Independent Sources Versus Redactional Strata in the "Book" of Numbers: Reexamining the Composition of Numbers 25

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Numbers 25 describes the Israelites’ deviation towards a form of idolatry involving sexual transgressions, Yhwh’s harsh response to their deeds, and the acts the Israelites were required to perform in order to appease the divine wrath. Scholars have long noted that difficulties within the story lead to the conclusion that it does not constitute a single cohesive narrative. For more than a century there has been broad consensus regarding the need to distinguish between the first part of the chapter, verses 1–5, which discusses the daughters of Moab and Baal-peor, and the second part of the chapter beginning with verse 6, which describes Phinehas’s act, and to further differentiate between two separate components within verses 1–5. Until recently, it was also agreed that the Phinehas story belongs to the Priestly literature.[[1]](#footnote-1)

Although in recent decades alternative suggestions for analyzing the chapter have been proposed, they have merely increased the controversy surrounding the problematic points. In fact, this chapter stands at the center of several fundamental debates within Bible scholarship in recent decades.[[2]](#footnote-2) It would appear that most scholars today believe that the author of the Phinehas story was in possession of the first part of the chapter, verses 1–5, and wrote his text as a continuation of those verses. This opinion goes hand in hand with a reassessment of the dating of the Phinehas story. It was originally ascribed to one of several layers of the Priestly source, but today is considered to be part of a Priestly or post-Priestly redaction layer, regarded by certain scholars as the final stage in the creation of the book of Numbers, as a complete, independent work, redacted separately from the rest of the Pentateuch.[[3]](#footnote-3) In some research literature, this conclusion led to a re-analysis of the elements in verses 1–5 while in others, analysis was abandoned and the first section of the chapter was discussed as a single, complete, and coherent text, notwithstanding its obvious complexity.

The centrality of Numbers 25 to the debate over various models for the Pentateuch’s composition necessitates a detailed reexamination of the chapter’s composition, an objective I will endeavor to realize in this paper. I will attempt to demonstrate that the amalgamation of three separate and independent stories, a theory similar to one proposed over a century ago, remains the most sagacious and convincing explanation for the composition of the chapter. However, in order to make this argument again today, it must be presented anew in a comprehensive and systematic manner, while examining the major alternative explanations of the chapter’s composition and contending with further questions that have arisen in recent decades.

## Two Narratives in Verses 1–5

Research on the Phinehas story beginning in verse 6 and its relationship to verses 1–5 is often based on the assumption that the author of the Phinehas story had before him verses 1–5 , as we know them. However, a complete discussion of the chapter must include a detailed analysis of verses 1–5 on their own, without presupposing that their compilation preceded the creation of the following verses.[[4]](#footnote-4)

The story begins in verse 1b which relates that “the people profaned themselves by whoring with the Moabite women”.  Verse 2 goes on to explain the particulars: The daughters of Moab called upon the Israelites to partake of the sacrifices dedicated to their god (or gods) and to bow down, “*vayistahavu”* וישתחוו)) before him (or them). The narrative function of verse 3a, “Israel attached itself to Baal-peor”, with respect to what was previously related, is unclear: Did the attachment follow the bowing down and if so, what does it mean, or was the bowing down itself the attachment? Moreover, the verse mentions the god Baal-peor, although the deity of the Moabites was not in fact Baal-peor, but Chemosh (see for example Num 21:29).[[5]](#footnote-5) The subject also changes: In verse 3a, it is “Israel”, in contrast to “the people”, which appears three times in verses 1b–2. The use of the name “Israel”, as opposed to “the people”, is also found in verse 1a, which, as will become clear, is the exposition of verse 3a.[[6]](#footnote-6)

Verses 3b–4 are a single continuous sequence describing Yhwh's wrath, “*ḥᵃrôn ʾap̱”* (חרון אף) and the way in which it is to be appeased, in accordance with the divine instruction. In verse 4, God commands Moses to impale the leaders in order to remove the divine wrath from Israel. In contrast, in verse 5, Moses does not harm the leaders but directs them or, more precisely, the judges, to punish only the sinners, “who attached themselves to Baal-peor”, referring to verse 3a. Hence, verses 3b–4, which direct the ringleaders to be impaled, are not part of this sequence but are the continuation of the daughters of Moab story in verses 1b–2.

This analysis indicates that from both narrative and linguistic perspectives, verses 1–5 include two separate continuous sequences:[[7]](#footnote-7)

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| --- | --- |
| The Story of the Daughters of Moab | The Story of Baal-peor |
| (1b) ויחל העם לזנות אל בנות מואב (2) ותקראן לעם לזבחי אלהיהן ויאכל העם וישתחוו לאלהיהן (3b) ויחר אף יהוה בישראל (4) ויאמר יהוה אל משה קח את כל ראשי העם והוקע אותם ליהוה נגד השמש וישב חרון אף יהוה מישראל. | (1a) וישב ישראל בשטים (3a) ויצמד ישראל לבעל פעור (5) ויאמר משה אל שפטי ישראל הרגו איש אנשיו הנצמדים לבעל פעור. |
| (1b) The people profaned themselves by whoring with the Moabite women (2) who invited the people to the sacrifices for their god. The people partook of them and worshiped that god. (3b) and the Lord was incensed with Israel. (4) The Lord said to Moses, “Take all the ringleaders and have them publicly impaled before the Lord, so that the Lord’s wrath may turn away from Israel.” | (1a) While Israel was staying at Shittim (3a) [thus] Israel attached itself to Baal-peor. (5) So Moses said to Israel’s officials, “Each of you slay those of his men who attached themselves to Baal-peor.” |

This division was first proposed more than a century ago.[[8]](#footnote-8) While it is supported by other biblical passages, as we shall see below, it derives primarily from the text of Numbers 25 itself and thus is not dependent on any particular hypothesis about the compilation of the Pentateuch. It is therefore difficult to accept the scholarship of the past few decades that reads verses 1–5 as a single coherent unit or as an indivisible aggregate, in some cases without textual analysis refuting the proposed division.[[9]](#footnote-9) This tendency was also evident among early scholars who attributed these verses in their entirety to what they referred to as “JE,” and thereby exempted themselves and future generations from the need to separate them into different sources, which, in this instance, is not a very complicated task.[[10]](#footnote-10) This theory succumbs to the methodological error of giving preference to general theory over concrete textual analysis, implying that if it is *difficult* to distinguish between different non-Priestly texts wherever they appear, it is *impossible* to distinguish between them in *any* place they appear. Indeed, some current research does revert to the distinction between the two stories in verses 1–5, in a manner similar to the division proposed above.[[11]](#footnote-11)

Now that we have distinguished between the two independent narrative threads, the story of Baal-peor and the story of the daughters of Moab, I will discuss each one of them separately against a background of other associated biblical texts.

