

evidence of any such practice among the nations contiguous to Israel. It is true that the idea that divinity would intervene to reveal the guilt or innocence of one accused of a crime is found among many peoples; yet in none of the nations neighbouring to Israel is there evidence of any custom with significant details similar to those of our present section. The nearest analogy would be the Babylonian ordeal described in the Code of Hammurabi, but this is very different from anything contained in the Bible.

It should be noted that it is nowhere stated that this test is intended to be used after the people settle in the Promised Land. Chapter 5 begins with specific references to the purity of 'the camp' (2-3), and there is no reference to such a practice in later parts of the Bible or in any other writing that has come down to us from the period prior to the destruction of the Jerusalem temple in A.D. 70. A century or more after that event the rabbis engaged in extensive speculations about every feature of the law and every aspect of the ancient life of Israel. In the Talmudic discussion of the law they add to this ordinance other features quite unknown to the book of Numbers, selecting a particular place in the temple where they say that the rite was administered, and say that it was abolished by a first-century rabbi for a very strange reason. Such evidence is of little value as far as actual events in first-century Jerusalem are concerned. Even assuming, however, that the practice might have been carried on at that time it would certainly not prove anything about the long period from Joshua to David, to Zedekiah, and during the centuries from Ezra to the Maccabees. It is most reasonable to consider the practice in the light of the context as a provision intended only for the wilderness journey. Our chapter teaches that God promised to perform a miracle