

May 29

Scriptures: Read Numbers 15 & 16

Key Verse: "...By this you shall know that the Lord has sent me to do all these works, for I have not done them of my own will." (Numbers 16:28)

Overview

After the rebellion at Kadesh (Num.14), the people needed to be reminded of the commands of the Lord regarding sacrifices, and to know that these commands were still obligatory, even though they were to remain in the wilderness and would not be entering the Promised Land for forty years. Twice in chapter 15, the Lord reaffirms His intention to give them the land (15:2, 18), but it would be their children who would enjoy it; it was these younger people who would need these teachings reaffirmed.

God made provision of atonement for sins committed in ignorance, but it was clearly shown that for deliberate sins committed with evil intent, no sacrifice was acceptable, and that person was to be "completely cut off" (15:31). An example was given of a man stoned to death for despising the command of the Lord concerning the observance of the Sabbath. This may seem harsh, but we must remember these were rebellious people, and it was necessary to strictly enforce the laws or total anarchy would result.

Chapter 15 stresses that the non-Israelite, or stranger who lived among them, was to be welcomed to follow in the ways of the Lord and have fellowship with Him (Rom.3:29). They were, however, also expected to follow the same rules, for God had only one law for both a native-born Israelite and a gentile (15:14-16, 26, 29-30), that all might enjoy the privileges.

In chapter 16, we read of one of the most well planned rebellions against Moses. They had not learned from the lesson taught to Aaron and Miriam (Num.12). In this conspiracy there were two factions against Moses; (1) A religious revolt that resented the superior rights of the priesthood was led by Korah (a cousin of Moses; Ex.6:18-21), who was privileged as a Kohathite to assist the priests in an important service of the Tabernacle (4:4). That was not enough for Korah: he coveted the position of the priests. Many of his followers were other overly pious Levites, as well as some men from the general congregation. (2) But there was also a political revolt. Those people resented Moses' leadership and failure to bring them into the Promised Land (they blamed him for God's judgment). This was led by two Reubenites, Dathan and Abiram, who gathered much support from the community by spreading discontent. Both groups united in the uprising and gathered about them 250 influential men of the community. They challenged Moses' authority and charged him with exalting himself over all others whom they said were, "holy every one of them, and the Lord in among them" (16:3). Moses answered them wisely and challenged them, for only God could make the decision of "who is His and who is holy" (16:5).

The Bible says, concerning God's wrath, "it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (Heb.10:31); "For the Lord will judge His people and have compassion on His servants, when He sees that their power is gone" (Deut.32:36). In three ways, the Lord vindicated Moses, making the decision clear that he was definitely ordained by Him to be their leader, and only

Aaron and his sons, whom He appointed, were to be the priests. (1) God consumed with fire the 250 arrogant men who had joined with Korah, presuming they were worthy to offer incense before Him. Their flattened censers would serve to always remind the people of the cost of rebellion against the Lord and His appointed leaders and priests (16:38). (2) God caused the earth to swallow up Dathan, Abiram, and Korah, along with their household (however, it seems Korah's own sons had not supported him, for later we read that they did not die at that time, Numbers 26:11). (3) After these displays of God's wrath, intended to restore Moses to power and his high position, the Israelites accused him about the severity of the punishments (as though he was the cause). God's anger was once again aroused and a plague began among the people, and before Moses' and Aaron's intercession became effective, nearly 15,000 had died.

Today, many people are in rebellion against God by rejecting His Son Jesus Christ and the authority of His inspired Word, but a great judgment day is coming when all will know the truth and God will show clearly those who are His and those who are not (Matt.25:31-34, 46).

Prayer

Lord, You are God whom we do fear. You judge sin most harshly. Thank You that You became a human being in the person of Your Son, Jesus, and took the judgment for our sin and rebellion upon Yourself. Grant us the grace and humility to daily recognize and acknowledge this fact before You.