

BIBLE BRIEFING

“The Young & the Rebellious”

NUMBERS 15-17

Introduction

I call this message, *The Young & the Rebellious*:

1. In chapter fifteen, God has words of encouragement and instruction for the younger generation.
2. In chapters sixteen and seventeen, the older condemned generation grows restless and rebels.

The Young

Numbers 15:1 And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying,

Numbers 15:2 “Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: ‘When you have come into the land you are to inhabit, which I am giving to you,

The children of Israel had just been told they would *never* enter the Promised Land. They would *all* die in the wilderness. Their children would inherit the land.

The events described in these chapters probably occurred shortly after Israel’s tragic failure at Kadesh-Barnea. The younger generation faced thirty-eight years of wandering, but the Lord guaranteed that they would one day enter the land and claim their inheritance.

The children suffered because of the sins of their fathers. Better that your kids are blessed through your obedience!

The phrase “to make a sweet savor [aroma] unto the Lord” is found five times in verses one through twenty-one and means “an aroma pleasing to the Lord.”

Verses three through twenty-one describe three freewill offerings the young people will make in the land. The burnt offering typified the worshiper’s complete devotion to God, for the animal was totally

consumed on the altar. The meal (grain) offering spoke of the worshiper's dedication of his labor to the Lord, and the peace (trespass) offering represented joyful fellowship and thanksgiving to God for His blessings.

Numbers 15:3 and you make an offering by fire to the Lord, a burnt offering or a sacrifice, to fulfill a vow or as a freewill offering or in your appointed feasts, to make a sweet aroma to the Lord, from the herd or the flock,
Numbers 15:4 then he who presents his offering to the Lord shall bring a grain offering of one-tenth of an ephah of fine flour mixed with one-fourth of a hin of oil;
Numbers 15:5 and one-fourth of a hin of wine as a drink offering you shall prepare with the burnt offering or the sacrifice, for each lamb.
Numbers 15:6 Or for a ram you shall prepare as a grain offering two-tenths of an ephah of fine flour mixed with one-third of a hin of oil;
Numbers 15:7 and as a drink offering you shall offer one-third of a hin of wine as a sweet aroma to the Lord.
Numbers 15:8 And when you prepare a young bull as a burnt offering, or as a sacrifice to fulfill a vow, or as a peace offering to the Lord,
Numbers 15:9 then shall be offered with the young bull a grain offering of three-tenths of an ephah of fine flour mixed with half a hin of oil;
Numbers 15:10 and you shall bring as the drink offering half a hin of wine as an offering made by fire, a sweet aroma to the Lord.
Numbers 15:11 'Thus it shall be done for each young bull, for each ram, or for each lamb or young goat.
Numbers 15:12 According to the number that you prepare, so you shall do with everyone according to their number.
Numbers 15:13 All who are native-born shall do these things in this manner, in presenting an offering made by fire, a sweet aroma to the Lord.
Numbers 15:14 And if a stranger dwells with you, or whoever is among you throughout your generations, and would present an offering made by fire, a sweet aroma to the Lord, just as you do, so shall he do.
Numbers 15:15 One ordinance shall be for you of the assembly and for the stranger who dwells with you, an ordinance forever throughout your generations; as you are, so shall the stranger be before the Lord.
Numbers 15:16 One law and one custom shall be for you and for the stranger who dwells with you.'"
Numbers 15:17 Again the Lord spoke to Moses, saying,
Numbers 15:18 "Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: 'When you come into the land to which I bring you,
Numbers 15:19 then it will be, when you eat of the bread of the land, that you shall offer up a heave offering to the Lord.
Numbers 15:20 You shall offer up a cake of the first of your ground meal as a heave offering; as a heave offering of the threshing floor, so shall you offer it up.
Numbers 15:21 Of the first of your ground meal you shall give to the Lord a heave offering throughout your generations.

The sacrifices discussed in these verses were spontaneous expressions of love and gratitude to God. They were “[freewill offerings](#).” God did not require them; but, because of what He had done, and for who He was and is, the people would want to please Him with their offerings.

