

# **A Charge to Pursue a Zeal for God in 2017 Phinehas' Passion for God – Numbers 25**

## **Pray's Mill Baptist Church Adult Sunday School Lessons**

**Part One: January 8, 2017**

**Part Two: January 15, 2017**

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## Phinehas' Passion for God<sup>1</sup>

January 1, 2017 has now come and you likely welcomed it in one of two ways: complete indifference or an opportunity to refresh and engage goals for life. Like birthdays, anniversaries, and holidays it is just another day. However, also like birthdays, anniversaries, and holidays it is also a tangible marker in time and life. A time to recollect and examine. Now, while our culture's engagement of making resolutions at New Year's may or may not have the strength of a long history or magnificent foundations, it is nevertheless an opportunity if one would take it to examine oneself and determine what you, by God's grace, hope to be at the coming of the next year and its tangible marker on time. My prayer is that you will examine yourself now and discern with a measure of honesty your progress as a disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ and how it looks in comparison to the prior year. What investments and efforts did you apply to grow in grace? What deficiencies in sanctification did you tackle? What sins did you mortify? How much joy do you find in the Scriptures and worshiping with the beloved?

Would you now resolve to engage January 1, 2018 with a reflection over this coming year as a time that you can rejoice in your being mightier in the Scriptures, more consistent in your obedience, more faithful and diligent in your proclaiming the gospel, being stronger in worship, and more seasoned in prayer?<sup>2</sup> If you would so resolve yourself then I want to encourage you to begin with a zealous momentum, an explosion off the starting blocks, and a passion that carries you through the joy and troubles ahead.

So here we begin! For our first two Sunday School lessons in 2017 I want to direct your attention to the example provided by Phinehas, son of Eleazar, son of Aaron. A man whose lineage was one of passion unrestrained that, in the Lord's kindness, matured to passion pleasing to God.

"Phinehas the son of Eleazar, son of Aaron the priest, has turned back my wrath from the people of Israel, in that he was jealous with my jealousy among them, so that I did not consume the people of Israel in my jealousy." Numbers 25:11

These lessons will cover several chapters of Scripture and it is my hope that you will give the various passages due attention as you prepare for Sunday School each week. How much your teacher chooses to cover on week one and week two of this lesson will be at their discretion, but here is a general guide for preparing yourself.

### **Part 1 of Phinehas' Passion for God.**

Read: Genesis 34, 49

Read: The provided sweeping summary through the book of Numbers, pages 6-11, 17-18 of this Study Guide.

Read: Numbers 23, 24, 25

Work On: Zeal For God, Applied. Week One. Page 19 of this Study Guide.

### **Part 2 of Phinehas' Passion for God.**

Review the Prior Week's Material

Read: Numbers 25

Read: Joshua 22

Work On: Zeal For God, Applied. Week Two. Page 20 of this Study Guide.

Finally, by way of introduction and instruction for these lessons, wherever your class finishes this first week please see page 19 (Application Section) at the end of class and spend some time together putting these magnificent truths to practice. I have provided a week one and week two application section for you and your class.

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<sup>1</sup> Prepared by David Crowe for Pray's Mill Baptist Church Adult Sunday School

ALL Scripture Quotations are from the ESV Bible unless the Scripture reference is in a quote from another author – their original translation was kept.

<sup>2</sup> If the Lord is pleased to give you strength and the Son has not returned for his own before the conclusion of the year.

## **Pastoral Sidebar**

### ***So much reading and so much attention on priests and the book of Numbers!***

I have labored over what these lessons would look like for several weeks as I wanted them to be of special consequence and value to you. They were chosen for two primary reasons: First, as stated above I wanted to provide you a magnificent picture of a passion for God. Second, I want to provoke an insatiable appetite in your souls for the whole of Scripture. These lessons were crafted to help do this by providing you the following:

*Giving attention to:* a sampling of the magnificent details and providential unfolding of the works of God. As you will soon see one moment of passion changed history for thousands and thousands of people and another moment of passion changed it yet again. I want you to love those details in Scripture... some of them took decades and even hundreds of years to unfold and some we also still await.

*Giving attention to:* some of the critical elements of Scripture – namely the priesthood, so that you might better understand the ways of God's work for so much of Redemptive History. Further, understanding the Aaronic priesthood will better posture you to understand the work of our Great High Priest (after the order of Melchizedek). Giving attention to elements of this historic priesthood will give you the foundation that the New Testament presumes you know and appreciate, particularly the author of Hebrews.

*Giving attention to:* the beauty that is often never properly mined because we fail to exercise a healthy breadth in our reading and studying of the Scriptures. Many an ambitious Bible readers likely have lost momentum in Leviticus only to begin to decline their efforts in reading when engaging a book called Numbers that begins with a counting of families and tribes. I hope this time in Numbers will provoke you to give it much more attention, but also to other challenging books such as Leviticus, which demands that you appreciate the holiness of God. Leviticus also shows through its exhaustive engagement of the sacrificial system that the necessary sacrifices are very demanding, precise, and would cost someone much. However, what The LORD requires he provides and he blesses obedience. Might we also learn something of the holiness of God, his demands for costly worship, and delight in his provision and blessing.

