

Date : 27 August 2023

Theme : Journey of the new generation

Topic : **Understanding and relating to the jealous God**

Passage : Numbers 25

Key verse : Numbers 25:11 (NASB) - "Phinehas the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, has turned away My wrath from the sons of Israel in that he was jealous with My jealousy among them, so that I did not destroy the sons of Israel in My jealousy.

Introduction:

Continuing from last week at Numbers 21, the 2nd generation Israelites turned from contempt for the Lord to humbling themselves. They were able to then turn from the Lord's severity to the Lord's goodness. The Lord gave them victory over the 3 powerful kings – king of Arad, king of Amorite, and king of Bashan, and took possession over their land on the east side of Jordan.

In Numbers 22, they settled down on the east side of Jordan river, opposite to Jericho on the west side, getting ready to enter and take possession of the west side of Jordan. King Balak of Moab who was nearby at the south, was so fearful that he employed the renown sorcerer Balaam to curse Israel, so that they could drive Israel away. But the Lord intervened behind the Israelites' knowledge, turned all the 3 curses into blessings and fulfilled His promise to protect Israel from their enemies.

However, in Numbers 25, things took a drastic turn. King Balak, with the counsel of Balaam, sent beautiful girls to seduce the Israelites into sexual immorality, making sacrifices and to bow down to their god Baal. The Lord burned in anger against the Israelites and inflicted them with plague. 24,000 people died in the plague. This was the largest number of deaths compared to the last plague where 14,700 people died due to Israel's rebellion related to Korah.

We'll answer the question why God was so severe and how we can turn back to God's goodness.

1. Severity of God due to the severity of their crime

Why did 24,000 people die in such a short time?

a. They broke the first 2 commandments that carried severe consequences.

Exodus 20:3-5 NIV

3 "You shall have no other gods before me.

4 "You shall not make for yourself an image in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. 5 You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, 6 but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments.

- By their act of sexual immorality with the Moabite woman, they had participated in the sexual religious practices with the god of Baal. This led them on to eating the food sacrificed to Baal and bowing down to Baal. (Numbers 25:2) They broke the 2nd commandment by bowing down to other gods (Exodus 20:3).
- By this, they have joined (Numbers 25:3) themselves to Baal, breaking the 1st commandment by having "other gods" (Exodus 20:5).
- The consequence was so severe that the punishment would go down to even the 3rd and 4th generation. (Exodus 20:5). In contrast, God's goodness was far greater for those who loved Him, showing love to a thousand generations. (Exodus 20:6).
- After the 10 commandments were given, the 1st generation quickly broke the first 2 commandments by making the golden calf and worshipping it. God wanted to destroy all the people had Moses not interceded for them. God was also angry enough with Aaron with intention to destroy him had Moses not interceded for him as well. (Deuteronomy 9:20). 3,000 men were executed (Exodus 32:28) and the Lord struck the guilty Israelites with plague (Exodus 32:35).
- Each tribal leader was commanded to conduct the immediate execution. What a messy and difficult job. Sin always brings misery upon the entire society.

b. The first 2 commandments were severe because they directly involved breaking the Israelites' relationship with the LORD.

- God said the reason why they must not have other gods or worship them is because “... I, the LORD your God.” (Exodus 20:5).
 - Just before the 10 commandments were given, the LORD God Creator and Owner of the whole universe, who with His mighty hand and power delivered the Israelites from slavery in Egypt, offered to make a covenant with the Israelites on condition that they would obey God fully.
 - God had promised to make the Israelites His treasured possession above all the nations, on condition that they would be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. (Exodus 19:4-6)
 - The Israelites witnessed that God fulfilled the covenant to Abraham to bring them out from slavery in Egypt. (Genesis 15:14). God demonstrated that not only was He faithful to keep His promise, and He was also all powerful to fulfill the promise to give the Israelites the land of Canaan as an everlasting possession.
 - The Israelites all responded in agreement and said, “We will do everything the LORD has said” (Exodus 19:8), confirming their relationship with God.
- And what kind of relationship was that? It was a lordship relationship between the Israelites and the Lord. Breaking the commandments thus severed the relationship with the Lord and reaped the severe consequences.