God encourages them they **will** enter the land; but beyond that, He encourages them that they can enter it with joy, living lives pleasing to God. In other words, they were not doomed to repeat the failure of their fathers.

When you are seeking to live to please the Lord, you grow more sensitive to certain types of sin. You don’t just notice the sins you commit; you notice the things you should have done but didn’t. We sometimes call these ‘sins of omission.’ They are unintentional, but still sinful. Verses twenty-two through twenty-nine instructed the people on how to handle these sins of omission.

[Numbers 15:22](#) ‘If you sin unintentionally, and do not observe all these commandments which the Lord has spoken to Moses -

[Numbers 15:23](#) all that the Lord has commanded you by the hand of Moses, from the day the Lord gave commandment and onward throughout your generations -

[Numbers 15:24](#) then it will be, if it is unintentionally committed, without the knowledge of the congregation, that the whole congregation shall offer one young bull as a burnt offering, as a sweet aroma to the Lord, with its grain offering and its drink offering, according to the ordinance, and one kid of the goats as a sin offering.

[Numbers 15:25](#) So the priest shall make atonement for the whole congregation of the children of Israel, and it shall be forgiven them, for it was unintentional; they shall bring their offering, an offering made by fire to the Lord, and their sin offering before the Lord, for their unintended sin.

[Numbers 15:26](#) It shall be forgiven the whole congregation of the children of Israel and the stranger who dwells among them, because all the people *did it* unintentionally.

[Numbers 15:27](#) ‘And if a person sins unintentionally, then he shall bring a female goat in its first year as a sin offering.

[Numbers 15:28](#) So the priest shall make atonement for the person who sins unintentionally, when he sins unintentionally before the Lord, to make atonement for him; and it shall be forgiven him.

[Numbers 15:29](#) You shall have one law for him who sins unintentionally, *for him* who is native-born among the children of Israel and for the stranger who dwells among them.

Today, in the church, many a gossip, many a talebearer, many a divisive person will claim the best of intentions. Even if we agree they have the right intentions, they still may be in grievous sin. The same applies for a myriad of other sins we are often ready to ignore or think lightly of, all on the basis of “after all, they had good intentions.”

Not everyone was quite so sensitive to sin; some sinned “presumptuously”:

Numbers 15:30 ‘But the person who does *anything* presumptuously, *whether he is* native-born or a stranger, that one brings reproach on the Lord, and he shall be cut off from among his people.

Numbers 15:31 Because he has despised the word of the Lord, and has broken His commandment, that person shall be completely cut off; his guilt *shall be* upon him.”

To sin “presumptuously” means to disobey God’s law deliberately and arrogantly, knowing full well the danger involved. The Hebrew literally means *to sin with a high hand* as though the person were shaking his or her fist in the face of God, daring God to do something.

Presumptuous sins are committed by people who have “no fear of God before their eyes” (Romans 3:18).

The example:

Numbers 15:32 Now while the children of Israel were in the wilderness, they found a man gathering sticks on the Sabbath day.

Numbers 15:33 And those who found him gathering sticks brought him to Moses and Aaron, and to all the congregation.

Numbers 15:34 They put him under guard, because it had not been explained what should be done to him.

Numbers 15:35 Then the Lord said to Moses, “The man must surely be put to death; all the congregation shall stone him with stones outside the camp.”

Numbers 15:36 So, as the Lord commanded Moses, all the congregation brought him outside the camp and stoned him with stones, and he died.

He was gathering sticks to start a fire, and it was unlawful to kindle a fire on the Sabbath.

Living lives pleasing to God involves fellowship with God’s people; fellowship with God’s people involves concern for the welfare of God’s people. You get involved... **Sometimes when people don’t want you involved.**

The younger generation got a new wardrobe accessory:

Numbers 15:37 Again the Lord spoke to Moses, saying,

Numbers 15:38 "Speak to the children of Israel: Tell them to make tassels on the corners of their garments throughout their generations, and to put a blue thread in the tassels of the corners.

