

CHAPTER 25

INTRODUCTION TO NUMBERS 25

The contents of this chapter are, the sin of the people of Israel, their whoredom and idolatry, (^{<0251>}Numbers 25:1-3), their punishment for it, multitudes being slain, (^{<0254>}Numbers 25:4,5), whose number is given, (^{<0259>}Numbers 25:9), the zeal of Phinehas in slaying two notorious offenders, (^{<0256>}Numbers 25:6-8), whose names are observed, (^{<0254>}Numbers 25:14,15) for which he is commended, and the covenant of priesthood was given and confirmed unto him, (^{<02510>}Numbers 25:10-13), and the chapter is concluded with an order to vex the Midianites, for vexing Israel with their wives, (^{<02516>}Numbers 25:16-18).

Ver. 1. *And Israel abode in Shittim*, etc.] A place in the plains of Moab, so called from the shittim wood, which grew here in great abundance, so often mentioned in the building of the tabernacle; which was a sort of white thorn, or rather the acacia tree, since there was scarcely any thing else grew in the deserts of Arabia, (see Gill on “^{<0255>}Exodus 25:5”) its full name was Abelshittim, (^{<02539>}Numbers 33:49), here the Israelites abode even to the death of Moses, for this was their last station in the wilderness; they were now on the borders of the land of Canaan, and just ready to enter into it, which is an aggravation of the sins they here fell into, and are next observed:

and the people began to commit whoredom with the daughters of Moab; and of Midian also, as appears from (^{<0256>}Numbers 25:6 31:9,16) by the advice of Balaam, the Moabites and Midianites found ways and means to become familiar with the Israelites, and to introduce their daughters into their company and conversation, and being ensnared and enamoured with them, they were drawn to commit lewdness with them, and hereby were led on to commit other abominations, which brought the divine displeasure upon them; so that what they dared not attempt by war, and could not effect by sorceries and divinations, they accomplished by those iniquitous arts, namely, bringing the wrath, the curse, and plague of God upon them.

Ver. 2. *And they called the people unto the sacrifices of their gods,* etc.] 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 enamoured 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.

Ver. 3. *And Israel joined himself unto Baalpeor,* etc.] The name of an idol; one of the Baals, Baal being a general name for an idol; and, to distinguish this from other Baals or idols, it was called Peor, either from its opening its mouth in prophecy, as Ainsworth; or from some obscene posture and action used in the worship of it, being, as it is by many thought to be, the same with Priapus; or rather from the mountain Peor, where it was worshipped, as Jupiter is called Jupiter Olympius, Capitolinus, etc. from the mountains where he had a temple, or was worshipped; or from the name of some great personage, called Lord Peor, who was deified after his death; hence these Israelites are said to “eat the sacrifices of the dead”, (~~f398~~ Psalm 106:28). Mr. Bedford ^{f399} takes him to be Mizraim the son of Ham, the Osiris of the Egyptians, and the Priapus of other Heathens: and Father Calmet ^{f400} is of opinion that he is the same with Orus, Osiris, and Adonis; and that Pe is only a prepositive article, and that Or is the name, and no other than Orus; but such a criticism the word will not bear: this

idol, the chief god of the Moabites, was, in all probability, the same with Chemosh, who is expressly called the abomination of Moab, (^{<11107>}1 Kings 11:7) of whom (see Gill on "^{<2487>}Jeremiah 48:7") so Chemosh and Peor are thought to be the same by our English poet ^{f401}: to him the Israelites joined themselves, forsook the true God in a great measure, and were initiated into the rites of this deity, and constantly attended the worship of it, and cleaved unto it with their hearts and directions, and joined with their harlots in all parts of service performed unto it; (see Gill on "^{<390>}Hosea 9:10"),

and the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel; for no sin is more provoking to God than idolatry, that being so directly opposite to his nature, honour, and glory, as well as to his will and worship; and hereby the end of Balaam and Balak was, in a great measure, answered, and Balaam obtained that by his evil counsel which he could not by all his conjuring; this was seen by the plague sent among them; (see Gill on "^{<2244>}Numbers 24:14").

Ver. 4. *And the Lord said unto Moses*, etc.] 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:

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; and if it was the sun that was worshipped in this idol, as some think, they were hanged against the sun, to show that the idol they worshipped was not able to deliver them; but, in the face of it, and as it were in defiance of it, they were ordered to be hanged up; and this, according to the Targum of Jonathan, was in the morning

against the rising sun, and where they hung all day, and were taken down at sun setting:

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.

Ver. 5. *And Moses said unto the judges of Israel*, etc.] 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 everyone his men, that were joined unto Baalpeor; 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.

Ver. 6. *And, behold, one of the children of Israel came*, etc.] 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; and not content with indulging himself with those impurities at a distance and where he was less known:

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; by which it appears, that though there were many who had fallen into those foul sins, yet there were a great number which were not defiled with them, and sighed and cried for the abominations in the midst of them: and

because the fact here recorded was such an amazing piece of impudence, the word “behold” is prefixed to the account of it, it being done in such a public, bold, and audacious manner, 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^{f402} relates, it was a further aggravation of it.

Ver. 7. *And when Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, saw it,* etc.] 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 an holy indignation against the sin and sinner, and with a just concern for the honour 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, as it appears afterwards this man was:

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 Korahites, and had, besides his priestly office, a civil authority, (~~1~~1 Chronicles 9:20)

and took a javelin in his hand; a spear or pike; the Jews say^{f403} he snatched it out of the hand of Moses; and, according to Josephus^{f404}, it was a sword; but the word rather signifies an hand pike; this being ready at hand, he took it up and pursued the criminal.

