

Sacrifice for Sin

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Date: 21 September 2025

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[0 : 0 0] And please turn your Bibles back to Numbers chapter 15. Our passage today is the whole chapter, but we don't have time to go through the whole passage.

So we'll leave the last five verses out and we'll cover verse 1 to 36. Still a lot, but we'll try to do that.

Well, last week we read about a significant event in the history of God's people in the Old Testament. So just a reminder, God asked 12 spies to be sent to Canaan, to the promised land.

They went there and they returned. Ten of them said they shouldn't go into the land because the cities were fortified and the people were giants.

Only two of them, Joshua and Caleb, believed in God's promise to give them the land. And as a result, all Israelites grumbled.

[1 : 0 6] Same old story. They wanted to go back to Egypt and God became angry and he threatened to destroy them all except for Moses.

So Moses interceded. He appealed to God's character, who's merciful, slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love, but who is also just.

And God forgave them. He's not going to destroy them. But as a punishment, they would have to wander the wilderness for 40 years before they could enter the land.

Straight after that, at the end of the chapter, the Israelites rebelled again. This time they wanted to go into the land and attack, even though God told them not to attack.

And so at the end of the chapter, they were defeated. Now after that event, a natural question arises.

[2 : 0 7] The people still displayed rebellious hearts. What will God do? Is the whole enterprise going to fail? And then chapter 15 comes, our chapter, and here we see more clearly the character of God, who is merciful.

He is slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love, but he's also just. The opening in verse 1 to 2 is abrupt, but breathtaking.

Verse 1, The Lord said to Moses, Speak to the Israelites and say to them, After you enter the land, I am giving you as a home.

Even the context, that's astonishing. Chapter 14 ends with another rebellion and a defeat, and here God immediately says after that, After you enter the land, I am giving you.

He still holds on to his promise. He still wants to give them the land. In fact, in this passage, we see how many times God refers to himself as the Lord.

[3 : 2 3] The Lord literally means Yahweh. It's God's covenant name. The name that says, I am your God and you are my people. It's a relational name.

And look at how many times in this passage, God refers to himself not as I, but as the Lord. In the third person.

After multiple rebellions, God still revealed himself as the covenant God. He still desired a relationship with his people.

And indeed, that is highlighted further by what God says, the content of what God says. The instructions that God gives in this passage relate to the food offerings, or literally offerings by fire.

We have gone through this in the book of Leviticus. So, these offerings were necessary to maintain a peaceful and harmonious relationship with God.

[4 : 32] Perhaps it's helpful to think of the offerings as opportunities to bring meals, like to a king's party. Think of a potluck, right?

Everyone brings a meal for the sake of the fellowship. Everyone here is invited to contribute a meal, to have a feast, a fellowship with God.

And remember the context. After that rebellion, this is significant. God is highlighting the privilege. He still wants to invite them all to come, despite what they had done.

And that's why these offerings are called an aroma pleasing to the Lord. These offerings, these contributions, pleased the king.

It's amazing, isn't it? After that gross rebellion, God reminded them of this invitation to please him. God showed that he still desired fellowship with his people.

[5 : 46] He still desired to be pleased by his people. How gracious is he? Now, even though the general instructions for these offerings have been given in Leviticus, here there are additional instructions.

Namely, that every animal that is to be sacrificed is to be accompanied by the finest flour, olive oil, and wine as a drink offering.

Now, why add these instructions here and not in Leviticus? Again, because of the context.

God is reminding them that despite their rebellion, he is still going to be faithful to his promise, and the land that he was going to give them was going to be good and abundant.

It's going to be a land of milk and honey, and out of their abundance, they were expected to give. They would be able to give in abundance too. The things that are expected here in this chapter are expensive things.

[7 : 03] The finest flour, olive oil, wine. God is telling them, I'm still going to be faithful to my promise, and the land is still going to be abundant.

They're expected to give according to their means. As you can see on the screen, those who could afford larger animals, like a bull, were expected to bring more flour, oil, and wine.

And those who could only afford smaller animals were expected to bring less. Either way, everyone could give.

Everyone was invited to contribute. Remember that in the previous chapter, the spies said that the land of Canaan devoured those living in it.

Here, God insists, I'll show you that the land will be abundant, and you'll be able to bring offerings out of abundance.