Numbers 15:39 And you shall have the tassel, that you may look upon it and remember all the commandments of the Lord and do them, and that you *may* not follow the harlotry to which your own heart and your own eyes are inclined,

Numbers 15:40 and that you may remember and do all My commandments, and be holy for your God.

Numbers 15:41 I *am* the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, to be your God: I *am* the Lord your God."

When they dressed each morning, the Jews would see the tassels and be reminded that they were God's people, obligated to obey His will. But why a **blue thread**? The ark of the covenant was covered with a blue cloth; blue curtains adorned the tabernacle; blue was in the high priest's garments. It was full of holy reminders.

Perhaps the blue threads would remind them that their God was in heaven, seeing everything they did. As they walked about during the day, they would notice the tassels and remember God's commandments, and likewise when they prepared for sleep at night. No matter how many idols they might see during the day, the tassels reminded them that it was Jehovah, the God of Israel, who had delivered them from Egypt; and they were to worship and serve Him alone.

The Rebellious

Chapters sixteen and seventeen record two challenges to the leadership of Moses and Aaron, one from a rebellious group of Levites (16:1-35) and one from a larger group of restless people (16:41-50). Out of each of these confrontations came a visible reminder to the Jews of their rebellion: the brass covering on the altar (16:36-40) and Aaron's rod that budded.

Numbers 16:1 Now Korah the son of Izhar, the son of Kohath, the son of Levi, with Dathan and Abiram the sons of Eliab, and On the son of Peleth, sons of Reuben, took *men*;

Numbers 16:2 and they rose up before Moses with some of the children of Israel, two hundred and fifty leaders of the congregation, representatives of the congregation, men of renown.

Numbers 16:3 They gathered together against Moses and Aaron, and said to them, “*You take* too much upon yourselves, for all the congregation *is* holy, every one of them, and the Lord *is* among them. Why then do you exalt yourselves above the assembly of the Lord?”

A Levite in the family of Kohath, Korah must have been a distinguished leader to be able to enlist the support of 250 “men of renown” from the other tribes. The fact that the text gives his genealogy is another hint that he was an important man. Numbers 27:3 suggests that men from other tribes were involved in the rebellion.

Whenever you find complaining and rebelling among God’s people, there’s usually a stated reason and a hidden reason. Korah’s *public* complaint was that Moses and Aaron were running things and not giving the people opportunity for input. He wanted more democracy in the camp. After all, the Lord dwelt in the entire camp and all the people were “a kingdom of priests,” so who were Moses and Aaron to elevate themselves above everybody else?

The *hidden* reason was that Korah wanted the Levites to have the same privileges as Aaron and his sons. Korah wasn’t satisfied to be assisting the priests; he wanted to be a priest.

Numbers 16:4 So when Moses heard *it*, he fell on his face;

Numbers 16:5 and he spoke to Korah and all his company, saying, “Tomorrow morning the Lord will show *who is* His and *who is* holy, and will cause *him* to come near to Him. That one whom He chooses He will cause to come near to Him.

Numbers 16:6 Do this: Take censers, Korah and all your company;

Numbers 16:7 put fire in them and put incense in them before the Lord tomorrow, and it shall be *that* the man whom the Lord chooses *is* the holy one. *You take* too much upon yourselves, you sons of Levi!”

Numbers 16:8 Then Moses said to Korah, “Hear now, you sons of Levi:

Numbers 16:9 *Is it* a small thing to you that the God of Israel has separated you from the congregation of Israel, to bring you near to Himself, to do the work of the tabernacle of the Lord, and to stand before the congregation to serve them;

Numbers 16:10 and that He has brought you near *to Himself*, you and all your brethren, the sons of Levi, with you? And are you seeking the priesthood also?

Numbers 16:11 Therefore you and all your company *are* gathered together against the Lord. And what *is* Aaron that you complain against him?"

"That you should keep acting like a prince over us." Moses was indeed at one time a prince, a self-confident man who thought he could deliver and lead Israel with his own hand. God had broken him of that with forty years of leading another man's flock in the wilderness - yet now Dathan and Abiram throw it back in his face, as if God had never dealt with Moses in these areas. Don't live in the past – yours or others!

