

Message #27

Numbers 25:1-18

This character Balaam is an interesting guy. Some have wondered could he actually have been a believer. He was a demonic polytheist who functioned as a professional seer, who could supposedly contact various deities and give advice to those who paid him.

This matter with Balak was a shocker for Balaam because God did, in fact, appear to him and reveal truth to him. God warned Balaam he was not to curse Israel, and he actually did submit to the truth of God and refused to curse Israel.

Balaam was not like a real Hebrew prophet, even though God did speak to Balaam. Balaam was a self-seeking, immoral, greedy man and godless man. What we have here is one moment in his life when God really did speak to Balaam and he did communicate truth. But this is it. There are many phony religious leaders on television who do at times say some true things about Israel and God. That does not mean they are right with God at all.

In the N.T. Balaam is not viewed favorably. Peter said he was an immoral man who “loved the wages of unrighteousness” (II Pet. 2:14-16). Jude said that Balaam was an immoral, false-teaching animal (Jude 7-11). Jesus said that Balaam was known for teaching and promoting two things: immorality and idolatry (Rev. 2:14). So what we have here is a religious charlatan.

Now Balaam was closely linked to Balak the Moabite King, who was closely connected to the Midianites (22:4). In fact, Balaam was actually killed with the Midianite Kings as a direct command of God through Moses (Numbers 31:7-8).

We may recall that Balak was angry with Balaam because he would not curse Israel, and both headed home (24:25). The words “departed and returned to his place” is a way of saying he was heading home. **But apparently before he went home he came up with some idea to make a contact with Israel.** He could not curse Israel via some Satanic means, but he could appeal to Israel to indulge their flesh and have some pleasure by inviting them to get together with the Midianites. Perhaps **Balaam thought I can still turn a profit on this and get paid if we can lure Israel away from the God who said we cannot curse Israel.**

Now when we come to Numbers 25, we come to a sordid story that apparently was instituted and instigated by Balaam (Numbers 31:16). He invited the Israelites to get to know and participate with the godless neighbors that included the Moabites and the Midianites. What we see here is this:

WHEN GOD’S PEOPLE GET INVOLVED IN IDOLATRY OR IMMORALITY, THEY WILL EXPERIENCE THE PUNISHMENT AND CHASTISEMENT OF GOD.

Balaam was not able to curse Israel, but the sad reality is, he was able to seduce Israel. God protected Israel from a direct military attack of the Moabites and Midianites, but there was a way they could infiltrate the Israelites and that was the way of immorality and idolatry. **God's people got involved in pagan things and it cost them.**

Apparently Balaam suggested to the Moabites and Midianites that they should have a religious festival to honor Baal and invite the Jews to attend (Numbers 31:16). This will be the first time the Israelites got involved in Baal worship, but it won't be the last time. In fact, **this is the first time Baal occurs in the Hebrew Bible, but it won't be the last.**

Baal was the chief deity of the Canaanite gods. They believed this was the deity responsible for rain and fertility. Their worship services included both male and female prostitutes and was a free-for-all party that encouraged all kinds of sexual immorality. Both idolatry and immorality were clearly forbidden in the law of God (Ex. 20:1-5, 14). But Baal worship couldn't care less about the Word of God.

Balaam decided to invite the Jews to come to one of their religious parties and several decided it would be the neighborly thing to do and they went.

There are three main parts to this:

PART #1 – God is angered by His people who participated in idolatrous and immoral behavior. 25:1-3

The Israelites were camped at Shittim, which was a plain area in Moabite land that, according to Josephus, was located about seven miles east of the Jordan and six miles north of the Dead Sea. This is about the Israelite "people" mentioned three times in **verses 1-2.**

Israel was camped and relaxing and enjoying some peaceful existence, waiting to move forward to take the Promised Land. While they were camped there, they received an invitation to have some fellowship with the Moabites and the Midianites.

God had specifically warned Israel against getting involved in any of this (Exodus 34:15-16). He warned them not to go to these worship festivals and not to have anything to do with them. But obviously, Israel did not listen.

