

# Bamidbar Chapter 25 - Transcript

## Shiur Overview

### Summary: Bamidbar Chapter 25 — The Story of Baal Peor and Pinchas

#### Broader Context and Thematic Framework

Bamidbar 25 belongs to the third part of the book, where Bnei Yisrael are already circling around Eretz Yisrael and dealing with the surrounding nations. A key framework for understanding these narratives comes from Moshe's derashah at the beginning of Sefer Devarim.

From the perspective of the people living in Eretz Yisrael (Bayis Rishon, Bayis Sheni, etc.), there are multiple layers of challenge with other nations:

- **Conquest of the seven nations** — primarily a subject of Sefer Yehoshua, not the Torah itself
- **Neighbor relations** — diplomatic issues, wars (Amalek), requests for passage (Edom), power dynamics
- **Spiritual threats** — following the avodah zarah of surrounding nations, particularly through intermarriage

This chapter addresses the **spiritual threat** specifically. While the Eigel story deals with avodah zarah, it doesn't involve following the gods of neighboring nations. Here, even after the conquest problem is addressed, the persistent danger of being drawn into the worship practices of surrounding peoples is the focus. This is the **paradigm story** of that phenomenon in the times of Moshe.

#### Pesukim 1–2: The Sin at Shittim

**Pasuk 1:** \*Vayeishev Yisrael baShittim\* — Israel camps at Shittim, part of Moav. \*Vayachel ha'am liznos el bnos Moav\* — the people begin to stray toward the daughters of Moav. The word \*liznos\* (from \*zonah\*) is better translated as "to stray" than "to prostitute." This is the classic mechanism by which nations could cause Israel to sin in a "friendly" way — through intermarriage leading to idolatry. Parallels include Shlomo HaMelech's foreign wives, the crisis in Ezra and Nechemya's time, and the Torah's own warning in Parshas Va'eschanan.

**Pasuk 2:** \*Vatikrenah la'am lizivcheihen\* — the Moabite women invite the people to their sacrificial feasts. The word \*zevach\* always implies a sacrifice that includes eating — essentially a festival or holiday celebration. The people eat, bow down to their gods (\*vayishtachavu leiloheihen\*), and become attached to Baal Peor (\*vayitzamed Yisrael l'Baal Peor\*). The name Baal Peor means the lord/god of the place Peor, with \*Baal\* functioning like \*adon\* (lord).

#### Pesukim 3–5: Hashem's Response and the Command to Moshe

**Pesukim 3–4:** Hashem is furious and instructs Moshe: \*Kach es kol roshei ha'am\* — take all the heads/leaders of the people. This reveals that not just lower-class people (an \*asafuf\*) but **leaders** were involved, which is the real crisis. This prefigures the pattern in Ezra and Nechemya where the \*chorim\* (nobles) are the ones intermarrying. The instruction \*vehoka osam laHashem neged hashamesh\* means to execute them publicly — \*neged hashamesh\* always means "in the open, where everyone can see." The public nature of the punishment is essential to turning back Hashem's anger.

**Pasuk 5:** Moshe relays the command to the \*shofetim\* (judges), since the leaders themselves are compromised. Each shofet is to kill the Baal Peor worshippers within his group, recalling the judicial structure from Parshas Yisro (\*sarei alafim\*, etc.). An alternative reading: Hashem tells Moshe to instruct the \*roshei ha'am\* (who are the shofetim) to kill the guilty \*anashim\*.

#### Pesukim 6–8: The Brazen Act and Pinchas's Response

**Pasuk 6:** A new episode begins. An \*ish\* (implying a person of importance and power) from Bnei Yisrael publicly brings a Midianite woman (\*Midyanis\*) before Moshe and the entire congregation. The sudden mention of Midian alongside Moav suggests these were neighboring peoples in the same area, part of the same regional group. This act is a brazen public defiance of Moshe's efforts to stop the people from following Baal Peor. Meanwhile, Moshe and the \*adas bnei Yisrael\* (the leadership/Sanhedrin) are weeping at the entrance of the Ohel Moed, apparently **not knowing what to do**.

