

NUMBERS

Lesson 18 - Chapter 15 Continued

We continue today in Number chapter 15; and in our last meeting we examined one of those small, but critical, Hebrew words whose meaning has a lot of important implications to the Believer. We looked at just exactly what the Hebrew term **ger** (or in the plural, **gerim**) meant, in its fullest sense. And this is because it is almost always translated into English as **foreigner or stranger**; and both of these English words give us an incomplete, if not flatly wrong, idea of what a **ger** is. The problem is not bad translation, the problem is that there is no single English word or simple English term or phrase that can impart to us the complex Middle Eastern and Biblical concept of what a **ger** amounts to.

And, what we found is that a **ger**, in it's simplest sense, is a protected foreigner with the word "protected" being the key. Most often in the bible a **ger** is a gentile except if the context is speaking directly about a Hebrew person. That is a **ger** is a person born into another culture or another tribe who has (for any number of reasons) decided to attach him or her self to a different tribe temporarily or long term. And that new tribe has agreed to allow this attachment, and to allow the **ger** to become part of their society.

A **ger** was governed by many customs and boundaries and well-understood rules that shaped and guided their lives and behavior as members of whatever society they had joined. And, the Bible does not bother to explain to us the more general characteristics and boundaries that a **ger** must abide by (we are expected to already know), however the Torah does tell us some specifics concerning the required behavior of a protected foreigner within Israelite society.

In a nutshell a **ger** cannot own land, and therefore they are generally laborers for others, or they have a very specific trade from which to make their living. Further, they are under the protection and authority of whatever tribe or clan they have attached themselves to. The protected stranger is to follow the clan or tribal customs and civil law they are not to offend the tribal god (and usually but not always they are to actively worship ONLY the accepted tribal god or gods). **Ger** are not slaves, or misfits, nor necessarily a lower class but they are 2nd class citizens with fewer privileges in the society they are now living in. If a **ger** stayed long enough he would invariably be absorbed into his host's family (generally by marrying a tribe or clan member) and within a generation or two the "protected foreigner" label simply no longer applied.

Our interest concerns mostly what the relationship is between a **ger** who comes to live with Israel. For these particular **gerim** the Lord gives very specific guidelines: and the first is that they MUST abide by the Torah commands that prohibit things (called negative

commandments), and in most cases they CAN, by choice, participate in commands that demand certain things to be done (positive commandments).

But, when they chose to participate in some of the positive commandments.....such as observing the Biblical Feasts..... they had to do it strictly according to the Law of Moses.

This all leads to what I consider to be the most important question that this section of Numbers faces us with: as gentiles who have been joined to what Paul calls True Israel, or The Israel of God, or the Kingdom of God, are gentile Believers **ger** among Israel and its covenants? Is that what Numbers is trying to explain to us?

And what we found in Ephesians 2 was that we Christians are NOT classified as **gerim**. We are not 2nd class citizens of True Israel, with natural Israelites (Jews in our modern day era) being 1st class citizens.

READ EPHESIANS 2:11-13, 19-22

The Lord, through Paul, makes it very clear that at one time gentiles were really even further away from Israel than **ger** are. We were as nothing. At least a **ger** who came to Israel was connected to Israel.....but gentiles who had not chosen to become attached to Israel as **ger** were completely apart from the national life of Israel and apart from Israel's covenants. However through trusting Yeshua gentile Believers have been brought near and are now full-fledged members of True Israel, of the divine ideal of Israel as a pure and holy Kingdom of God. Not as **ger**, but as 1st class citizens.

Notice something that I realize many of you have heard from me on numerous occasions, but I want to repeat from another angle: just as an immigrant to the USA must go through a swearing-in ceremony to vow allegiance to the United States Constitution and to abide by its tenants, so must a foreigner to Israel vow allegiance to the Constitution of Israel, which are the Biblical Covenants God made with Israel. Now when I say Constitution of Israel I'm not speaking of the political Constitution of the modern state of Israel as drawn up by men after WWII. I'm talking primarily about the Abrahamic and Mosaic covenants because that's what Paul is referring to; contained within them is the establishment of God's Kingdom on earth with Israel as the core group of people who are to bring it about as well as the membership requirements, the rules and regulations, and who is eligible for membership.

