



What happened to Phinehas as a result of his zeal? v12

What was God's response to the sin? v9
What do you make of this level of judgement?



We should not commit sexual immorality, as some of them did--and in one day twenty-three thousand of them died. 1 Corinthians 10:8

Paul says that this incident is a warning to us.

How should we respond?

What turns away God's wrath today?

They fought against Midian, as the LORD commanded Moses, and killed every man. Among their victims were Evi, Rekem, Zur, Hur and Reba-- the five kings of Midian. They also killed Balaam son of Beor with the sword Numbers 31:7-8



In one of his oracles Balaam said he wanted to die the death of the righteous, did he? What caused Balaam downfall?

All of us have weaknesses. For Balaam, it was the money, or perhaps the desire to please Balak. Balaam is conflicted. He wants to please both God and Balak. Somehow he ends up pleasing the wrong side. If we are to end up pleasing God and dying the death of the righteous we need to recognise our weakness. This is the first step to overcoming them.



But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for the Lord's people. Ephesians 5:3

What qualifies for us as sexual immorality?



It is God's will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality; that each of you should learn to control your own body in a way that is holy and honorable, not in passionate lust like the pagans, who do not know God; 1 Thessalonians 4:3-5

If like Israel sin is still our weakness.

What is our strength?

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Balaam and Baal Peor



Then Balaam got up and returned home, and Balak went his own way. Numbers. 24:25
If only that were the end of it.



Balaam

The first question that needs to be asked:

Was Balaam a: good prophet, false prophet or bad prophet? What are the issues?

Balaam is an enigmatic character. He is described as a Prophet and Seer but also a Sorcerer and Diviner. He clearly knows God and prophecies by the Spirit, but he is not on Israel's side. His prophecies come true, but his concern is for money. He calls God his God, Numbers 22:18, but God had in mind to kill him. He also seems to want to spin God's words to his own advantage. He is a complicated character. He wants to side with Israel but ends up siding with Moab.



How would you describe him? What would you say to him?



Was Balaam used by God? Does that make him good? Matthew 7:22-23

Does it worry you that a non-Israelite prophet could be used by God?



Do you have to be perfect for God to use you? Does God still use non-Christians today?

What happens next makes it clear what we should think about Balaam. Before we get there, it is worth looking at the many references to him in the bible.



What is Balaam like? What did he do right or wrong? Is he negatively or positively portrayed?

Deuteronomy 23:4-5

Joshua 13:22

Joshua 24:9-10

Nehemiah 13:1-2

Micah 6:5

1 Peter 2:15-16

Revelation 2:14



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This last verse we will consider later, but it does raise the issue of the meaning of Balaam's name. It could be *Baal Am*; Baal meaning master or owner and Am meaning people or nation. It could also be *Bal Am*; *Bal* meaning swallower of the people. Nicolaitan Rev. 2:15 can also mean to swallow or triumph over the people. The connection is made because the names mean the same thing.

✓ *However, the LORD your God would not listen to Balaam but turned the curse into a blessing for you, because the LORD your God loves you. Deuteronomy 23:5*

? **How can God turn a curse into a blessing?**
Do you still expect God to do this?

▶ **Balaam's Revenge**
Read Numbers 25:1-3
What happens?

This is a second "golden calf" type incident. Israel is being shown their strength and their weakness. Their strength is in God their weakness is sin. Balak does find a way to defeat Israel, it is not through spiritual means but by moral means.

Who does Revelation blame for the incident at Baal Peor?

Israel manages to pluck defeat from the jaws of victory. Where he fails to turn God away from Israel he succeeds in turning Israel away from God.

? **Is this still a technique the enemy uses?**
Is sex still a weakness for us today?

! *Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins people commit are outside their bodies, but those who sin sexually sin against their own bodies. Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honour God with your bodies. 1 Corinthians 6:18-20*
What do you think this means?

? **Does it have to be sex or can the enemy use other temptations to pull us away from God?**
Does it even have to be something that is sinful?

The event ends in war and a strong rift between Israel and Moab. Deuteronomy 23:3 In this war both Joshua and Numbers tell us that Balaam was killed, Joshua 13:22; Numbers 31:7-8. His presence here after he had supposedly gone home is suspicious. It is widely held that this was Balaam's idea. This is stated in the passage we looked at in Revelation;

! *There are some among you who hold to the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to entice the Israelites to sin so that they ate food sacrificed to idols and committed sexual immorality. Revelation 2:14*

Revelation is not suggesting a direct link to Balaam, simply that the Nicolaitan were doing the same thing. In Thyatira to get ahead you had to be part of the trade guilds, their meetings were held in a pagan temple and often included idolatry and sex. The Nicolaitans seem to have taught that it was OK for Christians to participate in this.

▶ **The Plan**
What did the Moabite women do? Numbers 25:1-2

♥ To understand this we have to understand more paganism 101. Sex and religion were often mixed in a bizarre way. Shrine prostitution was used to control the gods through an idea called sympathetic magic. The actions of humans either allowed or forced the gods to act. The human act was mirrored in a divine act, in the case of sex bringing fertility to the land and the flocks. This is how sex and Baal worship are linked in this account.

One of the things that seems strange about this sin is that it seems to have been done in a very open brazen way. It is almost as if what is being done is perfectly normal.

? **Why do you think this was?**
Is public sin worst than secret sin?

At Baal Peor Israel learn that purity is essential in order to succeed Baal is the name of the Canaanite god. It means master or owner. Peor is probably just a place name but it has been suggested it means mouth or opening. (There is no real evidence for this)

The Moabites sprung a honey trap.

? **Why is temptation so hard to resist?**
Why did the Israelites get so easily sucked in?

? **Why was this so offensive to God?**
What effect was this likely to have on the Israelites?
What effect would it have had on their family structures?

What was the result of this sin? Numbers 25:8b-9

? **Verse 5 describes those who were caught up in this "as yoking themselves to Baal" what do you think this means?**

What must have been a fairly widespread incident is explained through the story of an individual incident.

Phinehas follows an Israelite man, Zimri, and a Moabite woman, Kozbi, into a tent and kills the two of them with a spear, in one single action; through both of them into the ground.

What do you make of the violence in this account?

✓ In Hebrew, the word for violence not only covers physical violence, like the killing of Zimri and Kozbi but also adultery. The adultery in this passage would also be considered violence.
Do you agree?

▶ **The Characters**
Who was Phinehas? v11
Who was Zimri v14
Who was Kozbi? v15

You will note that each of them was a leading individual. The presence of the daughter of a chief in such an act reminded us that this was an orchestrated event – planned to defeat Israel. Just as hiring Balaam had been in the first place.