

Numbers Chapter 25

The Doctrine of Balaam and the Zeal of Phinehas

In this chapter, we discover the most subtle and satanic thing Balaam did against the Israelites. In Chapters 22-24, we have read about the “way” and “error” of Balaam, which was covetousness, pursuing wealth instead of God’s will, and perverting his gifts into attempting to curse those whom God has blessed (2 Peter 2; Jude 11). This lesson will show us how, after Balaam’s effort to curse the Israelites for Balak failed, he advised his friends how to lead God’s people astray.

Read Numbers 25:1-3

Shittim was the final encampment before the Israelites crossed the Jordan (see Josh. 2:1).

Baal was the chief fertility god of Canaan. Baal worship include sexual acts with the priestess/prostitutes.

In Numbers 31:15-18, God says that the Midianite women who seduced Israel were acting on Balaam’s advice, presumably given some time during his stay with Balak. After God had protected the Israelites from external attacks, first military attacks then attacks of sorcery, look at how easy it was to corrupt the Israelites from within.

It is the same with us. Read Rev. 2:12-14. The church at Pergamon “lived where Satan lived,” but persevered. What God had against them came from within, in the form of false teaching. Pergamon represents a church that has joined with the world.

False teaching and compromising on the right way of God represents the greatest danger we face. The Bible says that nothing shall snatch us out of God’s hand (John 10:27-29), and that nothing, not principalities nor powers, shall separate us from the love of God (Romans 8:37-39). But it also warns us against falling away, and urges us to persevere to the end, reminding us that we remain creatures with free will, and that the danger lies within us. Read Hebrews 3:14; 6:4-6

Read Numbers 25:4-5

Displaying the bodies in the sun was a sign of disgrace and a public humiliation of the offender, intended to deter similar crimes. This may seem extreme. So is surgery! The disease that had entered Israel had to be cut out for the health of the rest of the body.

Read Numbers 25:6-9; 14-15

Moses gave orders to kill all the idolaters, yet Zimri, the son of the Israelite prince Salu from the Tribe of Simeon, openly defied Moses and publicly showed his opinion to those standing at the Tabernacle entrance with Moses by going in to Cozbi, the daughter of the Midianite prince Sur. In a moment of great strength born of holy zeal, Phinehas went after them and ran them through with a spear simultaneously apparently while they were lying together.

Why did Phinehas’ action stop the plague?

Read Numbers 25:10-13

Some translations say that Phinehas was “jealous” and some that he was “zealous.”

To be jealous, as it is used here, is to have vigilance in maintaining or guarding against intrusion, or to have the desire for another to have total commitment.

To be zealous means to have fervor, eagerness, desire for a cause, enthusiastic diligence and commitment

Why are those two words so closely related in this passage? Read Exodus 20:5-6.

Phinehas’ zeal turned aside God’s wrath, and apparently put an end to the Israelites’ dalliances with the Midianite women, as evidenced by the fact that the plague stopped. By turning the people to the right, what did he earn? In reward for his commitment to God, Phinehas is honored with an everlasting hereditary priesthood. Read James 5:19-20.

Read Numbers 25:16-18

That expedition is later described in Numbers 31, when Phinehas leads the army. Balaam was killed when the Israelites attacked the Midianites. Num 31:8. Phinehas later succeeded his father Eleazar as high priest (Judges 20:28).