

“One Stood Up”  
Numbers 25:1-13  
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In this study we will be looking at Number 25. This book is not often on the top of everybody's to read book of the year. The problem is it's been given this name Numbers yet the Hebrew would say it's called 'in the wilderness' which is a much better name. The first ten chapters of the book of Numbers do have a lot of numbers and some peculiar details, but it's a book that has espionage and insurrection. It's got fiery serpents and talking donkeys. It's got an angel with a sword. It's got explosive manifestations of God's wrath. The ground opens up and fire comes from everywhere in this book. Don't skip over it. When you get to Numbers 11:1, wipe off the glaze and say “something wild is going to happen” but sometimes horrifying, sometimes bizarre, but always Godly and edifying. So we can't start in Numbers 25 without having a little bit of context. I'm going to try and make the context as quick as possible, because we could spend a lot of time with the things that have gone on between Genesis 1 and Numbers 24. So what's happening?

Israel has been wandering in the wilderness for 38 years. The original generation are dying out. They are probably all dead. Moses disobeyed and he will die in the wilderness. Miriam and Aaron are dead. The next generation is what's left and then we get to this section called the book of Balaam. It's longer than the book of Jonah. It's a long book in the middle, and it's designed to be in the middle, because when we're asking the question, who will speak to God for Israel and does God still care about Israel, suddenly, a false prophet with a talking donkey shows up and God says, “They are my chosen people. They are uncursable. They're beloved by Me. They will have dominion over the land.” Praise God for His faithfulness. So, what will Israel do? Here's where we pick up at Numbers 25.

Numbers 25:1-13 says *[1] While Israel lived in Shittim, the people began to whore with the daughters of Moab. [2] These invited the people to the sacrifices of their gods, and the people ate and bowed down to their gods. [3] So Israel yoked himself to Baal of Peor. And the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel. [4] And the LORD said to Moses, “Take all the chiefs of the people and hang them in the sun before the LORD, that the fierce anger of the LORD may turn away from Israel.” [5] And Moses said to the judges of Israel, “Each of you kill those of his men who have yoked themselves to Baal of Peor.”*

*[6] And behold, one of the people of Israel came and brought a Midianite woman to his family, in the sight of Moses and in the sight of the whole congregation of the people of Israel, while they were weeping in the entrance of the tent of meeting. [7] When Phinehas the son of Eleazar, son of Aaron the priest, saw it, he rose and left the congregation and took a spear in his hand [8] and went after the man of Israel into the chamber and pierced both of them, the man of Israel and the woman through her belly. Thus the plague on the people of Israel was stopped. [9] Nevertheless, those who died by the plague were twenty-four thousand.*

*[10] And the LORD said to Moses, [11] “Phinehas the son of Eleazar, son of Aaron the priest, has turned back my wrath from the people of Israel, in that he was jealous with my jealousy among them, so that I did not consume the people of Israel in my jealousy. [12] Therefore say, ‘Behold, I give to him my covenant of peace, [13] and it shall be to him and to his descendants after him the covenant of a perpetual priesthood, because he was jealous for his God and made atonement for the people of Israel.’” This is God's Word.*

Prayer:

Father, we are grateful for Your Word. It's perfect, inspired, inerrant, infallible, holy, mighty, and difficult. It cuts us, prods us and leads us to ask big questions. Father, in this study the best thing we can do is hear Your Word and it's been done. I pray that as we look further into this message, You would guide our hearts, open our hearts, and help us to see that You have given us a covenant of peace. We ask these things in Jesus' Name for the sake of His kingdom, Amen.

This is a bizarre passage. Maybe not what you were expecting to hear on the first of the new year, but it's important. Israel's new generation – new year, new people, new everything and they have failed mightily. They don't have resolve or resolute and they don't have leaders. They have done something awful. They've played the harlot. They've yoked themselves with Baal. This passage is very interesting because their wedding with these daughters of Moab, but what does God say? He doesn't say they're marrying the daughters but they've married the god, Baal, the wicked one. Israel has married Baal and they're yoked together and we have to see that this is how it always goes. What starts physical will always go spiritual, from the tent to the altar, from the allure of the eye to the poison of the heart.

What we do with our bodies, matters. We're not some separated entity where my brain and my thoughts are way over here and my body can do anything it wants to over there. What I do leads to what I believe and what I think and when I unite with the wickedness of the world, it is a spiritual, religious, worshipful endeavor that is destructive. Israel has yoked themselves to Baal.