### **Phinehas' Passion for God**

#### **Historical Backdrop – Genesis 34**

#### **Phinehas, son of Eleazar, son of Aaron**

The patriarch Jacob had twelve sons who would later become the heads and namesakes of the twelve tribes of Israel. However, he also had a daughter named Dinah and at the time of this incident Benjamin was not yet born.

As stated, Jacob (at this time) had eleven sons and one daughter. Therefore, one can only imagine that even with the esteem of having sons that the care for Dinah likely ran strong, particularly among her older brothers... among whom were Simeon and Levi. So, it was a grave tragedy that when Jacob and his family were dwelling in Canaan near the city of Shechem, Dinah was violated by Shechem the son of Hamor. By what means is not completely clear, but there was an element of force and humiliation involved, and the conclusion is that even if she was seduced she did not willfully submit to Shechem's actions toward her. Dinah, the daughter of Jacob was defiled.

Jacob became aware of the violation, but did not respond until his sons returned from their work in the fields. This was also when Shechem and his father entreated the family for Dinah to be given to Shechem in marriage. There is no further discussion regarding Dinah being defiled only what arrangements could be made for a marriage. So, whatever the details or reasons Shechem was now pursuing that Dinah be made his wife. However, while there was no reference to the offense, it clearly loomed before Jacob's sons as they used the request for the naming of a bride price as a means to deceive and ultimately avenge their sister. The bargaining appears simple and straightforward: the sons of Jacob were offered the opportunity to marry the daughter's of Hamor's people and

intermingle the two families/peoples, but Hamor's people must first submit to circumcision as a required prerequisite or the whole deal was off. Hamor and Shechem gladly agreed to the circumcision clause and returned home to persuade their people. It was at this time that it was plain that both sides had their own agendas... Jacobs sons would seek to exact revenge and Hamor's people agreed to circumcision because they intended to assimilate and effectively annex the people and wealth of Jacob's family.

It was at this time that there was another terrible tragedy when an apparent equitable agreement among families turned grim. When the men of Hamor's city had been circumcised and were in a position of compromise and great pain, Simeon and Levi came to the city and slaughtered all of the men and retrieved their sister, Dinah. They did not simply take the life of the offender or even the men of his immediate home, but all of the men of the city. Then following this grave massacre the sons of Jacob came in and pillaged the city, taking all of its wealth, livestock, women, and children. This too in retribution for their sister's defilement.

This terrible incident drew the rebuke of Jacob on his sons as their conduct provoked an imminent threat for their survival as a family/clan, noting that it would take little effort for this offense to lead to others wiping them out.

*Now note the gravity of this incident.*

The sons of Jacob overtly deceived their offenders, Shechem and his father, by abusing the very sign of the covenant Israel had with God, namely circumcision. The sons were choosing to use the distinguishing mark of them as a people of God to abuse another, thereby abusing the sign itself. Perhaps a means of getting your mind around this would be to think of one using baptism<sup>3</sup> as a means to drown one's enemies – it is a terrible abuse both of the means and the sign.

Simeon and Levi slaughtered a whole city when not all were culpable for the offense against their sister and people. This was unrestrained vigilante passion that exceeded the reasonable scope of personal justice. If such was the desire of God, to wipe out this city, as a means of greater judgment they still would have superseded their rights to carry such an action out by acting without clear command and only submitting to self-will.

This rash and violent action by the sons of Jacob, particularly Simeon and Levi, made Israel odious in the sight of the peoples, and short of divine protection they would themselves have been wiped out. This was vulgarly shortsighted and potentially detrimental.

### **Phinehas' Passion for God**

#### **Historical Backdrop – Genesis 49**

#### **Phinehas, son of Eleazar, son of Aaron**

"Then Jacob said to Simeon and Levi, "You have brought trouble on me by making me stink to the inhabitants of the land, the Canaanites and the Perizzites. My numbers are few, and if they gather themselves against me and attack me, I shall be destroyed, both I and my household." Genesis 34:10

Jacob's expression of disapproval was not his final peace regarding this matter. It was clear that his distress was greater than his family be putting in jeopardy; he was distressed regarding Simeon and Levi's violent wrath, and he cursed it.

"Simeon and Levi are brothers; weapons of violence are their swords. Let my soul come not into their council; O my glory, be not joined to their company. For in their anger they killed men, and in their willfulness they hamstrung oxen. Cursed be their anger, for it is fierce, and their wrath, for it is cruel! I will divide them in Jacob and scatter them in Israel." Genesis 49:5-7

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<sup>3</sup> I am NO WAY intending to communicate or infer that baptism is the equivalent to circumcision, but that both serve a unique role in their respective places within God's economy so as to draw out how shocking and offensive this choice was by Jacob's sons.