The test Moses proposed was a simple one. If Korah and his men were indeed priests acceptable to God, then let them bring their censers to the tabernacle and see if God would accept them. Surely the rebels remembered what happened to Nadab and Abihu when they rashly brought "strange fire" before the Lord, but even this warning didn't deter them.

Numbers 16:12 And Moses sent to call Dathan and Abiram the sons of Eliab, but they said, "We will not come up!

Numbers 16:13 *Is it* a small thing that you have brought us up out of a land flowing with milk and honey, to kill us in the wilderness, that you should keep acting like a prince over us?

Numbers 16:14 Moreover you have not brought us into a land flowing with milk and honey, nor given us inheritance of fields and vineyards. Will you put out the eyes of these men? We will not come up!"

Numbers 16:15 Then Moses was very angry, and said to the Lord, "Do not respect their offering. I have not taken one donkey from them, nor have I hurt one of them."

Numbers 16:16 And Moses said to Korah, "Tomorrow, you and all your company be present before the Lord—you and they, as well as Aaron.

Numbers 16:17 Let each take his censer and put incense in it, and each of you bring his censer before the Lord, two hundred and fifty censers; both you and Aaron, each *with* his censer."

Moses called Dathan and Abiram to come to the meeting, but they refused. Nothing is said about On, so perhaps he wisely dropped out of the rebellion.

Moses didn't argue with the rebels; he prayed to the Lord and asked Him to vindicate His servant. Moses' anger wasn't selfish irritation; it was the righteous indignation of a man of integrity who sought only

the glory of the Lord. There **is** a righteous anger that God's people ought to feel when sinners defy the will of God and tempt others to sin.

Some people are offended that a man like Moses would be angry with men like Dathan and Abiram; they think a gentle, easy love is the proper response. Such thinking is understandable, but wrong: Shepherds are gentle with wayward sheep who might injure themselves, but they are passionately against wolves who would injure the flock.

Numbers 16:18 So every man took his censer, put fire in it, laid incense on it, and stood at the door of the tabernacle of meeting with Moses and Aaron.

Numbers 16:19 And Korah gathered all the congregation against them at the door of the tabernacle of meeting. Then the glory of the Lord appeared to all the congregation.

Numbers 16:20 And the Lord spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying,

Numbers 16:21 "Separate yourselves from among this congregation, that I may consume them in a moment."

Numbers 16:22 Then they fell on their faces, and said, "O God, the God of the spirits of all flesh, shall one man sin, and You be angry with all the congregation?"

Numbers 16:23 So the Lord spoke to Moses, saying,

Numbers 16:24 "Speak to the congregation, saying, 'Get away from the tents of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram.'"

Numbers 16:25 Then Moses rose and went to Dathan and Abiram, and the elders of Israel followed him.

Numbers 16:26 And he spoke to the congregation, saying, "Depart now from the tents of these wicked men! Touch nothing of theirs, lest you be consumed in all their sins."

Numbers 16:27 So they got away from around the tents of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram; and Dathan and Abiram came out and stood at the door of their tents, with their wives, their sons, and their little children.

Numbers 16:28 And Moses said: "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 16:29 If these men die naturally like all men, or if they are visited by the common fate of all men, *then* the Lord has not sent me.

Numbers 16:30 But if the Lord creates a new thing, and the earth opens its mouth and swallows them up with all that belongs to them, and they go down alive into the pit, then you will understand that these men have rejected the Lord."

Numbers 16:31 Now it came to pass, as he finished speaking all these words, that the ground split apart under them,

Numbers 16:32 and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them up, with their households and all the men with Korah, with all *their* goods.

Numbers 16:33 So they and all those with them went down alive into the pit; the earth closed over them, and they perished from among the assembly.

Numbers 16:34 Then all Israel who *were* around them fled at their cry, for they said, “Lest the earth swallow us up *also!*”

Numbers 16:35 And a fire came out from the Lord and consumed the two hundred and fifty men who were offering incense.

