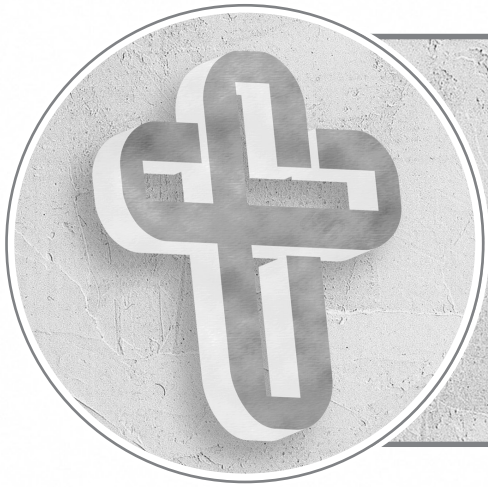


LESSON 3



CORNERSTONE CONNECTIONS

JULY 15 2023

roads to the soul

Scripture Story: Numbers 25.

Commentary: *Patriarchs and Prophets* (or *Beginning of the End*), chapter 41.

PREPARING TO TEACH

I. SYNOPSIS

The children of Israel camped between the river and the high plain in a lush valley known for its rich, tropical climate shaded by palm trees. There the children of Israel relaxed from their recent victory in Bashan, and as they luxuriated in the fertile valley they made a costly error in judgment. They became familiar with the Midianites, and familiarity gave birth to ease. The result was key leaders of Israel mixing with Midianite women. Of course, the Midianites had plotted to sow the seeds of idolatry in Israel through the lure of these seductresses. As a result, many leaders of Israel got involved with promiscuity, and God acted swiftly, causing a plague to break out among the participants. Shaken into an awareness of their sin, some felt genuine sorrow for their behavior. But the leaders who led them astray were promptly put to death. This lesson captures the shocking, yet typical human behavior: There is no moment when the human heart is safe from temptation.

If there was ever an age in which young people live incubated in a relaxed moral environment, it is now. In this lesson there is a real warning emerging from the story and stated simply by the apostle Paul: “These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the culmination of the ages has come. So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don’t fall!” (1 Corinthians 10:11, 12, NIV). Ellen White reminds us: “The heart must be renewed by divine grace, or it will be in vain

to seek for purity of life” (*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 460). Throughout this dark episode in Israel’s journey we are reminded to “guard well the avenues of the soul” (*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 460).

II. TARGET

The students will:

- Consider the seductive nature of sin and discover how to guard their hearts. (*Know*)
- See the similarities between this story and today’s cultural mood and sense the danger. (*Feel*)
- Decidedly fill the avenues of their soul with the grace of Christ and the activities of His kingdom. (*Respond*)

III. EXPLORE

Christian Behavior, Seventh-day Adventist Fundamental Beliefs, No. 22

“We are called to be a godly people who think, feel, and act in harmony with biblical principles in all aspects of personal and social life. For the Spirit to recreate in us the character of our Lord we involve ourselves only in those things that will produce Christlike purity, health, and joy in our lives. This means that our amusement and entertainment should meet the highest standards of Christian taste and beauty. While recognizing cultural differences, our dress is to be simple, modest, and neat, befitting those whose true beauty does not consist of outward adornment but in the imperishable ornament of a gentle and quiet spirit. It also means that because our bodies are the temples of the Holy Spirit, we are to care for them intelligently.

. . . (Gen. 7:2; Exod. 20:15; Lev. 11:1-47; Ps. 106:3; Rom. 12:1, 2; 1 Cor. 6:19, 20; 10:31; 2 Cor. 6:14-7:1; 10:5; Eph. 5:1-21; Phil. 2:4; 4:8; 1 Tim. 2:9, 10; Titus 2:11, 12; 1 Peter 3:1-4; 1 John 2:6; 3 John 2.)”

TEACHING

I. GETTING STARTED

Activity

Refer the students to the What Do You Think? section of their lesson. After they have completed it, discuss their responses.