The terrible/wicked conduct of Simeon and Levi as recorded in Genesis 34 informs the blessing that Jacob chose to give these two sons at the conclusion of his own life. Jacob unambiguously disassociates himself from this event and expresses his moral disdain for their cruel wrath. This moment of passion will have consequences on their respective posterities, and while still blessed as children of covenant promise, it will be a greatly diminished role that they will now have as they will be divided and scattered in Israel.

At the time of the covenant nation of Israel's conquest of their promised land, Simeon had become the smallest tribe in Israel and ultimately shared territory with the substantially larger Judah. This was a tangible digression as observed from the beginning and end of the book of Numbers.

When The LORD commanded Moses to take a census of the tribes/people of Israel, Simeon initially numbered at 59,300 at the census taken in the second year after the exodus from Egypt.

"The Lord spoke to Moses in the wilderness of Sinai, in the tent of meeting, on the first day of the second month, in the second year after they had come out of the land of Egypt, saying, 'Take a census of all the congregation of the people of Israel, by clans, by fathers' houses, according to the number of names, every male, head by head.'" Numbers 1:1-2

"Of the people of Simeon, their generations, by their clans, by their fathers' houses, those of them who were listed, according to the number of names, head by head, every male from twenty years old and upward, all who were able to go to war: those listed of the tribe of Simeon were 59,300." Numbers 1:22-23

However, approximately thirty-eight years later when Israel was about to enter the promised land The LORD commanded Moses to take another census of the tribes/people of Israel, and now Simeon only numbered 22,200.

"After the plague, the Lord said to Moses and to Eleazar the son of Aaron, the priest, 'Take a census of all the congregation of the people of Israel, from twenty years old and upward, by their fathers' houses, all in Israel who are able to go to war.'" Numbers 26:1-2

"The sons of Simeon according to their clans: of Nemuel, the clan of the Nemuelites; of Jamin, the clan of the Jaminites; of Jachin, the clan of the Jachinites; of Zerah, the clan of the Zerahites; of Shaul, the clan of the Shaulites. These are the clans of the Simeonites, 22,200." Numbers 26:12-14

Simeon lost 37,100 men between the two census and was the smallest of the tribes going into the promised land. While a tragic detail, it is worthwhile to note the value in giving attention to the details in the Scriptures ranging from the value of numbers, to the awareness of the individual acts of men, to prophecies small and great.

Interestingly, while equally consistent in fulfillment, Levi's story was very different. The tribe of Levi had no inheritance of their own beyond forty-two designated cities throughout the land and the six cities of refuge for a total of forty-eight cities as an inheritance. However, this was because of the tribe of Levi enjoying a blessed condition of being The LORD's possession and serving as the caretakers of the worship system of Israel and having among them the priests.

"The cities that you give to the Levites shall be the six cities of refuge, where you shall permit the manslayer to flee, and in addition to them you shall give forty-two cities. All the cities that you give to the Levites shall be forty-eight, with their pasturelands." Numbers 35:6-7

## **Phinehas' Passion for God**

### **Finding Phinehas in *The Book of Numbers***

#### **Phinehas, son of Eleazar, son of Aaron**

The purpose for the prior two passages is to offer a background and contrast to Levi's passion and Phinehas' passion.

This next section is a sweeping overview of the book of Numbers with an emphasis on Eleazar, Phinehas' father, and then Phinehas himself. The intent is to demonstrate that Phinehas had a seasoned and informed zeal, not just a zeal about the unknown that happened to demonstrate itself in a profitable manner. When walking through this overview think about Moses' moment of passion when smashing the first set of tablets with the Decalogue... an action informed by the magnificent things he saw and from his constant engagement with the holiness of God. *Men and women with passion for God are not created in the moment, but their moments are a reflection of a life seasoned by seeing, hearing, and being enraptured by the holiness and greatness of God.*

Interestingly Exodus 6:25 is the first reference to Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, and the only reference to him until the moment of magnificent zeal in Numbers 25. However, he has a story, a magnificent backdrop, and a seasoned heritage and life of experiences that made him who he proved to be in that moment. The moment did not make him, it only put who he was on display. *What will life's moments demonstrate about you?*

Phinehas was the son of Eleazar who was the son of Aaron and they were all ultimately the sons of Levi. From chapter one and the numbering of the people of Israel you begin to see the distinction of the tribe of Levi as a people set apart for service to The LORD, and this line and those among it who serve as priests will become all the more refined through Phinehas and his posterity by covenant promise from God.

#### Numbers 1

The Levites were not numbered as the other tribes were numbered.

The Levites were assigned a distinct task of the caretaking and safeguarding of the Tabernacle and its contents.

"...if any outsider comes near [the Tabernacle], he shall be put to death." Numbers 1:51

This was a safeguarding of the other tribes from The LORD's wrath as holiness has great demands.

#### Numbers 2

Instructions for the arrangement of the tribes by their camps and order of marching. Note that the Levites identification was with the Tabernacle and while all of the other tribes are numbered they are intentionally not numbered as commanded by God.