## The Story of Baal-peor

Various biblical texts mention a settlement by the name of “Beit Peor” located in the eastern Transjordan, and it would therefore appear that “Baal-peor,” a name unknown in extra-biblical texts can be identified with the Canaanite god Baal, worshipped in that area.[[12]](#footnote-12) A transgression related to Baal-peor is described in five places in the Bible: Numbers 25:1–5, 18, 31:16; Deuteronomy 4:3–4; Joshua 22:17; Hosea 9:10 and Psalm 106:28–31. Joshua 22 and Psalm 106 have been shown to be later texts and are, apparently, based on knowledge of Numbers 25 in its canonical form;[[13]](#footnote-13) we will examine one of them later in the context of the story of Phinehas. In contrast, the references to this sin in Hosea and in Deuteronomy do not reflect familiarity with the canonical form of Numbers 25. Hosea 9:10 reads, “But when they came to Baal-peor, they turned aside to shamefulness (לבשת), then they became as detested as they had been loved.” This brief and concise description attests to the existence of an Israelite tradition dating from the time of the First Temple which tells of the worship of Baal, in the context of Peor – without the plot elements familiar to us from the two other stories in Numbers 25, the daughters of Moab and Phinehas. Whether one author borrowed from the other or two independent texts relied on a shared tradition, this verse strengthens the claim that the Baal-peor story found in Numbers 25:1–5\* originally stood alone.

In Deuteronomy 4:3-4 as well the sin of Baal-peor is described with no reference to the daughters of Moab or to Phinehas, providing further indication that the story in Numbers was originally separate. Aside from the fact of the event and the emphasis on its severity, there is an additional motif common to the two texts from the Pentateuch, though not to Hosea’s prophecy -- the idea that all the transgressors, and only them, are to be punished for the sin. Both these texts imply that there were many sinners -- "And *Israel* attached itself" (Num. 25:3), "*Every* person who followed" (Num. 4: 3) – and both stress that it was the sinners alone who were punished. The difference is that in Numbers 25:5 punishment is meted out by man and in Deuteronomy 4:3 it is dispensed by God. Given this similarity, we can assume that in the original ending of the Baal-peor story in Numbers 25\*, which was not preserved (for reasons we will address below), all the sinners were killed as well.

Several pieces of evidence indicate that the story of Baal-peor in Numbers 25 belongs to the Elohistic source of the Pentateuch. First, it is reasonable that the “judges of Israel” that carry out Moses’ instructions are the officials he appointed, according to E, to judge the people, as related in Exodus 18 (regarding the verb root שפט, *shin-pey-tet,* "to judge", see Exodus 18:22, 26, etc.). J and P do not refer to the appointment of judges for the people. While D does describe the appointment of judges (Deut. 1:9–18), there is no reason to assume that the Baal-peor story in Numbers 25\* is deuteronomic (or deuteronomistic, post-deuteronomic, etc.), especially as D has its own version of this story in Deuteronomy 4:3-4, where the distinct deuteronomic style contrasts with Numbers 25\*. While the similarity between the Baal-peor story in Numbers 25\* and in Deuteronomy may indicate dependence, a plot variant allows D to use the story for its own purposes, corresponding exactly to the nature of the relationship between D and E generally.[[14]](#footnote-14) Its parallel in the Israelite prophet Hosea reinforces the attribution of the Baal-peor story to E, in light of this source’s association with the kingdom of Israel. It is not impossible that the entire episode is the continuation of stories, found in E, about Israel’s activities in this region of the wilderness, that continue from what was related in Numbers 21. The language, “*vayeshev yisrael*” “Israel stayed” (וישב ישראל) appears in both Numbers 21:25, 31 and Numbers 25:1a. Finally, the Israelites’ stay in Shittim corresponds to Joshua 2:1, attributed by early scholars to E,[[15]](#footnote-15) and it was recently suggested that these two texts may belong to a single work.[[16]](#footnote-16)

Attributing the Baal-peor story to E is contingent upon the recognition of E as a separate source, in the other texts mentioned and in additional ones, and many scholars today do not acknowledge this to be the case.[[17]](#footnote-17) But even without attributing the story to E, the parallels between Deuteronomy and Hosea reinforce the basic conclusion derived first and foremost from an analysis of Numbers 25 itself – verses 1a, 3, 5 are an independent story, not an additional layer added to other writings. This is also true of the daughters of Moab story, to which we will now turn our attention.

## The Story of the Daughters of Moab

The second narrative thread in Numbers 25:1–5 describes how the daughters of Moab seduce the people of Israel into engaging in idolatrous sexual acts. Specific plot and linguistic connections between the description of the sin in this verse and the warning issued in Exodus 34: 14–16 have been noted:

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| --- | --- |
| Daughters of Moab Story: Numbers 25: 1b–2, 3b–4 | Exodus 34:14–16 |
| (1ב) ויחל העם לזנות אל בנות מואב. (2) ותקראן לעם *לזבחי* **אלהיהן** ויאכל העם וישתחוו **לאלהיהן**.  (3ב) ויחר אף יהוה בישראל. (4) ויאמר יהוה אל משה קח את כל ראשי העם והוקע אותם ליהוה נגד השמש וישב חרון אף ה' מישראל. | (14) כי לא תשתחוה לאל אחר כי יהוה קנא שמו אל קנא הוא. (15) פן תכרת ברית ליושב הארץ וזנו אחרי **אלהיהם** *וזבחו* **לאלהיהם** וקרא לך ואכלת מזבחו. (16) ולקחת מבנתיו לבניך וזנו בנתיו אחרי **אלהיהן** והזנו את בניך אחרי **אלהיהן**. |
| 1b the people profaned themselves by whoring with the Moabite women, **2**who invited the people to the *sacrifices* for **their god**. The people partook of them and worshiped **that god**. **3**and the Lord was incensed with Israel. **4**The Lord said to Moses, “Take all the ringleaders and have them publicly impaled before the Lord, so that the Lord’s wrath may turn away from Israel.” | **14**for you must not worship any other god, because the Lord, whose name is Impassioned, is an impassioned God. **15**You must not make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land, for they will lust after **their gods** and *sacrifice* to **their gods** and invite you, and you will eat of their sacrifices. **16**And when you take wives from among their daughters for your sons, their daughters will lust after **their gods** and will cause your sons to lust after **their gods**. |