This would prove to be a major downfall because some of the Israelites got involved in immorality with Moabite women. John Calvin said that Balaam suggested that the Moabite women should encourage the Israelite men to get involved in immorality with them by luring them into "unholy worship."

Balaam knew by revelation that God's favor was on Israel and that they were invincible. So he came up with a plan that would lure them from within. The Moabite people invited the Israelites to come to their false worship services that were held up on the side of Mount Peor.

Those religious services featured eating and drinking and dancing and bowing down to false deities, and they also included wild fertility orgies. What apparently would happen is that the Moabite women would bring the men to their false religious fertility worship services and after the meal all got involved in a sensual orgy.

When you get behind the scenes of false religion, you will discover that there is a lot of sexual immorality and activity. It is no coincidence that now and then things surface about immoral behavior of Catholic priests, Mormon bishops and Muslim sheiks. False religion and sexual immorality are closely linked.

Now the Baal of Peor was the supposed deity of the Moabite mountain known as Peor. It was a place where Baal was worshipped and where this episode took place.

So here are the Israelites up on the mountain joining in with a pagan worship of a false deity. **Verse 3** says they “joined themselves.” They unequally yoked themselves right with these people and engaged in their worship.

By the way, the initial lure was not let’s go up on the mountain and worship a false god and be immoral. The initial lure was we would like to invite you to join us so we can get to know you better. It was a snare. As things progressed, they turned to the idolatry and the immorality and Israel was right there in it.

Well this angered God to the point that He was “against Israel” (v. 3).

When things are going well, God’s people must keep up their guard against being seduced away from God’s Word and will into that which is contrary to His Word and will.

**PART #2 – God punishes those who were involved in the idolatrous and immoral behavior.
25:4-9**

God will not ever honor those who get involved in idolatry and immorality; He will always punish them, and that is precisely what He does.

According to **verse 4**, God said to Moses, you take all the leaders of the people who were involved in this and round them up and execute them in broad daylight so that the fierce anger of the Lord may be turned away from Israel.

The God of the Bible is a God of the death penalty. The death penalty needs to be reinstated and it needs to be public. There is a place for letting people see in broad daylight the execution of a person who does evil. It is a preventative that prevents others from wanting to do it.

There is a place for dealing with rotten, sinful leadership. God wanted these leaders to be publicly exposed and publicly executed.

According to **verse 5**, Moses told the judges to slay those men who were involved in the Baal worship.

According to **verse 6**, while this was taking place, most of the people of Israel were weeping and mourning, but one of the sons of Israel had the arrogance and the audacity to bring to his family a Midianite woman. This was one of the Midianite women who had been involved in all of this idolatrous and immoral behavior.

So some son of Israel took one of these women into his tent, probably thinking no one would know or see. Well he was wrong. Phinehas (the grandson of Aaron), the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, saw it, he grabbed a spear and went into the tent and killed both the man and the woman and the plague judgment was stayed (**verses 7-8**).

The total number of those who were killed in this judgment were 24,000 (**verse 9**).

PART #3 – God rewards one who stands against idolatry and immorality. **25:10-18**

By his swift action, Phinehas did the will of God and, as a result, moved God to not destroy Israel. As a reward for this, God made a lasting covenant with him and his family that they would be in a peace relationship with God and that he and his family would have a lasting priesthood (**verses 10-13**).

People who are honored by God stand for something. They stand against evil and they stand up for God.

In **verses 14-15**, God wanted the Israelite man and the Midianite woman named. The Israelite man who was slain was Zimri, who had come from a leadership family among the Simeonites. Just because one has a godly heritage and godly father does not mean he will end up blessed by God. He may end up immoral and dead.

The name of the woman was Cozbi, who also came from a leading Midianite family. She was the daughter of Zur, who was one of the five Midianite kings (Num. 31:8).

When God's people move into immoral things, they are moving right into the judgment of God.

According to **verses 16-18**, God spoke to Moses and said you treat the Midianites as enemies and don't go easy on them.

Moses will obey this in Numbers 31.

Most people want a love God who would never raise a finger against any nation or any one.

What kind of doctor would one be if one just let the cancer fester and did nothing about it? God is a God who will remove cancers from the world and if one gets into immorality and idolatry, one will be punished.