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Taking a Stand for God

25: 1-9

Taking a stand for God DIG: What was Balaam's evil plan? How did Isra'el curse themselves? What is the sin for which Yeshua rebuked the church at Pergamum? Who were the Nicolaitans? How has the teaching of Balaam harmed the Jews through the centuries? How did Peter compare false teachers to Balaam? What instruction did Moses receive from God? Who carried it out? Why was it difficult to carry out? God says, "Do not murder," what made the actions of Phinehas different than murder?

REFLECT: Is someone that you know walking in the way of Balaam? What does that mean? How can you pray for them? How can we be careful to avoid being religious, and yet love the wages of wickedness? How does the zeal of Phinehas compare with Messiah's coming as our Kinsman Redeemer? When have you received instruction from God's Word that was difficult for you to follow? What are some current practices that could erode the faith? What does it mean to be zealous of the Lord in today's culture?

Every believer has to have courage to stand up against the politically correct culture for God; for what is holy and pure without calculating what will be personally gained or lost.

While **the wilderness generation** was more faithful than **their** parents, **they** were no less **sinful**. The human tendency to lapse into unfaithfulness (see **Romans, to see link click Bm - The Consequences of Adam**), even after some of the most dramatic demonstrations of the love and power of **ADONAI**, is underscored by the positioning of the apostasy seen here immediately after the successful victories of **the Israelites** over **Sihon** and **Og** of **the Amorites** in the Transjordan, and the climactic work of **God** is using a pagan **sorcerer** to pronounce a **blessing** upon **His people**.⁵⁵⁴ The Bible startles us by the way it contrasts the brightest revelations with **the** darkest **sins**. The giving of the Torah at Sinai was following by the golden calf incident, the ordination of Aaron by the disobedience of his sons, the covenant with **David**, followed by the affair with Bathsheba, Palm Sunday by the cross. Here we have another classic example of this pattern. In this way Scripture teaches us the full

wonder of **God's grace** in the face of our habitual tendency to **sin**.⁵⁵⁵

Balaam had failed to **curse Isra'el**. Worse yet (in **his** eyes), **he** had failed to win a large reward from **Balak**. But then, from **his** black heart, a thought occurred to **him**. Instead of cursing **Isra'el**, **he** could induce **Isra'el** to **curse themselves**. In **31:16** we learn that **the sorcerer** conspired with **the Midianite** and **Moabite** leaders and suggested a plan. Rather than march out to war with **Isra'el**, **he** advised **them** to invite **Isra'el** to a party, errrrr, an orgy. **Their** own **daughters** were to be **the hostesses**. **They** were to be used as bait to lure **the Israelite** men to an **idolatrous** feast. Even the infamous **Cozbi** (the three consonants of **Cozbi's** name in Hebrew, *kzb*, form the verb *to lie, to deceive*) **the daughter of Tzur, head of the people in one of the clans of Midian (25:15)** prostituted **herself** to **Isra'el**. When **Moshe** realized what was happening, **he** declared: **See, these are the ones who - because of Balaam's advice - caused the people of Isra'el to rebel, breaking faith with ADONAI in the Peor incident, so that the plague broke out among ADONAI's community (31:16)!**



The idolatry of Israelite men (25:1-3): While the Israelites were camped at Shittim on the plains of **Mo'ab**, some of the men defiled themselves by having sexual relations with local **Moabite** women. These women invited them to the sacrifices of their gods, so the Israelites feasted with them and worshiped the gods of **Mo'ab**, breaking the first commandment (see the commentary on **Deuteronomy Bl - Have No Other Gods**). This is what happens when we forget who we are. **In that way, Isra'el joined in the worship of Ba'al of Peor, the local god, causing the anger of ADONAI to burn against Isra'el.** The choice of words is intentionally suggestive of **sexuality**, a theme that **the prophet Hosea** picks up in **his** rebuke regarding **the Israelite** fertility cult, when **he** said: **They came to Ba'al Peor and devoted themselves to shame, and they became as detestable as that which they loved (Hosea 9:10).** **The Salter** declares that **they** joined themselves to **Ba'al Peor** and ate meat sacrificed to the dead (**Psalm 106:28**).