The sin in Numbers 25:1b–2 is thus the complete and precise fulfillment of the situation about which the Israelites were warned in Exodus 34:14–16. How can this be explained? Those early scholars who were able to distinguish between the two narrative threads in Numbers 25:1–5 ascribed the daughters of Moab story to the same source to which Exodus 34:14–16 belongs, the Yahwist source.[[18]](#footnote-18) In recent decades however, more complex explanations of the connection between these texts have been proposed. Christophe Nihan, in one of the most thorough analyses, distinguished between two components in verses 1–5 but viewed them as two layers rather than as two independent narratives. According to his analysis, the basic layer, similar to what is referred to above as the “story of Baal-peor”, includes verses 1a, 3, 5 and belongs to a pre-Priestly text telling the history of Israel’s exodus from Egypt up to the conquest of the Land of Israel, including the mention of “Shittim” in Joshua 2:1. On this there is a post-deuteronomist redaction including verses 1b, 2, 4, similar to what is referred to above as the “story of the daughters of Moab.”[[19]](#footnote-19) According to Nihan, this layer is based on Exodus 34:14–16, which he considers a post-deuteronomist text, and on Deuteronomy 7:3–4: “You shall not intermarry with them … For they will turn your children away from Me to worship other gods, and the Lord‘s anger will blaze forth against you and He will promptly wipe you out.” In Nihan’s words:

The post-dtr revision reinterpreted the original account of Israel’s apostasy at Pe‘or by introducing the reference to the “daughters of Moab,” thereby connecting the issue of apostasy with the topic of inter-ethnic (so-called “mixed”) marriages, following a device attested in late deuteronomistic or post-deuteronomistic passages.[[20]](#footnote-20)

There are several problems with this suggestion. The link between Exodus 24 and Deuteronomy 6–7, as well as the link between Exodus 34 and Numbers 25:1–5\*, is undeniable and can be explained in various ways. In contrast, the link between Numbers 25 and Deuteronomy 6–7, upon which Nihan relies, is weak. The only evidence of such a link is the mention of God’s wrath. While it is true that the cause for the wrath in both cases is relations with other peoples, when the author of the daughters of Moab story described the nature of these relations in detail and the way they led to the worship of other gods, he made exclusive use of Exodus 34:14–16 without referring to Deuteronomy 7:3–4. This is difficult to explain. If his aim were to connect the sin of worshipping Baal-peor with inter-ethnic marriages, he would have had no need of the description from Exodus 34:14–16. However, if, from the beginning, the catalyst for his connection between such marriages and God’s wrath was Deuteronomy 7:3–4, it would be expected that he would make some use of the language appearing there rather than relying exclusively on Exodus 34:14–16.

Regarding the divine wrath itself, there is no reason to assume that the author of the “daughters of Moab” story relied on Deuteronomy 7:3–4. If there is a link between them at all, it is more reasonable to hypothesize that it ran in the opposite direction – from Numbers 25:1–5\* to Deuteronomy 7:3–4. The verse in Deuteronomy is deuteronomic in its style and outlook. It threatens that the wrath will result in Yhwh’s immediate destruction of the sinners, using the verb root “*shin-mem-dalet*” (שמד) (compare to Deuteronomy 4:25–26, 6:15, 9:19). In contrast, in the daughters of Moab story, a singular and anomalous way to appease the wrath of God is presented -- God Himself commands Moses to publicly punish all the leaders of the people. The meaning of “*vehoka otam*” והוקע אותם)) is to “impale them” -- to publicly display their bodies impaled lengthwise,[[21]](#footnote-21) as was a customary form of deterrence in the Assyrian Empire.[[22]](#footnote-22) Here we encounter what may be called "the odd details problem" of the redactional strata model. There is no obvious reason why the author of the daughters of Moab story, if he was influenced by Deuteronomy 7:3-4, would replace the standard divine punishment appearing there with an extraordinary and singular demand[[23]](#footnote-23) that does not appear in any early text available to him.[[24]](#footnote-24) Nihan’s hypothesis regarding the motivation of the story’s compiler – the desire to link inter-ethnic marriage with idolatry – also cannot explain the introduction of the concept of impalement.

However, if the original story indeed included the command to impale, and if the author of Deuteronomy 7:3-4 was familiar with this story (it is not necessary to assume this as it is possible that there is no link between these writings), it is definitely plausible that he would have replaced the exceptional punishment of impalement with the threat of immediate destruction. This possibility becomes stronger in light of D’s opposition to the punishment of impalement, evident in the Deuteronomic prohibition against displaying the body of an executed sinner (Deut. 21:22–23).[[25]](#footnote-25) As we saw above, this is exactly what D did with the story of Baal-peor (Deut. 7:3–4) -- instead of commanding the leaders to kill the sinners, Moses declares that God will slay them – and here too the verb “*shin-mem-dalet*” (שמד) in the *hiphil* is used.

In addition to the comparison between the story of the daughters of Moab and other texts, an intrinsic internal analysis of the chapter itself, unrelated to other texts, reveals that the story of the daughters of Moab is not a redaction layer added to the Baal-peor story, but one of two independent stories that were woven together. The two stories include three identical plot elements: exposition (1a | 1b), transgression (3a | 2), and instruction to punish ( 5 | 3b–4). Thus, each of the narratives can be read as an independent sequence to which the elements from the other stories contribute nothing. As we have seen, the impalement concept in the daughters of Moab story is anomalous in its content. If this is a redaction layer, this concept is also superfluous as a plot feature because the redactor could merely have noted God’s wrath, leading directly to the command to kill the sinners. It is not clear why he added an alternative method of appeasing the divine wrath, thereby making the story both repetitive and contradictory. From the plot perspective, the daughters of Moab story is clearly independent; from the linguistic perspective as well, there is no evidence of borrowing between these two stories.

We have seen that the daughters of Moab story appearing in verses 1b–2 and 3b–4 existed as a cohesive entity, as did the story of Baal-peor appearing in verses 1a, 3a, 5, before the two were interwoven. It is reasonable to view the daughters of Moab story as the continuation and fulfilment of Exodus 34:14-16, and there is no reason not to accept the position of several early researchers who attributed both writings to the J source. To illustrate the affinity between the texts and their attribution to a single source, it is worthwhile to note that the distance between these two passages is short, if all the non-Yahwistic material that now exists between them is ignored, especially the Priestly material. The relationship between the daughters of Moab story and the warning in Exodus 34 is similar to the J story of the spies (Num. 13–14\*) where Moses repeats in his plea to Yhwh (Num. 14:17-18) the exact words of Yhwh Himself in the J story of the revelation of Yhwh’s attributes (Exod. 34:6–7). In both cases, what was said earlier in the same source anticipates and explicates what comes later. This characteristic is not surprising as it is a standard feature of every independent creative narrative (not only in the Bible). In this case, however, interlacing one creative work within others, one of which is particularly lengthy, distances the two sections of the work from one another and prevents the reader from sensing the continuity. An additional impediment to perceiving continuity is the division of the Pentateuch into five scrolls, an essentially technical act which led to the perception of the Pentateuchal *humashim* as “books” rather than as “volumes”, and the continuity between one *humash* and another as “editorial glue” rather than an original sequence.[[26]](#footnote-26)

## The **Story** of Phinehas

What is the relationship between the two separate and independent narratives interwoven in Numbers 25:1-5 and the story of Phinehas beginning in verse 6? This question has implications for the composition of the Pentateuch, the nature of the Priestly material within it, and for what is referred to as the “redaction of the Book of Numbers”. The question of the dependence of the Priestly story on the non-Priestly material in the chapter is also related to the degree of uniformity within the Priestly story itself. Even if evidence for such dependence were to be uncovered, there would be a need to clarify its scope, that is, the degree to which this evidence can be instructive, if at all, regarding the story in its entirety or its parts.