Now I would like to tell you something that occurred to me recently, and you can do with it what you please. Paul constantly warns gentiles who wish to trust Yeshua and to worship Him, that it is not only unnecessary to convert and become a Jew to worship Christ.....but that doing so is essentially counter productive. He usually puts it in terms of putting yourself "under the law" or NOT "putting yourself under the law", and thus advises a gentile to NOT put himself under the law.

Now, understand that in every case of Paul talking about how gentiles should NOT put themselves "under the law", Paul is NOT talking about whether or not to obey the Torah commands. The issue he is addressing is whether or not the requirement to gain membership

to the body of Believers.....to become a disciple and worshipper of Jesus and thus become part of the family of God.....was to FIRST become a Jew, which by definition meant accepting the Law, which of course included male circumcision. That is, that obedience to the Law was step one in HOW one gained membership to the body of Believers. And to this, Paul emphatically says no. However when one has been saved by means of faith in Yeshua obedience to the Law as a way of proper behavior for one who has been saved is another matter.

OK. With that understanding, and the many ramifications of what being a **ger** means, part of the reason that Paul does **not** want gentiles to accept the Law, meaning to become a Jew and to start practicing Traditional Judaism, is 1) because that is NOT the means to Salvation, and 2) if a gentile DOES accept the law as even part of an attempt to achieve Salvation, this former gentile (now a Jew) has just put himself in a very strange position with God. You see, as we discussed last week, God Himself has classified Israelites as **ger** living with Him (even though, on the one hand, Yehoveh calls Israel "My People" and on the other He still sees those Israelites as **ger** to Him). That is why from the time of Moses onward, Hebrews do not speak of OWNING the Promised Land. God says, I own the land; you are just leaseholders and possessors. You, Israelites, are as much **ger** with Me, the Lord, as the foreigners who live among you are **ger** with you. You **ger** have rights, and you are under My protection (says God), but you are NOT on an equal footing with Me, nor have you attained the status as 1st class citizens in the Kingdom of God.

Yet several hundred years into the future, we find in Ephesians 2 Paul saying that a gentile who becomes a Believer in Yeshua is NOT a **ger** to God, but a full-fledged citizen in the True Israel, which is defined as the spiritual Kingdom of God. So, the dilemma Paul is trying to explain to his mostly gentile audience is this: a gentile who, misguided, puts himself under the Law (as a MEANS to Salvation) effectively winds up making himself a **ger** to God. That gentile gains the same status as Israel always had.....a status every Jew is born into.....a **ger** with God. But.....a gentile who trusts Messiah as the only LEGITIMATE means to Salvation becomes a full-fledged citizen of the Kingdom of God with all the rights and privileges associated with it. In essence, a gentile, who was as nothing, leapfrogs OVER the status of a fleshy (non-Believing) Hebrew, and instantly (along with the Jews who accepted their Messiah) becomes a first class citizen in God's divine Kingdom. And, the question Paul asks is: why, gentile, would you want the 2nd class status of a **ger** when you could have the of 1st class status as a citizen of Heaven? And, in effect, Paul offers the same argument, in other of his writings to the Jewish people. That is, Paul says, 'hey Jews, why not accept Yeshua as Messiah, and be elevated from your current legal status (the legal status most of you were born into) as **gerim** to God, to become first class citizens WITH God, in the Kingdom of God?'

Now, understand: all of this is contained in the rules and ordinances of the covenants God made with Israel. This ability for a Jew to have his status elevated from ger to 1st class citizen of the Kingdom of God, and for a gentile to have his status elevated from basically nothing to a 1st class citizen of the Kingdom of God, is possible ONLY under the terms of Israel's covenants. A gentile only becomes a member of the Kingdom of God by means of Israel's covenants with God. And of course those covenants all speak of and point to the Messiah.

Do you follow this? Paul is not addressing about whether it is good to be obedient to the Torah,

the Law, or not (he addresses that issue head-on in other epistles where he says in that **it is good** and preferable for a Believer to obey Torah). Later, on your own, go examine Romans 2; for instance in 2:13 Paul says such things as: "**..... the doers of the law will attain righteousness**". And, in 2:14, "**.....Gentiles who do what the law requires will be held innocent**". And, in 2:25 - 28, "**....., Those who keep the law will condemn those who do not.**" Paul is talking about behavior and response to God, NOT how one becomes saved. Paul is speaking **not** about HOW a gentile becomes a member of the Kingdom of God but about how one is to live his life afterward. But, he also says obedience to the Torah (the Law) is the proper response for a person who gets saved by His Jewish Messiah.