We must always remember that happiness, joy, and contentment cannot be found apart from the ways of our **God**. **King David** found that out the hard way.

The appetite for wine and **sex** ended in **idolatry**. This brings to mind the apostolic injunctions on the **Gentile** believers in **Acts 15** (see the commentary on **Acts Bt - The Council's Letter to the Gentile Believers**). Each of their four minimum requirements for fellowship prohibited something from the categories of food, **sexuality**, or **idolatry**. In **Exodus**, the **LORD** specifically warned **Isra'el** about the combination of **sexual** immorality, appetite and **idolatry**. When discussing the prohibition on eating **food sacrificed to idols**, **Moses** warned: **Be careful not to make a treaty with those who live in the Promised Land**. This was not because of a lack of neighborliness or for ethnic or racial reasons but because **when they prostituted themselves to their gods and sacrificed to them, the Israelites** would eventually **eat their sacrifices** and accept **their gods**. **And** if the Canaanites **chose some of their daughters as wives for the Hebrew men and those daughters prostitute themselves to their gods, they would lead the Hebrew men to do the same**. As a result, **they** would be led back into spiritual adultery (**Exodus 34:15-16**).

In the book of **Revelation**, **Yeshua** rebukes **the church at Pergamum** for eating **food sacrificed to idols** and engaging in **sexual** immorality under the influence of **the teaching of the Nicolaitans** (see the commentary on **Revelation Bb - The Church at Pergamum**). They seemed to have been an early antinomian sect that misused **Paul's** teaching on **grace** as license for self-indulgence and compromise. Early on, **they** exhibited the syncretistic tendencies that later came to stumble the early Messianic movement. **The Master** referred to **it** as the teaching of **Balaam**, saying: **Nevertheless, I have a few things against you: 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. Likewise, you also have those who hold to the teaching of the Nicolaitans (Revelation 2:14-15).**⁵⁵⁶

The Nicolaitans taught "When in Rome, do as the Romans do. Don't be a 'holier than thou' isolationist. Be a good neighbor and a good sport. Be inclusive, and don't be judgmental. After all, we live in a pluralist society, so learn to respect the way other people believe and live." But from **God's** perspective, what **Isra'el** did was compromise and a violation of their covenant made in Sinai (see the commentary on **Exodus EI - The Sinai Covenant Oath of Allegiance**). The problem at **Pergamum** was that false teachers had gotten into the church and were enticing people to attend the feasts at the idol temples. As at **Ba'al Peor**, **their sin** was a combination of idolatry and immorality, but the false teachers didn't present it

that way. **They** taught that **God's grace** gave **His** people the freedom to **sin**, what **Jude** called **turning the grace of our God into immorality** (also see the commentary on **Romans Bq - The Background of the Messianic Mikveh**).

The Jews were, and are, **God's chosen people (Deuteronomy 14:2)**, set apart from the rest of the nations to serve and glorify **Him**. **They** were, and are, not to worship **the gods** of **their** neighbors or share in **their** pagan festivities. When **they** entered the Promised Land, **they** were to tear down **the pagan temples and altars and destroy the idols (Deuteronomy 7 and Joshua 23)**, to prevent **Isra'el** being tempted to turn from the true and living **God** and start imitating the heathen neighbors. Unfortunately, that's exactly what happened after the death of **Joshua (Judges 2:10 to 3:7)**.

The doctrine of **Balaam (Revelation 2:14-15)** is the lie that it's acceptable for **the children of God** to live like the devil, that **God's grace** gives us the right to disobey **the Word of God**. Throughout the TaNaKh, **Isra'el's** compromise with idolatry is called spiritual adultery, for the nation was **the wife of ADONAI** and "married" to **YHVH** at Mount Sinai (**Jeremiah 2:19-20 and 3:1-11; Ezeki'el Chapters 16 and 23; Hosea Chapters 1 and 2**). **This** same marriage is implied to **Messiah** and **the Church** in the B'rit Chadashah (**Second Corinthians 11:1-4; Ephesians 5:22-33 and Revelation 19:6-9**). The believer compromising with **sin** is like the husband or wife committing adultery in their marriage.