[8 : 09] God is gracious. And then in verse 13 to 16, God extends this gracious invitation even further, not only to Israelites, but also to foreigners living amongst them.

They too could bring offerings. They too could have fellowship with God. And again, if we think of these offerings as invitation to contribute to the king's party, it's amazing that even the foreigners were invited to do that.

That even the foreigners could have a relationship with God as well. God is gracious.

God is gracious. God is gracious. God is gracious. And then in verse 17 to 21, another instruction was given, this time to bring the first batch of the ground meal, that is, the dough, as an offering to God.

And again, if we think about this as an opportunity to contribute, to a feast with God, what this symbolizes is, even those not working in the fields, but cooking and baking at home, were also invited to contribute to the feast with God, to have a relationship with Him.

[9 : 41] Isn't God gracious? Despite what all members of Israel did in the previous chapter, God showed His faithfulness in this chapter by promising to deliver them to the abundant land and by inviting them or reminding them of the invitation to feast and have a relationship with Him through bringing these offerings.

Isn't God merciful and abounding in steadfast love? And didn't God already show His mercy and steadfast love to us as well?

We have rebelled, haven't we? But what did God do? God sent His Son to die for us. Isn't that an act of mercy and steadfast love?

We no longer need to bring any bulls or rams or olive oil to the altar to be able to have a relationship with God. And that's the beauty of the gospel.

God's mercy and steadfast love have come to us. not because we have climbed up to His altar. Ultimately we can't. But because He came down here to us in Jesus.

[11 : 05] He has provided for us the Lamb, His own Son who ended the need for sacrifices once for all.

as Hebrews 10 says we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus once and for all and so we can feast with God and have an eternal relationship with him we don't even have to go to the Jerusalem temple anymore because our relationship with God and Jesus is so intimate that we have become the temple that his spirit lives in us and we in him how amazing is that now if we bring anything to the altar it's not an animal sacrifice it's a sacrifice of ourselves as a response of thanksgiving as Paul says in Romans 12 offer your bodies as a living sacrifice holy and pleasing to God

Paul also sometimes talks about his life being poured out like a drink offering not wine but his life as a drink offering and so even though everything has been provided in Jesus it is finished he is our final sacrifice and we can enjoy an eternal feast with God in an eternal relationship with him we are still invited to bring something to the feast and that is ourselves our souls our lives our all isn't that what the hymn says we bring them all to God in thanksgiving that's our offering and we want to do it because we love God and we desire that relationship with him we have tasted the goodness of God and we want to give ourselves to him what does that look like in practice?

it looks like a life of service to God using our energy our time our money our house our pets our intellect everything for the sake of serving God sometimes we serve God by cooking for our kids sometimes we serve God by cooking for those in need sometimes we serve God by physically working like physically helping our friend who's moving house for example sometimes we serve God by physically resting so we might have the energy to serve again sometimes we serve God by giving money to mission sometimes we serve God by going on mission in all these ways we bring our lives as living sacrifices not to earn God's love but in response to it because our relationship is already secured in the final sacrifice of Jesus and our offerings flow from knowing God who is merciful slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love he has given us much and he will give us much more when we get to our promised land in the new creation and so we bring much bring our lives to him but God is not just merciful and slow to anger he is also just and that's the focus of the next verses in verse 22 to 26

God makes provision for communal unintentional sin I'll read it for you verse 22 now if you as a community unintentionally fail to keep any of these commands the Lord gave Moses any of the Lord's commands to you through him from the day the Lord gave them and continuing through the generations to come 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 the priest is to make atonement for the whole Israelite community and they will be forgiven for it was not intentional and they have presented to the Lord for their wrong a food offering and a sin offering the whole Israelite community and the foreigners residing among them will be forgiven because all the people were involved in the unintentional wrong and then straight after that in verse 27