The King of Moab sent in an army to Israel and I have no doubt that they would have stood firm and stopped the army. Later on in Scripture we find out that this was Balaam's wise idea, the false prophet with the talking donkey. He said, 'Send them your daughters' and that's where they fell. So, the question, though is, whose fault is it? God, just said one chapter ago they are uncursable.

I had a professor who told me this illustration of how he invited a student up to the front of the classroom as he was holding a cup of water. He told the student to bump into him so she did. When he was bumped, he dumped the water on the floor. He told the student to go sit down and then said to the class, "Why did water fall on the floor?" One student said, "It's because you're clumsy." That's not a good thing to say to your professor since he's the one grading your papers. One student said, "It's because you didn't have a lid." One student said "It's because you were bumped." They had all these reasons, but he stopped them and "No, it's because there is water in the cup."

Why did Israel sin? It was because there was sin in their hearts. Israel didn't start sinning with the daughters of Moab because they tempted them. They started sinning because they were sinners. Moab whispered words that Israel was not on guard for, and it was to their doom. Look what it says Numbers 25:3b; *And the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel.* Now we know from reading later on that this kindling was a plague. When you look back through Numbers, the plagues go pretty quick. In Numbers 11, they're eating quail that they've been complaining for, and it says the plague started killing them while it was still in their teeth. So that means it while they're eating or flossing, they were dying from the plague. It's not a slow moving thing. In Numbers 17, Aaron is running away from the center of the tabernacle, and he's racing with the circumference of God's rage as it moves outward. And he stands finally between the living and the dead and makes atonement. The plagues move quickly. This is not the flu

where over the weekend it went bad for some people. No, this is they're dropping like flies. But before we see that, the problem exacerbates itself.

We have to recognize this isn't something locked in time that only Israel does. We're just like Israel. We do this. We have to ask probing questions, self-evaluating questions. When I sin, what was the root behind it? Hopefully no one reading this will get sucked into murder as a sin. Hopefully no one reading this will wake up tomorrow morning and start proclaiming heresies against the King and hopefully we will stand firm for life for all the things that are important. Where does the world whisper in your ear? Do you grumble? Israel did. That one's easy. I grumbled on the way here. Do you lust? Does your search history betray you? Do you worship as a man who is appointed by people instead of the Man who has sent by the Father? Where is the world whispering to you? Find that place and look at it, because the enemy will not often send soldiers, at least not now in America. Maybe one day, but the siren song is always sung and it is beckoning us to our doom. It would love nothing more than to whisper and sing something sweet in your ear and lead you to a catastrophe.

That's not Israel's only problem here for they had bad resolve. I think they also don't have leaders who will obey. Numbers 25:4 says [4] *And the LORD said to Moses, "Take all the chiefs of the people and hang them in the sun before the LORD, that the fierce anger of the LORD may turn away from Israel."* There is a disagreement here between commentators. Does this say take the chiefs and execute them, the people that sinned? I think that it doesn't because it doesn't seem to make sense that way and I will give you three reasons why I think this. These three reasons also happen to be three problems for what Moses does according to the next verse.

Numbers 25:5 says [5] *And Moses said to the judges of Israel, "Each of you kill those of his men who have yoked themselves to Baal of Peor."* I think Moses is saying to the judges 'you **take** the people that sinned' and so Moses is kind of intentionally playing that game of telephone where God says to you, then you change it a little bit and say to them. It is partially because I think Moses is looking like the false prophet of the last chapter who did that exact same thing. Here's why I think that Moses is disobedient. First, we see in Numbers 25:3 that Israel yoked themselves to Baal. This is a corporate, national problem. The problem is not that a particular individual or individuals did it. The problem is Israel did it so God brings about federal punishment by saying 'Take the heads.'

Reason number two, is this is the leaders' responsibility. They've been given the Leviticus law. They've been given the Levites who in Exodus received their prime position as guardians of holiness. When Aaron made the golden calf, the Levites strapped the sword to their thigh and they did what needed to be done. The leaders, the Levites, the priests, when all this started happening, they should have stopped it. Leadership works this way; when the leader fails, it goes up. When the leader succeeds, credit is given to the people. God should not have had to be angry with Israel for the leaders, like Moses should have been angry already and taken care of this.