**Pesukim 7–8:** Pinchas ben Elazar ben Aharon sees this and is the **only one** who stands up — \*mitoch ha'edah\* — from within the congregation. While everyone else stands crying, he takes a \*romach\* (spear), pursues the Israelite man and the woman into the \*kubah\* (tent or chamber), and stabs them both \*el kovatah\*. The term \*kubah\*/\*kovatah\* may carry a double meaning — possibly sharing the root k-v-h, which appeared earlier in the parashah in Bilaam's narrative meaning "curse." It could thus refer to "the place from which she cursed" or euphemistically to intimate areas.

#### Pasuk 9: The Plague Revealed

Only now does the text reveal that a \*magefah\* (plague) had been raging, killing 24,000 people. This retroactively explains why the people were crying and clarifies the meaning of \*charon af Hashem\*. Whenever the Torah uses this phrase, it doesn't mean God is abstractly angry — it means something bad is actively happening. The \*charon af Hashem\* **was** the plague.

#### The Courage Required of Pinchas

The story of the \*ish Yisrael\* bringing the Midianite woman is presented as one example of the broader phenomenon of people — possibly the \*rashei ha'am\* — going to Baal Peor and needing to be stopped. What made Pinchas's act extraordinary was the courage required to confront someone important and elite. Pinchas himself was elite — grandson of Aharon — but he was willing to act against another high-status person when no one else would.

#### Pesukim 11–13: Pinchas's Reward — Brit Kehunat Olam

God tells Moshe that Pinchas \*heshiv et chamati\* — turned back God's anger — \*bekan'o et kin'ati\* — by being zealous with God's own zealousness. Only because of him were the rest of the people saved (\*velo khiliti et benei Yisrael\*).

His reward: \*hineni noten lo et briti shalom\* — "I give him my covenant of peace." This covenant explains itself in the next line: \*vehayta lo uleazar'o acharav brit kehunat olam\* — it is a covenant of eternal priesthood for him and his descendants.

This raises a significant question, since the kehunnah was already established through Aharon and passed to Elazar. However, it appears that while Elazar's succession from Aharon was already settled, the question of who would succeed **Elazar** — or which of Elazar's children would carry the line forward — had not yet been determined. Pinchas's initiative earned him and his line the permanent priestly succession. The reason is repeated: *\*tachat asher kina Eilokav\** — because he acted on God's zealotry — *\*vayechapter al benei Yisrael\** — and thereby atoned for and saved the people.

### **Pesukim 14–15: The Delayed Identification of the Victims**

The chapter employs a deliberate literary technique: the story is first told anonymously, and only afterward are the identities revealed. This may reflect that Pinchas himself didn't care who they were — he acted because these people were causing harm to the nation.

- The Israelite man: **Zimri ben Salu**, *\*nasi beit av laShimoni\** — a leader of a *\*beit av\** (a clan or group of families) within the tribe of Shimon. Not necessarily the head of the entire tribe, but an important person.

- The Midianite woman: **Kozbi bat Tzur**. Her father Tzur was *\*rosh umot beit av beMidyan\** — head of a family group in Midyan. He will appear again later in the war against Midyan.

Both figures on each side were high-status, underscoring Pinchas's courage in confronting them.

### **Pesukim 16–18: The Command Against Midyan**

God commands Moshe: *\*Tzror et haMidyanim vehikitem otam\** — make enemies of the Midianites and strike them. The reason: *\*ki tzorerim hem lachem benichleihem\** — they are hostile to you through their schemes (*\*nichleihem\** = plans, espionage, stratagems), specifically *\*bidvar Pe'or\** and through Kozbi.