Now that we've affirmed once again why the Old Testament in general, and the Torah in specific, is still critically important to Christians let's move on a little further in Numbers 15.

READ NUMBERS 15:17 - end

This section about setting aside for God some of the bread that is made AFTER the people enter the Promised Land is quite interesting and instructive. Remember: even though we may struggle with **which** of the Torah commands we are still to obey literally, and also just **HOW** we are to obey them in a practical way in our modern western society (and of course factoring in the advent of Christ), God is setting up unchangeable patterns that we are to learn, recognize, and apply to our lives FOREVER.

And what is being discussed beginning in verse 17, is the **first** of the bread dough that is made regularly in every Israelite household. And, the instruction is that the first of each batch of bread is to be given to a Priest. It is a holy portion.

The principle this is operating from is the principle of Firstlings, or in more familiar language, Firstfruits. That is, the first of everything belongs to God; your first male child (called the Firstborn), the first of your crops (called **bikkurim**), and the first of your bread dough (called **Challah**).

Now, what is interesting is that typically only farmers could participate in the most common Firstfruits offerings, because they were the ones who grew the crops, and therefore they were the ones required to offer the first of their crops as a sacrifice. What this new command does is to bring the ability to offer Firstfruits sacrifices out of the field, and into every Hebrew household. Every Hebrew home baked bread.....as it was the staple daily food.....and now with the requirement of an offering of a portion of that bread dough to God, every Hebrew home could have direct participation in offering Firstfruits on regular basis.

This custom of offering some of the dough from the household bread baking became such a deeply ingrained custom within Israel that even after the Temple was destroyed the Talmud tells us that the woman would take a small piece of the bread dough and throw it into the fire as a sort of min-sacrifice in remembrance of this commandment.

Now, let me quote for you a saying of Paul; one you have heard several times from me, but now, perhaps, you will better understand why he chose the words that he did.

NAS Romans 11:16 *And if the first piece of dough be holy, the lump is also; and if the root be holy, the branches are too.*

Paul was simply using the common language of an every day occurrence in virtually every household in Israel as an illustration. He was referring directly to the principle of Firstfruits, and to the law and custom of offering a bit of the bread dough as a sacrifice, which in turn sanctifies the remainder of the large lump of bread dough.

When we get to verse 22 of Numbers 15, however, the entire subject changes. Here we get into the thorny area of what is called inadvertent sins. That is, someone commits a violation of one of God's commandments, but they didn't intend to, and often didn't even know they did. However, this section also makes a contrast between what is required of a person who commits this kind of unwitting sin, and what happens when a person commits an intentional sin. Often the Bible will refer to this intentional kind of sin as "high-handed". And, it denotes that which the Lord considers shockingly brazen and without excuse.

These two categories of sin (inadvertent and high-handed) are themselves each spoken of in two major contexts: the sin being committed by the whole community.....a national sin.....and a sin being committed by an individual. Let me here remind you that when the Torah speaks of "the whole community" or "the whole congregation", that nine out of ten times it is speaking of the leaders and elders of Israel.....not every common person. Let that sink in for a second. Though the selection of leaders in ancient Israel was not democratically accomplished, there was an element of affirmation by the people that was required. The governmental structure of ancient Israel though not a one-man-one-vote system, nevertheless was a representative-based system, similar in concept to our American system. The leaders and elders represented the diverse interests of the various tribes, and therefore the interests of the people of each of those tribes were addressed. A leader that was too unpopular didn't last terribly long.

Now if God held the people of Israel responsible for going along with what the leaders and elders of Israel decided (in other words, that the leaders and elders were representative of the will of the people) then I wonder how the Lord views the citizens of America where our process of affirming leadership is much more in our hands than was ever imagined in Biblical times. How often I would like to divorce myself from what our elected leadership has decided: to allow abortion on demand, to celebrate homosexuality, to demand that Israel give up some of its land inheritance to achieve a more quiet Middle East and serve our needs for an uninterrupted supply of oil. But the fact remains that Biblically I am (and each of you are) responsible to God for these affronts towards Him. And such a responsibility falls under the context of "the whole congregation". Understand: the term "whole congregation" isn't only a religious term it's a national term and theologically it applies to us just as forcefully as it did to ancient Israel.

