

Numbers 25 • Jealous for God

Introduction

So you tune into a “Christian” television broadcast of someone that is obviously setting a bad example, or you’re presented with a “Christian” book that fails on many doctrinal points, or there is someone in your church that is out-and-out wrong in their teaching and/or lifestyle. What do you do? Is it up to someone else, someone “more qualified” or possessing greater credentials? At what point—if any—do **YOU** have to make a stand, to draw the line with them?

It’s interesting to note David’s true motivation to go out and take on Goliath, who told Saul after hearing Goliath’s challenge: “Your servant has killed both the lion and the bear, and this uncircumcised Philistine will be like one of them, since he has taunted the armies of the living God.” (1 Samuel 17:36)

Sometimes you have to be more jealous for God than for yourself.

¹While Israel remained at Shittim, the people began to play the harlot with the daughters of Moab. ²For they invited the people to the sacrifices of their gods, and the people ate and bowed down to their gods. ³So Israel joined themselves to Baal of Peor, and the LORD was angry against Israel

[Read v.1-3]

Q: What is significant about “Shittim” in terms of Israel’s travels?

A: It is the very last place they will reside in the wilderness before embarking on the conquest of Canaan.

Q: How do we know that this event didn’t come about by chance, but was a specific plan of spiritual attack against Israel?

A: It’s later revealed that this came about on the advice of Balaam, the man who couldn’t curse Israel but apparently did not have any qualms in advising Israel’s enemies how to overcome them through spiritual corruption.

And Moses said to them, “Have you spared all the women? Behold, these caused the sons of Israel, through the counsel of Balaam, to trespass against the LORD in the matter of Peor, so the plague was among the congregation of the LORD.”

Numbers 31:15-16

Balaam’s specific actions are further documented:

But I have a few things against you, because you have there some who hold the teaching of Balaam, who kept teaching Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols and to commit acts of immorality.

Revelation 2:14

Q: Who is “Baal of Peor”?

A: “Baal” means “lord” or “master” and “Peor” is a mountain in the region. The real name of this false god worshiped by the Moabites is “Chemosh” and “Baal-peor” describes a high place of Chemosh worship. The worship of Chemosh involved the worst kind of public, sexual practices. In other words, sexual immorality was an actual part of their worship.

Q: What is the key phrase in these verses that describes the Israelites both literally and spiritually?

A: “...the people began to play the harlot” (v.1) They are not just being literally unfaithful by engaging in sexual immorality with the Moabite women, but spiritually unfaithful to God in that the sexual enticement was a part of worshiping a false god. This is what is meant in v.3 by the phrase, “Israel joined themselves to Baal of Peor”; it was spiritual intercourse as much as earthly.

Numbers 25 • Jealous for God, Page 1 of 4

Q: How was this a test for Israel regarding the Promised Land?

A: They were experiencing the real dangers God had foretold of not completely destroying such influences, and in turn being enticed by them.

Point: *What could not be accomplished by an attempt at war or effected by sorcery and divination, came about by sexual immorality. The attack is on one's personal relationship with God.*

Application: *Have you ever known of a cult or false teacher that incorporates sexual practices into their overall teaching? (Examples are David Koresh, Jim Jones, etc.) False teachers justify the introduction of sinful practices into their congregations in the name of God and in the places that people meet in His name. They make it seem like a "natural" extension of worship and fellowship.*

[Read v.4-5]

⁴The LORD said to Moses, "Take all the leaders of the people and execute them in broad daylight before the LORD, so that the fierce anger of the LORD may turn away from Israel."

⁵So Moses said to the judges of Israel, "Each of you slay his men who have joined themselves to Baal of Peor."

Q: How seriously does Moses take what is happening? What is his course of action?

A: Moses orders the public execution of the offenders as a very visible lesson to Israel of the consequences of spiritual immorality.

Q: Why is it not recorded that Moses first went in to seek God's Word on this affair as was his normal custom so many times in the past? How is this similar to a very famous past event?

A: Moses didn't need an additional Word from God to explain all the commandments that were being broken that had already been given. It's basically the same action Moses took when he came down from God's mountain with the tablets and found Israel worshipping the golden calf.

Application: *Do you know what you should do in the presence of clear violations of God's Word? Have you ever been in this position? What did you do? What reasons prevented you from acting as you knew you should?*

[Read v.6-9]

⁶Then behold, one of the sons of Israel came and brought to his relatives a Midianite woman, in the sight of Moses and in the sight of all the congregation of the sons of Israel, while they were weeping at the doorway of the tent of meeting. ⁷When Phinehas the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, saw it, he arose from the midst of the congregation and took a spear in his hand, ⁸and he went after the man of Israel into the tent and pierced both of them through, the man of Israel and the woman, through the body. So the plague on the sons of Israel was checked. ⁹Those who died by the plague were 24,000.

Q: How are the actions of the man in great contrast with Moses and those at the doorway of the tent of meeting?

A: Whereas Moses and company were assembled before God to weep and mourn for the sins and abominations being committed, the man had such disregard and contempt that he openly and publicly practiced his sin before them.

Point: *This is one of the worst aspects of false teaching/false worship, that there is no regard for the presence of things of God. Sinful practices are openly encouraged to give them an air of legitimacy.*

Q: Just as Moses acted similarly to the golden calf incident, who does Eleazar seem to emulate?

