

Second Baptist Church of Doylestown
Bible Study Notes
1-19-22
Numbers 25

Israel's Harlotry With The Women Of Moab – Verses 1-3

25 While Israel was staying in Shittim, the men began to indulge in sexual immorality with Moabite women, ² who invited them to the sacrifices to their gods. The people ate the sacrificial meal and bowed down before these gods. ³ So Israel yoked themselves to the Baal of Peor. And the LORD's anger burned against them.

25:1 This verse shows the great challenge Israel had to face. The most dangerous problem for Moses and Joshua was not Jericho's hostile army, but the ever-present temptation to compromise with the pagan Canaanite religions and cultures.

25:1-2 The Bible doesn't say how the Israelite men got involved in sexual immorality. We do know that sacred prostitution was a common practice among Canaanite religions. At first, they didn't think about worshiping idols; they were just interested in sex. Before long they started attending local feasts and family celebrations that involved idol worship. Soon they were in over their heads, absorbed into the practices of the pagan culture. Their desire for fun and pleasure caused them to loosen their spiritual commitment. Have you relaxed your standards in order to justify your desires?

25:1-3 This combination of sexual sin and idolatry, it turns out, was Balaam's idea (see 31:16; Revelation 2:14), the same Balaam who had just blessed Israel and who appeared to be on their side. It is easy to see how the Israelites were misled, for Balaam seemed to say and do all the right things—at least for a while (22–24). Not until Balaam had inflicted great damage on them did the Israelites realize that he was greedy, used sorcery, and was deeply involved in pagan religious practices. We must be careful to weigh both the words and the deeds of those who claim to offer spiritual help.

25:3 Baal was the most popular god in Canaan, the land Israel was about to enter. Represented by a bull, symbol of strength and fertility, he was the god of the rains and harvest. The Israelites were continually attracted to Baal worship, in which prostitution played a large part, throughout their years in Canaan. Because Baal was so popular, his name was often used as a generic title for all the local gods.

God's Judgment On The Offenders – Verses 4-5

⁴ The LORD said to Moses, "Take all the leaders of these people, kill them and expose them in broad daylight before the LORD, so that the LORD's fierce anger may turn away from Israel." ⁵ So Moses said to Israel's judges, "Each of you must put to death those of your people who have yoked themselves to the Baal of Peor."

25:4 Take all the leaders and the people and hang the offenders before the LORD: God thought it important that the offenders be judged openly; this was not a sin to keep hidden. Open sin had to be dealt with openly.

25:5 Every one of you kill his men who were joined to Baal of Peor: When sin such as this is tolerated or even approved in a culture, it is a sure sign of decay, and Moses wouldn't accept that decay. He commanded the community to bring the offenders to be judged, to show they would not accept this kind of sin in their midst.

Phinehas' Stand For Righteousness Stops God's Angry Plague – Verses 6-9

⁶ Then an Israelite man brought into the camp a Midianite woman right before the eyes of Moses and the whole assembly of Israel while they were weeping at the entrance to the tent of meeting. ⁷ When Phinehas son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron, the priest, saw this, he left the assembly, took a spear in his hand ⁸ and followed the Israelite into the tent. He drove the spear into both of them, right through the Israelite man and into the woman's stomach. Then the plague against the Israelites was stopped; ⁹ but those who died in the plague numbered 24,000.

25:6 That this man “brought into the camp a Midianite woman” meant that she was brought into the Israelite's tent for sex. Zimri (25:14) so disregarded the law of God that he brought the woman right into the camp.

25:7 Now when Phinehas the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, saw it, he rose from among the congregation: Phinehas was one among those in Israel who would not accept this wholesale rebellion against God. He brought God's judgment by thrusting through an Israelite man and a Midianite woman with a spear - seemingly, as they were in the midst of immorality.

25:8 So the plague was stopped among the children of Israel: Phinehas was probably not the only one to make such a stand for righteousness. But his was the singular act that stopped the plague. We may think our particular stand for righteousness makes no difference in the awesome tide of sin around us; but God can honor just one righteous act and cause it to make the difference.

25:9 Twenty-four thousand: This many died in the plague. This must have delighted Balak, king of Moab. He knew that Balaam succeeded in cursing Israel - or, rather, in getting them to curse themselves.

God Honors Phinehas For His Zeal – Verses 10-13

¹⁰ The LORD said to Moses, ¹¹ “Phinehas son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron, the priest, has turned my anger away from the Israelites. Since he was as zealous for my honor among them as I am, I did not put an end to them in my zeal. ¹² Therefore tell him I am making my covenant of peace with him. ¹³ He and his descendants will have a covenant of a lasting priesthood, because he was zealous for the honor of his God and made atonement for the Israelites.”

25:10-11 It is clear from Phinehas's story that some anger is proper and justified. Phinehas was angry because of his zeal for the Lord. But how can we know when our anger is appropriate and when it should be restrained? Ask these questions when you become angry: (1) Why am I angry? (2) Whose rights are being violated (mine or another's)? (3) Is the truth (a principle of God) being violated? If only your rights are at stake, it may be wiser to keep angry feelings under control. But if the truth is at stake, anger is often justified, although violence and retaliation are usually the wrong way to express it (Phinehas's case was unique). If we are becoming more and more like God, we should be angered by sin.

25:12-13 Phinehas's act made atonement for the nation of Israel; in effect, what he did averted God's judgment. Because of this, his descendants would become the high priests of Israel. They continued so throughout the history of the tabernacle and the temple.

God Commands Israel To Harass And Attack The Midianites – Verses 14-18

¹⁴ The name of the Israelite who was killed with the Midianite woman was Zimri son of Salu, the leader of a Simeonite family. ¹⁵ And the name of the Midianite woman who was put to death was Kozbi daughter of Zur, a tribal chief of a Midianite family. ¹⁶ The LORD said to Moses, ¹⁷ “Treat the Midianites as enemies and kill them. ¹⁸ They treated you as enemies when they deceived you in the Peor incident involving their sister Kozbi, the daughter of a Midianite leader, the woman who was killed when the plague came as a result of that incident.”

25:14-18 Harass the Midianites, and attack them; for they harassed you with their schemes by which they seduced you in the matter of Peor: They were to show no tolerance towards that which brought the sin in their midst and turned their hearts away from God. They were to battle against the Midianites every opportunity they had.

25:18 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.