

## “Reassurance”

### Numbers 15

After having just finished Num. 13-14 and God’s stunning punishment on the 10 spies who rebelled against God’s promises by spreading an evil rumour about the land, as well as His harsh sentence on that generation of fighting men who were too afraid and lacked faith to believe God could help them defeat the giants in the land, we have this undramatic chapter of sacrifices and laws and tassels. Then we come to Ch. 16, another stunning punishment after another rebellion led by a man named Korah. One commentator calls Ch. 15, the eye of the hurricane. Sandwiched in between the turmoil and chaos of the 10 faithless spies and the turmoil and chaos of Korah’s rebellion, we have a somewhat unassuming assortment of rules and regulations. Why is this here?

If we were part of the nation who just learned that we had to go back into the wilderness for 40 years, knowing we ourselves will probably not see the promised land, we might begin to doubt God. Why did we leave Egypt? It was hard but predictable. I had a small place to live even if we’re oppressed. There was food even if it meant being a slave. I thought God was going to rescue us and make our lives better. And now we can’t go in. Will our children really go in? Is God truly the only God? Is living for Him worth it?

Every child of God has questions of doubt at some point in our life when walking with God has not been pleasant and life hasn’t turned out the way we expected. But when we think that way we have to correct our theology – stop looking at our life through our expectations and start looking at life through God’s perspective. And Ch. 15 reminds Israel, even though its hard right now, nothing about God or what He said has changed. And the first words that Moses hears from God after Ch. 14 to the people are **“After you enter the land ...”**

So Ch. 15 are instructions for the Israelites “when you enter the land”. These are reassurances in a dark time that God hasn’t forgotten you or His promises. In this chapter, there are three major sections all beginning with “The Lord said to Moses” (v.1, 17, 37), which we’re going to summarize by asking ourselves three questions of doubt that all enter our minds at some point in our walk with God. Do you need reassurances of God’s love, presence and power in your life? We all do. So let’s listen to what God is saying through Moses that will help us also navigate those times in our life when we may doubt God’s power and character.

As the Israelites settled into the nomadic life for the next 40 years, God knew they would need reassurances, so He reminds them of some regulations that reassured them that God is still for them, He’s not against them. Sometimes believers think God is not for them and they wonder

## **Is God Really For Us?** **(15:1-16)**

Many of us are familiar with Romans 8:31

<sup>31</sup> *What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us?*

But what is the “this” that we’re to respond to? Vv.28-30

<sup>28</sup> And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. <sup>29</sup> For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. <sup>30</sup> And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.

It's not unusual for followers of Christ to occasionally doubt God is for us, when we are going through difficulties. The reason we think that way is because we wrongly conclude that God's people shouldn't have trials, even though God says many times He's going to use trials to conform us into Jesus. If we continue in Rom. 8, Paul assures us that

<sup>37</sup> No, in all these things [hardships] we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. <sup>38</sup> For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, <sup>39</sup> neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

So we have to keep a biblical perspective on our life. We have to keep God's Words in front of us to have His perspective on life. So He tells Moses here to tell the Israelites, "*when you enter the land I am giving you*" [it will still happen], "*as a home*" [no longer tents], "*form the herd or the flock*" [yes you're going to have plenty of herds and flocks from which you can offer to God in worship] ... when they think about what God was saying,

### ***His promises don't change (vv.1-2)***

All that God promised about the land is still going to happen. They just have to wait on God's timing and trust Him to fulfill His promises in His time and way, just as we have to wait on God's timing to fulfill his promises in His time and way. We're always waiting on God for something. All His promises haven't been fulfilled yet, but they will be. We doubt at times but that's because we look at the world from a humanistic perspective and not a faith-in-God's-Word perspective. By reminding them about making sacrifices in the land of Canaan, God was reassuring them that He is still with them and for them.

A phrase that appears in v.3 and five more times between here and v.24 is "*an aroma pleasing to the Lord*". God doesn't say that because He was hungry but because it's His way of saying I am pleased by your obedience. That hasn't changed either.