Ver. 8. *And he went after the man of Israel into the tent,* etc.] Into which he went with his harlot; the word here used is different from what is commonly used for a tent: Aben Ezra observes that in the Kedarene or Arabic language there is a word near to it, which Bochart, putting the article “al” to it, says^{f405}, is “alkobba”, from whence is the word “alcove” with us; and Aben Ezra says, there was some little difference between the form of a tent and this, as well as others observe^{f406} there was in the matter of it, this being of skins and leather, and the other of hair, boughs of trees, etc. the author of Aruch^{f407} says, it was short, or narrow above and broad below, and interprets it a place in which whores were put; and so it is used in the Talmud^{f408} for a brothel house, and is so translated here by some interpreters^{f409}:

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, and under a more than common emotion of spirit, and not to be drawn into an example by persons of a private character:

so the plague was stayed from the children of Israel; which had broke out among them and carried off many; even a disease, the pestilence, according to Josephus^{f410}; it ceasing upon this fact of Phinehas, shows that that was approved of by the Lord.

Ver. 9. *And those that died in the plague were twenty and four thousand.*] The apostle says 23,000 (~~408~~1 Corinthians 10:8). Moses includes those that were hanged against the sun, in the time of the plague, as well as those that were taken off by it, even all that died on this account; the apostle only those that “fell”, which cannot with propriety be said of those that were hanged, who might be 1000 and so their numbers agree; but of this and other ways of removing this difficulty (see Gill on ~~408~~1 Corinthians 10:8”).

Ver. 10. *And the Lord spake unto Moses*, etc.] Out of the cloud, or out of the tabernacle, at the door of which Moses now was, (~~026~~Numbers 25:6), this was after so many had died of the plague, and after the fact of Phinehas, by which it was stopped: saying; as follows.

Ver. 11. *Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest*, etc.] His descent and genealogy is 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 you; for the glory of God, the honour of his law, the credit of religion, and the good of his people, which is a good cause to be zealously affected in, (~~408~~Galatians 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, (^{<1880>}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 bore 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.

Ver. 12. *Wherefore say*, etc.] 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 honour 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; but that he should enjoy all peace and happiness, external, internal, and eternal: Baal Hatfurira on the place says, that “Shalom”, peace, is by geometry, or numerically, the Messiah; who is the peace, the peace maker, and peace giver, and in whom all the blessings of grace and peace are: and if this covenant is the same with the covenant of the priesthood in the next verse, it may be so called, because the priests had a peculiar nearness to God, and enjoyed his friendship, favour, and peace with him, and because the right administration of their office was the means of peace between God and his people; in this also Phinehas was a type of Christ; the covenant of grace made with him is called the covenant of peace, (^{<2540>}Isaiah 54:10 ^{<3015>}Malachi 2:5) 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.

Ver. 13. *And he shall have it, and his seed after him*, etc.] The covenant, and all the blessings of it; so the covenant stands fast with Christ, and all his spiritual seed, (^{<1883>}Psalm 89:28,29):

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, (~~sc172~~ Hebrews 7:21,24,25, 27):

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; or else "he shall look that spares", or "and spare"^{f411}; that is, God, who looks upon the person, righteousness, blood, and sacrifice of his Son, and spares his people.

Ver. 14. *Now the name of the Israelite that was slain*, etc.] 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 Sela, 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 ^{<0912>}Numbers 26:12,13) though Josephus ^{f412}, and so the Samaritan Chronicle ^{f413}, 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 honour 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.

Ver. 15. *And the name of the Midianitish woman that was slain was Cozbi, the daughter of Zur*, etc.] One of the five kings of Midian, (^{<0918>}Numbers 31:8) and so the Samaritan Chronicle says ^{f414}, 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. The Targum of Jonathan says she was called Selonae, the daughter of Balak, chief of the nation of Moab, whose habitation was in Midian:

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, (^{<0204>}Genesis 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 honour of Phinehas, that he spared not any for their rank and quality, of whatsoever nation they were.

Ver. 16. *And the Lord spake unto Moses*, etc.] This was some time after the above affair happened; how long it was is not certain; and a little time before the death of Moses, (see ^{<0910>}Numbers 31:1,2):

saying; as follows.

Ver. 17. *Vex the Midianites, and smite them.*] Go to war with them, and smite them with the sword; not the Moabites, but the Midianites, though they were both confederates against Israel; but God had given a charge not to contend in battle with Moab, (^{<0819>}Deuteronomy 2:9), they were spared for the sake of Lot, from whom they sprang; and, as Jarchi says, for the sake of Ruth, who was to come from them; and so in the Talmud ^{f415}; though they did not entirely escape the divine resentment, as appears from (^{<0923>}Deuteronomy 23:3,4) but the Midianites were the first that advised to send for Balaam, and with them he stayed and was entertained, after he had

been dismissed by Balak; and it seems as if it was to them he gave the wicked counsel, to draw Israel into fornication, and so into idolatry, and thereby bring the curse of God upon them; which advice they communicated to the Moabites, and both were concerned in putting it into execution; (see ^{4023H}Numbers 22:4,7 25:1,6 31:9,16).

Ver. 18. *For they vex you with their wiles*, etc.] Not with wars, but with wiles, 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, Baalpeor; 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 inveigled to worship the idol Peor:

and in the matter of Cozbi, the daughter of a prince of Midian, their sister; their countrywoman, 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, 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.