

# Planning Ahead



## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Numbers 15; 2 Cor. 2:15, 16; Gal. 3:26–29; Eph. 5:2; Col. 3:11.*

**Memory Text:** “But I said unto their children in the wilderness, Walk ye not in the statutes of your fathers, neither observe their judgments, nor defile yourselves with their idols: I am the Lord your God; walk in my statutes, and keep my judgments, and do them” (*Ezekiel 20:18, 19*).

At the beginning of Numbers 15, the scenes of tumult and rebellion, of shame and defeat (at the hands of the Amalekites and Canaanites), have now faded. The people have learned, the hard way, the suffering that disobedience brings.

The masses are now on the way back into the wilderness out of which they had first come. And it's at this point that the Lord communicates with Moses as the chapter opens: “Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, When ye be come into the land of your habitations, which I give unto you . . .” (*vs. 2*).

Despite the major setback, the promise was still sure: God would bring His people into the Promised Land. Of that there was no question!

Also, we come across some of the special instructions given to God's chosen people. However unique the circumstances, however unique the specific commands, there are spiritual lessons and principles given not only for them but for us, as well.

*\*Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, November 7.*

## Thankfulness

**Read** Numbers 15:1–10, 18–21. What were the purposes of these offerings? What did they represent? What was the purpose of bringing oil, drink, and grain, as well?

---



---

The Hebrew term for “meat/grain” is *minchah*, meaning “gift” or “tribute.” It included the flour, olive oil, and wine, representing the offerer’s gratitude for God’s blessings on the fields and crops (*see Deut. 8:18*).

In the context of Numbers 15, these directions really carried a promise to the younger generation 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 establish vineyards on the hills and orchards of olive trees and other fruits such as figs and pomegranates. In other words, these nonbloody offerings helped point them to the material blessings that were to be theirs were they to remain faithful. No doubt, all these thoughts were wrapped up in their sacrifices to the Lord, which helped point them day by day to the land of promise that awaited them.

**How** did the apostle Paul apply this concept in New Testament times? *Rom. 12:1; 2 Cor. 2:15, 16; Eph. 5:2.*

---



---

However difficult their circumstances at present, the Lord wanted His people to cultivate an attitude of praise and gratitude 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 your present woes, why is it important to dwell on God’s goodness, love, and care? How does keeping the Cross before you help you better realize God’s love and care for you, even in the worst of times? What things can you be grateful for now, regardless of your situation? Why is dwelling on these blessings so important for us?**

---

## *The Lesson in Brief*

► **Key Text:** *Ezekiel 20:18, 19*

► **The Student Will:**

**Know:** Examine how God guided and instructed the Israelites through their lengthy time of discipline in the desert.

**Feel:** Appreciate God's attention to individual circumstances as He guides and teaches us.

**Do:** Present our lives as a living sacrifice in thankful, joyful service, following Christ's example.

► **Lesson Outline:**

### I. Know: Prescribed Obedience

**A** Though Israel was being punished for rebellion, God continued to give them instruction by carefully outlining how to respond properly in thankful worship. What other instructions did God give on relating to strangers, deliberate and inadvertent sins, and what to wear as reminders of His law?

**B** How would these specific instructions aid a weak and ignorant people, prone to doubt and rebellion?

### II. Feel: The Importance of Individual Experience

**A** What can we learn from God's distinctions between deliberate and inadvertent sins and the shocking picture of a community stoning a man?

**B** How does God treat us as individuals?

### III. Do: Our Lives in Christ, a Pleasing Aroma

**A** Paul reminds us that as we live our lives in Christ, it is the aroma of His sacrifice that ascends to the Father on our behalf. What can we do each day to keep in mind the sacrifice that God, through the Son, has made for us?

**B** Since we don't operate under the sacrificial system, what does God expect us to do with inadvertent sins, as well as with conscious ones?

► **Summary:** We forever can be grateful that our God is a God of order and detail in both mercy and justice.