This reveals that the entire affair with the Midianite women was not innocent. It was a deliberate plan — perhaps a "honeypot" operation. The conventional interpretation focuses on a spiritual scheme to lure Israel into idolatry, but there is also a material and strategic dimension: by ensnaring a *\*nasi\**, the Midianites could become allies, gain influence, and subvert the nation from within. God's response — commanding war against Midyan — confirms that this was understood as a national and military threat, not merely a spiritual failing. The actual war will occur in later chapters, as the narrative is interrupted by the census.

## **Full Transcript**

### **Bamidbar Chapter 25: The Story of Baal Peor and Pinchas**

#### **Introduction: Contextual Framework**

Bamidbar chapter 25 is a kind of weird chapter. I don't entirely know how to understand it in the context of the whole book or in the context of what exactly is the story, but I will talk about it and certain ideas of what it might be about.

We've understood that this is part of the third part of the book. It's part of the story of the generation where they're already close, they're already sort of circling around Eretz Yisrael. In some other sense, we're already dealing, as we've seen already in the prophecies of Bilam, with all the nations that the people will have to deal with around them. This is also a very important theme in the derashah of Moshe, I think in the beginning of Sefer Devarim, which I've been using as a way of interpreting all these stories already.

#### **The Challenge of Neighboring Nations**

If you think of it from the perspective of the people living in Eretz Yisrael in Bayis Rishon and Bayis Sheni and whenever, now of course there's the seven nations—the nations that they have to conquer in order to get to Eretz Yisrael. That's one subject. That subject is not so much a subject of Eretz Yisrael; it's a subject of Sefer Yehoshua and so on. But now, even after they solve that problem, or if they don't solve it, whatever happens with that problem, there's still all the neighbors, there's all the nations around and around. So now there's the question of how to interact, how to deal with all the neighbors around and around.

Of course, Sefer Bereishit already talks about this question. There's all the stories of Esav and Ishmael and Moav and so on, all these stories of all these nations starting in Sefer Bereishit, and they end up being our neighbors. So we're not conquering them, but we have the neighbor issue. Sometimes

they do start wars with us. We have Amalek, right, which is one problem—they start all this stuff. Sometimes we have to be nice to them. Sometimes they're stronger than us. Sometimes we're stronger than them. There's an imperial power going in one direction or the other and so on. Now one other issue between the nations in between—sometimes they're not just diplomatically nice, right? Some of the stories we've had about Moshe asking Edom, "Could we pass by?" And of course these things will have repercussions or something like symbolic repetitions later when sometimes we need a favor from a neighbor and they're not letting our airplanes pass by over their airspace or whatever it is. That's a very similar idea where Moshe is saying, "Here we're on the way to Israel and we have to get through it. We're not asking you, we're not conquering your land, we're gonna pay you, we're gonna buy your water," but sometimes they're not even agreeing to that.

#### **The Spiritual Threat**

Just like there's all these kind of threats and relations with the neighbors, there's also spiritual threats. What we know in Tanakh very much as following the ways of the goyim around them, specifically in worshiping avodah zarah. And it seems like this story of Bnei Yisrael and Baal Peor is the most significant story in the Torah and the Chumash which discusses something like that happening, and it also discusses some kind of solution or some kind of protocol-type solution for it and the role of Pinchas, or the role of the kanai [zealot] maybe in general, as solving that problem.

So I think that's what is going on in this chapter from a broader perspective of what it's all about. We will describe of course the story. The story of the Eigel [Golden Calf] is about avodah zarah in some sense, but it doesn't talk about them following the avodah zarah of the nations around them. That's something that we see a little bit in Sefer Devarim, but mostly about the nations they will come to. Here we see, even after we

got rid of that, we're still going to be left with the avodah zarah of the nations around, and that's something we find in some sense later in Tanakh more specifically—more stories about that. But this is the primary story, the paradigm story of that in the times of Moshe where something like this happens.