Illustration

Share this illustration in your own words:

The symptoms of leprosy are likened to the effects of sin on the human soul. Leprosy starts as a subtle annoyance, a headache and occasional dizziness. The headaches might continue over several months without any visible signs on the skin. Small spots appear on the skin, eventually becoming hard nodes that open and fester. But by the time leprosy shows up on the skin the central nervous system has already been breaking down. The areas that are furthest removed from the heart lose sensation first. The tip of the nose, fingers, and toes become numb to pain. Perhaps the most difficult part of leprosy is the inability to feel pain. Serious damage can be inflicted on the appendages because the victim is unaware they are hurting themselves, and by that time it is too late. Some have described how leprosy, in its final stages, turns the hair white and shifts the facial structure, flattening the nose (due to atrophy and loss of circulation). The cheek bones tend to stick out as the lips retreat into tight skin. In the New Testament era, as soon as someone was diagnosed with leprosy, they were excommunicated from society and basically taken off the public record. Although they were still alive they were counted as dead.

It is no wonder that leprosy is often considered the perfect analogy of sin's effects on people. Think about the many parallels to the way sin sneaks up on people and destroys them from the inside out.

II. TEACHING THE STORY

Bridge to the Story

Share the following in your own words:

Much like the infection of leprosy, the horrible seduction the Midianites managed to incite in Israel occurred because the children of God left the avenues of their soul open. Instead of devoting themselves to prayer or recounting the stories of God's faithfulness to them, they filled up their time with idle living and curious perusal of the Midianite women and their religion. As you read the story remember the way the leprosy of sin has its way if we are not fully connected to God.

Out of the Story for Teachers

After you read the Into the Story section with your students, use the following in your own words to process it with them.

- *Underline* the key people mentioned in this story.
- *Circle* the various words that convey emotion in this story and draw a line to the persons feeling it.
- *Place brackets around* the major sections of this story as though they were scenes in a play. How many different themes do you see emerging from the story?
- If you had to identify one or two key verses in this story, which would you say captures the central point best?
- In this story, do you find . . .
 - An example to follow?
 - A prayer to pray?
 - A warning to heed?
 - A truth to proclaim?
 - An encouraging word to share?
 - An action to take or a change to make?

Extra Questions for Teachers:

- Does this story remind you of similar events or scenarios elsewhere in Scripture? How is it similar? What might be different?
- When you see God enact such swift and serious judgment on people, how does it affect your perception of and your relationship to Him?
- What might this story look like today?

(Use the following as more teachable passages that relate to today's story: James 1:2-4; 1 Corinthians 10:13; 2 Peter 2:9; James 1:12; Luke 11:4.)

Sharing Context and Background

Use the following information to shed more light

on the story for your students. Share it in your own words.

This week's story is shocking in several ways: (1) the way the children of Israel witnessed God's blessing and victory and so quickly slipped into the most base and offensive behavior; (2) the way God orders judgment; (3) leaders (both good and evil) get tested and exposed for who they really are.

It's painful to witness the roller-coaster ride the Israelites take in their faithfulness to God. When Joshua and Caleb sent spies out, it was probably from this wooded area of acacia trees not far from Jericho. The first verse of this story informs us that "the men began to indulge in sexual immorality with Moabite women" and subsequently "yoked themselves to the Baal of Peor" (Numbers 25:1, 3, NIV). Baal was the deity of fertility so it is not a surprise that sexual entertainment and worship are connected in this pagan ritual. Apparently it was the "heads" or leaders of Israel that were seduced in this unthinkable act. When they worshipped Baal they "proclaimed themselves to be his followers" thus shunning their loyalty to God (*The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 1, p. 914).

God acted swiftly, and the leaders were killed and hung out in the sun for all to see. Why would God react so harshly? It is possible that young people today might recoil at stories that depict God sentencing people to death because of their sin. But those who united with Baal are no different from those who refused to enter the ark or the heathen nations that were dead

set against God. They had made their choice, and, "the wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23, NIV). *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* claims: "The chiefs of the tribes, if guilty, were to be executed. Their position among the people and their participation in idolatry made them primarily responsible" (vol. 1, p. 914). As a result, the people repented.

In verses 6-8 we see two forms of leadership exposed. While Israel's leaders were hanging dead before the weeping congregation, Zimri publicly brought Cozbi, a Midianite prostitute, into his tent, mocking the shame of Israel. That this was done "in the sight of Moses" (verse 6, NKJV) demonstrates how far this man had gone. Such poor leadership was met with the action of another type of leadership. Phineas, the son of Eleazer, who was the son of Aaron, was so offended by this affront to Moses and to God that he raced into the tent with a spear and killed them both. Such a passionate defense of the name of God exposed the integrity of Phineas as a leader, and one who would "succeed his father in the office of high priest" (*The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 1, p. 914). As a result, God removed the plague because Phineas was "zealous" for God's sake.