Any teaching that makes it easy or permissible to **sin** is false doctrine, because **the Word of God** was given to us as our blueprint for living, enabling us to live holy lives (**First Timothy 6:3-4 and Titus 1:1**). **Paul** emphasized the need in the Church for **sound doctrine**, which means "healthy doctrine" (**First Timothy 1:10; Second Timothy 4:3; Titus 1:9 and 2:1**). **He** compared false doctrine to a cancerous growth in the Body (**Second Timothy 2:17**). And when **Isra'el** killed **Balaam** many centuries ago, **they** couldn't kill the lies **he** turned loose in the world, lies that still influenced **the Israelites** after **they** had conquered Canaan (**Joshua 22:15-18**). These lies influence individual believers and the congregations of **God** today. The cancer of compromise weakens our witness and saps our spiritual strength (see the commentary on **Second Corinthians Bi - Do Not be Unequally Yoked with Unbelievers**). **Peter** warned us about such false teachers when **he** said: **They have left the straight way and wandered off to follow the way of Balaam son of Bezer, who loved the wages of wickedness (Second Peter 2:15).**⁵⁵⁷

Moshe's instruction from God (25:4-5): To stop **the plague (31:16)**, atonement had to be made and those who were **the leaders of the people** in this awful act of **sinfulness**

were to be **put to death**. The gravity of **the sin** called not only for **death**, but also for a special display of the corpses of the offenders **in broad daylight**. **ADONAI** said to **Moshe**, “**Seize all the ringleaders and execute them before ADONAI in broad daylight, so His fierce anger will turn away from the people of Isra’el.**” So, **Moshe** ordered **Isra’el’s judges**, “**Each of you must put to death those in his tribe who have joined themselves in worshipping Ba’al of Peor.**” At times we have trouble coming to grips with TaNaKh’s commands that **Isra’el** kill **her** enemies (see the commentary on **Deuteronomy Ag - The Problem of Holy War in the TaNaKh**). But this chapter is even more difficult for us to face, for it commands **Hebrews** to kill fellow **Hebrews**. But those rebellious **Israelites** were like a cancer and would have eventually ruined the whole nation.⁵⁵⁸



The zeal of Phinehas (25:6-9): Just then one of the Israelite men, **Zimri** the son of **Palu**, the prince of the tribe of **Simeon**, and a **Midianite** woman, **Cozbi** the daughter of **Zur**, a princess of **Midian** (25:14-15), were having sex right before the eyes of

Moshe and the elders of Isra'el, as they were praying and **weeping at the gate to the Tabernacle** (see the commentary on **Exodus Ez - The Gate of the Tabernacle: Christ, The Way to God**). The brazenness of the Bonnie and Clyde of the Torah made **them** not just **sinner**s but an abomination to **ADONAI**. It would have been bad enough had this been a foreign man with a foreign woman. But it was **a leader** from **the tribe of Simeon**. The point was that in starting the sexual frenzies of the sacrificial feasts of **Ba'al, Zimri** and **his priestess partner** were attempting to transform the worship of **ADONAI** into Canaanite worship.⁵⁵⁹ In the heat of the moment, **Moses** didn't know what to do. **He** just stood there wringing **his** hands, "Oy Vey! Oy Vey!" But **when Phinehas, the son of Eleazar and grandson of Aaron the high priest, saw it, he jumped up and left the congregation, took a spear in his hand** (probably from a nearby soldier), **and pursued the Israelite right into the inner part of his vaulted canopy** (Hebrew: *hakkubbah*), **where**, taking the law into **his** own hands, **he thrust his spear all the way through both of them - right through the Israelite and into the woman's stomach**. Therefore, **Balaam's** wicked plan succeeded. **He** managed to entice **Isra'el** into **sin**, bringing **a curse** down upon **her** own head.