### **Pesukim 1-2: Israel Strays Toward Baal Peor**

So what we have is like this: They stay, they camp, they live, they are in the place called Shittim, and this is this part of Moav. Then the people start to be zoneh, to sort of stray towards the daughters of Moav. **Liznot** [to stray/prostitute] means to become, to prostitute themselves, or the word zonah, but I think "stray" maybe is a better translation—to **Benot Moav** [daughters of Moav].

### **The Mechanism of Spiritual Corruption**

Now this, of course, is one of the major ways in which, in a friendly way—in a friendly way—the nations around Israel could cause them to sin, could cause them to stray from the correct path, specifically by intermarriage. We know the story of Shlomo HaMelech criticized for marrying foreign women who caused him to worship others. We know the stories in the times of Ezra and Nechemya with Ezra, with the foreign women causing them to worship avodah zarah and so on. The Torah itself warning against this in Parshat Va'etchanan. So this is the story that talks about this, this is the story that talks about this happening in times of Moshe.

Now exactly what the Torah describes is happening: **Vatikrenah lahem lizivcheihen** [and they called them to their sacrifices]. This is exactly what happens. They call the people to the sacrifices, or zevach. Zevach always means also not just a sacrifice, it means sacrifice where you eat also, where there's a party for their gods. And therefore they eat, and therefore they also bow down, because that's what you do when there's a sacrifice, when there's a—maybe zevach should be translated as a festival, a holiday. And therefore **Vayitztamed Yisrael el Baal Peor** [and Israel became attached to Baal Peor]. Part of Israel become connected, become attached to Baal Peor.

Baal Peor being, as we discussed, Baal is a word that means something like a lord. So Baal Peor is this place where they just were. So Baal Peor—they become attached to this god, this foreign god of Peor.

### **Pesukim 3-5: Hashem's Anger and Moshe's Response**

**Vayichar af Hashem** [and Hashem's anger burned]. Hashem is very angry. Because Hashem is very angry, what does he do? He deputizes, he sends a message, a messenger to Moshe, and he tells him what to do. He says—so apparently there were the leaders, but now we found out something more important. Not only some asafsuf [rabble], some lower-class people were part of this Baal Peor, now also some leaders, some important people have went along with Baal Peor, and that's really a problem. And of course this is also prefiguring something we see in Ezra and Nechemya where it's the important people, the high-class people, the chorim [nobles] and so on, who are marrying, intermarrying with the foreign women and therefore worshipping their gods and so on and so on.

### **The Command for Public Punishment**

And he tells Moshe, **Kach et kol roshei ha'am** [take all the heads of the people], the leaders, the **Roshei ha'am**, the heads of the people who are connected to Baal Peor, and

**vehoka otam laHashem neged hashamesh** [and hang them up for Hashem before the sun]. This might mean something like kill them, string them out, put them out in front of the sun so they will be killed publicly. That's the important thing—to be publicly. **Neged hashamesh** [before/against the sun] always means publicly, something where everyone can see, publicly.

So Hashem is himself giving Moshe the solution—how do you solve this? By publicly punishing, destroying these people who are going with Baal Peor. And that's what Moshe does. He tells the shoftim [judges]—so of course he can't tell the leaders himself because these are leaders. He tells the shoftim to kill—each of the shoftim should kill his people who are attached to Baal Peor. So the shoftim, each one has some people under him, maybe like we discussed in Parshat Yitro, right? They started with sarei alafim [officers of thousands] and so on. Each one is charged to take care of the Baal Peor worshippers of his group, of his part.

So maybe if we read like this, we could say that Hashem is telling Moshe to tell the **Roshei ha'am**, which are the shoftim, to kill the anashim [men]. Maybe that's one way to read it.