"Then the tent of meeting shall set out, with the camp of the Levites in the midst of the camps; as they camp, so shall they set out, each in position, standard by standard." Numbers 2:17

"These are the people of Israel as listed by their fathers' houses. All those listed in the camps by their companies were 603,550. But the Levites were not listed among the people of Israel, as the LORD commanded Moses." Numbers 2:32-33.

#### Numbers 3

Aaron's surviving sons, Eleazar and Ithamar (Nadab and Abihu died offering strange fire) served as anointed priests alongside Aaron their father, who was the high priest.

The tribe of Levi, who The LORD took as his own in place of all the firstborn of Israel (following the Passover), served as lethal guards of the priesthood: the priests, the elements/contents of the Tabernacle and the Tabernacle itself, and those worshipping.

Aaron and his sons were specifically to guard their priesthood.

"And you shall appoint Aaron and his sons, and they shall guard their priesthood. But if any outsider comes near, he shall be put to death." Numbers 3:10

"And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 'Behold, I have taken the Levites from among the people of Israel instead of every firstborn who opens the womb among the people of Israel. The Levites shall be mine, for all the firstborn are mine. On the day that I struck down all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, I consecrated for my own all the firstborn in Israel, both of man and of beast. They shall be mine: I am the LORD.'" Numbers 3:11-13

The various sons of Levi, families within the tribe were assigned different guard duties centered on the Tabernacle and its worship system - Eleazar provided particular oversight of the chiefs of the Levites and their guard duties, "And Eleazar the son of Aaron the priest was to be chief over the chiefs of the Levites, and to have oversight of those who kept guard over the sanctuary." Numbers 3:32

Moses, Aaron, and the two priestly sons appear to have a particular posts themselves - and an especially consequential one at that: "Those who were to camp before the tabernacle on the east, before the tent of meeting toward the sunrise, were Moses and Aaron and his sons, guarding the sanctuary itself, to protect the people of Israel. And any outsider who came near was to be put to death." Numbers 3:38

This was not an inconsequential post - this was a post that would stand to the very death of those who would challenge it.

#### Numbers 4

Aaron and his two priestly sons (one being Eleazar, the father of Phinehas) had the responsibility of preparing the holy items of the Tabernacle for transport - they had prescribed ways to cover and prepare them for those who would carry them, but who could not touch the holy items.

Eleazar had additional responsibilities regarding the elements of the Tabernacle: "And Eleazar the son of Aaron the priest shall have charge of the oil for the light, the fragrant incense, the regular grain offering, and the anointing oil, with the oversight of the whole tabernacle and all that is in it, of the sanctuary and its vessels." Numbers 4:16

Aaron and his sons had to not only prepare the holy items of the Tabernacle for transport by the Kohathites (of the Levites) but they had to prepare the men themselves too by appointing them to their specific task. But these men under their instruction were not to go in and look on the holy things even for a moment or they would die... further demonstrating that there was clearly a magnificent distinguishment of the priest and even other Levites of distinguished service.

#### Numbers 5

Elements of maintaining a holy camp: the unclean go outside the camp, confession and restitution for wrongs, and a prescription for examining the fidelity of one's wife.

#### Numbers 6

Aaron and his sons were to pronounce the prescribed blessing on Israel, later referred to as the Aaronic Blessing.

"The LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 'Speak to Aaron and his sons, saying, Thus you shall bless the people of Israel: you shall say to them, The LORD bless you and keep you; the LORD make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you; the LORD lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace.' So shall they put my name upon the people of Israel, and I will bless them." Numbers 6:22-27

#### Numbers 7

The anointing of the altar in the Tabernacle, twelve days of offerings – collected from each of the tribes.

## Numbers 8

The Levites were completely set apart in Israel and this setting apart included their being made as a gift to Aaron and his sons to participate in Tabernacle service.

Note that while among the tribe of Levi, it was Aaron and his sons, the priests, that were definitively separate/distinct in their role and service. Among the sons of Aaron that would eventually serve as both priest and then high priest is Phinehas, son of Eleazar.

Note also the defining nature of these men serving under Aaron and his sons in this most holy work.

"Thus you shall separate the Levites from among the people of Israel, and the Levites shall be mine. And after that the Levites shall go in to serve at the tent of meeting, when you have cleansed them and offered them as a wave offering. For they are wholly given to me from among the people of Israel. Instead of all who open the womb, the firstborn of all the people of Israel, I have taken them for myself. For all the firstborn among the people of Israel are mine, both of man and of beast. On the day that I struck down all the firstborn in the land of Egypt I consecrated them for myself, and I have taken the Levites instead of all the firstborn among the people of Israel. And I have given the Levites as a gift to Aaron and his sons from among the people of Israel, to do the service for the people of Israel at the tent of meeting and to make atonement for the people of Israel, that there may be no plague among the people of Israel when the people of Israel come near the sanctuary." Numbers 8:14-19

## Numbers 9

Instructions for the keeping of the Passover.