Since national responsibility (and subsequent national blessings or national curses) is one of the Lord's fundamental principles we find it addressed here in Numbers 15. And the requirement for dealing with an **inadvertent sin** of the nation (generally meaning the nation's leadership but also including the guilt by association of the common citizens) is that a sacrifice of atonement must be offered when that sin becomes known and apparent. And, the offering shall consist of a bull as an '**Olah** sacrifice, accompanied by the standard **Minchah** sacrifice, a

grain offering, and also a libation offering of wine. In addition a male goat must be offered as a **Hata'at** offering, usually rendered as "sin offering", but I believe is more accurately translated as a "purification offering".

Please notice some key words in verse 25: "The priest shall make expiation for the whole Israelite community AND THEY SHALL BE FORGIVEN." Forgiveness of a type was indeed available to the ancient Israelites at the will of God. In our modern English, and in our western way of thinking, we would be much better off to take this statement about forgiveness to mean "that they MAY be forgiven", rather than "they SHALL be forgiven". Because the Lord has set down many principles concerning His meting out of forgiveness and they all apply and all must be met in order for Him to show mercy. For instance, repentance and contriteness MUST be present. It is not the sacrificial ritual itself that has some type of supernatural quality that forces forgiveness out of God; rather it is the sincere obedience to the sacrificial commandment that is at issue. Vertical Retribution is also at work. The PUNISHMENT due to the nation may be pardoned if God so chooses but the guilt of the sin remains, and the requirement for exacting divine retribution is often simply passed on to the next generation.

Notice that in verse 26 that it is made crystal clear that the forgiveness that MAY be afforded by God upon Israel applies to both Israelites and the **ger** (the protected foreigners) who live among Israel.

Next up the inadvertent sins of an individual are dealt with. The individual is NOT required to bring an '**Olah and Minchah** sacrifice, but he or she is required to bring a **Hata'at** (a purification offering) sacrifice, though it is of lesser value than the **Hata'at** required for the nation as a whole. The individual must bring a female goat to the Priest for sacrifice. And, interestingly, a **ger** must do the same thing. If a **ger** sins inadvertently he too must offer a sacrifice of atonement. Let me remind you, though, that the sheer number of laws that a **ger** might be subject to advertently breaking were significantly fewer than for the Israelite. And this was because a **ger** was bound ONLY to obey the prohibitive (negative) commandments of the Law. However since a **ger** was also permitted to observe some of the positive commandments if they chose (such as observing the Feast Days as one can imagine most of the **ger** did), they had to do it correctly. So, likely, many **ger** fouled up the more strict aspects of one observance or another without intending to, and when someone informed them of this the **ger** was required to make the **Hata'at** sacrifice of a she-goat.

Now the more severe requirements and consequences mentioned in this section appear. Beginning in verse 30 the case of person committing a "high handed" sin is broached. And we find that this law applies equally to an Israelite or to a **ger** (again, the **ger** usually had fewer commandments that he was required to obey and thus fewer that he could break). And notice that NO sacrifice of atonement is prescribed for the one who "acts defiantly" against the Word of God. In other words the person committing a highhanded sin isn't excused from a sacrifice of atonement, it's that he has NO atonement available. Therefore there is no mercy, only divine retribution. And the punishment is in Hebrew, **karet**. Cut-off. The idea of **karet** is that the punishment is NOT usually meted out by men; that is, the guilty party is not usually stoned, or are they jailed, or are they punished by the citizens of Israel (though, if a direct revelation from Yehoveh was claimed instructing such punishment to be carried it, it could be). Rather God will

now, supernaturally, exact judgment. It could mean dying young. It could mean dying childless and thereby bring to an end a man's family line (this was probably the most feared punishment in the Biblical era). But it could also mean being less prosperous, or one's health being poor or any number of other onerous things. And the timing of just when the effects of this punishment might take place, only the Lord knew. So the guilty party walked around with the judgment of divine retribution on his head at all times, with no remedy for it and he didn't know when the eternal shoe might fall.

Now as one might expect, over the centuries just what **karet** amounted to varied between more modern Hebrews versus the ancients. By the time of the great Rabbi Maimonides (the RamBam) of the 12th century AD, it was held that **karet** INCLUDED the possible death of the soul so that a spiritual afterlife became impossible. Today **karet** as practiced in Judaism is usually defined as excommunication from the Synagogue, or, the death sentence imposed by civil authorities.....lawful execution. No matter, we can get the sense that **karet** is VERY serious and is applied only in the most high-handed, offensive acts against the Lord. And we're about to get a very well-known example of a high-handed sin that has no possibility of atonement available.

