

# The Book of Numbers

## The Sin of Israel with Moab

Text: Numbers 25

### Introduction:

1. As Israel neared the time of their entrance to the Promised Land of Canaan, trouble continued to surround them.
2. Balak, the King of Moab, had sought to bring about Israel's downfall by hiring Balaam to curse the nation.
3. Instead, Balaam had prophesied blessings upon Israel from God.
4. Unable to curse them, the Moabites sought to defeat Israel by enticing them to sin – thus, away from the protection of Jehovah.

### I. The Idolatry of Israel

(25:1-3a)

- A. Israel continue to wait on the east side of the Jordan River, at a place called Shittim.
  1. The word 'Shittim' means, "Acacia Tree."
  2. Thus, this was a fertile, shaded place characterized by groves of Acacias.
- B. Here, the daughters of Moab invited the Israelites to take part in their idolatrous worship.
  1. This was the result of the planning and plotting of Balaam (Num. 31:16; cf. Rev. 2:14).
  2. Balaam had "returned to his place" after trying to curse the people of Israel.
  3. But, he had apparently returned with a plan to bring harm to Israel.
  4. When Israel retaliated against Moab, Balaam was present and killed in the battle (Num. 31:8).
  5. These events were so significant that they would be remembered throughout the history of God's people (cf. Deut. 4:3; 23:4-5; Josh. 13:22; 22:17; 24:9-10; Neh. 13:2; Psa. 106:28; Hos. 9:10; Mic. 6:5; 2 Pet. 2:15; Jude 11; Rev. 2:14).
- C. The worship of Baal was enticing for several reasons:
  1. Baal was a fertility god; thus, his worship often involved feasting.
    - a. Thus, the Israelites ate things sacrificed unto idols (cf. Rev. 2:14).
    - b. They are called the "sacrifices of the dead" because idols have no life – in contrast with the true and living God (cf. Psa. 106:28).
  2. Prostitution and fornication were also a part of worshipping Baal.
    - a. It is not by accident that the "daughters of Moab" were present at the worship of the idol.
    - b. "Whoredom" in this passage is both physical and spiritual.
  3. Israel was tempted and yielded to the practice of idolatry.
- D. By their actions, Israel joined (attached, fastened, bound, yoked) themselves to Baal (cf. 2 Cor. 6:14; Gal. 5:1).

### II. The Anger of Jehovah

(25:3b-5, 9)

- A. As a result of their actions, the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel.
- B. God commanded Moses to mete out judgment upon the guilty people.
  1. Note that God Himself did not do this, but required it of Moses.
  2. However, God did send a plague among the people that killed 24,000.

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- C. The punishment was to be in the form of execution – and a public display of their dead bodies.
  - 1. The word for “hang” can refer to impalement or crucifixion.
  - 2. Here, it seems that they were killed first and then displayed by the hanging of their bodies.
- D. This was a strong reminder of the serious nature of sin and its consequences.

## III. The Heroics of Phinehas (25:6-8)

- A. Because of the terrible sin and suffering in the camp of Israel, Moses and many of the congregation were weeping before door of the Tabernacle.
- B. In spite of this, a prince from the tribe of Simeon named Zimri brought a Midianite woman (Cozbi, the daughter of a Midianite chief) to his tent ***in the sight of all the congregation!***
  - 1. All sin is seen and known by God (cf. Heb. 4:12-13).
  - 2. Yet, there is a display of tremendous arrogance, disrespect, and rebellion in openly committing one’s sin before the House of God and the congregation of His people – especially as they are weeping over that very sin.
- C. Phinehas responded to this affront to God and to decency by punishing the offenders.
  - 1. Phinehas took a spear and followed this couple into their tent.
  - 2. He thrust the spear through both of them, killing them.
  - 3. As a result, the plague upon Israel was ended.
  - 4. Remember that God had commanded that those who practiced this idolatry were to be killed (vs. 5).
- D. Again, this is a strong reminder of the nature of sin and the suffering and death that results from it.

## IV. The Promise to Phinehas (25:10-13)

- A. God approved of the actions of Phinehas – seen in the ending of the plague.
- B. In fact, God declared that Phinehas was “zealous with my zeal.”
  - 1. Exodus 20:1-6; 34:14; cf. 1 Cor. 10:20-22
  - 2. God is jealous and zealous for His holy name!
  - 3. Man must learn to have that same kind of zeal (cf. Psa. 69:9; John 2:17).
- C. Thus, God gave unto Phinehas “my covenant of peace” or “the covenant of my peace.”
  - 1. By his actions, Phinehas had restored peace between God and Israel.
  - 2. This was the function of the priesthood (cf. Malachi 2:1ff).
  - 3. Phinehas had fulfilled his role and would be blessed.
  - 4. Following the death of Eleazar, Phinehas became High Priest (Jud. 20:28).
  - 5. From that time forward, the office of High Priest would be filled by his descendants, save for one exception at the time of Eli (1 Sam. 1 – 3; 14:3).

## V. The Punishment of Moab (25:14-18; 31)