

Numbers Chapter 25

Verses 1-18

The final failure of Israel before the conquest of Canaan occurred in the plains of Moab. According to (31:16), the incident was brought about by the counsel of Balaam.

Failing to be able to curse Israel, he gave the Moabites and Midianites direction in how to provoke the LORD's anger against His people.

Verses 1-9

The wicked "daughters of Moab" seduced Hebrew men into immorality and idolatry, costing 24,000 people their lives.

Moabites were so evil in the eyes of God that they were among the few people He said could never be admitted into the congregation of Israel.

The instigator of this sad situation was Balaam (31:16; Rev. 2:14).

Verses 1-5

"Shittim" was the last encampment of Israel before crossing the Jordan (Joshua 2:1).

"Commit whoredom":

This has both a physical and a spiritual sense.

Prostitution was a common feature of Canaanite religion; through it some of the Israelites were allured to participate in pagan sacrifices and "bowed down to their gods".

They "called":

the verb is feminine, referring to the women of Moab.

Balaam advised this (31:16), in order to compromise Israel, whom he could not curse (see Rev. 2:14).

"Baal-peor":

This shrine was dedicated to Baal of Peor and may have been the place where Balaam delivered his final oracle (23:28).

Baal was the Canaanite fertility god, whose worship consistently caused problems in Israel (Judges 2:13; 1 Kings chapter 18; 2 Kings 17:16; Jer. 2:8).

By participating in this cult, they flagrantly repudiated the essential heart of the covenant, total and exclusive allegiance to the LORD.

Thus a severe plague broke out, killing 24,000 people (verse 9; compare Exodus 32:35).

Numbers 25:1 "And Israel abode in Shittim, and the people began to commit whoredom with the daughters of Moab."

“Shittim”:

The region across the Jordan River from Jericho where Israel invaded the land of Canaan (see Joshua 2:1).

It appears this Shittim was the location of the center of the encampment.

The Israelites had been successful in their battles, and have settled down to rest.

The idle mind has a way of causing a person to sin.

These Moabite women were forbidden to the Hebrew men, but this did not seem to stop them.

The following Scripture is the very reason God did not want them to mix.

Exodus 34:16 "And thou take of their daughters unto thy sons, and their daughters go a whoring after their gods, and make thy sons go a whoring after their gods."

Numbers 25:2 "And they called the people unto the sacrifices of their gods: and the people did eat, and bowed down to their gods."

That is, the daughters of Moab and Midian, with whom the children of Israel carried on an unlawful correspondence.

Invited them, their gallants, to come and partake of the feasts which attended the sacrifices of their idols.

For part of what was offered to idols a feast was kept with, to which great numbers were invited.

And which was observed with all the circumstances of joy and pleasure imaginable.

And which was very ensnaring, especially to young people.

And the children of Israel being so much enamored with the beauty of the Moabitish women.

And so strong were their lusts and passions, that they could not refuse the invitation.

"And the people did eat":

Of the things sacrificed to idols, and so became guilty of idolatry.

Even by so doing, and then when they had eaten and drank, and were merry, they were led on to other acts of idolatry.

"And bowed down to their gods":

Which was a plain and open act of idolatry.

Whereby they testified their faith in their divinity.

Their reverence of them, and their homage and obedience to them.

Jarchi says, when the evil concupiscence or lust was strong in them, and they solicited the daughters of Moab to hearken to them, and comply with them.

They used to take the image of Peor out of their bosom, and said, worship this.

Signifying that on that condition they would gratify them.

And thus, whoredom led them on to idolatry.

And they committed the one for the sake of being indulged in the other.

We find that lust of the flesh caused these men to follow these Moabite women.

They sinned greatly, when they followed these women, and sacrificed to false gods.

They ate the food offered in sacrifice, as well.

In this, they have committed physical and spiritual adultery.

God will not allow the worship of false gods under any circumstances.

Numbers 25:3 "And Israel joined himself unto Baal-peor: and the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel."

"Joined himself unto Baal-peor":

Israel engaged in acts of sexual immorality with the women of Moab.

Since this was part of the pagan cult that was worshiped by the Moabites, the Israelites joined in these idolatrous practices.

The Israelites yoked themselves to the false god of the Moabites and the Midianites, referred to as Baal of Peor.

This was a violation of the first commandment.

“Joined” means “yoked”.

This was not just participation in idolatry but unrestrained betrayal of the LORD that would have impact for generations to come (Psalm 106:28-29).

This "Baal-peor" was a false god that used sex to lure its people.