## The Stranger Within Your Gates

One of the more radical ideas of ancient Israel dealt with their attitude toward strangers, toward those who were not of their heritage or of their faith.

**What** specific commands were given to the second generation of Israelites as they looked forward to settling in Canaan? *Num. 15:14–16*. How is this same principle revealed in the New Testament? *Gal. 3:26–29, Col. 3:11*.

---

---

The “stranger” or foreigner would be a person who settled among the Israelites and who fully accepted the faith and, if male, duly was circumcised. They were to be treated and loved as if they were Israelites. “One ordinance” or “one law” shall be for you, and “for the stranger that sojourneth with you” (*Num. 15:16*). Talk about inclusiveness!

**In** the dedicatory prayer at the opening of the first temple, what request did Solomon make of God in regard to non-Israelites? *1 Kings 8:41–43*. What does Isaiah have to say about the strangers who sought to worship at the temple? *Isa. 56:6, 7*.

---

---

When one considers the whole purpose of God calling out His people and establishing them in the Promised Land, these texts all make perfect sense. Israel had to maintain its distinctive teaching and truths, the teaching and truths that made them God’s special representatives to the pagan world. Yet at the same time, they needed to be open and receptive to the pagans who wanted to learn about their God and follow Him.

In many ways, our church today must do that same thing. We have specific truths to teach the world, truths that we need to guard and protect, and yet at the same time, we have to be willing to embrace those who are seeking to know the Lord and His message for this time.

**In what ways is it so easy to be exclusive, judgmental, and condemnatory of those who don’t see things as we do? How can we avoid that attitude, and yet at the same time, protect the truths we have been given?**

## Learning Cycle

### ► **STEP 1—Motivate**

**Key Concept for Spiritual Growth:** In spite of our unfaithfulness, God is still merciful and stands by His promises to us.

**Just for Teachers:** After reading the following excerpt, discuss the nature of God’s mercy and give class members a chance to offer personal examples of those who have extended mercy toward them.

Former televangelist Jim Bakker tells about what occurred shortly after his release from prison:

“When I was transferred to my last prison, Franklin [Graham] said he wanted to help me out when I got out—with a job, a house to live in, and a car. It was my fifth Christmas in prison. I thought it over and said, ‘Franklin, you can’t do this. It will hurt you. The Grahams don’t need my baggage.’ He looked at me and said, ‘Jim, you were my friend in the past and you are my friend now. If anyone doesn’t like it, I’m looking for a fight.’

“So when I got out of prison the Grahams sponsored me and paid for a house for me to live in and gave me a car to drive. The first Sunday out, Ruth Graham called the halfway house I was living in at the Salvation Army and asked permission for me to go to the Montreat Presbyterian Church with her that Sunday morning. When I got there, the pastor welcomed me and sat me with the Graham family. There were like two whole rows of them—I think every Graham aunt and uncle and cousin was there. The organ began playing and the place was full except for a seat next to me. Then the doors opened and in walked Ruth Graham. She walked down that aisle and sat next to inmate 07407-058. I had only been out of prison 48 hours, but she told the world that morning that Jim Bakker was her friend.”—“The Re-education of Jim Bakker,” *Christianity Today*, December 7, 1998, cited in *Perfect Illustrations for Every Topic and Occasion* (Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 2002), pp. 182, 183.

### ► **STEP 2—Explore**

#### **Bible Commentary**

**I. Thankfulness** (Review Num. 15:1–21; Rom. 12:1; 2 Cor. 2:15, 16; Eph. 5:2 with the class.)

CONTINUED ►

## Sins of Ignorance

We must keep in mind that the younger generation that God is addressing in this chapter (*Numbers 15*) was born in slavery. Thus, they had been influenced by the Egyptian culture that surrounded them, as well as by their parents, who as slaves also were influenced by that same culture. Hence, they had a lot of bad things to unlearn and a lot of new and good things to learn.

