

Reformation Fellowship Notes • March 31, 2019

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Handout #8

Numbers 14 & 15

I. Introduction

- A. From chapter 11 until now, the concern about the foreign element in their midst must be kept in mind.
 - 1. Much that is said is in reference to that issue.
 - a) Miriam had argued that the foreigners were the problem.
 - (1) Events and statements in the text are pushing back on that claim.
- B. Last week we read about the spies going into the land.
 - 1. We could tell from the reports how the people would react.
 - 2. Now we will read about their reaction and how God responds.

II. Numbers 14:1-4

- A. The reaction of the people to the report:
 - 1. The response was complete despair.
 - a) Lifted up their voices
 - b) Wept
 - c) Grumbled
 - (1) We have seen this verb many times in Exodus and Numbers.
 - 2. To have died any death before this time would have been better.
 - a) We should have died in Egypt or the wilderness.
 - 3. They thought their fate was clear.
 - a) We will die by the sword.
 - b) Our wives and children will be plunder.
 - 4. We need new leadership that will take us back to Egypt.
 - a) We may have been slaves, but we had a measure of comfort and security.
 - (1) Undervalues freedom
 - (a) More about this at the end
 - 5. The text makes it clear that this revolt cannot be attributed to the foreign element.
 - a) All the congregation
 - b) All the sons of Israel
 - c) The whole congregation

III. Numbers 14:5-10

- A. Aaron and Moses bow down—
 - 1. In the presence of great wickedness;
 - 2. Fall down before God in recognition that he is our creator and righteous judge.

- a) God needs to be given his due even if only by Moses and Aaron.
 - b) Something terrible could very well happen.
- B. Caleb and Joshua tore their clothes.
- 1. They are mourning the reaction of their countrymen.
 - 2. They try to set the record straight.
 - a) The land is very good.
 - b) God can lead us there and help us conquer—
 - (1) If God is pleased with us.
 - 3. So don't rebel against God.
 - a) We can defeat the inhabitants.
 - (1) Their protection is gone.
 - (2) God will help us.
 - (a) We will be the ones taking them as plunder.
 - 4. In sum, don't be afraid of them.
- C. The people's response was to want to stone them.
- 1. This became a pattern.
 - a) Whenever prophets told them to do the right thing, they wanted to kill the messenger.
- D. Then God appeared to all the people in the Tabernacle.
- 1. This must have been ominous.
 - a) It is always easier to do wickedness when we convince ourselves that we are hidden from the holy God.

IV. Numbers 14:11-19

- A. God spoke to Moses.
- 1. How long will they refuse to believe?
 - a) After all the signs
 - 2. I will destroy them with pestilence.
 - a) I will make you into a nation greater than them.
 - 3. This is very similar to God's response after the incident with the Golden Calf.
- B. Moses appeals to God for mercy like he did at Mount Sinai.
- 1. If you wipe them out, the nations will say that you did this because you could not deliver the land over to them.
 - a) Even though you are uniquely close to them
 - (1) In their midst
 - (2) Seen eye to eye
 - (3) Lead them with a cloud and a pillar of fire
 - b) This point is similar to the first point Moses made on Mt Sinai.
 - (1) Moses followed this by recalling the patriarchs and God's promises to them.

- (2) This time he does not raise that issue but moves on in a slightly different direction.
2. Show the greatness of your power by showing your *hesed* and forgiveness.
 - a) While not abandoning the standard of punishment for wrong doing, show your slowness to anger by forgiving them.
 - (1) God is not infinitely merciful.
 - (a) To be infinitely merciful would be to be unjust.
 - b) Pardon them like you have several times before.
3. Moses seems to think that in this situation, it is particularly important to stress the value of God displaying his forbearance.
4. Moses never argues that the Israelites should be saved because of their merit.