### ***When we obey God is pleased (vv.3-13)***

Yes, right now they are eating humble pie [technically manna for a few more years] but it doesn't mean they can't still please God. For the Israelites, God would ask for specific animals for specific sacrifices and when Israel obeyed God with the right heart God was pleased. Notice the type of offerings mentioned. The burnt offering was your worship offering, the animal is offered all to God, symbolic of you offering your all to God. The other offerings are mostly grain and drink offerings, which are the 'thank you God for providing for us' offerings. And the vow and voluntary offering were when you were walking with God and desired to show Him with a special offering. The peace offering was when you were right with God and your fellow Israelites and you shared that offering. All these offerings were thanking God for His provision and goodness to you. In other words, thank You God for your blessings in my life.

Again, it's God's way of saying, your fine, trust Me, it's going to be okay. I have better days for you coming and when they come You will thank Me. I enjoy your worship and our relationship.

In v.13 we read this to prepare us for v.14,

<sup>13</sup> “ 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. <sup>14</sup> 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. <sup>15</sup> 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: <sup>16</sup> The same laws and regulations will apply both to you and to the alien living among you.’ ”

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God wasn't only 'for' Israel, he was 'for' anyone who wanted to follow Him. This reminds Israel of their mission because,

### **God always wants more followers (vv.14-16)**

How are 'foreigners' [people not familiar with the true God] going to learn about God? People who know Him have to tell them. If the foreigner wants to know how to worship God, the Israelite has to explain who God is and why He wants people to worship Him the way He does. Notice the foreigners live among them, which means you have to befriend them and get to know them. But you don't change your belief in God for them. They have to follow God according to the Word of God also. God does not apologize for His Word and His ways. He is a good God and His ways are good and are for the good of everyone, if they choose to follow Him.

So, yes, God is still for His people even when we don't 'feel' like God is with you or don't think He's working in your life the way you think He should. If we think like that, go to the Word, find out you're wrong and understand God better. He's still for us even when He has to chastise us. And He wants more people to know Him.

In vv.17-36 God gives the people further instructions about something that the people I'm sure are still thinking about: what happens when we sin the next time? What's God going to do then?

## **Does God Really Forgive Our Sins?** **(15:17-36)**

Vv.17-21 sound like they should go with the previous section, except that there is a clear introduction that God is speaking something new to Moses for the people, and v.22 begins with 'but' or 'now if' connecting 22 and on with vv.16-21.

Vv.15-21 are reassuring instructions again about when they get into the land, they have to give God the first fruits of their harvest, "lifting them up" to the Lord. The lifting up part was done by the priests and they received a portion of that since they didn't own their own fields. This is how you thank God and provide for others every harvest season.

But what if we forget to do this or any other law (v.22)? There were a lot of laws for sure and no one is perfect. What if I forget a first fruits offering or any other law unintentionally? 40 more years in the wilderness??? The chapter reads like God's side of a conversation, addressing unwritten questions the Israelite had in his mind. So then, what if we forget to obey or sin without originally realizing it? Will God punish us? No, God says,

### **When we recognize we sinned and confess (vv.17-29)**

Vv. 22-26 deal with sins done unintentionally by the community while vv.27-29 deal with individual unintentional sins. While we are not given any examples, the key words here are 'atonement' which means the sacrifice covers the sinners and forgiven, God's assurance that the relationship is restored.

We see the principle applied in the New Testament as well. 1 John 1:9 assures us, followers of Jesus,

*<sup>9</sup> If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.*

James tells followers of Jesus as well,

*<sup>4:8</sup> Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. <sup>9</sup> Grieve, mourn and wail. Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom. <sup>10</sup> Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.*

We don't always immediately recognize when we sin, either. But the Spirit works in our hearts rewinding our mind to previous conversations and actions and in the process reveals words we said that we're harsher than we intended or thoughtless actions where God was absent from our minds. We are forgiven based on the sacrificed blood of Jesus Christ who paid for all our sins, past and future. Since God makes forgiveness possible, believe that we are forgiven when we confess and repent. We have to have a healthy balance of genuinely grieving over our sin but not beat ourselves up continually when we've confessed and received forgiveness. We may suffer consequences for our sins but if we are truly repentant, Lord-willing there will be healing.