It was the worst kind of worship of false gods.

This worship of false gods greatly angered God.

Numbers 25:4 "And the LORD said unto Moses, Take all the heads of the people, and hang them up before the LORD against the sun, that the fierce anger of the LORD may be turned away from Israel."

Being provoked with the sins of the people, He called to him out of the tabernacle, or out of the cloud.

"Take all the heads of the people":

The princes of the tribes, not to hang them, but to judge those that worshipped Peor, as Jarchi interprets it.

Though some think that these having sinned, were ordered to be taken and hanged, and made public examples of.

But it can hardly be thought, though there were some that might be guilty of the above sins, as Zimri, yet not all of them.

"And hang them up before the LORD against the sun":

That is, those that were guilty of idolatry.

The meaning is, and which all the Targums give into, that these heads of the people were to assemble at some proper place.

The court of judicature, and order the delinquents to be brought before them, and try, judge, and condemn those they found guilty.

And cause them to be hanged somewhere near the tabernacle, and before it, having neglected the worship of God there.

And served an idol.

And this was to be done openly in the daytime, that all might see and fear.

"That the fierce anger of the LORD may be turned away from Israel":

When justice had taken place, and proper punishment was inflicted upon the criminals.

Whereby a just resentment was made against sin, and God glorified.

We see the terrible wrath that God had on their leaders, who encouraged them in this terrible sin.

God holds the leaders of each of the groups responsible.

They who were responsible are killed, and hung up before all the people, to see the seriousness of this sin.

Whether they were hung, or crucified, we do not know.

We do know they were killed, and left hanging for all the sinners to see.

Numbers 25:5 "And Moses said unto the judges of Israel, Slay ye every one his men that were joined unto Baal-peor."

Either the same with the heads of the people, or the rulers of thousands, hundreds, fifties, and tens, according to the distribution by the advice of Jethro.

"Slay ye every one his men that were joined unto Baal-peor":

All that were under their several districts and jurisdictions, that were found guilty of that crime.

These they are ordered to slay, either with their own hands, or rather cause to be slain by proper persons they should appoint to be executioners.

Every man, that was involved in the worship of this false god, was to be killed by the judges.

Numbers 25:6 "And, behold, one of the children of Israel came and brought unto his brethren a Midianitish woman in the sight of Moses, and in the sight of all the congregation of the children of Israel, who [were] weeping [before] the door of the tabernacle of the congregation."

From one of the cities of Moab or Midian, the latter rather, by what follows.

Where he had been, very probably, to an idolatrous feast, and had eaten of the sacrifices, and worshipped idols, and committed fornication with the daughters of the land.

"Brought unto his brethren a Midianitish woman":

Into his father's family, into a tent where his brethren dwelt.

"In the sight of Moses, and in the sight of all the congregation of the children of Israel":

In the most open and undisguised manner, into the midst of the camp.

Passing by Moses, and a great number of the people, who were gathered together on this solemn occasion, to seek the LORD, and humble themselves before Him.

"Who were weeping before the door of the tabernacle of the congregation":

The place where the people used to assemble together for religious exercises.

Here they were weeping and mourning for the sins and abominations that were committed among them.

And on account of the punishment inflicted on many of them, by the hand of the civil magistrate.

And because of the plague that was broke out upon them, from an angry God.

And at such a time, when so many had been hanged up for it, and the plague of God was broke out among the people on account of it.

And good men were bewailing the sin, and the punishment of it.

And if this was on a Sabbath day, as the Samaritan Chronicle relates, it was a further aggravation of it.

Compare (verses 14-15).

This is the first mention of the Midianitish woman.

This could have even been the source of the problem with the Moabitish women.

It appears, they came to the door of the tabernacle weeping.

Verses 7-13: "Phinehas", the grandson of Aaron, was moved with Yahweh's zeal and thrust a spear through the hearts of a couple engaged in immorality.

This stopped the “plague”, but not before thousands of people died, punished for their immorality and idolatry (Psalm 106:30).

Because of his action, Phinehas was promised an “everlasting priesthood”.

Numbers 25:7 "And when Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, saw [it], he rose up from among the congregation, and took a javelin in his hand;"

Saw the man pass by in this impudent manner, and his whore with him.

His spirit was stirred up, he was filled and fired with zeal for the glory of God.

And with a holy indignation against the sin and sinner.

And with a just concern for the honor of the righteous law of God.

And, to prevent others from falling into the same sin, led by the public example of so great a personage.