Overall, this story is a window into the sinfulness of sin and the subtle way it creeps into our lives. Only by zealous or deliberate clinging to God's mercy and grace can we fix our minds on what God wants for us.

Teaching From . . .

Refer your students to the other sections of their lesson. Invite students to share the key text with the class if they have committed it to memory.

- **Key Text**

Invite the students to share the key text with the class if they have committed it to memory.

- **Flashlight**

*Read the Flashlight statement, pointing out that most of the time it is from the commentary on this week's story found in the book *Patriarchs and Prophets*. Ask what relationship they see between the statement and what they have just discussed from *Out of the Story*.*

- **Punch Lines**

Point out to your students the verses listed in their lesson that relate to this week's story. Have them share the verse that spoke most directly to them and allow them to explain why they chose it.

- **Further Insight**

Ask them how the quote in Further Insight conveys the point of the story in this lesson.



Tips for Top-Notch Teaching

Contextualizing—Not Standing Alone

As teachers, we can help students negotiate thoughtfully through difficult passages of Scripture more effectively by examining the context of a story. One way to get students to look at the context is to invite them to recount “what has happened to the children of Israel up to this point.” Have them list the good and the bad on the board or a piece of paper and see if similar scenarios occurred in the past. Another layer of context resides in the whole of Scripture. You might ask, “What stories in the Bible are similar to this one? How might the stories be different?” Without telling them what to think, you invite students to place the story among other stories and see the panorama of the interaction between God and people instead of focusing on only one moment that stands alone.

RABBI 101

III. CLOSING

Activity

Close with an activity and debrief it in your own words.

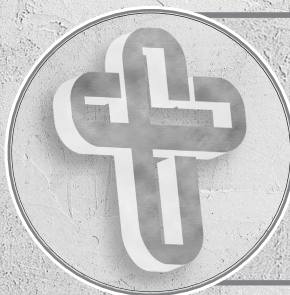
Have the students draw a stick person with five arrows or “avenues” pointing to the head or heart, and five arrows pointing away from the head or heart. Invite the students to identify five positive things they want coming into their minds and write one on each of five arrows pointing toward the figure. Then they can identify five things they would like to remove from their heads and hearts and write them on the five arrows pointing away from the figure.

In this week’s lesson we have discovered that we need to guard the avenues of our heart. Being deliberate about what comes in and goes out is critical. You may want to have the students share their responses, and perhaps some students have similar goals and could be a source of encouragement to one another.

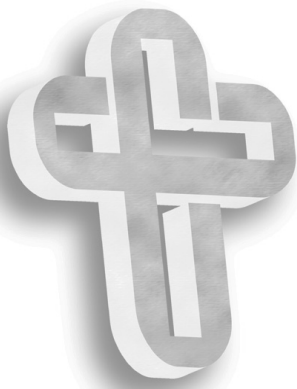
Summary

Share the following thoughts in your own words:

The incident in which God’s people, and especially key leaders, completely surrendered their will and loyalty to Baal through the enticement of sexual immorality is sad. But the inspiring leadership of Moses and especially of Phineas can urge us on toward being intentional about what we do with our time, our mind, and the activities we engage in. Clearly, there are some things that are not as awful as worshipping Baal-peor, but are they stepping stones in that direction? Paul tells the church of Philippi: “And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ—to the glory and praise of God” (Philippians 1:9-11, NIV).



Remind the students about the reading plan, which will take them through the inspired commentary of the Bible, the Conflict of the Ages Series. The reading that goes with this lesson is *Patriarchs and Prophets* (or *Beginning of the End*), chapter 41.



CORNERSTONE CONNECTIONS

JULY 15 2023

STUDENT LESSON

Scripture Story: Numbers 25.