**If the congregation became aware that, as a group, they had erred from the Lord’s commandments, what were they to do? What is the significance of the fact that they had to bring a “sin” offering to the Lord for what was done out of ignorance?** *Num. 15:22–27.*

---

The sin offering atoned for their sin. The burnt offering represented a renewal of the congregation’s consecration to God. How interesting that the Lord would distinguish between things done unintentionally and that which was deliberate. At the same time, however, even the things done unintentionally were deemed “sin” and needed to be atoned for.

**How did an individual secure atonement for his or her sin of ignorance? How did this procedure differ from that of the congregation?** *Num. 15:27–29.*

---

“There are those who have known the pardoning love of Christ and who really desire to be children of God, yet they realize that their character is imperfect, their life faulty, and they are ready to doubt whether their hearts have been renewed by the Holy Spirit. To such I would say, Do not draw back in despair. We shall often have to bow down and weep at the feet of Jesus because of our shortcomings and mistakes, but we are not to be discouraged. Even if we are overcome by the enemy, we are not cast off, not forsaken and rejected of God. No; Christ is at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us. Said the beloved John, ‘These things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.’”—Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, p. 64.

**How often do you tend to doubt whether you truly have been renewed by the Holy Spirit? What happened at the Cross that should give you the courage to press on, even when filled with doubt about your own salvation?** *See Rom. 5:6–8.*

*Learning Cycle* CONTINUED

While some other religions view the body as something to be disdained or as something from which we should escape, Christianity views the body and all the physical aspects of Creation as gifts from God over which we are His appointed managers (stewards). The promises of God take on physical dimensions—land, material wealth, and physical health.


It should not surprise us, then, that the human expressions of thankfulness for God’s gifts assumed physical dimensions, as well. The sacrifices that acknowledged God’s grace were things that one could touch, smell, and taste. The laws regarding the offerings of thanksgiving contained a latent promise of future prosperity and success. While in their wilderness wandering they would not have ready access to oil, flour, and grape juice that represented the productivity of a settled population, a time would come when God would fulfill His promises in spite of their unfaithfulness.

**Consider This:** When we hear an offering appeal, are we tempted to think, *Oh, they just want my money?* How would our attitude change if we recognized that our physical health and material wealth are the undeserved gifts entrusted to us by a God who mercifully forgives our unfaithfulness?

**II. The Stranger Within Your Gates** (Review Num. 15:14–16, 1 Kings 8:41–43, Isa. 56:1–8, Luke 10:25–37, Gal. 3:26–29, Eph. 2:11–18, Col. 3:11 with the class.)

When the human heart recognizes the depth of God’s mercy and accepts the forgiveness He freely offers, the most immediate response is to thank God for all He has done. The next part of our response to grace involves our fellow human beings. If God has forgiven us—and even the “smallest” sin is worthy of eternal condemnation—what right do we have to elevate ourselves above our fellow human beings? Could we rightfully do so on the basis of skin color, extent of material possessions, language, family connections, or any other superficial characteristic? Is it not true that we are *naturally* closer to a person of a contrasting skin tone who shares our commitment to Jesus than we are to someone of identical skin tone who rejects the Lord?

The fundamental basis, then, for accepting others is that we all equally are related to God, but there is also an evangelistic purpose. The world equates performance and status with acceptance. In Satan’s sin-based economy, this dysfunctional view has been responsible for the needless pain and psychological problems that come from exclusion.

CONTINUED 

## Sins of Defiance

**Read** Numbers 15:30, 31. What’s happening here, and what lessons can we draw from it for ourselves? Why does the punishment seem so harsh? Where is grace in all this?

---

---

The phrase in the Hebrew is “with a high hand,” a posture of arrogance and rebellion. Israel truly sinned “with a high hand” against the Lord at Kadesh. But God commuted the death sentence to banishment in the wilderness. The point is, sins were taken very seriously by the Lord. Often in cases like this, those who afterward say that they are sorry, are, in fact, sorry only because they got caught, not sorry for the sins themselves. Against such hardness of heart, what can the Lord do? Sin truly must be repented of before it can be forgiven.