Articulation of the practice of Israel dwelling and moving at The LORD's discretion: when his presence remained on the Tabernacle they stayed and when it moved they broke camp and followed.

"At the command of the LORD they camped, and at the command of the LORD they set out. They kept the charge of the LORD, at the command of the LORD by Moses." Numbers 9:23

## Numbers 10

Moses was commanded to have special trumpets made and blown at appointed times: summoning the people for various reasons: gathering, setting out as companies, in warfare - specifically so "...that you may be remembered before The LORD your God, and you shall be saved from your enemies." Numbers 10:9 Also on days of gladness, at appointed feasts, the beginning of months, and over sacrifices.

These trumpets were to be blown by the sons of Aaron, the priests, at the gathering of companies and presumably the other events too.

## Numbers 11

Here the ungrateful restlessness of Israel in general was coming to dramatic heights, which led to The LORD first consuming some of the outlying parts of the camp with fire and later bringing a plague as the ungrateful engorged themselves with the special delivery of meat from The LORD.

These grumblings were taxing on Moses and some of the general leadership responsibilities and the supernatural enablement to carry them out were placed on seventy of the elders of Israel.

## Numbers 12

Miriam and Aaron found offense with Moses and disrespected his unique authority that The LORD had given him among the people. Moses, the meekest man on earth, was not left to defend himself. The LORD championed this dear man and there was both punishment and restoration.



"And the LORD came down in a pillar of cloud and stood at the entrance of the tent and called Aaron and Miriam, and they both came forward. And he said, 'Hear my words: If there is a prophet among you, I the LORD make myself known to him in a vision; I speak with him in a dream. Not so with my servant Moses. He is faithful in all my house. With him I speak mouth to mouth, clearly, and not in riddles, and he beholds the form of the LORD. Why then were you not afraid to speak against my servant Moses?'" Numbers 12:5-8

### Numbers 13

The LORD commissioned spies to examine the promised land for Israel and while they praised its greatness they feared its inhabitants. To their shame the twelve spies, with the exception of Joshua and Caleb, feared the inhabitants of the land promised to them by God more than they feared The LORD. The majority then brought a bad report to the people.

"We came to the land to which you sent us. It flows with milk and honey, and this is its fruit. However, the people who dwell in the land are strong, and the cities are fortified and very large. And besides, we saw the descendants of Anak there. The Amalekites dwell in the land of the Negeb. The Hittites, the Jebusites, and the Amorites dwell in the hill country. And the Canaanites dwell by the sea, and along the Jordan.' But Caleb quieted the people before Moses and said, 'Let us go up at once and occupy it, for we are well able to overcome it.' Then the men who had gone up with him said, "We are not able to go up against the people, for they are stronger than we are." Numbers 13:27-31

### Numbers 14

The post-spy rebellion of the people and the subsequent promise of judgment on this generation, they will die in the wilderness.

At this time one might be wondering how Eleazar became High Priest and continued on to the Promised Land when he was among the living when the rebellion of the spies occurred. However, when one reads carefully it should be recalled that he was a Levite and they were not within those counted among the people (they were set apart for The LORD) and it was those counted who would perish, "Say to them, 'As I live, declares the LORD, what you have said in my hearing I will do to you: your dead bodies shall fall in this wilderness, and of all your number, listed in the census from twenty years old and upward, who have grumbled against me, not one shall come into the land where I swore that I would make you dwell, except Caleb the son of Jephunneh and Joshua the son of Nun." Numbers 14:28-30

"But the Levites were not listed along with them by their ancestral tribe. For the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 'Only the tribe of Levi you shall not list, and you shall not take a census of them among the people of Israel.'" Numbers 1:47-49

The Levites' exemption excluded them from this comprehensive judgment. They were among and yet distinct within Israel. This all goes back to the Passover and the setting aside of the firstborn among Israel - a people within the people distinctly belonging to The LORD.

"And the LORD said to Moses, List all the firstborn males of the people of Israel, from a month old and upward, taking the number of their names. And you shall take the Levites for me—I am the LORD—instead of all the firstborn among the people of Israel, and the cattle of the Levites instead of all the firstborn among the cattle of the people of Israel.' So Moses listed all the firstborn among the people of Israel, as the LORD commanded him. And all the firstborn males, according to the number of names, from a month old and upward as listed were 22,273. And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 'Take the Levites instead of all the firstborn among the people of Israel, and the cattle of the Levites instead of their cattle. The Levites shall be mine: I am the LORD.'" Numbers 3:40-45

### Numbers 15

The holiness of God is challenged through disobedience to a simple command and a man is stoned to death for violating the Sabbath.

### Numbers 16

Korah the Levite heads a rebellion against Moses and Aaron's Leadership – they were also accompanied by some Reubenites.