"He rose up from among the congregation":

Who were weeping at the door of the tabernacle, or from the midst of the court of judicature.

Set for trying and judging such persons who were charged with idolatry.

For he was not only the son of the high priest and his successor, but a ruler over the Korhites, and had, besides his priestly office, a civil authority (1 Chron. 9:20).

"And took a javelin in his hand":

A spear or pike.

The Jews say he snatched it out of the hand of Moses.

And, according to Josephus, it was a sword.

But the word rather signifies a hand pike.

This being ready at hand, he took it up and pursued the criminal.

"Phinehas" was the grandson of Aaron.

He was in line for the job of high priest, just under Eleazar.

Phinehas relates the problem of this false worship to this Midianitish woman, and the Israelite who took her.

He armed himself with a javelin to punish them.

Numbers 25:8 "And he went after the man of Israel into the tent, and thrust both of them through, the man of Israel, and the woman through her belly. So the plague was stayed from the children of Israel."

Into which he went with his harlot.

The word here used is different from what is commonly used for a tent.

"And thrust both of them through":

With his javelin, spear, or pike.

"The man of Israel, and the woman through her belly":

By which, it seems, they were killed in the very act of uncleanness.

This was an extraordinary action, done by a person of public authority.

"So the plague was stayed from the children of Israel":

Which had broken out among them and carried off many.

Even a disease, the pestilence, according to Josephus.

It ceasing upon this act of Phinehas, shows that that was approved of by the LORD.

Phinehas' action against these two, who had started the trouble, showed the utter disgust of the priesthood for this sin.

God stayed the plague, because He felt the priest could handle the situation.

Notice, Phinehas killed both the man and the woman.

They were each guilty.

They were each punished.

Numbers 25:9 "And those that died in the plague were twenty and four thousand."

"Twenty and four thousand":

This is to be differentiated from the plague over the golden calf where 23,000 died (compare Exodus 32:1-14, 28; 1 Cor. 10:8).

Before the plague stopped, 24,000 died.

We must remember that God will bring a plague upon the people, if the people will not govern themselves.

God will not allow the abomination of homosexuality, and lesbianism to go unchecked.

If the nation does not stop it, God will.

Verses 10-15

“He was zealous for my sake”:

Phinehas executed the sinner, expressing so clearly and visible God’s own anger through his deed that God’s wrath was turned away.

He “made an atonement for the children of Israel”:

He was rewarded with the promise that the high priest-hood would always remain in his family (1 Chron. 6:4).

Verses 10-13: Because of Phinehas’ zeal for God’s holiness, the LORD made a “covenant of an everlasting priesthood” with him so that through his family line would come all future, legitimate High-Priests (compare Psalm 106:30-31).

This promise will extend even into the millennial kingdom (compare Ezek. 40:46; 44:10, 15; 48:11).

Numbers 25:10 "And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying,"

Out of the cloud, or out of the tabernacle.

At the door of which Moses now was (Num. 25:6).

This was after so many had died of the plague, and after the act of Phinehas, by which it was stopped.

"Saying":

As follows.

Numbers 25:11 "Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, hath turned my wrath away from the children of Israel, while he was zealous for my sake among them, that I consumed not the children of Israel in my jealousy."

His descent and genealogy are observed as before.

Partly to show that he was not a private person, but a man of public authority that did the above fact.

Perhaps one of the judges that Moses ordered to slay every man his man, and therefore what he did by the order of the supreme magistrate.

And partly to show that he was heir apparent to the office of High Priest.

Who in course was to succeed in it.

Nor should this action of his hinder it, but rather serve to secure and confirm it to him.

"Hath turned away my wrath from the children of Israel":

Caused the effects of it to cease, by slaying the two persons, as before related.

"While he was zealous for my sake among them":

For the glory of God, the honor of His law, the credit of religion, and the good of His people. Which is a good cause to be zealously affected in (Gal. 4:18).

In which he was a type of Christ, whose zeal for the house of God, for the doctrine, discipline, and worship of it.

For the salvation of His people, and the glory of God thereby, ate him up (Psalm 69:9).

As well as in His turning away wrath from Israel.

Sin is the cause of wrath, and for it is revealed from heaven.

The people of God are deserving of it as others.

But Christ has borne it for them, and so has delivered them from it and all the effects of it.

And they are secure from its coming upon them.

"That I consumed not the children of Israel in My jealousy":

By the plague sent among them, being so highly provoked with their shocking abominations.

Had not this one man stood up and spoke out against this abomination, God would have killed the whole nation.