### Verses 6–13

According to the broadest approach, which currently seems to be the most popular, the entire story of Phinehas (Numbers 25:6–18) was written as a continuation of the two non-Priestly stories, after the two were joined together at an earlier stage. All those advocating this approach, with different nuances, suggest that the author of the Phinehas story either added his own conclusion to an existing plot fragment, or removed the ending of a complete story and added another in its place. In either case, the plot of the Phinehas story should be read as the continuation of the plot that unfolded in the previous verses. This returns us to the original problem – the plot gap between the stories. The Phinehas story mentions “a Midianite woman” (25:6) while earlier the “daughters of Moab” alone were mentioned (1). With a spear, Phinehas the priest pierces the Israelite man and the Midianite woman (7–8), an act incompatible with either of the two commands, themselves contradictory, mentioned earlier -- that Moses should impale all the leaders of the people (4) or that the judges of Israel should slay all the sinners (5). Nonetheless, his action merits praise. (11-13). Moreover, Phinehas’s act is presented as a direct response to the act of the Israelite man and the Midianite woman rather than as a response to the sins mentioned earlier, or to the words of God to Moses, or the words of Moses to the judges.

Israel Knohl attempted to reconcile the contradiction between the “daughters of Moab” and the “Midianite woman” with the hypothesis that the redactors, whom he identifies as the Holiness School, “expanded the early narrative on the sin of Ba'al-Peor, replacing the main character of the story, the daughters of Moab, with the daughters of Midian”.[[27]](#footnote-27) This explanation is problematic because it is difficult to understand why the author of the Phinehas story would write his story to be read as a sequence continuing from the previous verses while at the same time change a central plot element by switching the identity of one of the story’s antagonists. Nihan claims that this contradiction reflects the confusion between Moab and Midian in the post-exilic period, an example of which can also be found in Numbers 22:4,7.[[28]](#footnote-28) In these verses, however, the Midianites are secondary characters and one obscure text cannot help clarify another. Even if the terms Moabites and Midianites were synonymous during a certain period, changing the name of the nation in the course of so short a story, without any clear purpose, is odd. (In this case, we would expect the Midianite woman to be *added* to the Moabite daughters, as was apparently done in Numbers 22:4, 7, rather than replace the Moabite daughters.) Another suggestion is that although the use of the definite article “*hey*” "ה" ("the") usually indicates that the word relates to those previously mentioned in the text, use of “ה” for non-indicative purposes, to note something, is a familiar phenomenon in Biblical Hebrew (see for example Genesis 14:13 and Numbers 11:27) and thus, the word “*hamidyanit*” ((המדינית should be translated as “*a* Midianite woman”, as in the NJPS translation, rather than as “*the* Midianite woman”.[[29]](#footnote-29)

This would appear to be another case of the "odd details problem". If the main purpose of the Phinehas story is, as many believe, to explain why his dynasty merited the eternal priesthood, there is no justification for the author of this story to introduce changes to the existing plot that do not contribute anything to the story’s purported aim. On the contrary, in this case we would expect maximal preservation of narrative continuity with minimal changes needed to express the message that the author wished to convey. If, on the other hand, this is an independent story whose main objective is to establish Phinehas’s authority, it must accomplish its purpose by means of a plot. Not every plot detail needs to serve the story’s main objective, but all details should be compatible with the source’s past and future plot events, language, and general worldview.

**2. Verses 14–18**

Itamar Kislev also concluded that verses 6–13 comprise an independent Priestly story independent of verses 1–5. However, in Kislev’s view, verses 14–18 are an interpolation, also Priestly, intended to unify the three independent stories appearing in verses 1–13: two non-Priestly stories and one Priestly story.[[30]](#footnote-30) Kislev argues that as the names of the of the Israelite man and the Midianite woman are mentioned only as the narrative draws to a close (25:14-15), we may infer that their identification by means of their names and positions was not part of the original Priestly narrative. These details did not have a plot function in the original Phinehas story and have been added to explain that the sinners who were killed by Phinehas were actually leaders of the people and thereby present Phinehas’ act as a fulfillment of the instruction to impale the leaders of the people. This "Priestly redactor" later states that the plague was “of the affair of Peor” (18) and all three stories are thereby tied together. Kislev therefore discerns two Priestly layers in the chapter: 1) the P layer, an independent source, to which the Phinehas story in verses 6–13 belongs, which is not based on non-Priestly material, and 2) a redaction layer, also Priestly, found in verses 14–18, which does reflect familiarity with the non-Priestly stories.

However, it is not necessary to assume that the mention of the names in verses 14–15 is an interpolation reflecting familiarity with the non-Priestly stories in the chapter. As Nihan noted, mentioning names following the main plot events is a legitimate narrative device because insertion of the names during the course of the story would detract from the plot’s tension.[[31]](#footnote-31) The mention of the names only after the main plot event emphasizes Phinehas’s zealotry, by portraying him as uninterested in the individual identities of the sinners and concerned only with their national identities – Israelite and Midianite -- between whom a relationship is in his eyes unacceptable. It is only after these events that the author deems it appropriate to note that the two sinners were themselves very important figures. This fact actually fulfills an important function later on by providing the backdrop to the war with Midian which, according to verses 16–18, broke out as a result of the Midianites’ persecution of the Israelites, itself revenge for the killing of “their kinswoman Cozbi daughter of the Midianite chieftain” (18). The claim of several earlier and later scholars that verses 16–18 alone prepare the backdrop for the war with Midian is not convincing, since these verses build on the identities of the slain in verses 14–15.

The war with Midian clearly belongs to the Priestly literature, although scholars do not agree as to which Priestly layer it belongs. Therefore, even if we accept part of Kislev’s argument and view verses 14–18 as secondary to verses 6–13, this interpolation nonetheless belongs to an internal layer of the Priestly literature. Even if identification of the slain does not further the internal objective of the Phinehas story, it contributes to the story of the war with Midian, itself Priestly. Furthermore, these verses contain no solid evidence of the author’s knowledge of the non-Priestly stories in the chapter.

