

NOTES AND QUESTIONS FOR INDUCTIVE STUDY IN THE BOOK OF NUMBERS

PART FOUR – CHAPTERS 13-17 COMMON MISTAKES OF CHRISTIAN LEADERS – HAVE YOU AVOIDED THEM?

Chaps.7-12 focussed on the general problems of leaders. Now the book concentrates on the special responsibility of leaders to teach others.

Q1. We have seen in Deuteronomy, chapter 1, that the demand to send spies into Canaan was an expression of doubt in God's promises. Numbers 13 describes how they were sent, what they found and how the majority report discouraged the congregation. If we think of the spies as Bible teachers exploring the scriptures and then teaching others, what does this chapter teach about how this should be done and on the other hand the damage to others if it is done wrongly?

When Moses urged the Israelites to go in and possess the land of Canaan which God had given them, they doubted. The Lord urges us to discover and enjoy all that He has given us in Jesus Christ. Depending on Jesus rather than ourselves sounds too simple so we doubt. Moses' solution was to send a representative from each tribe, quite possibly some of the 70 who had been appointed to assist Moses in leadership in chapter 11. The twelve spies were to explore the land and come back with evidence of the truth of what God had promised. As leaders we are to be 'able to teach'.(I Tim.3:2) But before we can teach we need to search the scriptures for ourselves to be personally instructed and convinced by God of the truth.(Acts 17:11,12) As we search the word we will come across all kinds of big questions we may never have met before. Are these questions a cause for doubt or a challenge to prove God? Ten of the twelve spies could only see the giants in the land as insuperable obstacles. They then passed their fears on to the people who in turn doubted that God was big enough to deal with them. Caleb supported by Joshua said, 'Won't it be exciting to see how our great God will deal with them?'

Q2. Why is it dangerous to teach the truth?(Num. 14) What are the consequences of doubting the word of God? Is Moses' intercession,(v.13 - 19) an example of how to pray? What was the effect of his prayer?

Moses, Aaron, Caleb and Joshua, though a tiny minority of 4 among 600,000, stuck to their message of hope in God who keeps His promises. As Bible teachers we have responsibility to continue to emphasise grace. God has not only given us all we need in Christ for every life situation but He in us will be the power to overcome every obstacle. Those who do not accept the grace of God will either spend a futile life in a religious wilderness or they will try to return to Egypt, the life they had before Jesus met them. The rest were prepared to kill them. Jesus said we would be hated because He is hated.(Lk.21:17; Jn.15:18) The Lord spelled out His judgement on those who rejected His message. They would not enter the Promised Land. God repeated His earlier promise to Moses,(Exod.32:10) to make a great nation of him. Moses pleaded with God on the basis of the damage His action would do to His reputation with the Egyptians. The Lord agreed to Moses' request not to carry out His warning now, but nevertheless that generation would die out in the wilderness over the next 40 years. Though delayed, in the end His will would be done. When God reveals His will our prayers however passionate will not improve on His plan. Moses' intercession was fruitless because he thought he knew better than God. First to die were the 10 spies who had only

preached failure. The rest in panic decided to try now to enter Canaan, but without God's plan, timing, presence and power their attempts were inevitably a disaster.

Q3. Most of chap. 15 is a brief summary of the teaching of Lev. 1 - 7 on sacrifice. Why does the Lord break into the story of the wilderness journey in this way? How does Jesus use a similar method of training His disciples in the New Testament?

After dealing with the grumblers of chapters 11,12 and the fearful spies in chapters 13,14, God pauses the story briefly to remind the Israelites of the importance and meaning of the sacrifices to Him which they had been instructed to make. All sin was covered by the burnt offering. This opened the way for the grain offering as God feeds us with truth. The peace offering reminds us that the cross removes conflict and bitterness between us. From time to time they became aware that they had gone against God's plan unintentionally at which time the sin offering was to be made. All sacrifices speak of the cross of Christ where sin is dealt with, opening up the way for us to learn from God. Accompanying the animal sacrifice each time would be flour, the word of God ground up, wine, the blood of Christ, and oil, the Holy Spirit, all of which are needed to make the cross effective in our lives. It is good to pause frequently to let the Holy Spirit speak to us of what has gone wrong which He wants to deal with. And then we can move on.

Q4. Num. 13 warned of one danger for Bible teachers. Chapter 16 describes the opposite extreme. What is it? Compare this story with Phil. 1:15-17; Gal. 1:8,9; Judges 21:25 and II Pet. 1:20,21.

Chapter 13 warned of leaders called by God who lacked the confidence in all He can do in the face of difficulties for them and those they lead. Chapter 16 describes the opposite problem of those whose arrogance causes them to appoint themselves as leaders and to challenge those whom God has called. Inevitably as Paul points out, their message will be different. Korah was a Kohathite, the group of Levites responsible for the sacred equipment of the tabernacle, a hugely privileged position. They thought of leaders as people lifted above others. Moses is described in Num.12:3 as, 'very humble, more than any man who was on the face of the earth.' He led by placing himself not above others but below them. This was exactly Jesus' model of leadership.(Lk.22:24-27) The terrible fate Korah, Dathan and Abiram suffer is a strong warning of how seriously God takes this issue. Their families perish with them as whole families will often be drawn into personality cults. The general public are easily impressed by such people so the damage will often be widespread.

Q5. What authority do we have as Bible teachers? How does chap.17 say that authority can be recognised? Why in future was Aaron's rod kept permanently in the Holy of Holies?(Heb. 9:4)

In causing Aaron's rod to bud when the others did not God was confirming that it was to Aaron, the high priest, and the Levites, that God had given authority to speak on His behalf. This privilege was not given to other tribes. In the New Testament, Jesus is our high priest and all true believers are priests.(Heb.3:1; I Pet.2:9) Jesus gave all authority to speak His word to us as Christians.(Matt.28:18) Notice that this authority was given to all Christians not just to some. The evidence of Aaron's authority was simply that his rod was fruitful. In the church today, whether God is using any preacher or teacher also comes down to the question of fruitfulness. It is not title or qualification which determines God's authority but the fruit in people's lives who are blessed by what they hear.(Matt.7:15-23) Keeping the rod

of Aaron in the Holy of Holies was a permanent reminder of the simple question we need to ask about the authority of a Christian speaker. So long as the rod stayed there, next to the word of God, beneath the mercy seat from where God spoke, it remained fruitful.