**Read** Numbers 15:32–36. Why do you think the Lord had the whole congregation take part in this execution? What spiritual lesson can we draw from this?

---

---

It must have been a difficult thing for a group of Israelites to stone one of their members to death. Evidently God was attempting to show His people the seriousness of sin. “The wages of sin is death” (*Rom. 6:23*). Perhaps, too, He sought to show them the corporate nature of their community and that what they did influenced others around them. What each one did, individually, still impacted the welfare of the whole. After all, was it not because of the complaining of some people that the whole camp was made to suffer by remaining in the wilderness?

As Christians, we especially need to be aware of the fact that our deeds, be they for good or for evil, impact others, as well as ourselves.

Meanwhile, though in the theocracy of ancient Israel death often came immediately, we shouldn’t be fooled. Even though we aren’t immediately struck dead for our defiance, that does not mean that we are not going to reap our just rewards one day.

**How ready and willing are you to repent, confess, and admit your sins? Or, on the other hand, how often do you find yourself justifying your sins for one reason or another? Why is that so spiritually dangerous?**



*Learning Cycle* CONTINUED

The gospel offers to include all who will come, regardless of past performance or worldly status. In Christ everyone is somebody!

**Consider This:** What real life steps can I take to practice acceptance of those who are not like me, even of those who have hurt me?

### III. Sins of Ignorance, Sins of Defiance (Review Num. 15:22–36, Luke 12:42–48 with the class.)

Here, as Numbers 15:22–36 shows, God establishes a principle of law that is reflected in the laws of modern nations even to this day. Motive and attitude are considered when establishing the degree of culpability.

Jesus enunciated the same principle in the parable of the servants recorded in Luke 12. For example, if an intoxicated person hits and kills a person with his car, he would be convicted of manslaughter. If, however, the prosecutor can establish that the driver intentionally ran over the deceased, the driver is guilty of murder. Note that in either case, a crime has been committed. The punishment, however, in the second scenario would be greater than in the first. Sin, whether intentional or not, *always* requires atonement, but woe be to the person who arrogantly and defiantly opposes God.

**Consider This:** When the bills for sin are mailed out, not only is the sinner billed, but family and friends also are billed. How should this affect us when we are confronted with temptation?

## ► STEP 3—Apply

**Just for Teachers:** In spite of our best intentions, everyone has sinned and fallen short of God's glory, His ideal for His children. The Bible is full of examples of people who have struggled with temptation and lost (Rom. 7:14–25).

This week's story is just another example of God's mercy and patience with chameleon-like human willpower. In spite of many scriptural examples of God's mercy, we often are emotionally incapable of feeling His grace toward us. Read Romans 5:6–11 and 1 John 3:19, 20 in preparation for the following activity.

**Activity:** In the Bible we see God using very simple illustrations from the physical world to teach spiritual concepts and principles. These are prevalent

CONTINUED ►

## Tassels of Blue

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

**What** did the Lord direct Moses to instruct every Israelite to attach to their garments? *Num. 15:38*.

---

Apparently attaching tassels of various colors was a common practice among the ancient peoples of the Near East, and God adopted the practice. The “fringe” (*KJV*) or tassel was attached to the four corners of the outer garment with a thread (“ribband,” *KJV*) of blue on each tassel. The modern *prayer shawl* has four tassels—one on each corner, tied in a traditional knot with white and blue threads.

**What** reason was given for wearing tassels? That is, what specific things did God want the Israelites to remember? *Num. 15:39–41*.

---

The word *remember* stands out twice 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” (*vs. 40*). When tempted to go after other gods—spiritual adultery—the blue in the tassels would call him or her back to their sworn loyalty to God, the God who had brought the nation out of Egyptian slavery (*vs. 41*).

