

NOTES AND QUESTIONS FOR INDUCTIVE STUDY IN THE BOOK OF NUMBERS

PART FIVE – CHAPTERS 18-25 – MORE MISTAKES IN LEADERSHIP – SURELY NOT MINE?

Q1. Again the Lord interrupts the story to remind the Levites of their special responsibilities and privileges,(chap.18) and the way to be clean.(chap.19) Why does He do this? What are the main points being made? How do they apply to us as Bible teachers?

It is a huge privilege to serve God by bringing the opportunity to know Him to those who have not yet met Him. The Levites, who picture all true believers, were never to forget the wonder of their position between the Lord and the people. They were to keep Israel aware of who the Lord was by their beautiful example, their careful illustration of the cross in sacrifices and their faithful teaching of the word. In return the Lord would ensure that they were well cared for in all their needs. Paul reminds us of the same promise in Phil.4:19. The Levites, out of God's provision for them, were also to give to Aaron and his family by tithing from the tithes they received. Again Paul reminds us of our responsibility to support those who teach us while at the same time as teachers we are to look to God, not to those we teach, for our support.(I Cor.9) This way we will not confuse the message of grace, of God who gives limitlessly and unconditionally. As Christians we are to come to the cross and worship God before we try to teach anyone else. Chapter 19 reminded the Israelites through the illustration of touching a corpse that we must be clean before God if we are to help anyone else. Sin is catching by example.

Q2. Chap. 20 seems like a repetition of Exod. 17. In what way is it different? Why as a consequence of Moses' action in this chapter is he forbidden to enter the Promised Land?

Throughout our lives we will be confronted with situations some of which will be similar to ones we have faced before. Others will be different. Israel had previously faced drought and God had provided by telling Moses to hit the rock with his staff.(Exod.17) Water flowed out. Paul explains that 'the rock was Christ'.(I Cor.10:4) Christ crucified makes it possible for the Spirit to flow into our lives and give us His life. But Jesus only had to be crucified once.(Heb.7:27) When we face new problems He does not need to die again for us, but we only have to speak to Him and life will flow. Moses, irritated with the Israelites complaining yet again, loses his temper and hits the rock twice. It seemed a small mistake but God wanted him and us to be absolutely clear that the cross is not to be repeated. To make the point strongly God takes away Moses' opportunity to enter the Promised Land, though of course he went to heaven. Moses failure at Meribah had consequences for his brother Aaron who would also not enter the Promised Land. Aaron had messed up badly before, (Exod.32; Num.12) but been forgiven. Our fundamental mistakes when we fail to grasp the meaning of the cross readily infect those close to us. Aaron died on the top of Mt Hor, within sight of the Promised Land.(chapter 20)

Q3. In chap. 21 the people became impatient with God's way of doing things. How does the New Testament comment on this story? What meaning does it give it? What special application does this have for Bible teachers?

As Israel draw near to Canaan, the tribes living on the fringe become aware of the coming invasion and begin to resist. The first to attack is the king of Arad who seems to be winning and takes some Israelite prisoners. Israel recognises that victory will only come when they

are in God's hands. Next time trusting the Lord instead of themselves, Israel are the undisputed winners. This is a lesson we have to learn over and over. Now Moses leads the people on a semicircular route well to the east through the deserts of modern Jordan. Conditions are tough so the Israelites complain yet again, assuming starvation. Their complaint is hypocritical 'there is no food...we loathe this miserable food.'(v.5) The Lord sent fiery serpents, poisonous snakes, into the camp and people were bitten. Satan came into the Garden of Eden in the form of a serpent. Rev.12:9 reminds us his character has never changed. When we grumble against God, the Devil has bitten us and it could be fatal. Moses as always prays for his people and the Lord provides a remarkable solution, a bronze serpent on a staff to which they only have to look to live. Jesus explains that story in Jn.3:14,15 as picturing Him made sin for us on the cross, to whom we only have to look in faith to escape the consequences of Satan's temptation and live. Next Moses leads them to a well of water, as God leads us from the cross to the indwelling Holy Spirit. Two more battles lie ahead as first Sihon, king of the Amorites, and then Og, king of Bashan try to prevent Israel reaching the edge of the Promised Land. Each time the battle is fought by God and they enjoy victory.(chapter 21)

Q4. Look up all the New Testament references to Balaam.(Num.22-24) How does this help us to understand the message of his life and ministry to us as teachers today? (II Tim.4:3,4)

The king of Moab was very much aware of what had happened to the kings who had challenged Israel in chapter 21. To avoid the same fate, he hoped for some divine intervention but his idea of God was of someone who could be persuaded by money to do what he wanted. Balaam obviously already had a reputation as someone who had the ear of God like several other non-Israelites such as Melchizedek,(Gen.14:18) and Jethro,(Exod.3:1) who had previously come into the story. He was from Pethor in Mesopotamia like the wise men who came from the East seeking Jesus.(Matt:2:1) Balak sent messengers to ask Balaam, for a good price, to put a curse on the Israelites. He assumed that ministry could be bought which is an idea the modern church has not entirely given up on. Balaam properly sought God's advice and the answer was clearly and firm - 'No!'. Balak was not to be so easily put off and sent more important ambassadors than last time with a greater bribe. He presumed Balaam was holding out for a better price. Unwisely Balaam swayed by money agreed to ask God again in case He had changed His mind.(II Pet.2:15,16) This time he was given permission to go with Balak's men but only to say what he was told when the time came. On the way to where Israel were, at a narrow point on the path, the Angel of the Lord, who elsewhere can be identified as Christ Himself,(Judg.3:3-18) blocked the way. Only the donkey could see Him at first. The donkey recognising his Creator refused to go further despite beatings from Balaam. Finally to show that Balaam was the real ass, the Lord enabled the animal to protest. Balaam was allowed to continue his journey with strict instructions to say only what God told him. When the time came he delivered many words of blessing only. Balak was not impressed.

Q5. Chap. 25 shows the outcome of another kind of false teaching. What is it and what effect does it have on family life? Why did the Lord deal with it so severely?

Balaam might have been remembered as one of the great prophets of the Old Testament but for what followed which ruined his record. Rev.2:14 confirms that Balaam was responsible for what happened in Numbers 25 when the women of Moab entice the Israelite men into first sexual immorality and then idolatry.(Num.31:16; II Pet.2:15; Jude 11) It seems that in the end having resisted Balak's original bribe, he eventually gave in to temptation. Israel had

been instructed to marry only those who shared their faith in God. Paul repeats the same warning in II Cor.6:14-16. If in marriage we do not share the same faith we are living dangerously.