V. Numbers 14:20-25

- A. God pardoned the people as Moses asked.
 1. God responded positively to the idea that his glory should be displayed.
 - a) Especially the glory of his forbearance
 - b) The earth will be filled with the glory of the Lord.
 - (1) This goes beyond what Moses had suggested.
 2. However, wickedness will not go unpunished.
 - a) All those who have seen God's signs but who have spurned God and don't follow him will perish.
 - (1) They will not see the Promised land.
 3. However, Caleb will see the Promised Land.
 - a) He has a different spirit.
 - b) He has followed me fully.
 - c) He and his descendants will possess the land.
 - (1) They will be given the land he scouted (Hebron).
 4. Why is Joshua not mentioned?
 - a) One of the main points of this section is that a member of the foreign element was actually the most faithful.
 - b) But Joshua, rather than Caleb, was made to be Moses' successor.
 - c) Joshua will be named in the next passage.
- B. The people are to turn and go back.
 1. If they go ahead, they will soon encounter Canaanite and Amalekite settlements.
 2. They should go back the way they came.
 - a) This is the very thing they had wanted to do.

VI. Numbers 14:26-38

- A. God has had it with the Israelites.
 1. How long shall I bear these grumblers?

- a) Like verse 11
- 2. I have heard their complaints.
 - a) As you have spoken, I will do to you.
 - (1) The various parts of the punishment are ironically connected with the people's complaints.
 - (2) All the men of fighting age will die in the wilderness.
 - (a) These are the ones who feared dying in the attempt to take the land.
 - (b) Caleb and Joshua will be the only exceptions.
 - (3) Your children will possess the land—
 - (a) The ones you thought would be plunder for the Canaanites,
 - (b) But they will eke out a nomadic living in the wilderness for 40 years because of you.
 - (i) One year for every day your spies were searching the land.
- 3. This is what I am going to do.
 - a) There will be no negotiation.
- B. Fate of the spies
 - 1. They died of a plague before the Lord.
 - a) The thing they feared if they were to obey happened to them.
 - 2. Joshua and Caleb were spared.

VII. Numbers 14:39-45

- A. The people mourned.
 - 1. They are mourning not their faithlessness, but their fate.
- B. They went up to the ridge overlooking the Promised Land.
 - 1. We sinned.
 - 2. Now we will go up to the place God promised.
- C. Moses challenged them.
 - 1. God said to turn back.
 - 2. If you go, you will be struck down.
 - a) God will not be with you (2x).
 - 3. The Amalekites and Canaanites will rout you.
- D. They attacked anyway.
 - 1. Moses and the ark of the covenant did not go.
 - 2. They were routed.

VIII. Introductory comments to chapter 15

- A. After the debacle of chapter 14, there must have been a significant time lapse.
 - 1. These laws assume a people settled in the land.

- a) It assumes agriculture as a significant part of the economy.

The whole of chapter 15 is best seen as a response to the rebellion of chapters 13–14. At the end of those chapters the future of the people is in doubt, the whole people has been disobedient to Yahweh; an entire generation will die in the wilderness as a payment for sin. Ch. 15 begins with a word of hope to the new generation: *When you come into your dwelling land ...* (v. 2; cf. v. 18). What follows is for the new generation in the new land. Furthermore it is still Yahweh who speaks. God is still determined to bring them into the land (v. 2b). The whole chapter shows that fullness of life is still to be had by exact obedience to Yahweh’s word. When the people come into the land of Canaan they will have enough agricultural abundance to afford these offerings of fine flour, oil, and wine for every appropriate sacrifice.¹³ (Ashley, p. 277)

B. Why these laws here?

- 1. They are all addressed to a settled people.
- 2. Clarifying the law is an on-going process.
- 3. The laws which God gave earlier are still valid (covenant still in place).

IX. Numbers 15:1-13

A. Moses is still the intermediary.

B. This is applicable only after they take possession of the land.

- 1. An optimistic note:
 - a) “the land which I am giving you”
- 2. This is for those who are coming into adulthood.