Apparently, even with the presence of God among them in such a marked manner, the Lord wanted to give them something even more immediate to help them remember what they needed to do.

Though we don’t wear tassels today, we have something so much more powerful: the cross of Christ, which always should bring before our minds the cost of sin, the cost of our redemption, and the promise of salvation for all who, through faith, trust in the merits of Jesus and who “follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord” (*Heb. 12:14*).

**How could following Jesus’ words to “pray always” (*Luke 21:36*) help you remember what God has done for you and what He asks you to do in return?**

---

Learning Cycle CONTINUED

in certain books, such as Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Zechariah. Jesus makes extensive use of the physical world in advancing the spiritual kingdom. For example, He merely could have spoken and healed the blind man, but instead, He formed mud cakes and applied them to the man's eyes. God knows that there is a dimension of human personality that better understands and *feels* the spiritual realm when elements of the physical world are used to teach spiritual concepts, however simple the illustrations may be.

For this activity you will need a large ball of Play-Doh, preferably three or four cans full rolled up into a large ball, several hand tools, such as knives, hammers, and screwdrivers, and a wooden cutting board. Place the symmetrical ball on the cutting board and pass it to several class members who will abuse and mar the ball with the tools. After it has been "scarred," the teacher should take the misshapen mass and roll it back into an unscarred symmetrical ball again.

**Talking Points:** (1) Discuss whether or not there is any scar, any abuse, that God cannot heal. (2) What would happen if we allowed the Play-Doh to dry up and become hard? If the ball were hard, how easy would it be to remove the scarring with our tools? What can we do in order to remain soft and pliable in the Potter's hands rather than becoming spiritually dry?

## ► STEP 4—Create

**Just for Teachers:** This assignment may be the most difficult one for the quarter, as it requires personal sacrifice. It is simple, in the sense that all of us can understand it. It is challenging because it is so real. The challenge is to select an action through which each class member may share with another person the mercy that God has shown to him or her this week. Here are a few suggestions:

1. Approach someone who has wronged you, and offer him or her the same forgiveness that God has extended to you.
2. Visit someone who has dropped out of church or is struggling spiritually, and encourage that person by telling him or her what the grace of God has helped you to overcome in your life.
3. If you have wronged someone, ask for his or her forgiveness.

**Further Study:** “Our confession of His faithfulness is Heaven’s chosen agency for revealing Christ to the world. We are to acknowledge His grace as made known through the holy men of old; but that which will be most effectual is the testimony of our own experience. We are witnesses for God as we reveal in ourselves the working of a power that is divine. Every individual has a life distinct from all others, and an experience differing essentially from theirs. God desires that our praise shall ascend to Him, marked by our own individuality. These precious acknowledgments to the praise of the glory of His grace, when supported by a Christ-like life, have an irresistible power that works for the salvation of souls.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 347.

### Discussion Questions:

- 1 Go through the Ellen G. White quote above. 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 “Christ-like life,” can be a powerful influence on the salvation of 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 Dwell more on Monday’s lesson about how the Israelites were to treat the strangers among them. What other lessons can we take from this for ourselves today? How do we treat those who are not of our faith, those who hold views that we believe to be wrong? 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, while not acting as if we are somehow superior? What lessons can we learn from the Israelites in this area?
- 4 What can we, as a community, do to help remind each other not only of what God has done for us but of what He expects us to do in response? What role does the Lord’s Supper have in helping us remember what we have in Jesus?

**Summary:** Although that first generation was condemned to wander in the wilderness until they died, the Lord would encourage their children to look forward to Canaan. Hence came God’s further instruction regarding sacrifices, a loving attitude toward the foreigner who converted to the faith, how to deal with sins of ignorance and sins of open defiance, and finally the attaching of blue tassels to their garments to remind them of God’s commandments and that their obedience to Him demonstrated the only way to true happiness.