But what about deliberate and defiant sin, as v.30 now deals with and defines as blasphemous sins; a clear and direct rejection of God's goodness and power?

*<sup>30</sup> "But anyone who sins defiantly, whether native-born or alien, blasphemes the Lord, and that person must be cut off from his people. <sup>31</sup> Because he has despised the Lord's word and broken his commands, that person must surely be cut off; his guilt remains on him."*

And then we have an illustration in vv.32-36 of a man collecting wood on the Sabbath, whom the Lord pronounces a permanent cutting off of His life. Why so harsh? Because it's defiant, blasphemous and a despising of God's Word.

### ***But not if people don't repent (vv.30-36)***

It's worth noting here that there was grace shown in the delay to discern God's will. But we have to remember, every day these people saw the cloud by day and fire by night and His miraculous provision of manna. The ten spies defiantly lied about the land and the people there and spread an evil report out of fear. God dealt harshly with them.

Sometimes God's people want to ignore God's harsh dealings. There have been prominent Christian leaders who over time have come out and declared that hell doesn't exist. But the bible is quite clear. Jesus Himself said

***Matt. 13:41** The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil. <sup>42</sup> They will throw them into the blazing furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.*

*Rev. 20:10 And the devil, who deceived them, was thrown into the lake of burning sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet had been thrown. They will be tormented day and night for ever and ever.*

*20:15 Anyone whose name was not found written in the book of life was thrown into the lake of fire.*

Anyone who despises God's words and rejects His Son and their only Saviour, Jesus does not receive the forgiveness. They will cut off forever. Num. 15 is primarily questions God's people have about their walk with God. Even after these assurances of God's continual presence and forgiveness, the last verses seem to answer any lingering doubts,

## **Yes But Can We Really, Really be Sure?** **(15:37-41)**

So God gives them a visible reminder that all His promises are true. Sew tassels on the corner of your garments to remind yourself of God's Words.

*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*

Each person had to put tassels on their garments. This reminds us that

***They (and we) must reassure ourselves what God's word says (vv.37-39a)***

You need to keep them on your garment to remind yourself of what God's Word says. Notice the individual application here. Moses wasn't responsible for their spiritual growth. Their parents would do their part, but it's up to each follower to read God's promises for themselves and bring to mind what God's Word says.

***So that we'll do what God's Word says (vv.39b-41)***

*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.' "*

*Ps. 119:11 I have treasured your word in my heart that I may not sin against you.*

*James 1:22 Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.*

You can lead a horse to water, but you can't make him drink. We've led you to spiritual water this morning. We watch and listen to messages and bible studies galore, but we alone must choose to do what God's Word says.

How did you apply God's Word this week? Did you remember His Word which says speak kindly to each other and it prevented unkind words from coming out? Did you start

worrying about someone you care about, and then stopped because you remembered Jesus says don't be anxious? Did you have an opportunity to talk about God this week and shared about His goodness and love? Were you tempted to sin and you remembered a verse that helped you not to sin?

If we can't answer yes to any of those questions, we need to start reading our Bibles so we remember what it says OR stop reading our Bibles because it's not changing our lives. Repent of your sins of puffing yourself up with Bible knowledge while failing to show love to those around you. Then start reading your bible so you won't intentionally sin.

God is for you always. He never leaves you nor forsakes you. Ask forgiveness when you blow it because His forgiveness is rooted in the sacrifice of His Son on the cross.

Stop doubting and reassure yourself every day that what God says in His Word is true. Learn what He says and do it by faith.

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