Commentary: *Patriarchs and Prophets* (or *Beginning of the End*), chapter 41.

roads to the soul



Photo by Dan Olson

flashlight

“Yet we have a work to do to resist temptation. Those who would not fall a prey to Satan’s devices must guard well the avenues of the soul; they must avoid reading, seeing, or hearing that which will suggest impure thoughts. The mind should not be left to wander at random upon every subject that the adversary of souls may suggest” (*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 460).

keytext

“The LORD said to Moses, ‘Phinehas son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron, the priest, has turned my anger away from the Israelites. Since he was as zealous for my honor among them as I am, I did not put an end to them in my zeal. Therefore tell him I am making my covenant of peace with him.’ ”

(Numbers 25:10-12, NIV)

what do you think?

Rank the following items according to their power to cause major destruction to your relationship with God (1 is the most destructive and 5 is the least)

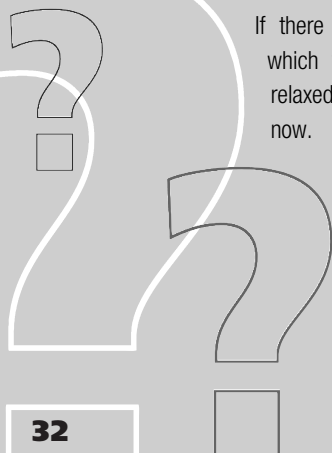
- ___ Media, movies, and music of a worldly nature
- ___ The example of key leaders who fall and are exposed as hypocrites
- ___ Impure entertainment
- ___ Apathy and boredom—the absence of good input
- ___ Rationalizing sin with intellectual arrogance

Explain why you chose the top three you did. Which behaviors or avenues to the human heart not mentioned above would you include in this list? Why?

did you know?

The Bible predicts waning moral values just before the coming of Christ. Perilous or dangerous times, the disintegration of the family unit, 'lovers of money,' 'lovers of pleasure,' 'without self-control' are word pictures describing life in the twenty-first century.—Mark Finley, *What the Bible Says About*, p. 39.

If there was ever an age in which young people live in a relaxed moral environment, it is now.



INTO THE STORY

“While Israel was staying in Shittim, the men began to indulge in sexual immorality with Moabite women, who invited them to the sacrifices to their gods. The people ate the sacrificial meal and bowed down before these gods. So Israel yoked themselves to the Baal of Peor. And the LORD’s anger burned against them.

“The LORD said to Moses, ‘Take all the leaders of these people, kill them and expose them in broad daylight before the LORD, so that the LORD’s fierce anger may turn away from Israel.’

“So Moses said to Israel’s judges, ‘Each of you must put to death those of your people who have yoked themselves to the Baal of Peor.’

“Then an Israelite man brought into the camp

a Midianite woman right before the eyes of Moses and the whole assembly of Israel while they were weeping at the entrance to the tent of meeting. When Phinehas son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron, the priest, saw this, he left the assembly, took a spear in his hand and followed the Israelite into the tent. He drove the spear into both of them, right through the Israelite man and into the woman’s stomach. Then the plague against the Israelites was stopped; but those who died in the plague numbered 24,000.

“The LORD said to Moses, ‘Phinehas son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron, the priest, has turned my anger away from the Israelites. Since he was as zealous for my honor among them as I am, I did not put an end to them in my zeal. Therefore tell him I am making my covenant of peace with him. He and his descendants will have a covenant of a lasting priesthood, because he was zealous for the honor of his God and made atonement for the Israelites.’

“The name of the Israelite who was killed with the Midianite woman was Zimri son of Salu, the leader of a Simeonite family. And the name of the Midianite woman who was put to death was Kozbi daughter of Zur, a tribal chief of a Midianite family.

“The LORD said to Moses, ‘Treat the Midianites as enemies and kill them. They treated you as enemies when they deceived you in the Peor incident involving their sister Kozbi, the daughter of a Midianite leader, the woman who was killed when the plague came as a result of that incident.’ ”

(Numbers 25:1-18, NIV)

OUT OF THE STORY

Read the story through and *underline* the key people mentioned in this story.

Circle the various words that convey emotion in this story and *draw a line* to the person or persons feeling it.

Place *brackets* around the major sections of this story as though they were scenes in a play. How many different themes do you see emerging from this story?

If you had to identify one or two key verses in this story, which would you say captures the central point?

As you read this story, is there . . .

An example to follow?

A prayer to pray?

A warning to heed?

A truth to proclaim?

An encouraging word to share?

An action to take or a change to make?

punch lines

“You adulterous people, don’t you know that friendship with the world means enmity against God? Therefore, anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God” (James 4:4, NIV).

“Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in them. For everything in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—comes not from the Father but from the world. The world and its desires pass away, but whoever does the will of God lives forever” (1 John 2:15-17, NIV).

“Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it” (Proverbs 4:23, NIV).

“How can a young person stay on the path of purity? By living according to your word. I seek you with all my heart; do not let me stray from your commands. I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you” (Psalm 119:9-11, NIV).

“Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things” (Philippians 4:8, NIV).

further insight

“So now it is by leading the followers of Christ to associate with the ungodly and unite in their amusements that Satan is most successful in alluring them into sin. . . . We cannot be too decided in shunning the company of those who exert an influence to draw us away from God.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 458.

connectingtolife

Sabbath

Read James 4:8-10.

As you rank the items in the *What Do You Think?* section, explain why you put them in the order you did. Do you sense that the world is becoming numb to how wrong sin is? What are some examples of this from your perspective? How can you apply today's text in your life?

Sunday

Read James 4:4.

Read the *Into the Story* passage and answer the questions in the *Out of the Story* section. This story is loaded with many sobering events and some inspiring moments. As you work through the study questions ask yourself, "What is God trying to say to me in this passage?" If you had to boil your insights down to 10 words or less, what would you say is the message you want to take away from this story? Which verse or phrase captures your attention the most and why?

Monday

Read 1 John 2:15-17.

The *Key Text* this week highlights Phinehas and his zealous attempt to vindicate God's name and the authority of His will for Israel. Read this passage and think of some other biblical heroes that were passionate and unwilling to let God's name be shamefully mocked by others. Reflect on your experience over the past month and identify a moment or two when you had the opportunity to stand up for God. In what ways do you want to be like Phinehas in his zeal for God? (Avoid throwing spears, however.)

Tuesday

Read Philippians 4:8.

In the *Flashlight* section Ellen White captures the essence of what we can do to prevent such a shameful incident from occurring in our lives. Read the passage again.

Part of the problem emerges when boredom or idleness leaves room for literally anything to creep in. Perhaps one of the best ways to guard our hearts is to engage in activities that deepen our experience with God. Who do you know that seems to fill up their life with rich, meaningful activities and input? Maybe they are avid readers or observers. It might be that they work diligently to serve others, or they might have a powerful prayer life. Who is your role model in this regard? What is one thing you can do this week to strengthen your own devotion to God?

Wednesday

As you read the *Punch Lines* for this week you will notice some passages that might be very familiar to you as well as some that are new. Number the passages from 1 to 5 according to how familiar you are with them. You may want to list these references in your Bible next to the story in Numbers 25 for future reference.

Which passage speaks to you most at this time in your life? Which passage applies to a friend or family member for whom you want to pray this week? As you pray, consider writing a note or sharing with them some encouraging words this week.

Thursday

Read John 3:16, 17.

While this week's lesson is a stark reminder of the sinfulness of sin, it is also a reminder of God's covenant of grace to journey with us to the Promised Land. Ellen White reminds us that "the heart must be

renewed by divine grace, or it will be in vain to seek for purity of life. He who attempts to build up a noble, virtuous character independent of the grace of Christ is building his house upon the shifting sand" (*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 460). Nothing strengthens our grip on God's plan for our lives as does deepening our understanding of His love and mercy displayed at Calvary. What are some ways you can remember Calvary throughout the week? Find a few tangible ways to jog your memory throughout the day about the most pivotal moment in history.

Friday

Read Psalm 119:9-11; Proverbs 4:23.

It is hard to imagine an event such as the worship of the Baal of Peor ever happening to you. Yet the incident started so subtly that it may have been hard to notice. Reflect on some of the big events of the Bible and consider for a moment how they began. As you determine to remain true to God, know that your faithfulness begins somewhere. Where does it begin with you?

this week's reading*

Patriarchs and Prophets (or Beginning of the End), chapter 41.

**Beginning of the End* is a special adaptation of *Patriarchs and Prophets*, created for you by the Ellen G. White Estate and Pacific Press®. Get more information about it at www.cornerstoneconnections.net/article/191/about-us/conflict-of-the-ages-companion-books#.URlhF1rBO9s. By following the weekly reading plan, you will read at least one book of the Conflict of the Ages Series each year.