

NOTES AND QUESTIONS FOR INDUCTIVE STUDY IN THE BOOK OF NUMBERS

PART TWO – CHAPTERS 4-8 TAKING OUR PART IN GOD’S PLAN SERIOUSLY

Q1. Why was such care to be taken in dismantling, moving and re-erecting the tabernacle? Why were they told that they must not see the holy objects, even for a moment, lest they die? What can we learn from this about Christian ministry today? (Num.4) Is all this careful instruction emphasising something we have lost sight of as Christians.

We have already seen in chapter three how the three sub-tribes of the Levites were each given responsibility for one aspect of the care of the Tabernacle, the outer covering, the framework and the inner working. Now their instructions when the Tabernacle is to be moved are broken down further. Each group has instructions about carrying the part of the Tabernacle which has been allocated to them but they are to touch or see nothing until the son’s of Aaron, the high priest, have covered them over. In the book of Hebrews, Jesus is our high priest.(Heb.4:14) Aaron’s role foreshadowed Jesus’. No-one else could see or touch things which were sacred. We are not to take our relationship with the Lord lightly. We need a deep sense of awe and wonder about the privilege of having a relationship with God through His Son.(chapter 4)

Q2. Chapter five deals with three practical situations. What are they? What does each one teach about sin, its nature, effects and cure? What are the common features between all three situations? Why are they introduced at this point in the book of Numbers?

Three seemingly very different problems are dealt with in turn in chapter 5. First there were 3 situations in which people were not fit to be in the company of others, leprosy, a discharge, or contact with a dead person other than immediate family. All three involved a risk of passing on infection to someone else. The most infectious disease is sin which is so easily passed on by example. The second situation involved sin of any kind which was always first against God but also against another human being. Having confessed to God, he also needs to put the situation right with the person he has harmed. This over-compensation is the principle Zaccheus is referring to in Luke 19:8. The third problem is of a jealous husband suspicious of his wife’s possible unfaithfulness. The remedy described here seems quite horrific to our modern world which takes such things so lightly. The point however is to emphasise the immense damage which occurs in the family if either jealousy or unfaithfulness is undealt with. Sin according to chapter 5 is no light matter!

Q3. Chapter six is concerned with a Nazirite's vows. What was the Nazirite to go without? Is this a picture of the Christian life? Why were his vows not permanent? Do you know anyone in the Old or New Testament who was a Nazirite? Was Jesus a Nazirite?

After dealing with the infectiousness of sin, the Lord instructs Moses in a custom known as the Nazirite vow. Nazirite means ‘separated’ or ‘dedicated’ and it illustrates the problem of trying to separate ourselves from sin so that we can be dedicated to God. The person taking this vow was to avoid three things, drinking wine or even eating grapes, cutting the hair and having any contact with a dead person, even a close family member. A man or a woman could take this vow. The length of time was not specified. At the end of the time of the vow, every kind of sacrifice was to be offered. Only one person in the Old Testament was a Nazirite, Samson. His parents were instructed to make him a Nazirite from birth,(Judg.13:7) so to start with he had no choice. His vow came to an end when he let Delilah cut his

hair.(Judg.16:17) His vow allowed him to receive God's supernatural strength but the Lord left him when he broke the vow.(Judg.16:20,28) To know God's strength in our lives we need to allow ourselves to be separated from sin. It can help us sometimes just to stop and realise what a huge issue separation for God really is. We might assume John the Baptist was a Nazirite though the Bible does not say so. Jesus certainly was not because He drank wine and willingly touched the dead.(chapter 6)

Q4. What was the task of the sons of Kohath?(Num.4:1-16; 7:9) Why were they not given ox carts like the other Levites to help them in their work? How do Matt.10:38 and 11:29 teach the same principle? What does this show us about the first condition of effective Christian leadership? Every tribal leader presented exactly the same offering. What do these offerings teach about the place of the cross, the Bible and prayer?(Numbers 7)

The Gershonites were responsible for moving the covering of the Tabernacle for which they were given two ox carts and 4 oxen. The sons of Merari had the much heavier task of transporting the framework of the Tabernacle so they were given twice as many oxen and carts. The Kohathites had the privilege of carefully carrying the furnishing of the Tabernacle, the ark, the altars and the tables which were too precious to be put on a cart. They were to be God's oxen as we are when we take up the cross as His disciples.(Matt.10:38; 11:29) This instruction would have been ignored when the captured ark of the covenant was to be brought back to Jerusalem under David's instruction in II Sam.6. The consequences were fatal. Equipping the Levites with the vessels and the sacrifices they would need was the responsibility of all the tribes equally. We are all to be part of the sacrifice of Christ on the cross not merely spectators. To make absolutely sure, the instruction about what to provide is repeated 12 times over to each tribe by name. There is no hierarchy in the Christian church. When everything has been done as God instructed to set up and equip the Tabernacle, God finally spoke from the mercy seat above the ark. When He speaks to us it is always based on His word and therefore completely consistent with the whole of scripture.(chapter 7)

Q5. What does the picture of the lampstand teach throughout the Bible? What was the overall purpose of the Levites? How did their preparation equip them for leadership? Why did the Levites retire at 50? Lampstands and Levites – what did they have in common?(Numbers 8)

Three objects were set up in the Holy Place, which was the domain of the Levites, the lampstand, the table of showbread and the altar of incense. There are three ways in which they, and we as Christians, are to serve the world in which God has put us – by being the light of the world,(Matt.5:14) by feeding people His message,(Jn.21:15) and in prayer.(Rev.5:8; Acts 6:4) The task of the Levites was to show the people how they could be clean from sin before God. The rest of the chapter is concerned with exactly how the Levites themselves were to be clean and stay clean. Unless we are enjoying the forgiveness of God and His power to keep us on His path we have nothing convincing to say.(chapter 8)