Korah's rebellion had a very significant element to it... namely that on some level they, as Levites, were challenging the role of Aaron and his sons as the exclusive priests: "And Moses said to Korah, 'Hear now, you sons of Levi: is it too small a thing for you that the God of Israel has separated you from the congregation of Israel, to bring you near to himself, to do service in the tabernacle of the LORD and to stand before the congregation to minister to them, and that he has brought you near him, and all your brothers the sons of Levi with you? And would you seek the priesthood also?'" Numbers 16:8-10

At the conclusion of the judgment of the sons of Korah, specifically the ones offering incense before The LORD in this challenge to Aaron, The LORD directed Eleazar to take up the censers and have them converted to plated sheets to cover the altar as they were holy and now were to serve as a perennial reminder of the unique service entrusted to Aaron and his descendants: "...to be a reminder to the people of Israel, so that no outsider, who is not of the descendants of Aaron, should draw near to burn incense before the LORD, lest he become like Korah and his company—as the LORD said to him through Moses." Numbers 16:40

Also, note that when there was a secondary rebellion that arose from the judgment of God on those who initially rebelled, it was Aaron, the high priest, who had to provide a check to the plague and this included him taking up post between the living and the dead.

### Numbers 17

The LORD put a final check to the challenges against Aaron and his sons - having all the chiefs of the tribes submitting their staffs for supernatural testing, it was Aaron's staff that blossomed and bore fruit supernaturally distinguishing him and his sons.

### Numbers 18

The LORD further distinguishes the role of Aaron and his sons as priests. The Levites have been given to them for service, and the priesthood has been given as a gift too - this gift has a high demand of stewardship required of it, "And behold, I have taken your brothers the Levites from among the people of Israel. They are a gift to you, given to the LORD, to do the service of the tent of meeting. And you and your sons with you shall guard your priesthood for all that concerns the altar and that is within the veil; and you shall serve. I give your priesthood as a gift, and any outsider who comes near shall be put to death." Numbers 18:6-7

### Numbers 19

The red heifer that served as a critical element of sacrifice for the cleansing of persons who have had contact with the dead is addressed here, and it is Eleazar that The LORD told Moses and Aaron to oversee and carry out this special sacrifice.

### Numbers 20

Miriam, the sister of Moses and Aaron, died.

The terrible fall of Moses and Aaron. Moses and Aaron failed to uphold The LORD as holy before the people and were therefore excluded from entering the Promised Land. They were of the tribe of Levi and were not by default excluded, but would be now.

Moses and Aaron were provided instructions regarding Aaron's death (on account of his aforementioned rebellion at Meribah) and these instructions included transferring the high priest's garments from Aaron to Eleazar, the father of Phinehas.

Aaron, the high priest, died.

Moses and Eleazar returned to the people who mourned for Aaron.

The succession of the Aaronic priesthood was necessary because the high priest died.

"This makes Jesus the guarantor of a better covenant. The former priests were many in number, because they were prevented by death from continuing in office, but he holds his priesthood permanently, because he continues forever." Hebrews 7:22-24

Eleazar was the high priest through the time of the Conquest as he and Joshua oversaw the division of the tribal inheritances as observed in Joshua 14:1, 17:4, 19:51, 21:1.

### Numbers 21

Military victories for Israel:

When requesting to peacefully and respectfully pass through their land, Israel's request was rejected by Sihon king of the Amorites. Sihon then attempted to engage Israel in battle, and Israel defeated him and took their land.

Israel later took the villages of Jazer and dispossessed the Amorites there.

Israel next went to Bashan and was engaged by Og the king of Bashan, and they subsequently defeated Og and his people and took possession of their land, too.

### Numbers 22,23,24

It was in this context of military victory and the fear that it brought on the local people that we observe Balaam's failed curses and blessing of Israel.

"Then the people of Israel set out and camped in the plains of Moab beyond the Jordan at Jericho. And Balak the son of Zippor saw all that Israel had done to the Amorites. And Moab was in great dread of the people, because they were many. Moab was overcome with fear of the people of Israel. And Moab said to the elders of Midian, 'This horde will now lick up all that is around us, as the ox licks up the grass of the field.'" So Balak the son of Zippor, who was king of Moab at that time, sent messengers to Balaam the son of Beor at Pethor, which is near the River in the land of the people of Amaw, to call him, saying, 'Behold, a people has come out of Egypt. They cover the face of the earth, and they are dwelling opposite me. Come now, curse this people for me, since they are too mighty for me. Perhaps I shall be able to defeat them and drive them from the land, for I know that he whom you bless is blessed, and he whom you curse is cursed.'" Numbers 22:1-6

There was a fear of Israel by the Moabites (and reasonably so) which is why Balaam was hired to curse them and make them more susceptible to defeat. The Moabites and Midianites went in together in their hiring of Balaam, but the Moabites were most directly involved with his engagement of Israel from afar.

### *Balaam's Oracles*

With Balaam's first oracle, he blessed Israel (Numbers 23:7-10)

With Balaam's second oracle he blessed Israel (Numbers 23:19-24)

With Balaam's third oracle he blessed Israel (Numbers 24:3-9)

The final and unsolicited oracle of Balaam again blessed Israel (Numbers 24:15-24)

### **Numbers 25**

#### **Phinehas' Passion for God**

#### **Phinehas, son of Eleazar, son of Aaron**

Preservation, care, discipline, military victories, and blessings... yet Israel loved her sin more than she loved her God and gave herself to fornication and idolatry at a great price – the burning anger of The LORD, who is a jealous God, toward them.

