

Were 23,000 or 24,000 Israelites Killed by the Plague at Shittim?

The Question:

Did 23,000 or 24,000 Israelites die in the plague at Shittim? *Numbers 25:9* records 24,000 deaths, but *1 Corinthians 10:8* says 23,000. Does this mean the Bible contradicts itself?

The Answer:

No, the Bible is consistent and trustworthy. Both numbers are accurate when understood in their context.

The Biblical Account

In *Numbers 25:1-9*

“While Israel was staying in Shittim, the men began to indulge in sexual immorality with Moabite women... Then the Lord’s anger burned against them... Those who died in the plague numbered 24,000.”

The passage describes Israel's sin of idolatry combined with sexual immorality, provoking God's judgment through a deadly plague. Phinehas's zealous act stopped the plague (Numbers 25:7-8).

Paul's Reference

In *1 Corinthians 10:8*, Paul says:

"We should not commit sexual immorality, as some of them did—and in one day twenty-three thousand of them died."

Paul highlights how quickly sin can bring devastating consequences—23,000 died **in one day**.

Explanation

The difference between 23,000 and 24,000 can be understood as follows:

- The total death toll was 24,000, as recorded in *Numbers*.

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- Paul, writing to the Corinthians, emphasizes the **severity of the first day's judgment**—23,000 died quickly due to sexual sin.
- The plague likely lasted more than one day; by the end, 24,000 had died.

This aligns with biblical teaching on sin's consequences:

- Sin separates us from God (Isaiah 59:2).
- Sexual immorality is especially destructive because it involves the body, which is the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:18-20).

Sexual Sin and the Body of Christ

Paul explains in *1 Corinthians 6:15-20*

“Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ himself?... Flee from sexual immorality... your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit.”

The body is not just physical but sacred, entrusted to us by God. Sexual sin violates this holiness and has serious spiritual consequences.

Wisdom from Proverbs

Proverbs 6:32 says:

“But a man who commits adultery has no sense; whoever does so destroys himself.”

This warns of the self-destructive nature of sexual sin.

How to Overcome Sexual Sin

The Bible’s solution is not just repentance but **avoidance and fleeing temptation**, as Joseph demonstrated (*Genesis 39*). Paul commands:

“Flee from sexual immorality.” (1 Corinthians 6:18,)

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Summary of Lessons

- The **total deaths** from the plague at Shittim were **24,000** (*Numbers 25:9*).
- **23,000 died in one day**, showing the suddenness of God's judgment on sin (*1 Corinthians 10:8*).
- Sexual immorality carries swift, severe consequences because it defiles the body, the temple of the Holy Spirit (*1 Corinthians 6:18-20*).
- Sin separates us from God and destroys us spiritually (*Isaiah 59:2, Proverbs 6:32*).
- The best defense is to **flee from temptation**, honoring God with your body (*1 Corinthians 6:18*).

Shalom.

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