2. Severity of God as a Jealous God.

“... I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God...” Exodus 20:5,6

Jealousy and anger at betrayal of allegiance is a sign of a love relationship. The nature of God being jealous, shows how serious He feels and treats His relationship with the Israelites – to love and to punish.

a. The jealousy of God is like in a marriage relationship. It is the correct and right behaviour and feeling. It shows that the relationship matters.

- Jealousy should not be confused with envy.
- When a wife commits adultery, the husband is not envious but jealous.
 - Jealousy says, “I’m so jealous about my wife going out with that man.”
 - Envy will say “I’m so envious that the man has such a pretty wife.”
 - Envy will not say “I’m so envious of the other man who has my wife’s love”.
- God’s jealousy shows that we matter so much to Him that He cannot accept that we would foolishly co-habit with His archenemy – the devil.

b. The jealousy of God involves even great anger just like in a marriage relationship.

- Because both parties:
 - I. Have agreed to commit into an exclusive relationship that excludes a 3rd party, let alone His enemy.
 - In a marriage, a man and woman commit themselves to love each other, and be loyal to each other. Then they call each other husband and wife.
 - II. Belong to each other.
 - III. Have given all their affection as a sacred duty to each other.
- Jealousy and anger are justified in a marriage relationship.
 - Jealousy and anger are even more so justified in relationship with God who gives His goodness to us in surpassing greatness – Jesus gave His life to save us from hell.
- God’s anger was triggered after Israel committed spiritual adultery when they yoked themselves to Baal – a high ranking evil spirit which opposed God fiercely. (Numbers 25:3)'

c. Worship of other gods which are no god at all, makes such people unworthy of God’s love.

- They will be rejected by God outright. No love or mercy can be extended.

3. How does Phinehas' example show us how to relate to a Jealous God?

We need to keep the covenant relationship with God and be at peace with God. That we may walk under the goodness of God. *"Behold, I give to him my covenant of peace"* (Numbers 25:12)

a. We must understand God's heart and desire for mercy.

- For God to turn away His wrath, someone needed to carry out an act of atonement.
- *"Phinehas ... has turned away My wrath"* (Numbers 25:4,11)
 - Phinehas was obedient to the Lord's instruction to execute the offenders so that the Lord's fierce anger may turn away from Israel.
 - That we may come humbly before God for mercy for ourselves and to intercede for sinners.

b. We must fully align to God even when others are not.

- *"... he was as zealous for my honor among them as I am"* (Numbers 25:11 NIV)
 - Zimri, the son of a leader among the Simeonites, brought a Midianite woman into the Israelite camp, he did it in defiance before the sight of the whole congregation including Moses. Yet it seems like no one was courageous enough to oppose the leader's son. (Numbers 25:6)
 - Only Phinehas responded immediately. He was the only one who stood up from among the congregation, took a spear, followed Zimri and the Midianite woman (Cozbi) into his princely tent, and killed both of them. Then the plague stopped. (Numbers 25:7-8)
 - Like Phinehas, we need to stand up even when others are not, and to take hold of God's Word of truth and not allow false teachings entering the church.
- Our mindset must be aligned to God's biblical worldview instead of secular worldview.
 - Most of us would consider it too severe for 24,000 to die by execution and the plague, but fail to recognize that the whole population of over 2.5 million people were saved because Phinehas took action immediately. Phinehas' zealousness was demonstrated by his swift action. It was not a zealousness to kill as most see on surface, but he was zealous for God – to honor God.
 - Most of us see only the present problem but fail to see God's grand purpose - to bring His people into the promised land. So those who were not His people would not qualify to enter. The most basic qualification to be God's people is whether we have relationship with God or not - a lordship relationship.

c. To transfer from severity to goodness of God, sin must be paid for to take away the wrath of God.

- *"he was jealous for his God and made atonement for the sons of Israel"*. (Numbers 25:13)
 - Phinehas' act of killing Zimri and Cozbi was a way of atonement for the whole of Israel.
 - Atonement is an act that one can be justly forgiven.
 - Jesus is the sacrificial Lamb who is the only atoning sacrifice for our sins.
 - Through baptism, we are dead to sin and alive in Christ. Let us be dead to sin and walk in righteousness. (Romans 6:10-11)

Application

- a. Discuss whether Phinehas' action was too severe? What benefit did it bring?
- b. How would you make application from Phinehas' example?