



Sermon Discussion Questions  
November 17, 2024  
*In the Wilderness*

## **RESIST THE WORLD'S TEMPTATIONS**

Numbers 25

1. **Opening Discussion Questions:** (in a group setting you may not want to use all of these)
  - a. Without getting into the confession of actual sins, what is an area where you frequently yield to temptation (e.g., taking that extra piece of chocolate)? How do you feel when you make a deliberate effort and avoid yielding?
  - b. Can you share a time when you felt conflicted between following what was popular and adhering to your values? Why do we often find it so compelling to accept the popular practices of the majority?
  - c. It is widely recognized that advertising companies use sex to attract people's attention. What is your favorite advertisement that *does not* rely on sex to sell their product? Would you be more likely to purchase the item/service advertised than a similar product that relied on a sexually themed ad?
2. **Sermon Outline/Key Points**
  - a. Temptation Led Israel to Rebel Yet Again.
    - i. On the verge of success, Israel fell into sin once more.
    - ii. God's righteous wrath boiled over.
    - iii. Phinehas the priest dealt with a particularly brazen sinner.
  - b. God Blesses Those Who Remain Faithful and Punishes Those Encouraging Sin.
    - i. God blesses Phinehas for being zealous for His reputation and holiness.
    - ii. Those responsible for sin were condemned to death.
    - iii. This is a timeless principle, not just an interesting story!
  - c. You're On God's Mission So Resist Sin and Remain Faithful!
    - i. The world, the flesh, and the devil will continue to tempt you away from God's mission.
    - ii. Resist whatever yokes you to the world, the flesh, or the devil.
    - iii. What are you doing with what tempts you?
3. **Study/Discussion Points:**
  - a. ***Sunday Afternoon***
    - i. As soon as possible after listening to the sermon set aside some time to ponder these questions prayerfully:
    - ii. What one thing most stood out to you in this sermon?
    - iii. What new truth did you learn or of what truth were you reminded?
    - iv. After listening to the sermon, is there a Scripture passage you feel led to meditate on or commit to memory this week?
    - v. What is one thing you feel God is leading you to do after hearing this message?
    - vi. Did God convict you of a need to make any changes in your life and walk with Him?
  - b. ***Monday:***

- i. Start this week's study by reading Numbers 25.
  1. What would be an appropriate title or one-sentence summary of this chapter?
  2. Why do you think the Holy Spirit provided this account in chapter 25 immediately following the Moabites and Midianites' unsuccessful attempt to have the Israelites cursed (chapters 22-24) which has been the topic of sermons for the past few weeks?
  3. Based on this first reading of the focal passage, what take-away could you apply to your life?
- ii. Locate Shittim on a Bible map. If it isn't shown on your maps, it is about the same distance (8-9 miles) east of the Jordan River as Jericho is west.
  1. Read Joshua 2:1 & 3:1. How close were the Israelites to completing their journey?
  2. Why is it often easier to yield to temptation when the end of a task or journey is near than it is earlier?
- iii. Focusing on just verses 1 and 2.
  1. Which Commandments (Exodus 20:1-17) were broken?
  2. What does it seem must have happened after Balak's failed attempt to get God to curse the Israelites in order for the events in verses 1 & 2 to have occurred? Read Numbers 31:16. How does this help explain the turn of events?
  3. Based on these events how would you complete this sentence: "Because Balak could not get God to be unfaithful to His people, he chose to lead the people to be \_\_\_\_\_ \_." In what way do Christians today find themselves in similar situations?

c. **Tuesday:**

- i. Read Numbers 25:1-4 in several translations, if possible.
- ii. Verses 1-3 present a series of increasingly more serious sins that lead to God demanding action in verse 4.
  1. What is the first sin? How do people today, even Christians, try to justify (rationalize) this sin in their lives? Is it ever possible for a sin to be truly "private" and "not hurt anyone"?
  2. What did the first sin lead to next? Can you think of situations that are similar in our society? How does 2 Corinthians 6:14 apply?
  3. What might be considered the third step in this sequence? Why are sometimes innocent-sounding events/actions, like eating a meal, often spiritually dangerous? Does the inclusion of eating the sacrificial meal in this chain of sins help you understand/appreciate why eating food sacrificed to idols was an issue for first-century Christians (see 1 Corinthians 8)?
  4. The final step is provided in verse 3a. What does it mean to be "yoked"? Is it more important to not be "yoked" or to be "yoked" to the right thing (see Matthew 11:29-30)?
- iii. This is the first time in the Bible Baal is mentioned as a god (it does appear as part of a person or place name earlier). Baal was the god of fertility and rain and the chief god of the Canaanites.

1. Why would such a “deity” be particularly tempting to the Israelites?
2. While the men participating may have viewed their actions as only being temporary how long did the “yoking” actually last and what was the final result (see Jeremiah 11:17 and 32:29)?

