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The Interconnections between Numbers 15 and Numbers 16



The mitzvot in **Numbers 15** also has a role to play in the interpretation of the story that follows; namely, the revolts by **Korah**, **Dathan**, and **Abiram** in **Chapter 16**. The incident that caused the rebellion by **Korah** and **his** company is not immediately evident with the story itself. **The rebel's** charge against **Moshe** involves **his** right to be the sole mediator of **God's** words and mitzvot to **the people** (**16:3, 13, 28-29**). Throughout **Chapter 15**, the text notes repeatedly that **YHVH** speaks only through **Moses** (**15:1, 17, 22-23, 35-37**). This exclusive use of **Moshe** as the mouthpiece of **Ha'Shem** seems to be an unprovoked and unexplained revolt by **Korah**. In other words, while the interconnections with the rebellion stories in **Numbers 11-14** suggested that the mitzvot in **Chapter 15** functioned largely as words of promise and reassurance to the new generation, the following story of **Korah** and his cohorts suggests that these same words of **Chapter 15** were heard as a burden and a threat to other hearers. One kind of hearing brought life to **the wilderness generation**. Another kind of hearing, however, brought threat and death to **the Exodus generation** eager to exalt **themselves** and not accept **ADONAI's** chosen mediator and guide in **Moses**.

The mitzvot in **Numbers 15** also include discussions of sins done **intentionally** (**to see link click [Cj](#) - Unintentional Sin: When an individual commits an intentional sin**). Unintentional sins could be **atoned** for by **the priest** through **a female goat in its first**

year as a **purification offering**. But intentional and flagrant sins required that **the person be cut off from his people**, meaning that **the entire community was to be stoned to death outside the camp**. The mitzvah about **the tzit-tzit and blue thread** (see [Cl - Tzit-tzit and Blue Thread](#)) emphasize **Isra'el's** need to remember and obey **God's** word. The story of the rebellions of **Korah** and **his** followers clearly presents **them** as examples of the flagrant and **intentional** despising of **God** and **His** mediator, **Moshe**. The guilt of **the rebels** was obvious, and **their** actions required the severest penalty (see [Cr - The Response of God](#)). The thankful **burnt offering by fire** given to **ADONAI** in a spirit of gratitude in **15:3, 13-14** and **25** contrasts sharply with **the rebels'** presumptuous desire to take over **Aaron's** priestly role and to **offer fire** and **incense** before **YHVH** in a spirit promoting **themselves** in **16:18** and **35**.

One of the final reminders in the series of mitzvot in **Numbers 15** is directed to all **the people**, **"Remember all of ADONAI's mitzvot and be holy to your God" (15:40)**. **Those** who rebelled in **Chapter 16** repeated this claim about **the holiness of the whole community in their** attack on **Moses** and **Aaron**, **"The whole community is holy, every one of them, and ADONAI is with them" (16:3b)**. **The rebels** used **the holiness of the whole community** as the basis for arguing that anyone, layman or Levite, could offer incense and sacrifices on the bronze altar; it was not an exclusive right of **Aaron** and **his sons**. **Their** claim, however, was repudiated by **Ha'Shem**. **Chapter 15** revealed the important function of **the true priest**, **"The priest is to make atonement for the whole Israelite community" (15:25 and 28)**. In **Chapter 16**, **Aaron** confirms his proper status as **the high priest** when **he stood between the living and the dead, stopped the plague** and made **atonement for the people (16:47-48)**.

Thus, the collection of mitzvot in **Numbers 15** is intimately and artfully interwoven in the words and themes with the rebellion stories that precede and follow it. The mitzvot were words of promise and hope for **the Wilderness generation**, but they became words of rejection and hopelessness for **the defiant Exodus generation**. **Numbers 15** also shows its own internal cohesion and logic of development through its several interlocking themes. It is an artfully designed progression. The question at the end of **Chapter 15** is whether the break in the narrative represented by the new mitzvot in this chapter will put an end to the series of rebellions that had begun in **Chapters 11-14**. The answer follows in **Chapter 16**.²⁹⁹