Numbers 25:12 "Wherefore say, Behold, I give unto him my covenant of peace:"

Moses is bid to tell what follows to Phinehas himself.

For his comfort and encouragement.

And to the people of Israel, that they might take notice of it.

And give him honor and respect, as one highly esteemed by the LORD.

"Behold, I give unto him my covenant of peace":

Not only hereby assuring him that he had nothing to fear from the brethren and relations of the person he had slain, as Aben Ezra states.

But that he should enjoy all peace and happiness, external, internal, and eternal.

In this also Phinehas was a type of Christ; the covenant of grace made with him is called the covenant of peace (Isa. 54:10).

For in this covenant the scheme of peace and reconciliation was formed, agreed to, and settled.

Christ was appointed the peace maker, which he agreed to be.

And in consequence of it was sent and obtained peace by the blood of his cross.

Which is published in the everlasting Gospel, called therefore the Gospel of peace.

The zeal of Phinehas to do what was right in the sight of God, brought God's approval.

He brought great peace to Phinehas.

Numbers 25:13 "And he shall have it, and his seed after him, [even] the covenant of an everlasting priesthood; because he was zealous for his God, and made an atonement for the children of Israel."

The covenant, and all the blessings of it.

So the covenant stands fast with Christ, and all His spiritual seed (Psalm 89:28).

"Even the covenant of an everlasting priesthood":

Or this may be read in connection with the preceding words, and the sense be, and he and his shall have the covenant of an everlasting priesthood.

Beside the covenant of peace before promised to him.

The Aaronic priesthood is called everlasting, because it was to continue, and did continue.

Throughout the whole Jewish dispensation, unto the coming of the Messiah, in whom it had its fulfilling end.

Now though Phinehas in course was to have the priesthood at his father's death, yet it is here promised him on account of his zeal.

Both to assure him that he should survive his father, and that nothing should befall him that should render him incapable of the priesthood.

And moreover, that he should have a seed in whom it should be continued.

There was indeed an interruption of it in his line for a little while, on some account or other, it being translated into the family of Eli, a son of Ithamar.

But then it was restored again in the time of Solomon to the family of Phinehas.

Where it continued unto the captivity, and even to the times of Herod, and so of the Messiah.

In this also Phinehas was a type of Christ, the covenant made with him not only being from everlasting and to everlasting.

A covenant that cannot be broken and will never be removed.

But the priesthood founded on it is so too, being established by the oath of God, who swore to him, "thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek".

Christ's priesthood is an unchangeable one and does not pass from one to another.

His sacrifice has a perpetual virtue and efficacy in it to take away sin, and he ever lives to make intercession for his people (Heb. 7:21).

"Because he was zealous for his God, and made an atonement for the children of Israel":

By executing judgment upon the delinquents, as Christ has made atonement for the sins of his people by satisfying law and justice.

And besides what has been observed, it may be remarked, that there is an agreement between Phinehas and Christ in his very name.

Phinehas signifies either "the face of Him that spares", that is, of God, that spares.

Christ is the face of God, the express image of His person, even of Him, who, though he spared not Christ Himself, yet he spares His people for Christ's sake.

God makes an everlasting covenant of peace with Phinehas, and his descendants.

His action brought atonement for all the people.

It appears that somehow, this had something to do with Balaam.

We do know that Balaam was a Midianite.

Verses 14-18

Balaam was involved in this further attempt to seduce Israel, as reported in (Rev. 2:14): “Balaam taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit sexual immorality.

What Balaam and Balak could not do to Israel by divination, they tried to accomplish by seduction.

Because of this, the Midianites would be punished (31:1-24).

Numbers 25:14 "Now the name of the Israelite that was slain, [even] that was slain with the Midianitish woman, [was] Zimri, the son of Salu, a prince of a chief house among the Simeonites."

By Phinehas, as before related.

"Even that was slain with the Midianitish woman":

Who was slain also, both together with one thrust.

"Was Zimri, the son of Salu, a prince of a chief house among the Simeonites":

Or a prince of his father's house, or family.

There were five families of the Simeonites, and this man was a prince of one of them (see Numbers 26:12).

Though Josephus, and so the Samaritan Chronicle, make him to be a prince of the tribe of Simeon.

His name is mentioned partly to the reproach of him, and partly for the honor of Phinehas.

Whose zeal and courage were such, that he feared not to take away the life of a person of such figure, authority, and interest among the people.

This is the only time this particular person, Zimri, is mentioned in the Bible.

He was descendent of Simeon.