[16 : 35] God makes provision for personal unintentional sin verse 27 but if just one person sins unintentionally that person must bring a year old female goat for a sin offering the priest is to make atonement before the Lord for the one who erred by sinning unintentionally and then atonement has been made and when atonement has been made that person will be forgiven one and the same law applies to everyone who sins unintentionally whether a native born Israelite or a foreigner residing among you God is not just merciful and slow to anger he is just and he has to punish sins accordingly note that unintentional sin here doesn't just mean accidental sin because later on the opposite to unintentional sin is sinning high-handedly or sinning spitefully or stubbornly or sinning out of spite towards God and so here unintentional sin seems to mean sinning without spite towards God that is when we love God and we desire to to live for God but we sometimes still fail don't we and in that case there's provision in the Old Testament they could turn to God by bringing sacrifices in repentance and there would be forgiveness because their sins were paid for by the blood of the animals it's justice sins cannot be left without punishment but the punishment is falls on the on the sacrificed animals the animals died in their place it's justice but if the sin was high-handed verse 30 to 31 but anyone who sins defiantly or high-handedly whether native born or foreigner blasphemes the Lord and must be cut off from the people of Israel because they have despised the Lord's word and broken his commands they must surely be cut off their guilt remains on them again justice notice that there's no provision for sacrifices when someone sins high-handedly or stubbornly or out of spite because it assumes that they don't repent they sin out of spite for God they don't just sin accidentally they sin because they don't desire to obey they rebel because they reject God perhaps like the spies who died in the previous chapter they rejected

God's salvation by wanting to go back to Egypt and so there's no forgiveness for them because they did it out of spite they did not repent and the punishment in verse 31 is they must be cut off not only from the people of God but also from life because their guilt remained on them they did not return with repentance by bringing sacrifices and so their sin was not put on the sacrifices but on themselves it's justice now what does this high-handed sin look like well the story gives us an example of what a high-handed sin looks like in verse 32 while the Israelites were in the wilderness a man was found gathering wood on the

Sabbath day those who found him gathering wood brought him to Moses and Aaron and the whole assembly and they kept him in custody because it was not clear what should be done to him then the Lord said to Moses the man must die the whole assembly must stone him outside the camp so the assembly took him outside the camp and stoned him to death as the Lord commanded Moses at first what the man did seems harmless to our modern minds gathering wood on the Sabbath day really equals death but if we think about the context this was a high-handed sin he was gathering wood for what for lighting fire and verse 32 highlights the context they were in the wilderness meaning they were living in tents very close to each other everyone would have been able to see the fire or the smoke the man knew that everyone would have been able to see the fire or the smoke this man was planning to break

God's law publicly without trying to hide it this was not a secret slip he was planning to parade his obedience and basically making the statement that God's law meant nothing to him and also this is significant in the context of the previous rebellions because every single time the Israelites rebelled what did they say they always said it's better for us to go back to Egypt in slavery rather than living in freedom with this God now by gathering wood on the Sabbath this man was making the same statement the Sabbath was given by God to free them from having to work seven days a week like slaves which they had to do in Egypt and here this man is saying through this act in this particular context that he did not want the freedom of rest that

God had given him this was a high handed sin in that particular context not every time a man gathers wood on Sabbath day is a high handed sin but this particular sin in this particular context was and so the punishment applied to him he was to be cut off from the people and from life God is not only merciful he is also just and here his justice was expressed through giving the man over to what he desired you don't want my law then you don't belong with my people you don't want my gift of life of freedom then you will be cut off from life God is just and haven't we seen

[24 : 13] God's justice most clearly in Jesus when we sin we do that every day but we return to him over and over again in repentance because we still love him and desire a relationship with him what does God do God forgives us because that is justice because he has given us the means of atonement in the cross of Jesus Jesus has paid it all and so it's justice that we don't need to pay it without our own death justice has been served in Jesus but if we continually reject Jesus if we sin high handedly that is we despise him we continually don't want anything to do with him then sure God is also just if we don't want the payment for sins that

God has given us as offered us in Jesus for free then justice means we must pay for our own sins and that is hell hell is God saying to us let your will be done because we continually reject the payment made in Jesus the punishment that this man who was breaking the Sabbath suffered was a type it's a pointer to the eternal punishment in hell don't let that happen to you and so here in Numbers 15 God reveals both sides of his character he is merciful slow to anger abounding in steadfast love but he is also just punishing those who reject him by giving them over to what they want and so now the question is this knowing that

God is merciful slow to anger abounding in steadfast love but he is also just and punishing sin will you turn to him if you haven't done so and receive his loving mercy in Jesus or if you have done that will you stay in it will you stay in his mercy and steadfast love by holding on to Jesus or will you reject him and face his justice on your own let's pray Father we thank you that through this story you have revealed to us both sides of your character that you are merciful slow to anger abounding in steadfast love but you are also just and we thank you that you have revealed those those two sides more clearly on the cross in the name of

Jesus Christ we pray amen up