

## NUMBERS 25 FROM THE HEIGHTS TO THE DEPTH

### PART 1: THE SITUATION

Do a quick read on Numbers 25, compare it with what you have gone through in chapters 23-24; what immediate reaction do you have?

#### Note:

לחיי (wayyāhel, “began”) may be an example of double entendre. The root hālal III means “to pollute,” “to defile,” “to profane” in the Niphal, Piel, and Pual stems. In the Hiphil, as here, the verb means “to begin.” It is used in the same way in other odious contexts (e.g., Gen 6:1; 10:8 [“grew to be”]). In any event, the next verb, תזנוז (liznôt, “to play the whore”), leaves nothing to the imagination. The root zānāh has the idea of “fornication” in Gen 38:24; Lev 21:9; Deuteronomy 22:21; Hos 4:13–14 et al.—all in the case of women engaging in illicit sexual relationships. Here the verb is used of men. They went “whoring” after the women priestesses of the Canaanite religion of Baal. It is a defect of our language that we have numerous words for loose women but few really suitable terms for loose men.

Read the note provided, what do you think is happening in the camp of Israel?

Examine the passage carefully, do you think that this is an isolated act by some people? Why?

What was the primary transgression for the Israelites? Is this about sexual sins (7<sup>th</sup> commandment) or idolatry (1<sup>st</sup> commandment)?

In verse 2, it is said “that the people took part in the sacrifices of their gods”. Do a quick read of these verses [Exodus 34:15; Deuteronomy 32:38; Judges 16:23; Isaiah 57:7; Ezekiel 20:28; Hosea 4:19; Psalm 106:28]. Can you pick out the emphasis in these verses? Why do you think the right sacrifices are so important in the life of God’s people? How do you relate it to your current routines?

Verse 3 can be rendered:

*And so Israel was yoked to Baal Peor; (see also Psalm 106:28)  
But Yahweh was enraged against Israel.*

What do you think the word 'yoke' is trying to convey? God's anger was aroused!  
Discuss the significance of the text here using the name of God (Yahweh)!

Do a cross reference to these passages, can you discover the plot against Israel?  
Numbers 31:8, 16; Revelation 2:14

Discover the significance of this passage in the light of what you have seen in chapter 22-24.

For further study, you may want to look into the following:

1. This is about 40 years after the departure from Egypt and the concluding chapter on the first generation of Israelites. Compare what happened at the start of their journey (at Mt Sinai) and what has happened here. What can you say of the Israelites?
  2. Compare all the other incidents of rebellion in the preceding chapters of Numbers with what is happening here in chapter 25. Can you highlight the difference? What significant lesson do you think it holds for us?
  3. Take a look at the temptation of Jesus (Matthew 4:1-11). Compare it with Israel's experiences in the wilderness. What comfort and lessons can you draw from this meditation?
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PART 2: GOD'S JUDGMENT

What was the judgment from God? (Please see note for the severity of this sentence)

Note:

*The NIV translation "kill them and expose them" is a rendering of עִקְוֵהוּ (w<sup>e</sup>hōqa', "expose [them]"). From v.5 we understand that this verse calls for Moses to take the leaders of the people and to execute them and then to "set them aside" or "expose them" to the Lord in broad daylight. The verb yāqa' ("to set aside," "to expose") is used in the Qal stem to describe a bone dislocation (Gen 32:25, of Jacob's thigh). Possibly here the meaning of the Hiphil is "to [kill them and then] expose them with legs and arms broken" 2 Sam 21:6, 9 may describe the same type of "exposing" of mutilated. The word hang may also be translated as 'impale' or to be pierced with a spike.*

What was the response from Moses to God's command? Looking at verses 6-9, do you think it was carried out? Discuss why?

Again look at verses 6-9, try and answer the following questions:

1. Where did the incident occur?
2. Who was the Midianite woman? What about the Israelite involved in this scandal?
3. What was Moses, the leaders and the 'faithful' doing? Before and during this incident?
4. What should have been done (but not carried out)? What was the consequences of inaction?

PART 3: PHINEHAS' ZEALOUS ACT

What did Phinehas do? What do you think is the motivation behind Phinehas? Is that your motivation too?

One of the consequence of Phinehas' action resulted in the enacting of the Zealot's right in latter day Israel. According to which anyone, even though not qualified by his official position, possessed the right, in cases of any daring contempt of the theocratic institutions, or any daring violation of the honor of God, to execute vengeance upon the criminals. Is this the right conclusion from the act of Phinehas in this passage? Why or why not?

This passage tells us that in order for the wrath and punishment of God to be averted, sin (rebellion against God) need to be dealt with (atoned). Your sins and my sins too need to be dealt with. Discuss how may it be dealt with?

Can you see Jesus even in Numbers 25? Discuss with your group.

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