The fact that the person's name involved is given here gives more evidence that this was a real happening, and not just a lesson to be learned.

Numbers 25:15 "And the name of the Midianitish woman that was slain [was] Cozbi, the daughter of Zur; he [was] head over a people, [and] of a chief house in Midian."

One of the five kings of Midian (Num. 31:8).

And so, the Samaritan Chronicle says, it was the daughter of a king that came to a prince of the tribe of Simeon.

And enticed him to eat of her food and worship her idols.

"He was head over a people, and of a chief house in Midian":

That is, Zur, the father of Cozbi, was.

There were five sons of Midian, whose names are given (Gen. 25:4).

From whence Jarchi concludes, that there were five principal families in Midian.

And that this man was the head or chief of one of them.

Which is not improbable.

And that also makes for the honor of Phinehas.

That he spared not any for their rank and quality, of whatsoever nation they were.

The name "Cozbi" means false.

What an appropriate name.

Zur was a chief among his people.

He is in fact, spoken of as one of the 5 kings of Midian.

All of this adds to the evidence that this whole thing was planned by the Midianites.

Numbers 25:16 "And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying,"

This was some time after the above affair happened.

How long it was being not certain.

And a little time before the death of Moses (see Num. 31:1).

Numbers 25:17 "Vex the Midianites, and smite them:"

“Vex the Midianites”:

Because the Midianites had attacked Israel by their schemes of sexual and idolatrous seduction, the LORD called Israel to attack them in return.

This attack is recorded (in 31:1-24).

This is another way of saying attack them in war.

It really appears, that the women of Midian were part of a plot by Balaam to bring disaster to Israel.

They used the lust of the men to entrap them.

God sees through the plan and says, destroy them.

Numbers 25:18 "For they vex you with their wives, wherewith they have beguiled you in the matter of Peor, and in the matter of Cozbi, the daughter of a prince of Midian, their sister, which was slain in the day of the plague for Peor's sake."

Not with wars, but with wives.

With cunning stratagems, and artful methods to draw them into sin.

That thereby they might be exposed to the wrath of God.

"Wherewith they have beguiled you in the matter of Peor":

The idol Peor, that is, Baal-peor.

Which seems to countenance the notion that Peor was the name of a man.

Some great personage, who was deified after his death.

Now the Midianites beguiled the Israelites, by sending their daughters among them, with whom they committed fornication.

And by whom they were persuaded to worship the idol Peor.

"And in the matter of Cozbi, the daughter of a prince of Midian, their sister":

Their country-woman, as it was common with eastern people to call those of the same country with them their brethren and sisters.

Now the Midianites beguiled the Israelites, by prostituting a person of such quality to a prince of theirs.

Which was setting an example to other daughters of Midian to follow her.

And so hereby many of the children of Israel were ensnared into whoredom, and into idolatry.

"Which was slain in the day of the plague for Peor's sake":

Or for the business of Peor, as the Targum of Jonathan states.

Because of the worship of that idol.

Not that Cozbi was slain upon that account, but the plague came upon Israel by reason of their worshipping of it.

And it was on the day that the plague was that she was slain.

By which it seems that the plague lasted but one day.

These women were indulging in sex with the men of Israel, not out of desire for them, but to destroy them.

The men of Israel are indulging in sex because of lust.

The men are lusting after the women to the extent, that they were even worshipping their false gods.

God says, kill the Midianites for plotting such a thing.

Numbers Chapter 25 Questions

1. What sin did the people begin to commit?
2. Where did this sin lead the men of Israel?
3. They have committed _____ and _____ adultery.
4. What was "Baal-peor"?
5. What did God tell Moses to do with all the heads of the people?

6. Why were they hung before the people?
7. Who did Moses tell the judges to kill?
8. In verse 6, we see a _____ woman.
9. Where did they come weeping?
10. Who was "Phinehas"?
11. What did he do?
12. The _____ was stopped, because of his actions.
13. How many died in the plague?
14. What is the plague in our land today?
15. What did God tell Moses had stopped the plague?
16. What would have happened to the whole nation, if Phinehas had not done this?
17. What covenant did God make with Phinehas?
18. What did his action bring to the people?
19. What was the name of the Israelite that Phinehas killed?
20. Who was the Midianitish woman?
21. Who was her father?
22. What position did he have in the land of Midian?
23. Who had planned this whole thing?
24. What does God tell Moses to do to Midian?
25. How had the women of Midian trapped the men of Israel?
26. The men's lust had even led them to _____ their _____.