"While Israel lived in Shittim, the people began to whore with the daughters of Moab. These invited the people to the sacrifices of their gods, and the people ate and bowed down to their gods. So Israel yoked himself to Baal of Peor. And the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel." Numbers 25:1-3

### **25:1-2, *The instigator, offense, and offenders.***

We learn later in the book of Numbers that this terrible event was instigated under Balaam's council, Balaam who had been hired by Balak to curse Israel, but who could only bless them by way of oracle.

"Moses said to them, "Have you let all the women live? Behold, these, on Balaam's advice, caused the people of Israel to act treacherously against the LORD in the incident of Peor, and so the plague came among the congregation of the LORD."  
Numbers 31:15-16

Now, whereas Balaam could not curse Israel, Israel nevertheless wholly embraced idolatrous whoring with the daughters of Moab. This after spending decades in the wilderness as a judgment on the prior generation and after just experiencing substantial military victories just East of the Jordan River.

We see here that Israel's first failure was their wrongful integration with the people of Moab. Adherence to the Law would have insulated them from this act as it would have safeguarded their being lured into idolatrous worship. This tragically spoke to their hearts' perennial propensity to wander, which is why they ultimately needed new hearts (the promise of the New Covenant).

"The lust of the flesh induced the Israelites to approach the daughters of Moab, and form acquaintances and friendships with them, in consequence of which they were invited by them 'to the slain-offerings of their gods,' i.e., to the sacrificial festivals and sacrificial meals, in connection with which they also 'adored their gods,' i.e., took part in the idolatrous worship connected with the sacrificial festival. These sacrificial meals were celebrated in honour of the Moabitish god *Baal-Peor*, so that the Israelites jointed themselves to him.... *Baal-Peor* is the *Baal* of *Peor*, who was worshipped in the city of *Beth-Peor*... a Moabitish *Priapus*, in honour of whom women and virgins prostituted themselves. As the god of war, he was called *Chemosh*...."<sup>4</sup>

"Moses relates how, when they had given way to their lust, they fell at the same time into whoredom and idolatry. We shall presently see that this arose from the counsel of Balaam, that the Moabites should prostitute their women to the Israelites, in order to entice them by their blandishments to unholy worship. Balaam had learnt by experience that God's favour was invincible safeguard to protect the people from injury. He, therefore, invents a plan whereby they may destroy themselves, by not only depriving themselves of God's protection, but also by provoking His wrath against them."<sup>5</sup>

### **25:3, *The LORD is provoke to anger.***

Israel yoked or bound themselves to an idol, "Baal or Peor," and this provoked the anger of The LORD toward Israel.

Note that in Psalm 106:28 we find out that an element of this idolatry was eating sacrifices offered to the dead.

"Then they yoked themselves to the Baal of Peor, and ate sacrifices offered to the dead...." Psalm 106:28

### **25:4, *Instructions for divine judgment.***

The LORD gave Moses instructions to eradicate this offense: put all the chiefs of the people to death before The LORD. This was to be done for a precise reason: "...that the fierce anger of The LORD may turn away from Israel."

The only way that the anger of The LORD would be averted was for the guilty to die.

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<sup>4</sup> C.F. Keil and F. Delitzsch; Keil & Delitzsch: Commentary on the Old Testament, Volume 1 – Pentateuch. Hendrickson Publishers, 2001. Pg.791

<sup>5</sup> John Calvin; Calvin's Commentaries, Volume 3 – Harmony of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy. Baker Books, 2003. Pg.233

This appears to have been a very public execution "in the sun" and this is where cultural elements being understood is helpful to understand the intent of the instructions here. The ESV Study Bible concurred with other commentators that "*hang them in the sun*" was effectively making a public display of the offense so as to deter further offense by others.

"This most likely refers to the ancient Near Eastern practice of impaling dead bodies on a stick after execution for heinous crimes, as a form of disgrace (rather than burying the bodies) and as a public warning to all who would be tempted to engage in such perversion themselves."<sup>6</sup>

### **25:5, *The commissioning of the judges.***

Moses passed this command of immediate judgment to those who were entrusted with helping him judge Israel, directing them to kill all guilty persons, those who have, "yoked themselves to Baal of Peor."

It appears from 25:1-3 that the offense was more widespread than just the chiefs of the people and it is speculated that they were the ones by whom the public example would be made in addition to the executions of all the other guilty persons. This was a matter of severe consequence and breadth.

### **25:6, *Icons of idolatry and righteous anger.***

We then observe a representative culmination to the offense that occurred in the midst of both the chaos and grieving over the sins of the people when a man of Israel, without regard for his offense or its ramifications, took a Midianite woman for himself in the plain sight of all who were before the Tabernacle. He shamelessly entered a tent to consummate his relationship with her, serving as it were as a representation to the whole of this great tragedy.

