

## NOTES AND QUESTIONS FOR INDUCTIVE STUDY IN THE BOOK OF NUMBERS

### PART ONE – CHAPTERS 1-3 EVERYONE HAS A PLACE IN GOD’S PLAN. FIND YOURS!

Before reading the notes in each part of this study, work through the questions which come first. As you do pray that the Lord will teach you. Only then go through the notes to see if they add anything to what the Lord has already shown you.

Q1. Where and when in the Exodus journey does the book of Numbers begin and end? If Exodus describes redemption, the problems of the Christian life and basic teaching about Christ - what would you expect to be the purpose of this book? I Cor. 10:1-13 is one of the best commentaries in the New Testament on the book of Numbers. Which four stories in Numbers are referred to? How does Paul relate these events in Numbers to the problems in the Corinthian Church? What therefore can we expect to learn from the study of Numbers?

The book of Exodus told the story of the early life and calling of Moses, and how God used him to bring the people of Israel out of slavery in Egypt into the Sinai desert. At Mt.Sinai they met with God and received instruction on how He wanted them to live. Because they would always fail to live to God’s standard He then gave them the plan for the Tabernacle which would symbolise forgiveness through the cross of Christ and the power to live differently through His resurrection and indwelling. The Tabernacle was built and God moved in. Numbers now picks the story up from this point, describing the next 38 years until they were finally poised on the edge of the Promised Land. It is the story of struggling believers who made all the mistakes we also make. It tells how Moses, as God’s appointed leader, attempts to deal with failure among God’s people and sometimes in the process fails himself. The New Testament, as always the best commentary on the Old Testament, identifies four such occasions in Numbers and one in Exodus.(I Cor.10:1-13) In Numbers 11, the Israelites became bored with nothing to eat except manna and demanded meat. We can become bored with no spiritual food except the Bible and want something more exciting. Numbers 25 describes the Israelite men preferring Moabite or Midianite women who followed other gods to their own women who should have shared their faith. Christian family life was threatened as it will be if we do not have wholeheartedly Christian marriages.(I Cor.10:8) In Numbers 21 the Israelites complain about the Lord and their living conditions. As Christians we can look enviously at the prosperity of some unbelievers and feel we have missed out.(I Cor.10:9) In Numbers 16, Korah and his allies challenge the leadership of Moses and want to take over. Division over leadership is destructive in the witness of the Christian church today.(I Cor.10:10) Paul had already pointed out all these mistakes from Numbers which were being repeated in the Corinthian church.

Q2. In chapter one the twelve tribes, other than the tribe of Levi, are numbered. Which of the people are counted? What does such a record teach us about the value of every individual to God, and what might be the message about the value and danger of statistics in the Christian Church? Why were the Levites treated differently (remembering that the Levites were the priests of the Old Testament)? Who are the priests in the New Testament? Where is Nahshon mentioned again in the Bible?

Chapter one is a list of names and numbers and as such seems irrelevant to us, but no part of the Bible is irrelevant.(II Tim.3:16,17) Many names are given of whom we know nothing else, but every created person is known to God and special to Him. The census taken here is only of men fit for war. God wants every believer to be part of His battle against evil for the hearts of men, women and children, and so to count in His plan.(Eph.6:10-17) On the other hand the Levites were not to

be counted yet. As the priests who served in the Tabernacle they were to be God's means of drawing people into a relationship with Christ. In the New Testament every believer is meant to be a priest.(I Pet.2:9; Rev.1:6) 'Priest' is not a special title for leaders. There is a warning here about our preoccupation with counting heads in the Christian church. God knows who belongs to Him. Nahshon of the tribe of Judah was the grandfather of Boaz who married Ruth, and so an ancestor of King David and eventually Jesus.(Ruth 4:20; Luke 3:32)

Q3. In chapter two, three tribes are ordered to camp on each of the four sides of the tabernacle. The Levites are those around the tabernacle closest of all. What can we learn from this about the effective functioning of the Christian church, and about the special place that God has in His plan for each of us? If the Levites were placed between the tabernacle, where God was, and the rest of the people, what does this tell us about the role God intended for them and for us? Sometimes the crowd around Jesus kept people who needed Him from seeing Him.(Luke 19:3) How does this still happen?

Central in God's plan for His people was the Lord Himself in the Tabernacle, a superb visual aid for understanding the gospel of Jesus Christ. Central to the church of Jesus Christ is Jesus, the head of His body.(Eph.1:22; 4:15; 5:23) No person, title, or organisation is to take His place. Three tribes were placed on each side of the Tabernacle, north, south, east and west. As families each had their place in His plan. None were more important than the others as every part of the body of Christ has a unique purpose and is no more or less vital to God's plan for His church.(I Cor.12:12-26) Our role in His church today will often also be as a family, not just as an individual. The Levites, as we have already seen in chapter one, foreshadowed not special leaders but all true believers who are meant to be God's means of first making contact with unbelievers and drawing them into a relationship with Him. We are to be a light switched on in a dark world.(Eph.5:8-11) Sadly sometimes the crowd around Jesus hindered the needy reaching Him.(Mark 2:1-5; Matt.19:13-15; Luke 19:3) We still can.

Q4. Chapter three describes how the Levites were numbered differently. Why was this? What were their three special tasks? What do these tasks represent in the church today? Why were the first-born numbered separately?(Exod.11-13) What does the comparison of the number of Levites to the number of firstborn throughout Israel imply about the special relationship that each Levite was to have with the rest of the nation? What clue does this give us as to how God would have Christians to make themselves responsible, for example, for a whole city? What happened to Nadab and Abihu? How by their fate was God warning all of us?

The Levites were set apart to serve God and so to reach out to others. They were divided into three sub-tribes each with distinct responsibilities. The Gershonites were to care for the outer covering of the Tabernacle. Some of us are called to show the Christian message in action to the world. The Kohathites looked after the various objects in the Tabernacle which were used in worship. Others of us are responsible for the actual task of ministry. The Merarites had the job of looking after the framework of the Tabernacle, the hidden structure which was vital to allow the whole process to function. Yet others work behind the scenes in management to provide a framework without which the church will be disorganised. No one is more important than the other. The first born of each family of the Israelites had been individually redeemed by the Passover lamb sacrificed in each household.(Exod.11-13) They belonged to God. The Levites represented the first born of the whole nation so each Levite was to think of himself as first representing one special first born man. Service of God leads into serving man on a one by one personal basis. Moses' oldest two sons, Nadab and Abihu took the whole process of representing people before God lightly, as described in Lev.10:1,2, and died as a result. Serving God is a hugely privileged calling to be jealously guarded.