In fact throughout the story in verses 6–18, there is but one single unequivocal piece of evidence for the author’s familiarity with the non-Priestly material in the chapter: the mention of “Peor,” repeated twice in verse 18, which is clearly an interpolation of the redactor who wove the stories together, not an organic part of the story of Phinehas. The phrase “because of the affair of Peor” “*al dvar peor*” (על דבר פעור) is repeated twice in verse 18. This repetition is blatantly awkward and inconsistent with the content of the verse: the Midianites persecuted the Israelites because of the killing of “their sister,” not because of the sin of Peor. The repetition of the same phrase in Numbers 31:16 reinforces the hypothesis that this is an interpolation. Not surprisingly, this possibility was also raised by early scholars.[[32]](#footnote-32) But, because of the assumption that the Midian story reflects a later layer in the Priestly literature, the possibility that only the words “because of the affair of Peor” ) (על דבר פעור had been added was rejected (in certain cases within the same study) with the general claim that verses 16–18 (or 14–18) were additions to verses 6–13.

### The Adaptation in Psalm 106

To demonstrate further that the story of Phinehas itself contains no evidence of the author’s knowledge of verses 1–5 (with the exception of the words על דבר פעור –“because of the affair of Peor” which are a redactional addition), I would like to make use of a method employed by Joel Baden.[[33]](#footnote-33) To clarify whether Numbers 17 reflects knowledge of Numbers 16 in its canonical form (the story of Korah interwoven with that of Dathan and Abiram ) or only with its Priestly elements, (the Korah story alone), Baden looked to another biblical source that without a doubt reflects knowledge of the canonical story in Numbers 16 – Psalm 106.[[34]](#footnote-34) His comparison between Psalm 106 and Numbers 17 revealed that the latter, unlike the former, does not display familiarity with the canonical text, but rather with the story of Korah alone. The same conclusion emerges from studying the psalmist’s adaptation of the complex story of Numbers 25 in Psalm 106:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **28** They attached themselves to Baal Peor,  ate sacrifices offered to the dead.  **29** They provoked anger by their deeds,  and a plague broke out among them.  **30** Phinehas stepped forth and intervened,  and the plague ceased.  **31** It was reckoned to his merit  for all generations, to eternity. | ויצמדו לבעל פעור  ויאכלו זבחי מתים  ויכעיסו במעלליהם  ותפרץ בם מגפה  ויעמד פינחס ויפלל  ותעצר המגפה  ותחשב לו לצדקה  לדר ודר עד עולם |

This description of events includes plot and linguistic elements from Numbers 25:1–18 while eliminating the many interpretive difficulties that have occupied us throughout this discussion. Verse 28 explains that the attachment to Baal-peor was expressed by eating the sacrifices, in contrast to Numbers 25, where the attachment to Baal-peor appears *after* eating the sacrifices, making the connection between them unclear. The duplication and the contradiction between the god of the daughters of Moab and Baal-peor in Numbers 25 is absent from Psalm 106 because the daughters of Moab and the god of Moab are not mentioned there at all. In place of the “*haron af*” (חרון אף), "wrath", mentioned in the daughters of Moab story and the “*hama*” (חמה) ,"fury" and “*kina*” (קנאה) ,”jealousy” mentioned in the Phinehas story, Psalm 106 uses the verb “*kaf-ayin-samekh*” כעס)) in the *hiphil* form ("provoked anger"). The other duplications and contradictions with reference to punishment, or to appeasing divine wrath, are also absent here because the demand to impale and the demand for punishment are omitted and only the act of Phinehas remains. In Numbers the end of the plague is mentioned although its initial outbreak is omitted, whereas Psalm 106 clearly states “and a plague broke out among them” (29), thereby solving another interpretive difficulty. Phinehas is portrayed as intervening, in line with the tendency of the psalm and in contrast to the story in Numbers. The result (“it was reckoned to his merit” ותחשב לו לצדקה in verse 31) corresponds to the narrative of the Phinehas story in Numbers but to the language of the non-priestly Genesis 15:6 ("he reckoned it to his merit" (ויחשבה לו צדקה. In contrast, the language of God’s comment about Phinehas in Numbers 25:11, "has turned back My wrath", (השיב את חמתי), found its way into a new plot context in Psalm 106:23, in relation to Moses, who was able "to avert His destructive wrath” (להשיב חמתו מהשחית).

Psalm 106’s adaptation of the canonical story in Numbers 25 is characterized by a compilation of linguistic and plot motifs from among the different elements in the chapter, assembled anew in the psalm with no relation to their original source; plot motifs from one story are described in language and expressions taken from another story. This compilation is itself an interpretation, resolving the difficulties created in the original story by the variety of sources used in its composition. However, a comparison between the Priestly story beginning in Numbers 25:6 and the two stories appearing in verses 1–5 reveals a very different picture. The Priestly story does not make use of plot or linguistic elements from the other stories, and rather than resolving their internal difficulties, it complicates them further, rendering the entire narrative even more incomprehensible. The interpretive assumption that the Priestly story is to be read as a continuation of the two stories preceding it does not contribute to our understanding of the story itself.

### The Phinehas Story as a Whole and its Attribution to the Priestly Source

The story of Phinehas in Numbers 25:6–18 is not based on the two narrative threads in verses 1–5. Like them, it belongs to one of the Pentateuchal sources, clearly the Priestly source, in this case an independent P source and not a redaction layer. The strongest proof for the attribution of the story to the Priestly source is the sequence of the plot. As we have seen, the story serves as the backdrop to the war with Midian which will be related in Numbers 31 and is thus not merely a feature incorporated into the Priestly plot but an element essential to it.[[35]](#footnote-35)

Although P’s sequel to the Phinehas story is apparent, the beginning of the story is more obscure. In order to search for the story’s opening, we must proceed in reverse, back to the last place where a Priestly verse appears, in Numbers 22:1, “The Israelites ]“*bnei yisrael*” [בני ישראל then marched on and encamped in the steppes of Moab, across the Jordan from Jericho”. The term “*bnei yisrael*” (בני ישראל) appears many times in the Phinehas story and it would appear that this verse is the original exposition of the story, informing us of the place where the story occurs, as seen in Numbers 26:3, “So Moses and Elazar the priest, on the steppes of Moab, at the Jordan near Jericho, gave instructions about them”.

It is possible that there was a direct continuous progression within P from Numbers 22:1 to Numbers 25:6:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| ויסעו בני ישראל ויחנו בערבות מואב מעבר לירדן ירחו והנה איש מבני ישראל בא ויקרב אל אחיו את המדינית לעיני משה ולעיני כל עדת בני ישראל והמה בכים פתח אהל מועד | The Israelites then marched on and encamped in the steppes of Moab, across the Jordan from Jericho. Just then one of the Israelites came and brought a Midianite woman over to his companions, in the sight of Moses and of the whole Israelite community who were weeping at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting. |

Brief exposition and a quick move to the heart of the plot are characteristic of the Priestly narratives, as can be seen in Leviticus 24:10 and Numbers 15:32, 16:1a, and 27:1, and perhaps also in Numbers 22:1 and 25:6.

