
Day 43 – February 12

Establishment of a Nation (1525 – 1400 BCE)

Israel Sins in Moab

Destruction of the Midianites

Readings: *Numbers 25:1-18; 31:1-54*

Reflections:

- The story of the Israel's men turning to have the Midian women is another terrible story. The story of Israel is not for the weak of heart. Baal worship in that area was much like many other forms of pagan worship in the ancient world. Agriculture was the basis of their society and so worshipping the fertility gods is like us worshipping the money gods of our day. The Baal was an obelisk (like the Washington Monument) and it was a symbol of the erect male penis. Their worship was sexual orgy with temple prostitutes. This was to arouse the fertility gods so that they would orgasm and cause their fields and animals to be fertile. Rain was a symbol of the gods having an orgasm. So this type of worship within Canaan was always the primary way the Israelites sinned. Why did they keep turning back to this form of worship? Obviously the motivation was the free sex and the promise of wealth. Now God is completely for sex but it was always within covenant. This pagan form of sex was without any form of covenant in place. Also, it involved human sacrifice at times as children were sacrificed probably the babies born to temple prostitutes (1 Samuel 57:5) and the focus of the worship were other gods. So this is why God judges them so harshly again.
- The slaying of Zimri and Cozbi by Phinehas was in direct response to their complete arrogance. It was like they were shooting the finger at God. It is a terrible story but it underscores again that God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.
- Also in the story we read the contrast to Jesus' teachings. "Treat the Midianites as enemies and kill them." What does Jesus say? "You have heard it said, 'Love your friends but hate your enemies. But I say love your enemies.'"
- The next story is very hard to read. It is brutal, shocking and awful. At first Israel just kills the men but then Moses commands that they must kill every man, woman, boy or girl that has slept with a man. Only virgin girls are allowed to live. It was the common practice in revenge war to slay all of your enemies and so most likely the motive of the men was likely to keep the women as a cover for wanting to continue that form of sexual worship. The boys may represent a future threat and indeed the Midians do return to cause Israel much harm. Was

this God speaking through Moses or was this Moses acting on his own? Whichever is the case, God does not judge Moses for taking this severe action. Again, Jesus clearly teaches the exact opposite and so those who follow Jesus must be reminded that this period of Israel's life, although aligned with the common practice of the human race of killing your enemies, is the story of "what doesn't work."

- Those involved in the killing must go through purification. This indicates again that the act of killing is sin before the Lord. Although allowed or even commanded in terrible times, it is still sin. We see this again and again in Scripture. In a world where things are broken and full sin, sometimes the option God chooses is not something that reveals his perfection but is simply the lesser of two evils. His grace is present even when the best that can be done is still far from his ideal. In the story of Israel it would seem that God is a pragmatist, not an idealist. In this case, the survival of his people leads to them having to take horribly drastic action. All we can do is be grateful for Jesus.