Moses and Aaron, being true leaders, immediately fell on their faces before the Lord and interceded for the nation. Why should all the people die because of the sin of these men? Moses frequently had to intercede for the people, and they probably didn't appreciate what he did for them. On two occasions, God was ready to destroy the entire nation, but Moses' intercession saved them.

The same attitude should be among God's people today - stay away from divisive, argumentative, contentious people in the body of Christ. **Get away!** You don't want to be close to them if God should deal with them.

Remember a divisive, contentious person will never *claim* to be divisive and contentious - they always consider their work a noble cause. Use some discernment! Look at what they are doing, not just at what they are saying.

We may be uneasy seeing the families destroyed also, but it clearly shows that the families of the rebellious, divisive, contentious people suffer also - often greatly.

God made it very clear that the Jews were to accept their appointed leaders and respect their authority. It's a dangerous thing for people to challenge God's order and promote themselves to become leaders.

In the Hebrew edition of the Old Testament, Numbers 16:36 begins a new chapter, chapter 17.

Numbers 16:36 Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying:

Numbers 16:37 “Tell Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, to pick up the censers out of the blaze, for they are holy, and scatter the fire some distance away.

Numbers 16:38 The censers of these men who sinned against their own souls, let them be made into hammered plates as a covering for the altar. Because they

presented them before the Lord, therefore they are holy; and they shall be a sign to the children of Israel.”

Numbers 16:39 So Eleazar the priest took the bronze censers, which those who were burned up had presented, and they were hammered out as a covering on the altar,

Numbers 16:40 *to be* a memorial to the children of Israel that no outsider, who *is* not a descendant of Aaron, should come near to offer incense before the Lord, that he might not become like Korah and his companions, just as the Lord had said to him through Moses.

Since the 250 censers had been offered to the Lord, they were sanctified, even though the men who held them were wicked, so the censers couldn't be treated like common metal. God ordered Aaron's son Eleazar to gather them up and have them beaten into plates to be put on the altar of burnt offering. These plates would be a lasting reminder.

It's likely that more churches have been divided because of arrogant leadership than because of false doctrine.

The deaths of over 250 people should have brought reverent awe into the hearts of the Israelites, but there was no fear of God before their eyes. What began with several hundred rebels had now become a national uprising! Instead of falling to their knees and crying out to God for forgiveness and mercy, the Jews were rebelling against Moses and Aaron just as Korah had done! Carnally minded people can't perceive the spiritual meaning of what God does because they lack spiritual discernment

Numbers 16:41 On the next day all the congregation of the children of Israel complained against Moses and Aaron, saying, “You have killed the people of the Lord.”

Numbers 16:42 Now it happened, when the congregation had gathered against Moses and Aaron, that they turned toward the tabernacle of meeting; and suddenly the cloud covered it, and the glory of the Lord appeared.

Numbers 16:43 Then Moses and Aaron came before the tabernacle of meeting.

Numbers 16:44 And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying,

Numbers 16:45 “Get away from among this congregation, that I may consume them in a moment.” And they fell on their faces.

It is no light thing to sympathize with a divisive, contentious person. God takes it seriously, and so should we.

Numbers 16:46 So Moses said to Aaron, “Take a censer and put fire in it from the altar, put incense *on it*, and take it quickly to the congregation and make atonement for them; for wrath has gone out from the Lord. The plague has begun.”

Numbers 16:47 Then Aaron took *it* as Moses commanded, and ran into the midst of the assembly; and already the plague had begun among the people. So he put in the incense and made atonement for the people.

Numbers 16:48 And he stood between the dead and the living; so the plague was stopped.

Numbers 16:49 Now those who died in the plague were fourteen thousand seven hundred, besides those who died in the Korah incident.

Numbers 16:50 So Aaron returned to Moses at the door of the tabernacle of meeting, for the plague had stopped.

