

# CHAPTER 25

Israel, having escaped the curse of Balaam, here sustains a great deal of damage and reproach by the counsel of Balaam, who, it seems, before he left Balak, put him into a more effectual way than that which Balak thought of to separate between the Israelites and their God. “The Lord will not be prevailed with by Balaam's charms to ruin them; try if they will not be prevailed with by the charms of the daughters of Moab to ruin themselves.” None are more fatally bewitched than those that are bewitched by their own lusts. Here is,

- I.** The sin of Israel; they were enticed by the daughters of Moab both to whoredom and to idolatry (v. 1-3).
- II.** The punishment of this sin by the hand of the magistrate (v. 4, 5) and by the immediate hand of God (v. 9).
- III.** The pious zeal of Phinehas in slaying Zimri and Cozbi, two impudent sinners (v. 6, 8, 14, 15).
- IV.** God's commendation of the zeal of Phinehas (v. 10-13).
- V.** Enmity put between the Israelites and the Midianites, their tempters, as at first between the woman and the serpent (v. 16, etc.).

## ~~0021~~ NUMBERS 25:1-5

### THE SIN OF ISRAEL

Here is,

**I.** The sin of Israel, to which they were enticed by the daughters of Moab and Midian; they were guilty both of corporal and spiritual whoredoms, for *Israel joined himself unto Baal-peor*, v. 3. Not all, nor the most, but very many, were taken in this snare. Now concerning this observe,

**1.** That Balak, by the advice of Balaam, *cast this stumbling-block before the children of Israel*, ~~0024~~ Revelation 2:14. Note, Those are our worst enemies that draw us to sin, for that is the greatest mischief any man can

do us. If Balak had drawn out his armed men against them to fight them, Israel had bravely resisted, and no doubt had been more than conquerors; but now that he sends his beautiful women among them, and invites them to his idolatrous feasts, the Israelites basely yield, and are shamefully overcome: those are smitten with this harlots that could not be smitten with his sword. Note, We are more endangered by the charms of a smiling world than by the terrors of a frowning world.

**2.** That the daughters of Moab were their tempters and conquerors. Ever since Eve was first in the transgression the fairer sex, though the weaker, has been a snare to many; yea strong men have been wounded and slain by the lips of the strange woman (<sup>2025</sup>Proverbs 7:26), witness Solomon, whose wives were shares and nets to him <sup>2025</sup>Ecclesiastes 7:26.

**3.** That whoredom and idolatry went together. They first defiled and debauched their consciences, by committing lewdness with the women, and then were easily drawn, in complaisance to them, and in contempt of the God of Israel, to bow down to their idols. And they were more likely to do so if, as it is commonly supposed, and seems probable by the joining of them together, the uncleanness committed was a part of the worship and service performed to Baal-peor. Those that have broken the fences of modesty will never be held by the bonds of piety, and those that have dishonoured themselves by fleshly lusts will not scruple to dishonour God by idolatrous worships, and for this they are justly given up yet further to vile affections.

**4.** That by eating of the idolatrous sacrifices they *joined themselves to Baal-peor* to whom they were offered, which the apostle urges as a reason why Christians should not *eat things offered to idols*, because thereby they had fellowship with the devils to whom they were offered, <sup>411D</sup>1 Corinthians 10:20. It is called *eating the sacrifices of the dead* (<sup>416B</sup>Psalm 106:28), not only because the idol itself was a dead thing, but because the person represented by it was some great hero, who since his death was deified, as saints in the Roman church are canonized.

**5.** It was great aggravation of the sin that *Israel abode in Shittim*, where they had the land of Canaan in view, and were just ready to enter and take possession of it. It was the highest degree of treachery and ingratitude to be false to their God, whom they had found so faithful to them, and to eat of idol-sacrifices when they were ready to be feasted so richly on God's favours.