Verse 32 tells the story of a man went out to gather wood on Shabbat. The man was arrested, brought before Moses, and Moses apparently wasn't clear on how to judge the matter because the end of verse 34 says, "**.....for it had not been specified what should be done to him.**"

So Moses consulted God, and God gave him his answer: execution by stoning. The man was summarily taken outside the camp, and stoned to death. Wow.

What really happened here? What was it that this man did wrong? Why didn't Moses know what to do? And why must the man be executed?

The first question to ask is what was the law about the Sabbath and we have to look in Exodus for the answer: **NAS Exodus 35:2 "For six days work may be done, but on the seventh day you shall have a holy day, a Sabbath of complete rest to the LORD; whoever does any work on it shall be put to death. 3 "You shall not kindle a fire in any of your dwellings on the Sabbath day."**

So the issue about gathering the firewood obviously is tied to the negative commandment that a fire must not be kindled on the Sabbath. But the man was NOT caught kindling a fire (that is, starting a fire) he was only caught gathering the wood FOR a fire. This probably was the primary reason that Moses didn't know exactly what to do about it, yet knew that the distinct possibility of a serious violation did exist.

So the issue revolves around INTENT. Was he merely gathering wood for another day? Did he fully intend to use the wood he gathered to start a fire on the Sabbath? Was gathering the wood "work" and therefore prohibited in general?

Well the Rabbis found the answer to this interesting little dilemma in the story of the gathering of Manna. They found the laws concerning the gathering and use of the Manna to be a clear

analogy to the matter of gathering sticks for a fire. Israel was told that whatever Manna they would need on the Shabbat should be gathered, cooked, and prepared BEFORE Sabbath. And they were also told that on the Sabbath they should not "leave their place". In other words they weren't to go on a journey, they weren't to go somewhere; they weren't to exert themselves to any substantial degree.

So, just as gathering Manna on the Sabbath was prohibited, because the eating of Manna that was gathered on the Sabbath is prohibited, so then gathering wood on the Sabbath is prohibited because it indicates the pre-mediated intention to start a fire on the Sabbath. The two actions of first gathering the wood and then kindling the fire are both required for a fire. Therefore the two actions are inseparable and God consider the violation of Sabbath on par with violation of the Day of Atonement.....Yom Kippur.....those two days forming the highest of the high observances of appointed days.

Yet as we saw just a few verses earlier, the punishment for a "high handed" sin such as this one, is **karet**..... divine retribution. So why was the man to be stoned to death at the hands of other men?

Here we find yet another very interesting principle: stoning is judicial death brought about by violation of civil law. Karet is divine punishment brought about by God due to violation of religious law (although of course from a spiritual standpoint the civil and religious are cut from the same cloth). The man carrying the sticks became subject to BOTH! Thus he was to be executed (stoned) by the people, causing his physical death.....and afterward, he would ALSO be cut-off, **karet**, by God.....spiritual death. So what we find is that for the most highhanded sins against God there is a double-whammy: first you'll face legal judicial punishment, then you'll face divine punishment. Here in the Torah, in Numbers, we have the principle that the Church has held so vital to our fundamental beliefs: there is a physical life and death, and there is a spiritual life and death. And what Christ saves us from is the spiritual death, not the physical death that all men are subject to regardless of their status before God.

Now does this sort of double-whammy still exist for the Believer? Is **karet** a possibility for the Believer? Well there is certainly a strong hint that under the most severe of circumstances something like karet remains a possibility. Listen to Hebrews 10:26 **NAS Hebrews 10:26 For if we go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, 27 but a certain terrifying expectation of judgment, and the fury of a fire which will consume the adversaries.**

This verse in Hebrews is nothing more than the re-stating of the Law concerning deliberate or high-handed sin. Now we'll not get into a debate, today, whether or not this is possible for a Believer to do in the first place. The wider point I wanted to make here is that the long held concepts of deliberate versus unintentional sins and their consequences were alive and well in Christ's day and in NT times, and this passage in Hebrews is a direct reference to those concepts and it clear they apply to Believers, Jew or gentile.

The final subject of this chapter is what most Bibles call "fringe" or "tassels", and the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the OT, calls them a "hem". In Hebrew, the word is tzitzit.

Lesson 18 - Numbers 15 Cont.

Next week, we'll complete chapter 15 by discussing Tzitzit and then move on to Numbers 16.