### **Pesukim 6-8: The Brazen Act and Pinchas's Response**

#### **The Public Defiance**

Okay, now there's a new story, a new part of the story. So now an ish—ish usually means an important person, a high-class person, a person with power—comes and he brings close to his brothers a Midianite woman. So we have talked about Bnot Moav [daughters of Moav]; suddenly there's also people from Midian there. Apparently these are neighbors, so they're part of the same sort of group, the same part of people. So it might mean the same area or something like that. And he brings a Midyanit [Midianite woman].

So he's publicly defying what Moshe said, what Moshe has been trying to get out—the people stop them from going with the Midianite women and stop them from following the Midianist, Bnot Moav, following Baal Peor. He's very publicly going against this, bringing the Midyanit. And what are they doing? They're crying **petach Ohel Moed** [at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting], where they get together for every kind of problem, for everything that's going on. And it seems like they don't know what to do—Moshe and the **Adat Bnei Yisrael** [congregation of Israel], which means usually the leaders, the congregations, the Sanhedrin and other people in charge, don't know what to do.

#### **Pinchas Stands Up**

And this is a situation, a very interesting situation, where Moshe and the people don't know what to do, and there's only one person who knows what to do, or it's not that he knows—he has courage and does what needs to be done.

So Pinchas ben Elazar ben Aharon sees this, and he stands up. This is the only one that stands up. They're all standing there and crying, and he stands up. He's part of the congregation, he stands up. He takes a romach [spear], he takes a spear. He comes, he chases—not clear what that means—**el hakubah** [to the tent/chamber], the tent or wherever they were, and he stabs them both, the man and the woman.

So again, kubah might mean—might be a word that has a double meaning. Might be also from the same shoresh [root]. It's interesting we had in the same pasuk just the previous

parsha, right, **kava** [curse], which means a curse. So maybe **kubah** might mean something like the place from where she's cursed, or her private places, where we might call that way.

### Pesukim 9-13: Pinchas's Decisive Action and Reward

And this is a situation, a very interesting situation, where the people don't know what to do, and there's only one person who knows what to do, and does what needs to be done. So Pinchas, son of Elazar, son of Aharon, sees this, and he stands up, he's the only one that stands up. They're all standing there and crying, and he stands up, he's part of the congregation, and he stands up, he takes a **romach** [spear], he comes, he chases — it's not clear what that means — it means something like the tent, or wherever they were, and he stabs them, both the man and the woman, **al-kubasa**.

So again, **al-kubasa** might be a word that has a double meaning. It might be also from the same \*shoresh\* [root]. Interesting, we had in the same passage, the previous \*shoresh\* **k-v-h**, right, which means a curse, so maybe it might mean something like the place from where she's cursed, or her private places, which might call that way.

### The Plague Revealed

And that solves the problem, but now we discover that there was a plague, 24,000 people died, and apparently that's why they were crying, and that's also the **charon af Hashem** [God's burning anger]. Of course, like Hashem, whenever it says, it doesn't just mean Hashem is sitting in his house or something, I'm ruining it, it means that something bad is happening, and that's what is ascribed to Hashem. **Charon af Hashem** — it means there was a plague already.

### The Courage Required to Act Against the Elite

Now this story of this **ish Yisrael** [Israelite man], bringing the Midianite, is apparently just one example of the people, maybe the **rashei ha'am** [heads of the people], who are going to Baal Peor, who need to be killed, but it's very hard. You need courage to go against someone important, against a high class person, against an elite person — it's not a simple thing. And Pinchas was of course also an elite, he's the son of Aharon, son of Elazar, so the grandson of Aharon. He had the courage, he takes the initiative to do that, and he kills these people that need to be killed, and that stops the **charon af Hashem**, and that stops the **magefah** [plague], and he was the only one who was able to do this.

### Pinchas's Reward: The Covenant of Peace and Eternal Priesthood

And for this, he gets a prize. And it's very interesting that Parashat Pinchas stops the story here, and ends here, but really the chapter is in this case right — this is where, this is all one long story. And Hashem tells Moshe, Pinchas has brought back, taken away my anger from the people, by angering my anger — he's been angry for me, he does what I did — and because of him, only because of him, were the rest of the people saved, so the **magefah** stopped, because of him.

