

NUMBERS - A STUDY GUIDE

THE CENTRAL QUESTION:

What does this book/story say to us about God?

This question may be broken down further as follows:

a. Why did God do it/allow it?

b. Why did He record it for our study?

1. What picture of God would you have if you had only the book of Numbers? Where and when did Moses write it down? (see Numbers 36:13)
2. Why did God instruct them to number the men of war if He didn't want them to fight? (Numbers 1 and 26) Why weren't the mixed multitude counted? Or did they become integrated into the different tribes? Why do you think the Levites were counted from age 1 month, while other tribes were counted beginning at age twenty?
3. If the Tent of Meeting was intended as a place of worship, why did He instruct them to put to death anyone who came near it? (Numbers 1:51; 3:10,38; 4:15-20; **17:12,13**; **18:2,3,7,22**; Compare Deuteronomy 25:5; Hosea 5:7; Exodus 29:33) How were the people to present their offerings if they couldn't come near the Tent? (Leviticus 1:1-5) If only Aaron and the Levites were to go in it, what happened in Exodus 33:7-11? Moses went in with Joshua from the tribe of Judah who apparently stayed behind even after Moses left?
4. Why did God forbid even the Kohathites, whose responsibility it was to carry all the sacred furniture, to ever look on it or touch it lest they die? (Numbers 4:15,20; 18:1-3,7) What had to be done to take care of the tabernacle that could possibly have occupied 8,580 men? (Numbers 4:34-48)
5. What is the meaning and the purpose of the "test for jealousy" or the "test for unfaithfulness?" (Numbers 5:11-31) Do you think that perhaps the way this test was actually carried out would have caused a person either through fear or guilt to reveal the truth? Considering the characteristics of males and females, it is more likely that the husband would be unfaithful. Was there a test for the husband if the wife become jealous? Why were the women so often treated as "property?" By contrast what about the "rights" accorded to the daughters of Zelophehad (Numbers 26:33; 27:1-11; 6:1-12; Joshua 17:3-6; 1 Chronicles 7:15) and God's directions regarding the inheritance laws?
6. What was the purpose of the Nazirite vows as outlined in Numbers 6:1-21? What is sinful about being in the presence of a dead body? How could that possibly contaminate someone? (Leviticus 11:31,32; Numbers 5:2; 6:11; 19:11-18)
7. We are told that a disaster would have struck if the Levites had not been dedicated to the Lord. What could possibly be the source of such a disaster? (Numbers 8:19; Compare 16:41-50) Do you get the impression that God is watching every move that the people made and if anyone did anything wrong God would strike him?
8. We have record of three times when the children of Israel complained about the food. Who always seemed to be the first to complain? (Numbers 11:4) On the first occasion God gave them quails to eat for a day or two and began to feed them with manna. (Exodus 16:1-36) On the next occasion, they were complaining about the manna itself and God sent them enough quail to last a month (Numbers 11:4-34) but many of them died in a plague. What do you think of God's way of reacting to the request for meat in Numbers 11:18-20? Doesn't this sound like a pouting child? Why would God allow Himself to be pictured like this? On the third occasion God didn't give them any food but sent them fiery serpents instead, followed by a bronze serpent so they could be preserved from death (Numbers 21:4-9). Was God losing His patience? Did God miraculously provide food for all the animals as well?

9. What do you think of Moses' complaint to the Lord in Numbers 11:10-15? What does this imply about the relationship between them?
10. Why can't God speak to all His people as He did to Moses, clearly face to face, instead of in riddles? (Numbers 12:6-8)
11. Is it fair that God visits the sins of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generations? (Exodus 20:5; Numbers 14:18 but compare Exodus 34:17) How do you think this actually happens?
12. Why did the Israelites later become so exclusive and so "us-versus-them" in their thinking, when God clearly says that the native born and the stranger are to be treated the same? (Exodus 12:49; 22:21; 23:9; Leviticus 19:34; Numbers 15:14-16)
13. Why was God so harsh on the man gathering sticks on the Sabbath? (Numbers 15:32-36) Was the man given a chance to repent? Why did God ask the people to stone the man? If he needed to be destroyed, why didn't God Himself do it? (as He did to Nadab and Abihu) What affect do you think this had on the people?
14. What would we do if we were told to follow the advice regarding deliberate sins as found in Numbers 15:30-31? What percentage of our sins are deliberate? If sin is "rebelliousness" (1 John 3:4) isn't that always deliberate?
15. Would you dare to speak out against the Lord after seeing His glory appear, then watching Korah, Dathan and Abiram and their families being swallowed up by the earth and fire burning up 250 men before your eyes? (Numbers 16:16-35) What kind of mental state do you think the people were in that allowed them to act so rebelliously at that point? How would you feel if you had been promised the opportunity to be one of the "conquering nation" that was to inherit and enjoy a land "flowing with milk and honey" and then were suddenly told that you would spend the rest of your life in a hot, dry desert and would never see the "promised land?"
16. What do you think of the method God used to identify the tribe of Levi as His priests? (Numbers 17) Why don't we use "budding rods" today? Wouldn't that be a more sure way of electing church officers?
17. Why were only the males allowed to eat the most holy offerings? (Numbers 18:8-10)
18. **What was so serious about Moses' sin when he struck the rock instead of speaking to it? (Numbers 20:2-13; Deuteronomy 3:23-28) Moses had spoken so well of God so many times before (Exodus 32:10-14; Numbers 14:13-25), why did this one incident of apparent passion disqualify him from entering the promised land? Why was Aaron also punished?**
19. **What is the meaning of the whole story of Balaam? (Numbers 22-25 and 31) Is this a story we should quote as evidence that we should "persevere in prayer?" Why did God "change His mind" and let Balaam go to curse Israel after He had told him not to earlier? What was Balaam's motive for wanting to go? Can you imagine asking permission from God to go and curse His people? What was the final end of Balaam? (Numbers 31:8)**
20. **When God asked the Israelites to destroy the Midianites, why would God tell them to utterly destroy men, women, even baby boys, but leave alive the unmarried women and girls? (Numbers 31:7,17,18) Wasn't it these same "unmarried women" that had gotten them into such trouble already? (Numbers 25:1-9; 31:16) What do you think the 12,000 soldiers would do with their 16,000 "virgins" and what would be done with the 64 who were a "tax for the Lord?" (verses 36-46) Compare the experience with Sihon and the Amorites and Og and his people (Numbers 21:21-35) when they killed everyone. (Numbers 21:34-35) Why were the Midianites treated differently?**