A: Just as the Levites heeded Moses' call to action, so here does Eleazar.

Observation: *The Hebrew word used for the man's "tent" is not the normal word, and in fact is used elsewhere to describe a brothel. The implication is that this man was not simply intending to engage in personal sin restricted to just himself, but establishing a center from which to defile many, many more. This event is so important that it is mentioned 4 other times in Scripture: Deuteronomy 4:3-4, Psalm 106:26-29, Hosea 9:10, and 1 Corinthians 10:9.*

¹⁰Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ¹¹“Phinehas the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, has turned away My wrath from the sons of Israel in that he was jealous with My jealousy among them, so that I did not destroy the sons of Israel in My jealousy. ¹²Therefore say, ‘Behold, I give him My covenant of peace; ¹³and it shall be for him and his descendants after him, a covenant of a perpetual priesthood, because he was jealous for his God and made atonement for the sons of Israel.’”

[Read v.10-13]

Q: How does God describe Phinehas' actions?

A: “...he was jealous with My jealousy”. (v.11) In other words, Phinehas reacted and acted exactly as God would. Phinehas' example is godly, not earthly.

Q: What is the biblical definition of godly jealousy?

A: The consuming, single-minded pursuit of God's will and ways.

Q: In v.13, how does God define the results of what Phinehas did?

A: “...made atonement for the sons of Israel”. The price of sin is always death and blood. This is what “cleanses” something so it can be accepted in God's presence. This is the net effect of Phinehas' actions.

Q: What is the lesson that is being taught by God making a covenant with Phinehas regarding the priesthood? As the grandson of Aaron, isn't that promise already given to him?

A: Phinehas is now distinguished by receiving a personal covenant with God based on his actions, not his lineage. It's a teaching that every generation must enter into its own faithful relationship with God and can't rely on it simply being handed down them.

Q: How is Phinehas' actions an example of Christ's actions to come?

A: Both made atonement for the sins of the people by satisfying the law and justice. It's interesting to note that Phinehas' name signifies “the face of him that spares”. It's not the violence that is highlighted, but the salvation result on everyone else's behalf.

Point: *False teachers/false teaching must be dealt with aggressively and out in the open, not in the same manner as resolving a personal issue with another member of the body.*

Application: *Do you see that battling false teachers and false worship has a greater affect on the church and a greater purpose than just a personal call to arms? How will you approach such a person or teaching the next time you encounter them? Will you find strength in the fact that this is not just a personal battle, but encompasses both God and the body of Christ?*

¹⁴Now the name of the slain man of Israel who was slain with the Midianite woman, was Zimri the son of Salu, a leader of a father's household among the Simeonites. ¹⁵The name of the Midianite woman who was slain was Cozbi the daughter of Zur, who was head of the people of a father's household in Midian.

¹⁶Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ¹⁷“Be hostile to the Midianites and strike them; ¹⁸for they have been hostile to you with their tricks, with which they have deceived you in the affair of Peor and in the affair of Cozbi, the daughter of the leader of Midian, their sister who was slain on the day of the plague because of Peor.”

[Read v.14-18]

Q: Is there a practical reason for providing the names of the man and woman killed by Phinehas?

A: Besides lending credibility to the account, there may be something to the fact that Zimri was a Simeonite; that is, of the tribe of Simeon. In the following chapter, a census will be taken before the final invasion of Canaan, and it should be noted that whereas Simeon's male population for the first census was 59,300 (Numbers 1:23), it is now 22,200 (Numbers 26:14). If mainly Simeonites were involved in this incident—further indicated by Zimri's possible intention of establishing a brothel of false worship—it would greatly explain a large part of the reduction in numbers.

[Continued on the next page.]

Numbers 25 • Jealous for God, Page 3 of 4

Q: The women involved are specifically identified in v.1 as coming from Moab. Why then does God direct Moses to strike Midian?

1. **Both** Moab and Midian were partners together in this venture against Israel. (Numbers 22:7).
2. Moab was previously identified as being under God's protection for the sake of Lot from whom they are descended. (Deuteronomy 2:9)
3. The Midianites were the first who advised to send for Balaam and it's with them that Balaam appears to have stayed after leaving Balak, so this appears to be the source of his wicked counsel to draw Israel into idolatry. In other words, they're the true source of the problem, trying to hide behind the Moabites.

Q: Is there a teaching in the fact that this came about through Midian? What was Midian's previous relationship with Israel?

1. They are descended from Abraham as the son of his concubine Keturah, ultimately sent away by Abraham.
2. They are the ones who sold Joseph to Egypt.
3. They are the people to whom Moses escaped from Egypt, and of whom he took a wife.
4. Jethro—Moses' father-in-law—had been an advisor to Moses.
5. Hobab—Moses' brother-in-law—had been a guide in the wilderness for Israel.

Point: *An overall teaching may be that they are a group close enough to Israel that they can, from time to time, gain their trust and confidence. In other words, they represent internal infiltration rather than an external, overt enemy. And whenever the opportunity presents itself, they turn on them.*

Overall Application

- *Christians both as individuals and collectively in churches are forgetting their call to be separate and instead are joining themselves to the world in many different ways. In what ways might this describe you personally? Or your church?*
- *How should such compromises be addressed? How have you handled them in the past? How will you face those that are before you now?*
- *Do you see that taking such action is not just a personal thing but is undertaken for the sake of the entire body?*