The third reason why this is a problem is this is not what God said. Moses takes the leaders and says to the judges of Israel, 'You get rid of the problem.' Why would Moses do that? Maybe he likes them or they like him. Maybe it's good to be the leader surrounded by a bunch of leaders like you. Maybe he wants to soften this for them, but whose plan should they have followed? They should have followed God's plan. This is also interesting for whether or not Moses was twisting God's words, either way, they didn't do what God told them to do. For if they had killed just one man – later on in Numbers 25, Zimri, a chief, son of Salu, would not

have walked into camp with that Midianite woman. If they had killed one person Zimri would not have shown up, I guarantee you that. He must have augmented or disobeyed for then it says that when this guy walks through they were weeping. There's a time for weeping but when God says 'go' don't wallow in self-pity and cry. Do what He says to do.

So, there's something wanted – resolve and righteous leaders. At the moment, Israel had none. Numbers 25:14 says [14] *The name of the slain man of Israel, who was killed with the Midianite woman, was Zimri the son of Salu, chief of a father's house belonging to the Simeonites.* Zimri is leadership material. He has brought a Midianite woman into camp and introduced her to his family. No longer is he going out to sin for he is now bringing sin in. It didn't get better. It got worse. Wickedness is being brought in. Matthew Henry says "Never was vice more daring, but where vice is daring, so is a virtue."

Let's look at the solution. We know from Numbers 25:7 that Phinehas, the son of Eleazar saw what had happened and 'rose up.' Before we look at what he does, I think the word for 'he rose' is already battle language. It's not how he stood up but he rose with intention. This is a man going to war. What does he do? Numbers 25:7-8 says [7] *When Phinehas the son of Eleazar, son of Aaron the priest, saw it, he rose and left the congregation and took a spear in his hand [8] and went after the man of Israel into the chamber and pierced both of them, the man of Israel and the woman through her belly. Thus the plague on the people of Israel was stopped.*

I would have loved to have seen the faces of the Israelites when Phinehas did this. They must have been bewildered. Moses and the other leaders must have been ashamed. Who should have been doing this? I'm sure that's what the others were likely thinking. Jonathan Edwards is famous for many things and one is he wrote the book 70 resolutions. Today is the first day of the year but I hope you don't try to do 70 in one year for one is difficult enough. One will be failed by most people. Edwards didn't write all of these in one day or one year but he has one in particular that I think is really good. They're all really good, but number 69 is really good for this sermon. Resolution number 69 is 'Resolve always to do that which I shall wish I had done when I see others do it.' Can you identify with that? 'I should have held the door open. That should have been me.' 'I should help that woman put her bag up on the airplane. That should have been me.' 'I should have stood up when they were attacking my God in my Savior. I shouldn't have been silent.' 'I saw him share the gospel with her and I was talking to her for 30 minutes. Why didn't I do that?' We need to be people who do instead of being people who wish we did.

So, Phinehas grabs a spear. Is that a good thing? Yes. God told Moses that this was to be punishment by death. This is important so there is only one thing you take away from this if, then this is it; This is not what you emulate. Don't go by a spear in the New Year and get all stabby. I want to be on record that I'm not saying emulate Phinehas and his spear. I'm saying emulate Phinehas in his zeal to do the right thing. The ESV translation says he was jealous, but it might be better put that he was zealous. He had passion and ardor. He was loving and he was overcome by what belonged to God. That's what Phinehas had so emulate that, because what does God compare it to? Numbers 25:10-11 says [10] *And the LORD said to Moses, [11] "Phinehas the son of Eleazar, son of Aaron the priest, has turned back my wrath from the people of Israel, in that **he was jealous with My jealousy** among them, so that I did not consume the people of Israel in my jealousy.* Phinehas had his Father's zeal.

We are currently in a war against truth any way you look at it and it's not a new war, it's a war that's been going on since Genesis 3 when you see the Serpent say 'Did God really say...'

Yes, He did, but the Bible has told us what to do when there's a war on truth. We are to do justice, love mercy and walk humbly before your God. Rejoice always. Pray without ceasing. Always pray. Give thanks. Expose the darkness with light. Love God. Love your neighbor. Love the truth. Be transformed by a renewal of your mind. Do not conform to this world. Make a defense for the hope that you have in Christ. Jesus and then take that hope and boast about it. Walk in the culture and boldly proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ, because it's the power of salvation. That's what we're called to do.