With this bold act of **the young priest, the plague** was **stopped**, which indicates that this **couple's** act was not just a singular outrageous instance of debauchery; rather, likely **they** were the instigators of the pagan rites! **Nevertheless, 24,000 died in the plague**. This was a physical atonement, not a spiritual atonement, with **24,000 perishing** instead of **the whole nation**. This incident at **Ba'al of Peor** is also referred to in **Deuteronomy 4:3-4; Psalm 106:26-29; Hosea 9:10. First Corinthians 10:8** says **23,000 people died** in this incident, whereas here in **Numbers 25:9** it has **24,000 people dying**. This apparent discrepancy can be explained by **Paul's** mention of "**a single day**" in **First Corinthians 10:8**, with the understanding that only **1,000 died** the next day.⁵⁶⁰ Thus, it seems that if **Pinehas** had not acted as quickly as **he** did, on each preceding day, another **23,000** would have **died**.

Here is when **Phinehas** comes into the picture. **Moses** and **the elders** were in total shock and tongue-tied. The leadership of **Isra'el** was paralyzed because **they** couldn't imagine that such an abomination would ever take place before **the Tabernacle, the holy things, and the LORD Himself**. You would think that **God** would be very upset that this **young Levite** who had no legal authority and took the law into **his** own hands and executed **Zimri** and **Cozbi** in public. Under the laws of most Western countries, a person like **Phinehas**, who takes the law into **his** own hands without authority and permission, and kills two people in public, would be charged with a crime. However, this was a man after God's own heart and we learn that **He** rewarded **Phinehas with an eternal priesthood** (see **Eb - God's**

Covenant with Phinehas) for taking the initiative and killing those two blasphemers (see the commentary on **Deuteronomy Bq - Do Not Murder**).

Phinehas was not concerned for **himself** or what might happen to **him** for killing those **two people** who were challenging **the Tabernacle of God** and **His Presence**. Not only that, **he** challenged the authority of **Moses, the elders of Isra'el** and **the priests of the LORD** who stood there with **their** mouths wide open. **Phinehas** was not trying to be politically correct. **He** was only concerned about stopping the depravity of **Zimri** and **Cozbi**

We can learn from **Phinehas** that there are moments when we have to stand for what is right, just and holy, by defending **God's** honor, even at a high personal cost. Every prophet of **God** had the courage to speak out about things that were neither popular nor politically correct. We think of **Jeremiah**, who had a rich experience speaking and calling out the kings of **Isra'el** and the spiritual leadership of Jerusalem to account. **The weeping prophet** experienced rejection, physical persecution, and loss of status. But to stand up against corrupt laws, evil practices, and injustice is the right thing to do. Someone has to have the courage to stand up and take a clear stand to change the tide and protect **God's Name**.

The principle that I think that every believer has to have a commitment to honor **God** and **His** cause. Second, every believer has to have courage to stand up against the majority against the politically correct culture for **God** and what is holy and pure without calculating what will be personally gained or lost. I pray that you and the leadership in your synagogue or church will have the character of **Phinehas**. To stand up for righteousness and holiness and justice in your camp. If not, who is going to stand up for **God** and for **His** word, and for The Torah and the prophets, and the Good News, for **the Jew first, and also for the Gentiles**? We need to stay on the side of faith and with **God's people**, and don't trust all the fake politicians of the world who want to destroy and uproot the Jewish nation of **Isra'el** from **God's** promises. The goals of the power mongering world of famous politicians are the same as the goals of **Balak, King of Moab, and Balaam, the son of Beor.**⁵⁶¹

Haftarah Balak: Micah 6:8

(see the commentary on **Deuteronomy Af - Parashah**)

He has told you, O man, what is good; and what ADONAI requires of you; but to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God? What is good? Some have called this the most important saying in prophetic literature. The question asks what is the way of true worship. **Micah**, a contemporary of **Isaiah** and the first to predict the coming destruction of **Jerusalem (Micah 3:12)**, answers. With a rhetorical question, **he**

makes the point that true worship requires more than merely going through the motions of **righteousness**, with its **burnt offerings**, offerings of **yearling calves** and **rams**, **rivers of oil** or even sacrificing **their firstborns** to atone for **their sins** (Micah 6:6-7). YHVH makes the case against **Isra'el** for breaking **His covenant** (Micah 6:1-2). **He will cut off their horses, their cities, sorceries, idols, and centers of idolatry** (Micah 5:10-13). **Isra'el** must walk in purity or face judgment. Most importantly, **God** demanded three changes: **do justice, love kindness** (see the commentary on **Ruth Af - The Concept of Chesed**), and **walk humbly with Him**.