In the light of 14:29, the ordinance that follows is obviously directed to the new generation, and, since it appears to be directed at adults rather than children, one might assume a time well into the wilderness-wandering period (although the nature of the case forbids a firm statement on this matter). (Ashley, p. 278)

C. First adjustment to the law

- 1. Specification of amounts for libations and grain offerings
 - a) This is applicable when they are giving peace offerings (*zevah shelamim*)
 - (1) “to make a soothing odor to the Lord”
 - (a) Borrowing the language of the common Middle Eastern culture
 - (b) An offering acceptable (pleasing) to God
 - b) With each peace offering a certain amount of fine flour and wine depending on the animal sacrificed

<u>Animal</u>	<u>Amount of Fine Flour</u>	<u>Amount of Wine/Oil</u>
lamb	1/10 ephah (1.6–2 dry qts.)	1/4 hin (.8–1 liq. qt.)
ram	2/10 ephah (3.3–4 dry qts.)	1/3 hin (1–1.4 liq. qts.)
bull	3/10 ephah (4.9–6 dry qts.)	1/2 hin (1.6–2 liq. qts.)

2. If the sacrifice was a whole burnt offering, the animal, the flour and the wine were all burned on the altar
3. If the sacrifice was a peace offering,
 - a) A small amount was poured out on the altar;
 - b) The rest was eaten by the priests.
4. Summary
 - a) Animals listed chiastically

X. Numbers 15:14-16

- A. Natives and *gerim* are the same before the Lord with respect to offerings.
 1. “There is to be one law and ordinance for you and for the alien who sojourns with you.”
 - a) Complete equality before the law for foreigners.
 - (1) Those who have come to identify with the Israelites
 2. This is repeated several times in this chapter.

XI. Numbers 15:17-21

- A. A second adjustment to the law
 1. Giving of first fruits
 - a) When you come into the land
 - (1) This assumes that the Israelites will take the land.
 - b) The first of your dough
 - (1) A first fruits offering from every batch of dough
 - c) This applies to craftsmen as well as farmers.
 - (1) Recognizes the evolution of a more prosperous economy

XII. Numbers 15:22-26

- A. Third adjustment to the law
 1. Unwittingly violating the law
 - a) If a community does unwittingly sin
 - (1) I cannot envision how this would happen.
 - (2) With respect to all the commandments given by God to the people of Israel
 - (3) Offer one bull (with grain and libation) as burnt offering, and one goat as sin offering
 - (4) Priest offers the sacrifices.
 - (5) They will be forgiven.

(a) Native Israelite and *ger***XIII. Numbers 15:27-31**

- A. If an individual unintentionally fails to observe these commandments
 - 1. Offer one-year old female goat as offering
 - a) Priest presents this offering.
 - 2. The rule will be the same for native Israelites and for *gerim*.
- B. Acts of defiance, blaspheming the Lord
 - 1. Such person will be cut off from his people.
 - 2. His guilt shall be on him.
 - 3. This rule will be the same for native Israelites and for *gerim*.
- C. What is new here?
 - 1. Most of this is covered in Lev. 4-5.

The main purposes of Num. 15 are the addition of the whole burnt offering in the case of the individual (v. 24), the application of the law to the sojourner (vv. 26, 29), and, most importantly, the explicit statement that *sins with a high hand*, i.e., sins of open rebellion (such as those of ch. 14), are not sacrificially expiable (vv. 30–31). (Ashley, p. 285)

- 2. What does it mean to “sin with a high hand?”
 - a) Blaspheming the Lord
 - b) Despising the word of the Lord
 - c) Breaking his commandment

This kind of rebellion therefore differs from the intentional sin described in Lev. 5:20–26 (Eng. 6:1–7) for which a reparation offering may be made, “when the offender feels guilty” (5:23, 26).²² The sinner with a high hand feels no guilt; therefore the offense is not sacrificially expiable. (Ashley, p. 286)

