

Lesson 4 – Numbers 25-31

Text: Numbers 25-31

Main Characters: God, Moses, Eleazar, Phinehas, Midianites, Joshua, Israelites

Key Passages:

- Numbers 26:63-65 – All of the people who God had said would die in the wilderness had died.
- Numbers 27:15-23 – Joshua was selected by God to be the next leader over Israel.
- Numbers 31:1-8 – The Israelites killed the Midianites for their evil influence over them, including Balaam, who had apparently advised them to seduce the Israelites.

Main Storyline:

While the Israelites remained near the Jordan River, a number of Midianite women (who also lived in the land of Moab) infiltrated the Israelite camp. They invited the Israelites to participate in worship to their god, Baal. The Israelites went and worshipped Baal along with the Midianites. Not only did this involve feasting and sacrifices, but it also required ritual fornication.

God became extremely angry as a result of these trespasses against Him, and instructed Moses to have the offenders hanged. It seems that He also sent a plague on the people to kill those who had joined themselves to Baal by their sexual immorality. While the offenders were being punished, an Israelite named Zimri openly paraded a Midianite woman, Cozbi, through the camp and into his tent, where they began to commit fornication. Phinehas, Eleazar's son, ran into Zimri's tent with a javelin and stabbed through him and the woman together, killing them both. At that moment, God stopped the plague against Israel, but not before 24,000 Israelites were killed. God also told Moses that, as a result of Phinehas' zeal, his family would always have the priesthood.

God then told Moses to take vengeance on the Midianites for what they did to Israel (Numbers 31). Moses sent 1,000 men from each tribe (12,000 men total) as well as Phinehas, the priest (recall Numbers 10:9), to kill the Midianites. They killed all of the men, but took all the women and children back to the camp. Moses rebuked them for bringing the women back, as it had been the women, specifically, who had caused the Israelites to sin. Moses instructed them to kill the rest of the males, including the children, and any woman who was not a virgin. The Israelites obeyed Moses' instructions. The Israelites split up the spoils among the army and the rest of the congregation, giving a portion of it to the Lord. Following this, however, the officers of the army noted that they had not lost one man in the battle. Feeling unworthy of this blessing, they decided to offer all of the gold they had found to God.

God gave Moses several other commandments between these two events. He commanded Moses to take another census of the men over 20 in the congregation (Numbers 26). The tribes with the most men would have the most land in Canaan, though the exact parcels of land would be chosen by lot. God also dealt with a situation where a man only had daughters and had died (Numbers 27). Since there was no man in the family remaining, he was not counted to have an inheritance in the land. God decided that if a man only had daughters and died, his inheritance would pass on to his daughters. Importantly, God also named Moses' successor, Joshua, and inaugurated him in front of all Israel. He also gave various laws regarding sacrifices, offerings, and oaths (see Numbers 28-30).

Lessons/Applications:

- 1.) Fornication and idolatry are heinous sins against God (Ephesians 5:1-7). The power of these two sins in our society cannot be underemphasized.
- 2.) We cannot outwit God; there will always be consequences for sin (Numbers 23:19-20).
- 3.) God delivers absolutely on His promises to care for His people (Romans 8:31-39).