**II.** God's just displeasure against them for this sin. Israel's whoredoms did that which all Balaam's enchantments could not do, they set God against them; now he was *turned to be their enemy, and fought against them*. So many of the people, nay, so many of the princes, were guilty, that the sin became national, and for it God was wroth with the whole congregation.

**1.** A plague immediately broke out, for we read of the staying of it (v. 8), and of the number that died of it (v. 9), but no mention of the beginning of it, which therefore must be implied in those words (v. 3), *The anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel*. It is said expressly (~~YACB~~ Psalm 106:29), *The plague broke in*. Note, Epidemical diseases are the fruits of God's anger, and the just punishments of epidemical sins; one infection follows the other. The plague, no doubt, fastened on those that were most guilty, who were soon made to pay dearly for their forbidden pleasures; and though now God does not always plague such sinners, as he did here, yet that word of God will be fulfilled, *If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy*, ~~KNT~~ 1 Corinthians 3:17.

**2.** The ringleaders are ordered to be put to death by the hand of public justice, which will be the only way to stay the plague (v. 4): *Take the heads of the people* (that is, of that part of the people that went out of the camp of Israel into the country of Moab, to join in their idolatries) — *take them and hang them up before the sun*, as sacrifices to God's justice, and for a terror to the rest of the people. The judges must first order them to be *slain with the sword* (v. 5), and their dead bodies must be hanged up, that the stupid Israelites, seeing their leaders and princes so severely punished for their whoredom and idolatry, without any regard to their quality, might be possessed with a sense of the evil of the sin and the terror of God's wrath against them. Ringleaders in sin ought to be made examples of justice.

## ~~Q2516~~ NUMBERS 25:6-15

### THE ZEAL OF PHINEHAS

Here is a remarkable contest between wickedness and righteousness, which shall be most bold and resolute; and righteousness carries the day, as no doubt it will at last.

**I.** Never was vice more daring than it was in Zimri, *a prince of a chief house* in the tribe of Simeon. Such a degree of impudence in wickedness had he arrived at that he publicly appeared leading a Midianitish harlot (and a harlot of quality too like himself, *a daughter of a chief house in Midian*) in the sight of Moses, and all the good people of Israel. He did not think it enough to go out with his harlot to worship the gods of Moab, but, when he had done that, he brought her with him to dishonour the God of Israel. He not only owned her publicly as his friend, and higher in his favour than any of the daughters of Israel, but openly went with her *into the tent*, v. 8. The word signifies such a booth or place of retirement as was designed and fitted up for lewdness. Thus he *declared his sin as Sodom*, as was so far from blushing for it that he rather prided himself in it, and gloried in his shame. All the circumstances concurred to make it exceedingly sinful, exceedingly shameful.

**1.** It was an affront to the justice of the nation, and bade defiance to that. The judges were ordered to put the criminals to death, but he thought himself too great for them to meddle with, and, in effect, bade them touch him if they durst. He had certainly cast off all fear of God who stood in no awe of the powers which he had ordained to be *a terror to evil-doers*.

**2.** It was an affront to the religion of the nation, and put a contempt upon that. Moses, and the main body of the congregation, who kept their integrity, *were weeping at the door of the tabernacle*, lamenting the sin committed and deprecating the plague begun; they were *sanctifying a fast* in a solemn assembly, weeping *between the porch and the altar*, to turn away the wrath of God from the congregation. Then comes Zimri among them, with his harlot in his hand, to banter them, and, in effect, to tell them that he was resolved to fill the measure of sin as fast as they emptied it.