While the omission of a brief intervening section cannot be ruled out, it does indeed appear that the main plot elements, the act of the Israelite man and the Midianite woman, Phinehas’s response and God’s words, were preserved in their entirety. In any case, as we have seen, the missing section of the Priestly source (if a section is actually missing) should not be sought in the non-Priestly text between 22:1 and 25:6, and its absence does not prevent us from attributing the story to the Priestly source.

The narrative function of the plague, mentioned for the first time as it ends, merits consideration. The plague, “*negef*” (נגף) as a means of punishment, though not exclusive to P, is characteristic of this source: “that no plague may come upon them through their being enrolled” (Exod. 30:12) and “so that no plague may afflict the Israelites for coming too near the sanctuary” (Num. 8:19). This is also the manner of killing the first-borns in Egypt: “For when the Lord goes through to smite the Egyptians … and the Lord will pass over the door and not let the Destroyer enter and smite your home”(Exod. 12:23). In these three texts it appears as if the Priestly authors avoided attributing the plague directly to God. This is also the case in texts which describe the plague as a past occurrence. In Numbers 14:37 it is said of the spies, “those who spread such calumnies about the land died of plague, by the will of the Lord,” although the plague’s outbreak itself is not described. In Numbers 17:11, a verse within a Priestly text containing many similarities to the Phinehas story, Moses informs Aaron that “the plague has begun", even though the narrator had not mentioned this earlier. Similarly, in the Phinehas story the Israelites “were weeping at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting” (Num. 25:6), apparently because the plague had begun, and although the outbreak itself is not mentioned at all, the narrative then states, “then the plague against the Israelites was checked” (8). These parallel texts from the Priestly source demonstrate that the omission of the plague’s outbreak in the Phinehas story is not only tolerable but in fact quite natural in light of other examples in Priestly literature. In Psalm 106:29 the psalmist adds, apparently at his own discretion, “and a plague broke out among them” ((ותפרץ בם מגפה, but it would appear that for Priestly authors this sort of statement was not necessary.

Attribution of the narrative to P is also indicated by the location of the events at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting (Num. 25:6) and by placing Moses at the side of the priestly figure who replaces Aaron after his death. This reference to the Tent of Meeting, in contrast to the way it is usually represented, is not a *linguistic* characteristic derivative of the Priestly literary style but rather a *plot* element, compatible with the Priestly *narrative*, through which we come to know of the Tent of Meeting as God’s dwelling place, located in the heart of the camp, At its entrance, the assembled community gathers around Moses with the priest at his side. Obviously, the language of the story is also Priestly , for example, the word “*eda*” (עדה) “assembly” (6, 7), the phrase "the Lord spoke to Moses, **saying**” (וידבר ה' אל משה **לאמר** ) (10, 16) and the word “*brit*” (ברית) with a first-person possessive suffix (בריתי) “my covenant” (12).[[36]](#footnote-36)

The story of Phinehas is the only place in P where Yhwh’s jealousy "*kina*" (קנאה) appears. However, the noun קנאה and the verb קנא (*pi'el)* do appear in P with reference to the ordeal of the suspected adulteress (Num 5:14–15, 29–30). The description of Yhwh as possessing jealously likens Him to a husband enraged by a wife’s betrayal – a metaphor that appears also in other biblical writings.[[37]](#footnote-37) Although the sin of the Israelite man and the Midianite woman is hard to define it appears that the need for Phinehas to take action, described as "by manifesting My jealousy among them" (בקנאו את קנאתי בתוכם) (Num. 25:11) attests to a sexual transgression associated with idolatry. P’s opposition to relations with the daughters of the land of Canaan is also seen in the story of Jacob and Esau (Gen 26:34–35, 27:46–28:9) and there is no need to defer any of these verses to the Persian period, as if it were only then that the issue of sexual relations between Israelites and non-Israelites arose. Neither the hypothesized theological aim of the story, nor any speculation regarding the identity of the school it supposedly comes to support, can serve as the basis for attributing it to a late date.[[38]](#footnote-38)

The Phinehas story’s obvious integration into the Priestly source’s plot sequence, language and even theology, would appear to cast doubt on Knohl’s claim that the story belongs to H, certainly given his position that H is not only a Priestly layer but also responsible for the redaction of the Pentateuch. We must all the more so reject Nihan’s argument that the story is not Priestly at all but belongs to what he, as well as other non-documentarian biblical scholars, call the “redaction layer of the Book of Numbers”. Nihan bases his argument on several phrases that would seemingly not appear in a Priestly text and to the story’s similarity to Numbers 17:9–15 which, in his opinion, also belong to that same "redaction layer". However, Nihan’s linguistic arguments against attributing the Phinehas story to the Priestly literature are not satisfying[[39]](#footnote-39) and there is likewise no reason to remove Numbers 17 from the corpus of Priestly literature. Moreover, Nihan’s approach is self-contradictory: if the Phinehas story is based on non-Priestly stories and is itself non-Priestly, there is no logical reason for the story not to use a single linguistically idiomatic phrase from the preceding verses. Thus, if the author of the Phinehas story wrote his text as the continuation of verses 1–5, and if he was not committed to the priestly plot, terminology and theology, why did he choose the term “my fury” (חמתי) (11) instead of “the Lord’s wrath” (חרון אף יהוה) (4)? Why did he use the term “*bnei yisrael*” (בני ישראל) “Israelite” three times (11, 11, 13) instead of “Israel” (1a, 3, 5) or “the people” “*am*” (עם)(1b, 2, 4)? This model cannot explain the author’s choice to replace the language from these other stories with alternative language.

It appears, therefore, that the attribution of the story of Phinehas to the Priestly source is strongly indicated. In effect, there is no reason to abandon Wellhausen’s four covenants model in its presentation of a meta-structure for the Priestly narrative in the Pentateuch: Yhwh’s covenant with humanity focusing first on Noah, then Abraham, and finally Phinehas.[[40]](#footnote-40) The eternal priesthood promised to Phinehas as the successor to Aaron parallels Joshua’s appointment as the successor to Moses and in that sense, is also a critical element in the plot of the Priestly story.

## The Work of the Redactor

Having shown that Numbers 25 is comprised of three independent narrative threads, we can now with greater clarity examine the work of the redactor who joined the three stories together. His motives are apparent. All three stories describe the sin of idolatry resulting from contact with foreign peoples and the need for human action to eradicate the sin (and in two cases to prevent harsh divine punishment). All three stories take place at the same point in a general plot sequence and in the same geographic area – east of the Jordan River, and timeframe -- on the eve of the Israelites’ entrance into the Land of Israel.