And therefore he gets his reward: give him my covenant of peace. Now what is this covenant of peace? I think it explains itself, what is that, that will be for him, this covenant will be for him, a covenant of **kehunah** [priesthood]. So in other words, Pinchas will be inheriting the **kehunah** from his father, Elazar, who got it from Aharon.

### The Question of Priestly Succession

This of course is a big question here, because it seems like, we already know that Aharon gets the **kehunah**, and is giving it to his children, but it seems like, there's different ways of understanding this, but it seems like, at least from this story, it seems like the question of succession after Elazar, we already know that Elazar will succeed in the Aharon, we learned that before, but it seems like the question after that was not solved, or maybe at least there might be several different children of Elazar, and maybe not all of them, but from Pinchas, I take this initiative, got this reward of becoming the **kohen** [priest], and forever his family.

And just because he, because he did his anger, he took the initiative of fulfilling God's anger, of doing, and by that, saving the rest of the people from being destroyed. So that's the story of Pinchas.

### The Delayed Identification of the Victims

The end of this chapter is just giving a note of the name of the people that he died and were killed, and that shows us what was the courage of Pinchas, what wasn't said before. It's interesting, and this is a specific style that the \*pesukim\* [verses] do sometimes, they give a story anonymously, and then they say who that was. It might be deliberate, like Pinchas didn't really [know] who they were, he just did it, because these are some people doing, causing damage to everyone else, right, and he's going to take the initiative and do that.

But in the end we get this note. Of course we have already Pinchas' name, we know exactly who he is. We get also the note of who this is: the **ish Yisrael** was **Zimri ben Salu** [Zimri son of Salu], he is the **nasi** [prince/leader] of the **shevet** [tribe], he's the leader of the **beit av** [father's house] — it might not be the whole **Shevet Shimon** [tribe of Shimon], but a **beit av**, we discussed one family, one group of families of **Shevet Shimon** — so it was an important person.

And the woman who was killed from Midian, she, her name was **Kozbi bat Tzur** [Kozbi daughter of Tzur], which was, and this Tzur, her father Tzur, we'll see later, we'll find him, meet him later, also in the story of the war with Midian. He is **rosh shema beit av** [head of a father's house], he is also the leader, the head of a family in Midian. So both of these, on both sides, these were high-class people, and Pinchas, he did what had to be done, even for that.

### The Command Against Midian: A Strategic and Spiritual Threat

And now, we have a mitzvah from Hashem, and this shows us also that this whole story — I've made an audio on the command of Midian, the mitzvah, of course it's interrupted by the census in the next chapter — but this shows us that this whole story is not like I said, it's a spiritual story, but it has, obviously has some kind of meaning here, it obviously has some kind of, we'll say national or military meaning.

Because obviously when people get involved with other people, then maybe they find out the espionage, they find out what's going on, or somehow they are able to control you, they are able to subjugate you. And therefore Hashem tells Moshe, I am the way to make enemies out of them, so find a way to make enemies of them. Why? Because they are enemies, they are hurting you, they are fighting with you, with their thoughts, or like plans, or like espionage plans, and with Kazbi, the daughter of **nesi Midian** [prince of Midian], their sister, who

was killed in the day of the **magefah** [plague] **be-Peor** [at Peor].

So we see that this whole thing with **nesi Midian** was not so innocent, maybe it was like a honeypot plan, but in any case, it was something. It's usually interpreted as just like a spiritual plan, they wanted to make us worship **avodah zarah**

[idolatry], but I think that there's also some material aspect of this, and that was like their plan. They got the **nasi**, and then they become friends with him, and somehow they subvert the people by that. And Hashem says we realize that, and Pinchas helped us, and therefore we're going to go fight with the Midian. That will happen in later chapters, since there's going to be a stop for other things in the next chapter.