**II.** Never was virtue more daring than it was in Phinehas. Being aware of the insolence of Zimri, which it is probable, all the congregation took notice of, in a holy indignation at the offenders he rises up from his prayers, takes his sword or half-pike, follows those impudent sinners into their tent, and stabs them both, v. 7, 8. It is not at all difficult to justify Phinehas in what he did; for, being now heir-apparent to the high-priesthood, no doubt he was one of those judges of Israel whom Moses had ordered, by the divine appointment, to slay all those whom they knew to have joined themselves to Baal-peor, so that this gives no countenance

at all to private persons, under pretence of zeal against sin, to put offenders to death, who ought to be prosecuted by due course of law. The civil magistrate is the avenger, to *execute wrath upon him that doeth evil*, and no private person may take his work out of his hand. Two ways God testified his acceptance of the pious zeal of Phinehas: —

**1.** He immediately put a stop to the plague, v. 8. Their weeping and praying prevailed not till this piece of necessary justice was done. If magistrates do not take care to punish sin, God will; but their justice will be the best prevention of his judgment, as in the case of Achan, <sup>(1773)</sup> Joshua 7:13.

**2.** He put an honour upon Phinehas. Though he did no more than it was his duty to do as a judge, yet because he did it with extraordinary zeal against sin, and for the honour of God and Israel, and did it when the other judges, out of respect to Zimri's character as a prince, were afraid, and declined doing it, therefore God showed himself particularly well pleased with him, and it *was counted to him for righteousness*, <sup>(1773)</sup> Psalm 106:31. There is nothing lost by venturing for God. If Zimri's relations bore him a grudge for it, and his friends might censure him as indiscreet in this violent and hasty execution, what needed he care, while God accepted him? In a good thing we should be zealously affected.

**(1.)** Phinehas, upon this occasion, though a young man, is pronounced his country's patriot and best friend, v. 11. He has *turned away my wrath from the children of Israel*. So much does God delight in showing mercy that he is well pleased with those that are instrumental in turning away his wrath. This is the best service we can do to our people; and we may contribute something towards it by our prayers, and by our endeavours in our places to *bring the wickedness of the wicked to an end*.

**(2.)** The priesthood is entailed by covenant upon his family. It was designed him before, but now it was confirmed to him, and, which added much to the comfort and honour of it, it was made the recompence of his pious zeal, v. 12, 13. It is here called *an everlasting priesthood*, because it should continue to the period of the Old-Testament dispensation, and should then have its perfection and perpetuity in the unchangeable priesthood of Christ, who is *consecrated for evermore*. By the *covenant of peace* given him, some understand in general a promise of long life and prosperity, and all good; it seems rather to be meant particularly of the covenant of priesthood, for that is called the *covenant of life and peace*

(<sup><3015></sup>Malachi 2:5), and was made for the preservation of peace between God and his people. Observe how the reward answered the service. By executing justice he had *made an atonement for the children of Israel* (v. 13), and therefore he and his shall henceforward be employed in making atonement by sacrifice. He *was zealous for his God*, and therefore he shall have the covenant of *an everlasting priesthood*. Note, It is requisite that ministers should be not only for God, but zealous for God. It is required of them that they do more than others for the support and advancement of the interests of God's kingdom among men.

## <sup><0256></sup>NUMBERS 25:16-18

### THE ZEAL OF PHINEHAS

God had punished the Israelites for their sin with a plague; as a Father he corrected his own children with a rod. But we read not that any of the Midianites died of the plague; God took another course with them, and punished them with the sword of an enemy, not with the rod of a father.

**1.** Moses, though the meekest man, and far from a spirit of revenge, is ordered to *vex the Midianites and smite them*, v. 17. Note, We must set ourselves against that, whatever it is, which is an occasion of sin to us, though it be a right eye or a right hand that thus offends us, (<sup><4052></sup>Matthew 5:29, 30. This is that holy indignation and revenge which godly sorrow worketh, (<sup><4071></sup>2 Corinthians 7:11.

**2.** The reason given for the meditating of this revenge is because they *vex you with their wiles*, v. 18. Note, Whatever draws us to sin should be a vexation to us, as a thorn in the flesh. The mischief which the Midianites did to Israel by enticing them to whoredom must be remembered and punished with as much severity as that which the Amalekites did in fighting with them when they came out of Egypt, (<sup><0274></sup>Exodus 17:14. God will certainly reckon with those that do the devil's work in tempting men to sin. See further orders given in this matter, (<sup><0612></sup>Numbers 31:2.