As we have seen, the Priestly story beginning in verse 6 is the continuation of the last preceding Priestly verse, appearing in Numbers 22:1, which is set in the same location. Similarly, we raised the possibility that the Baal-peor story, which apparently belongs to the E source, continues the report of the conquest of the cities on the eastern side of the Jordan in Numbers 21:21–35. The daughters of Moab story is apparently part of the J source. If the main part of the Balaam story belongs to this same source, as some early scholars claimed,[[41]](#footnote-41) then here too there is both plot and geographic continuity between two stories describing the tension between Israel and Moab: the story of Balak, king of Moab, who desires to curse Israel and the story of the Israelites who worship the Moabite gods.

These three stories were combined in narrative order, one stage after the other. The three independent stories were interwoven in one act of redaction. There is no evidence to suggest that the two non-Priestly stories were joined together first and the Priestly story added afterwards. On the contrary, we have seen that the Priestly story does not reveal any knowledge of the other stories and its plot does not continue theirs. The apparent connection between the three stories is not evidence of their reliance on one another, but instead would seem to be the reason the redactor joined the three together at the same time frame, intertwining them at precisely the points in the plot where it was possible to do so. As a result of the compiler’s work, when this chapter is read sequentially (a reading that should be referred to as “canonical”) Phinehas’ actions appear to be the fulfillment of two contradictory commands issued previously: to kill the sinners and to impale the leaders of the people. It is likely that when the redactor combined the three stories, he omitted the endings of the first two because he saw in the third ending a fitting conclusion to the other stories, This conclusion, with some hermeneutic stretching, can even be reconciled with the two punishments mentioned in the first two stories. Phinehas did kill sinners, in a manner superficially similar to the punishment mandated in the story of Baal-peor. (Although in this story the judges, not the priest, were required to kill the sinners who attached themselves to Baal-peor, not a lone Israelite, about whom there is no indication that he attached himself to Baal-peor.) Phinehas also did in fact kill one of the leaders of the people, an apparent similarity to what is required in the story of the daughters of Moab. (Although that story refers to all leaders, not only one, and to impalement, not lancing with a spear.)

These superficial similarities do not attest to dependence between the stories; the contradictions remain and prove that the Priestly story was not written as a continuation to the other stories. However, the general similarity was sufficient for the *redactor* to see a single event in all three and thereby decide to weave them together into a single account rather than joining them as separate accounts, as he had done in other cases. It is possible, though not certain, that the redactor perceived Phinehas’s actions as the fulfillment of the two commands in the previous stories and this led him to omit the concluding sentences of the two stories. It can be assumed that these endings also included descriptions of the actions required to be performed following the sin, accounts probably more concise than that of the Priestly story.[[42]](#footnote-42)

Finally, when the three stories were combined, the redactor added the phrase “of the affair of Peor” (על דבר פעור) in two places in the Phinehas story and at another point later on in the text. This minimal addition is phrased in wording taken from the sources but not really belonging to any of them, as seen not only from the context but also from the use of "Peor", instead of "Baal-peor". This short addition does not serve any ideological or theological purpose but rather comes to complete the process of joining the stories to one another – a process carried out by weaving them together based on their chronological order.

## Conclusion

The analysis in this article suggests that Numbers 25 is composed of three independent stories that were intertwined. These stories were created separately from each other and then joined together, not created in layers. This conclusion has been made from an internal analysis of the chapter, from the connection between the different components of the chapter and other passages in and outside the Pentateuch, and from the "odd details problem" which makes it difficult to adopt the redactional strata model in this chapter. These findings confirm the specific and general conclusions of early and recent documentarian scholars, and do not support the hypothesis of a separate redaction of the Book of Numbers.

Each of the three sections comprising the chapter is closely connected to one of the Pentateuchal sources. The story of the daughters of Moab is connected to the J source's passage in Exodus 34:14–16; the punishment of impalement included within it precludes it from being viewed as a redaction layer. The Baal-peor story is the E source’s expression of an Israelite tradition also documented in the Book of Hosea, and the D source presents its own version of this tradition, based apparently on the E version. The Phinehas story, which is not dependent on any others, is an integral component of the P source; as part of the four covenants structure, it tells of Aaron’s successor and prepares the ground for the war with Midian.