- d) For such a person guilt cannot be removed.
- 3. This was, at least in part, prompted by the rebellion in chapter 14.
 - a) There is provision for unintentional sin.
 - b) But for outright rebellion there is no forgiveness.
- 4. And the on-going rebuttal to the concerns about the foreign element raised by Miriam

XIV. Numbers 15:32-36

- A. Man caught collecting wood on the sabbath
 - 1. While the sons of Israel were in the wilderness

- a) This appears to have been written after they moved out of the wilderness.
2. Is this an example of a sin committed with a high hand?
3. Is the question what is the appropriate punishment?
4. Is the question whether wood gathering is wrong or only building a fire?
5. Put to death by stoning
 - a) Outside the camp
 - b) Community solidarity

XV. Numbers 15:37-41

- A. Wear tassels as a reminder to do the law.
- B. One way to avoid unwitting violations of the law is to know the law well.
- C. To follow the law is to be holy to your God.
- D. This suggests that following the law is an act of gratitude.
 1. God freed them from slavery.
 - a) But these people don't recognize how wonderful that was.

XVI. Conclusion

- A. Why are the laws stuck here?
 1. Earlier in Numbers there was an oddly located set of laws (5-6).
 - a) I argued that they were
 - (1) A reminder of the importance of the law
 - (2) An indication of the on-going nature of the revelation of the law.
 2. Here I think they are doing that same thing.
 3. But there is another purpose.
 - a) Reassurance for the people of Israel
 - (1) When our children were rebellious, we always did two things:
 - (a) Be more strict and consistent enforcing rules
 - (b) Spend more time with the child and find opportunities to show love
 - b) And tucked into this chapter are hints that the foreign element is fully a part of Israel.
- B. Why do the Israelites keep rebelling?
 1. What do they find wrong with their life in the desert?
 - a) What have been their complaints?
 - (1) Lack of water
 - (2) Lack of meat
 - (3) Fear of being led to their destruction
 - b) They are constantly comparing their current situation with their life in Egypt.
 - (1) In Egypt they had a variety of foods.
 - (2) Meat could be had for free.
 - (3) So they were better off there.

2. What do we know about their day-to-day life in Egypt?
 - a) Not much
 - b) They appear to have had a measure of private life.
 - (1) They were not living in labor camps.
 - (2) But they were slaves.
 - c) We have information about the time when Moses was born.
 - (1) The Egyptians killed Hebrew babies.
 - d) When Moses asked the Pharaoh to let his people go
 - (1) Israelites were used as labor force to build cities.
 - (2) The Israelites were oppressed.
 - (3) And Pharaoh made things even worse.
 - e) Apparently, they had enough food.
3. The desert is a food-scarce environment.
 - a) Hard to find food and water
 - b) Could run out at any time
 - c) They are a long way from a place where food can be found.
 - d) So they fear for their lives.
 - (1) Slavery in Egypt may have been miserable, but they did not fear starving to death.
4. If we focus on the above facts, it is easy to empathize with them.
5. But there are other very important facts.
 - a) In Egypt they were slaves.
 - (1) They were constantly having to do the bidding of their overlords.
 - (2) They have been freed from this.
 - b) They never actually ran out of food or water.
 - (1) God provided for their needs when they complained.
 - (2) They received manna on a daily basis.
 - (a) Adequate even if a little boring
 - c) YHWH was with them.
 - (1) Cloud and the pillar of fire were signs of his constant presence.
 - (2) God had shown himself to be powerful.
 - (a) Passover, splitting the Red Sea
 - (3) God had shown himself to be merciful.
 - (a) Bringing them out of Egypt
 - (b) Forgiving them at Mount Sinai
 - (4) God has promised to give them a very good land.
6. Why do they rebel?
 - a) They allow their fears to run wild.
 - b) They don't reflect on who God is and what he has done for them.
 - (1) They take God for granted.
 - c) They are fixated on immediate gratification of their needs instead of looking at the bigger picture.