B'rit Chadashah Balak: Romans 11:32

For God has shut up all mankind, Jew and Gentile together in disobedience, in order that He might show mercy to all. Isra'el's cumulative sins piled up to the heavens, triggering the wrath of **Ha'Shem**. Hardening and partial blindness resulted (**Leviticus 26:14-16; Deuteronomy 28:65, 32:28-29; Isaiah 6:9-13**). In a response of sheer mercy, **God** rips the scales off the eyes of Paul (**Acts 9:18**). And after **the Gentile world enters in its fullness, then all Isra'el will be saved** (**Romans 11:26**). **God** reveals a "mystery," something once hidden and now is revealed. All mankind has been justly imprisoned, or **shut up**, in disobedience so that **ADONAI** could reveal **His chesed** to **Isra'el: Out of Tziyon will come the Redeemer (Isaiah 59:20) . . . and this will be my covenant with them . . . when, as a nation, I will take away their sins** (see the commentary on **Romans Da - The Redemption of Isra'el**). Until then, **Gentiles** must not be **wise in their own eyes** (**Romans 11:25**). **Isra'el's** partial blindness **blesses the Gentiles** first. **So that by [you Gentiles] showing [Isra'el, the Jews] the same mercy that God has shown you, they too may now receive God's mercy** (**Romans 11:30-31**). **God** used **Jewish** disobedience for **His** own purposes. But, in contrast with that, **Gentiles** now have the opportunity to be the conscious and intentional means of **blessing** to **Isra'el**. **ADONAI** has **blessed the Gentiles** by choosing **them** as **His** instrument for willingly **blessing Isra'el and the Jews**.⁵⁶²

*Dear Heavenly **Father**, Praise **Your** wonderful **love** and perfect holiness. **Your** holiness dictates that no **sin** can enter heaven. **And nothing unholy shall ever enter it, nor anyone doing what is detestable or false, but only those written in the Book of Life (Revelation 21:27). You** so graciously paid the price for our **sin** and cloth with **Messiah's righteousness**, those who **love** and accept **You** as their **Savior (Romans 10:9-11)**. **He made the One who knew no sin to become a sin offering on our behalf, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God (2 Cor 5:21)**.*

Your love is so great and **Your** compassionate heart is anxious to bring people away from the cancer of **sin** that kills, so that **You** might be able to **bless**. It is not **kindness** to tolerate **sin** in ourselves or in anyone else. **You** who are omniscient and see into each person's heart (**First Samuel 16:7**) to see if their deeds were done out of selfish pride or out of a true love for **You** and **Your** honor. **Not everyone who says to Me, "Lord, Lord!" will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me on that day, "Lord, Lord, didn't we prophesy in Your name, and drive out demons in Your name, and perform many miracles in Your name?" Then I will declare to them, "I never knew you. Get away from Me, you workers of lawlessness" (Matthew 7:21-23)!**

Praise **You** for **Your loving** plan and purpose to unite all believers in **Messiah**. **The plan of the fullness of times is to bring all things together in the Messiah - both things in heaven and things on earth, all in Him (Ephesians 1:10)**. It is so wonderful that you have included both **Gentiles** and Jews in **Your** plan of salvation. **You [Gentiles] - being a wild olive - were grafted in among them and became a partaker of the root of the olive tree with its richness (Romans 11:17c)**. Lord, I desire to love **You** with all my heart, soul and mind, and to do my best to live a righteous life that honors **You**, for **You** are so worthy! In **Messiah Yeshua's** holy **Name** and power of **His** resurrection. Amen