition).

We do not wear tassels today. But we have something so much more powerful: the cross of Christ, which always should help us remember the cost of sin and the cost of our salvation.¹⁷ The Cross also should help us remember the promise of salvation for all who through faith, trust in Jesus' sacrifice as our Substitute.¹⁸

How could following Jesus' words to "pray always" in Luke 21:36, help you remember what God has done for you and what He asks you to do in return?

FRIDAY—NOVEMBER 6

ADDITIONAL STUDY: "We are to tell others about how faithful Christ is to us. This is Heaven's chosen way of showing Christ to the world. True, we are to recognize His grace as made known through the holy men of old in the Bible. But what is more effective is the testimony [story] of our own experience. We are witnesses for God as we show in ourselves the working of God's power. Every person has a life that is different from all others and an experience that is different from anyone else's. God desires that our praise shall go to Him, marked by our own differences. We add to the glory¹⁹ of God's grace when we praise Him before others. When supported by a Christlike life, our praise to God has power and a great influence to save souls."—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, page 347.

17. salvation—God's plan for saving sinners from eternal (without end) death; the gift of eternal life; being saved.

18. substitute—someone or something that takes the place of another person or thing. Jesus is our Substitute because He died for our sins.

19. glory—power and praise.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

① Go through the previous Ellen G. White quote. What is she saying? What important principles can we take from it? How do you understand the idea that our praise to God, along with a "Christlike life," can be a powerful influence to help God save others?

② What has your own experience of giving praise and glory to God done for you in your walk with the Lord? Why is this attitude so important?

③ Monday's study shows how the people of Israel were to treat the strangers among them. What other lessons can we learn from this idea for ourselves today? How do we treat those who are not of our faith? They may be people who hold views that we believe to be wrong. But how should we treat them? At the same time, how do we show them that we believe we have something that they need to know? And how do we do this without acting as if we are better than they are? What lessons can we learn in this area from the people of Israel in the time of Moses?

④ What can we, as a group, do to remind one another of what God has done for us and of what He expects us to do? What part does the Lord's Supper have in helping us remember what we have in Jesus?