1. See below. This paper will not refer to the copious scholarship on this chapter in its entirety but will instead focus on some important points in both early and recent studies. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. The NJPS translation is used here for the English version of the verses with my own occasional revisions. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. See for example: J. Estlin Carpenter and G. Hardford-Battersby, *The Hexateuch According to the Revised Version* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1900), II: 229; George Buchanan Gray, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Numbers,* ICC (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1903), 380–381. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. See for example: George R. Boudreau, "Hosea and the Pentateuchal Traditions: The Case of Baal of Peor", in *History and Interpretation: Essays in Honour of John H. Hayes,* ed. M. Patrick Graham, William P. Brown and Jeffery K. Kahn, JSOT sup. 173 (Sheffield: JSOT, 1993), 122; Baruch A. Levine, *Numbers 21–36: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB (New York: Doubleday, 2000), 279; Joseph Blenkinsopp, "The Baal Peor Episode Revisited (Num 25, 1–18)", *Biblica* 93 (2012): 88–89. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Julius Wellhausen, *Prolegomena to the History of Israel* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1994) [reprint of the 1885 edition], 356, 373; William E. Addis, *The Documents of the Hexateuch,* Part I: The Oldest Book of Hebrew History(New York: G. P. Putman's Sons and London: D. Nutt, 1893), 185. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Itamar Kislev, "P, Source or Redaction: The Evidence of Numbers 25", in *The Pentateuch: International Perspectives on Current Research*, ed. Thomas B. Dozeman, Konrad Schmid, and Baruch J. Schwartz, FAT 78 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011), 387–399; and with minor differences: Christophe Nihan, "The Priestly Covenant, Its Reinterpretations, and the Composition of 'P'", in *The Strata of the Priestly Writings: Contemporary Debate and Future Directions,* ed. Sarah Shectman and Joel S. Baden, ATANT 95 (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag Zürich, 2009), 117–119. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Klaas Spronk, "Baal of Peor בעל פעור", in *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible,* ed. Karel Van Der Toorn, Bob Becking, and Pieter W. Van Der Horst, second edition (Leiden, Boston, Köln: Brill, 1999) 147–148. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. On Joshua 22 see Ronnie Goldstein, "Joshua 22:9–34: A Priestly Narrative from the Second Temple Period", *Shnaton* 13 (2002): 5 [in Hebrew]. On Psalm 106 see below. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. On the relationship of D to E see Joel S. Baden, *J, E, and the Redaction of the Pentateuch,* FAT 68 (Tubingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009), 99–195. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. See n. 2 above. On the question of the existence of E in the Former Prophets in current scholarship, see Baruch J. Schwartz, "The Pentateuchal Sources and the Former Prophets – A Neo-Documentarianʼs Perspective", in *The Formation of the Pentateuch: Bridging the Academic Cultures of Europe, Israel, and North America*, ed. Jan C. Gertz, Bernard M. Levinson, Dalit Rom-Shiloni, and Konrad Schmid (Tubingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2016), 783–794. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. According to Nihan, "it is likely that this story was initially part of an earlier pre-Priestly narrative of Israel’s origins, which may have stretched from the exodus to the conquest of the land" ("The Priestly Covenant", 119). [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. On the agreements and disagreements in Pentateuch research, see Reinhard G. Kratz, ‘The Pentateuch in Current Research: Consensus and Debate’, in *The Pentateuch: International Perspectives on Current Research*, ed. Thomas B. Dozeman, Konrad Schmid, and Baruch J. Schwartz, FAT 78 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011), 31–61. More specifically about E, see Joel S. Baden, *The Composition of the Pentateuch: Renewing the Documentary Hypothesis* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2012), 103–128. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. See n. 2 above. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. For some reason, Nihan does not distinguish verse 3a from 3b, and assigns both to the Baal-peor story, though 3b clearly belongs to the daughters of Moab story. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Nihan, “The Priestly Covenant”, 118–119. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. See *HALOT*, 431. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. See Nili Wazana, “’For an Impaled Body is a Curse of God’ (Deut 21:23): Impaled Bodies in Biblical Law and Conquest Narratives”, in *Law and Narrative in the Bible and in Neighbouring Ancient Cultures,* ed. Klaus-Peter Adam, Friedrich Avemarie, Nili Wazana, FAT 2 Reihe 54 (Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 2012), 69–89. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Aside from in this story, the verb “יקע” (impale) in the *hiphil* form (הוקע) appears in the Bible only in the story of David and the Gibeonites in 2 Samuel 21:1–14. Elsewhere I intend to discuss the concept of impalement as a means of appeasing divine wrath. For now, see S. Chavel, "Compository and Creativity in 2 Samuel 21:1–14", *JBL* 122 (2003): 23–52, esp. 37–38. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. This consideration led Noth to the hypothesis that verse 5 is a later addition intended to emphasize that the sinners alone were punished. However, Noth fails to support this specific hypothesis with a convincing general hypothesis concerning the formation of the text. See Martin Noth, *Numbers: A Commentary,* trans. James D. Martin,OTL (London: SCM, 1968),197–198. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Wazana, "For an Impaled Body is a Curse of God". [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. On *humashim* as volumes, see Baruch J. Schwartz, "The Torah – Its Five Books and Four Documents", in *The Literature of the Hebrew Bible: Introductions and Studies,* ed. Zipora Talshir (Jerusalem: Yad Ben-Zvi, 2011), I, 161–162 [in Hebrew]. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Israel Knohl, *The Sanctuary of Silence: The Priestly Torah and the Holiness School* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), 97. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Nihan, "The Priestly Covenant", 120; and earlier as well, see Noth, *Numbers,* 198. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. Even if the “*hey*” were for purposes of indication, this would not be a sign of dependence between the stories since the story did not previously refer to a specific woman but rather to many women, and a specific one would be described as “one of the daughters of Moab”. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Kislev, "P: Source or Redaction". [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. Indeed, there are other places in the Priestly literature where the names of the heroes are not mentioned in the main body of the narrative but rather at its conclusion (Lev 24:11; Num 26:33, 46, 59). Obviously, it is always possible to argue that in all these other places they are also additions, but there is no logical reason to do so. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. See n. 2 above. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. Joel S. Baden, "Source Stratification, Secondary Additions, and the Documentary Hypothesis in the Book of Numbers: The Case of Numbers 17", in *Torah and the Book of Numbers,* ed. Christian Frevel, Thomas Pola and Aaron Schart, FAT 2/62 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013), 233–247. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. On the relationship of Psalm 106 to the canonical Pentateuch, see Marc Zvi Brettler, "Identifying Torah Sources in the Historical Psalms", in *Subtle Citation, Allusion, and Translation in the Hebrew Bible,* ed. Ziony Zevit (Sheffield and Bristol: Eqinox, 2017), 73–90, esp. 85–87. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. According to Ariel Kopilovitz, the earliest stratum of the Priestly story of the Midian war included the basic stratum of the Phinehas story, namely Numbers 25:6–15, because it was based on it. Ariel Kopilovitz, "The Legislation of War: A Study of the Story of the Israelite War against Midian [Numbers 31]", *Shnaton* 23 (2014), 35–41 [in Hebrew]. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. See Gen 6:1, 9:9, 19, 15, 17:2, 4, 6, 9, 10, 13, 14, 19, 21; Exod 6:4, 5. In H: Lev. 21:9, 15, 42, 42, 42, 44. The only non-Priestly occurrence is Exodus 19:5, in which the subject is Israel, not Yhwh – unlike most of the occurrences in the Priestly source. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. On this metaphor, see Moshe Halbertal and Avishai Margalit, *Idolatry* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1992), 9–36; Israel Knohl, *Biblical Beliefs* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 2007), 54–62 [in Hebrew]. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. See, for example, Noth, *Numbers,* 195. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. לפרט [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. Wellhausen, *Prolegomena,* 8, n. 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. הפניות [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. Another outcome of the redaction of the chapter from variant sources is the apparent criticism of Moses contained within the story: Moses’ helplessness is compared to the initiative displayed by Phinehas, and Moses’s ostensible silence in contrast to the actions of Phinehas come to be connected to the fact that Moses married a Midianite woman. (See, for example, Babylonian Talmud Sanhedrin 82a.) This criticism, however, does not emerge from any of the three stories. In the two non-Priestly stories, Moses himself is involved in carrying out the required punishment. In the Priestly story, while Phinehas is presented in a positive light as one who acts swiftly and to God’s satisfaction, it appears that the aim of this description is not to hold Phinehas up as a contrast to Moses but to present Phinehas as the successor to Aaron, as one who is able to act quickly in order to please the Lord and prevent Him from destroying the people. This situation is described in detail in Numbers 17:9-15, just a few chapters prior to our story, if we omit the non-Priestly material between them. Moreover, Phinehas to some degree exceeds Aaron in that Aaron requires Moses’ command while Phinehas understands on his own what he must do. Since, according to the Priestly story, it was decreed that Moses and Aaron would die before entering the Land of Israel (20:12), it is only fitting that the story should address the appointment of the successors to their leadership. As the Phinehas story addresses the appointment of Aaron’s successor, it presents Phinehas as acting in a manner similar to Aaron. The continuation of the Priestly story relates the appointment of Joshua as the successor to Moses (27:15-23). [↑](#footnote-ref-42)