Incense is a picture of prayer in the Bible (as in Revelation 8:3-4), because the sweet-smelling smoke of incense ascends to heaven as our prayers would. This is a dramatic picture of Aaron, as high priest, interceding for God’s people.

Aaron “[ran into the midst of the congregation](#)”; his sense of urgency is characteristic of true intercession.

Intercessors do the same today; they stand between the dead and the living, beseeching God’s mercy, preserving and promoting life with their prayer.

We were guilty sinners deserving judgment, we were rightly plagued, our Savior was sent on His mission, He was unjustly accused and attacked, He prayed on our behalf, He “ran” to save us, He stood between death and life for us, and He is the only chance for salvation, being the dividing line between death and life.

God would prove once and for all that He had chosen Aaron and his sons to serve as priests, and that any attempts on the part of any other tribe to seize the priesthood would meet with the wrath of God.

Numbers 17:1 And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying:

Numbers 17:2 “Speak to the children of Israel, and get from them a rod from each father’s house, all their leaders according to their fathers’ houses—twelve rods. Write each man’s name on his rod.

Numbers 17:3 And you shall write Aaron’s name on the rod of Levi. For there shall be one rod for the head of *each* father’s house.

A rod was a symbol of authority and power. By gathering rods, and inscribing each with the name of a tribe, and on Levi's rod inscribing Aaron's name, God will declare which tribe possess priestly authority - the issue at hand in light of Korah's rebellion - by choosing one of the rods.

Numbers 17:4 Then you shall place them in the tabernacle of meeting before the Testimony, where I meet with you.

Numbers 17:5 And it shall be *that* the rod of the man whom I choose will blossom; thus I will rid Myself of the complaints of the children of Israel, which they make against you."

Murmurers (complainers) are rarely satisfied by one evidence or the resolution of one issue. Complainers are not issue-motivated, though they claim to be and appear to be; they are heart-motivated. They murmur because they have complaining, discontent hearts. The complaining heart is demonstrated when people murmur about one issue after another, never being satisfied.

Numbers 17:6 So Moses spoke to the children of Israel, and each of their leaders gave him a rod apiece, for each leader according to their fathers' houses, twelve rods; and the rod of Aaron was among their rods.

Numbers 17:7 And Moses placed the rods before the Lord in the tabernacle of witness.

Numbers 17:8 Now it came to pass on the next day that Moses went into the tabernacle of witness, and behold, the rod of Aaron, of the house of Levi, had sprouted and put forth buds, had produced blossoms and yielded ripe almonds.

When Moses checks on the rods the next day, Aaron's rod – and only Aaron's rod - had **sprouted**; but not only sprouted, it had **put forth buds**; but not only put forth buds, it had **produced blossoms**; but not only produced blossoms, it had **yielded . . . almonds**; but not only yielded almonds, it yielded **ripe** almonds!

It didn't mean Aaron was the most spiritual... Or that he would not sin. Only that he was chosen to be the priest.

Numbers 17:9 Then Moses brought out all the rods from before the Lord to all the children of Israel; and they looked, and each man took his rod.

Numbers 17:10 And the Lord said to Moses, "Bring Aaron's rod back before the Testimony, to be kept as a sign against the rebels, that you may put their complaints away from Me, lest they die."

Numbers 17:11 Thus did Moses; just as the Lord had commanded him, so he did.

Numbers 17:12 So the children of Israel spoke to Moses, saying, "Surely we die, we perish, we all perish!

Numbers 17:13 Whoever even comes near the tabernacle of the Lord must die. Shall we all utterly die?"

The fact that all the tribes were included in the test suggests that all of them had been represented in the insurrection. The rod that sprouted would belong to the man God had chosen to be the nation's priest. When Moses brought out the rods the next day, everybody could see that only Aaron's rod had produced life. Aaron's staff "had not only sprouted but had budded, blossomed and produced almonds."

Conclusion

We look upon the youth as rebellious. In this case, it was the older generation.

Let's not sell our kids short. Let's involve them; let's encourage them. If they've got a blue tassle-thing going on, so what? It's upon the heart God looks.