*d. Wednesday:*

- i. Read Numbers 25:3-5 in several translations if possible.
- ii. What was God’s reaction to Israel’s yoking themselves to Baal?
  1. Who was going to “pay the price” for the sin of the people?
  2. While it certainly may have been the case, it seems unlikely that every “chief of the people” would have personally participated in the sinning. Nonetheless, which chiefs were to be executed?
    - a. Why do you think that even those who didn’t personally participate, if there were any, would have been included? What was their responsibility?
    - b. How do Acts 20:28-31, Hebrews 13:17, James 3:1, and 1 Peter 5:1-5 show us the application of this same principle in our age? What should this mean to us who are members of a local church?
  3. The actions God directs Moses to take in verse 4 require that the executed individuals be left on display by placing them on a pole for all to see. Compare this verse with Deuteronomy 21:22-23, 2 Samuel 21:6, and Galatians 3:13. What picture do you get when you consider them together?
  4. To whom did Moses assign the responsibility for performing the executions (see Exodus 18:21-25 and Numbers 11:16)? Which sinners were each judge told to kill? What lesson can we learn about dealing with sin issues in our homes and our church from this example?

*e. Thursday:*

- i. Read Numbers 25:6-15.
  1. What new information do these verses give us about how God had responded to Israel’s sin?
  2. The census taken immediately after these events showed that there were slightly over 600,000 men in Israel which would make the percentage of people who died from the plague roughly the same as the percentage of the US population that died of Covid during the first year of the pandemic. With that in mind, which punishment, the execution of leaders or the plague, do you think would have most influenced the average person in the camp?
  3. In 1 Corinthians 10:8 Paul says 23,000 died but Numbers says 24,000. This is often raised as an example of error in the Bible. After reading the verse carefully what explanation can you give for the difference?
- ii. The account of Phinehas’ response to an individual case of sin is a main theme of chapter 25. How it is to be understood depends to a degree on what you understand Zimri’s (the sinning Israelite man) motives were.
  1. If Zimri was just engaging in a lustful act of adultery, where would he probably have taken Cozbi (the Midianite woman)?

2. If he was instead participating in an act of worship of Baal, which often involved ritual intercourse, where might he have taken Cozbi?
3. Now read verses 6 and 7 carefully, in several translations, if possible, where do you think these events occurred? Which would most likely have aroused such zeal in Phinehas – an act of adultery in Zimiri's private quarters or an "act of worship" in a more public setting, perhaps even in the tent of meeting?
4. Based on your understanding of this account, what do you think it teaches about how we should respond to clear and obvious acts of sin in someone's private life? In clear and obvious acts of sin within the Church? What New Testament passages can you give to support your view?

f. **Friday:**

- i. Read Numbers 25:16-18 and Numbers 31:1-18.
- ii. What does God's instruction to Moses tell us about the true nature of the Midianite's temptation of Israel? What were they attempting to accomplish by inviting Israel to sacrifice to their gods? How does Numbers 31:16 clarify this?
- iii. Based on Chapter 31 what final assessment can we make about Balaam?
- iv. It was Moab's King Balak who started this whole chain of events by trying to hire Balaam to curse Israel, but Midian is the nation destroyed. Why did Moab seem to get off easy (see Deuteronomy 2:9)? What does this tell us about the nature of God (see Deuteronomy 7:9, Joshua 23:14, Psalm 145:14, and 1 Corinthians 1:9), and how we should view His promises to us?

g. **Saturday:**

- i. Read Numbers 25 again, meditating on how these events should influence you.
- ii. Read Ephesians 5:1-11, Philippians 2:14-15 and Galatians 5:16-25. Compare these New Testament commands to the lessons learned from Numbers 25.
  1. Is it important that we as Christians live lives separate from the world? Why?
  2. What most hinders us from doing so?

4. **Application:**

- a. The Israelites got into trouble because they began associating with those they should have avoided. Jesus knew this would be a problem we faced and prayed that we would be protected (John 17:13-19) but that requires us to take an active role. Spend time thinking about areas where the world's presence leads, or could lead, you to sin. What can/should you do to disassociate yourself from these influences? What would it cost you to do so?
- b. In a society where we are confronted daily with blatant sin acted out publicly and without apparent shame, we must carefully consider how we respond. Spearing someone for adultery probably won't accomplish the desired end. Pray that the Holy Spirit will lead you to the correct response that balances Christian love with a righteous zeal for God's Holy Name.

5. **Prayer Points:**

- a. Adoration – Psalms 8:1 and 29:1-2
- b. Confession – Proverbs 28:13 and 1 John 1:8-10
- c. Thanksgiving – Psalms 95:1-2 and 100:4-5
- d. Supplications – Matthew 21:22 and John 16:19