I'm fired up right now, but tomorrow morning, what am I going to do when I look on social media, see the news and see that we're losing the culture war? Am I going to have a steel nerve? Am I going to be resolute? How can I possibly do all of that? Thank goodness that there's a blessing from beneath, because this blessing finds a fulfillment in someone special because the law of this passage is this; Steal your nerves. Do the right thing. Don't buy a spear. Take your sword and plunge it into the heart of the world.

But we need a leader. Numbers 25:12-13 says [12] *Therefore say, 'Behold, I give to him My covenant of peace, [13] and it shall be to him and to his descendants after him the covenant of a perpetual priesthood, because he was jealous for his God and made atonement for the people of Israel.'*

The plague is checked. The priesthood will continue. What does it mean when it says a covenant of perpetual priesthood? It means that God will continue to work in and with His people for His good pleasure, and for their benefit. God will stay dwelling with His people. He will give them someone to always atone for their sins, but there's a problem. We know that eventually this line gets cut and we also know that this isn't the last plague. We find this out in the books of Joshua Judges, I and II Samuel, I and II Kings and the Prophets. There's plagues, famines, wars, exile, captivity and more.

Phinehas did not tie a bow on peace in the world because Phinehas is not the Messiah, but he points to Him and we know he points to Him because of that covenant of peace and that perpetual priesthood. It's all because there's One who, on His own initiative, came from heaven and stood where men stand. With His own resolve, He resisted all the wiles of the devil and think for a moment, He found His adulterous bride and instead of her being cursed, He was cursed. He came and instead of Him being the executioner, He was the executed. Instead of Him piercing, He was the pierced. Instead of Him hanging them up in the sun before God, He was hung up in the sun before God. And he didn't temporarily stop the plague, He checked death forever because in Jesus Christ, if you call upon Him as your Lord, there is no second death. You will not face the grave. You will be with your Father in paradise the day you stop breathing because Jesus didn't temporarily stop anything. He is the Messiah. He is the King and the Chosen One.

He said to us, "It's finished." Before that, He gave us a sign and a seal of the covenant of peace. Not only is He the perpetual Priest forever interceding for us, but if you call Him Lord, Hebrews says He's your older brother, you're adopted into God's family and you're a holy nation, a royal priesthood. Oh, that perpetual priesthood, for if you call Him Lord, it's you! Phinehas' priesthood had to be related by blood. Jesus' had to be washed by it. If His blood covers you, you are a priest and what's your job? Mediate to the world the goodness of your Savior. Fight for His honor. Stand bold for His name and have the zeal for the Father's house that Jesus did.

So how does that answer the question of giving me resolve? You're united to Jesus. There's a victory in Jesus for those who believe that's the One that has overcome the world.

There's only one way to steal your nerve, to steal your resolve, to walk boldly into the world and to do what we have been told to do and that is with complete and total humble dependance on Christ the King. It's to take that old message, that old story of sin and salvation, the King and the cross and with full dependance, say 'not my will, but Yours, Lord, because You are my example, but not only that, You are my only power.' It's total dependance on Him.

So good news – it's not how smart, strong, eloquent or gifted you are but it's how dependent you are and if you don't call Jesus, Lord, you will fall to the world. You might fight for a time, but you will be overcome. You'll be dragged down, drug through the streets, damaged, harmed and eventually you're going to bring it home with you and it will be doom. But if you call on the Name of the Lord, you'll be saved.

There's one last piece of good news I'd like to share with you. Despite all of that, we will still fail and that's the best part about Jesus over Phinehas. Phinehas atoned for that sin. Jesus is past, present and future. We don't need another mediator. We don't need another sacrifice. We don't need another high priest to stand up and slay the enemy. We can be resolute and we can be satisfied that Christ said 'it is finished' and He meant it. He knows exactly what you've done, what you're doing, and what you will do and His blood has atoned for that. Phinehas turned away God's wrath that day and called Jesus King, but Jesus turns it away forever. We can walk boldly because One stood up. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, I thank You so much for Your Word. I thank You for the example of Phinehas, but I thank You even more for the reality that Jesus Christ fulfilled everything that Phinehas did good, for Jesus did it perfectly. Lord, help us to be bold in this coming year, especially tomorrow, but also help us to trust that Your Son is satisfactory when we fail. Father, we ask that we would stand up because He stood up and we ask that You would help us to enjoy our life, but not at the cost of wishing we had done something that we ought to have done. So make us bold, make us dependent, make us worship You and we ask these things for Your sake and for the sake of Your Kingdom, in Jesus' Name, Amen.