### **25:7-8, *The righteous jealousy of God executed through Phinehas.***

Phinehas was among those who observed this man's offense and in turned acted upon it. Phinehas left the congregation with a spear in his hand and he pursued the couple into the man's tent and fatally pierced them both through: the Israelite and the Midianite. Phinehas' action was fueled by passion. However, it was not the passion of his tribe's namesake Levi, but the passion of God's own jealousy.

This action by Phinehas stopped the plague that was being executed by The LORD in his anger over Israel's yoking itself with Baal or Peor.

"When Phinehas the son of Eleazar, son of Aaron the priest, saw it, he rose and left the congregation and took a spear in his hand and went after the man of Israel into the chamber and pierced both of them, the man of Israel and the woman through her belly. Thus the plague on the people of Israel was stopped. Nevertheless, those who died by the plague were twenty-four thousand." Numbers 25:7-9

What is not known is whether the judges of Israel had the opportunity to follow through with Moses' instructions to execute the other guilty parties before Phinehas' act of atonement concluded the plague. However, what is clear is that Phinehas' act of passion was distinct. It was not just justice, but a zealous justice that averted the wrath of The LORD.

### **25:9, *A great sin and a great loss.***

Before the plague was stopped 24,000 people were dead. *24,000 people dead.*

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<sup>6</sup> English Standard Version Study Bible. Crossway Bibles, 2008. Pg.307

Note that when the second census was taken shortly after this there were 601,730 men numbered for war in Israel. It would have been approximately 632,274 (if no Levites were among the offenders) before this incident, which resulted in an approximate 4% drop or loss in their population.

### **25:10-11, *The LORD affirms Phinehas moment of righteous passion.***

Regardless of the success of the judges of Israel, it is clear that this singular act by Phinehas was the decisive reason that the plague stopped.

This act of passion for The LORD turned his wrath back from Israel.

It was not that the necessary persons or number of leaders were executed, but that Phinehas demonstrated the jealousy of God. *He demonstrated in a moment that he understood the heart of God as reflected in the commands of God for his people.*

"You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments." Exodus 20:3-6

This understanding of the heart of God is also seen when reflecting back on when The LORD provided Moses new tablets with the Decalogue after the originals were destroyed... he makes it quite clear that he has no patience or tolerance for idolatry or the syncretism that feeds it.

"Take care, lest you make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land to which you go, lest it become a snare in your midst. You shall tear down their altars and break their pillars and cut down their Asherim (for you shall worship no other god, for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God), lest you make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land, and when they whore after their gods and sacrifice to their gods and you are invited, you eat of his sacrifice, and you take of their daughters for your sons, and their daughters whore after their gods and make your sons whore after their gods." Exodus 34:12-16

Later, in Deuteronomy, we see this theme continuing with The LORD and his consuming jealousy.

"Take care, lest you forget the covenant of the LORD your God, which he made with you, and make a carved image, the form of anything that the LORD your God has forbidden you. For the LORD your God is a consuming fire, a jealous God." Deuteronomy 4:23-24

"It is the LORD your God you shall fear. Him you shall serve and by his name you shall swear. You shall not go after other gods, the gods of the peoples who are around you— for the LORD your God in your midst is a jealous God—lest the anger of the LORD your God be kindled against you, and he destroy you from off the face of the earth." Deuteronomy 6:13-15

### **25:12-13, *A Covenant of Peace: A Perpetual Priesthood.***

Phinehas' act not only turned away the wrath of The LORD, but it also led to The LORD establishing a covenant with his line/descendants, a covenant of peace, a covenant of a perpetual priesthood.

"And the LORD said to Moses, 'Phinehas the son of Eleazar, son of Aaron the priest, has turned back my wrath from the people of Israel, in that he was jealous with my jealousy among them, so that I did not consume the people of Israel in my jealousy. Therefore say, 'Behold, I give to him my covenant of peace, and it shall be to him and to his descendants after him the covenant of a perpetual priesthood, because he was jealous for his God and made atonement for the people of Israel.'"" Numbers 25:10-13

This was the first reference to a "covenant of peace" - however, it also appears to be applied to Israel as a whole at times, too.

Isaiah 54:10 speaks of a "covenant of peace" that shall not be removed from Israel - framed in a context of great comfort and magnificent hope. The outworking of this appears to be that no enemy can successfully oppose them.

Ezekiel 34:25 speaks of a "covenant of peace" in the context of a magnificent shepherding image where The LORD will shepherd his people - providing perfect care for them.

Ezekiel 37:26 speaks of a "covenant of peace" with a unified and restored Israel - new hearts and in their promised land.

Covenant of Peace appears to functionally be the guarantee of a peace, of a blessed life under the protection and care of God.

*The "perpetual priesthood" was already secured for Aaron and his sons:*

It was secured by statute: "And the priesthood shall be theirs by a statute forever." Exodus 29:9

It was secured by anointing: "And their anointing shall admit them to a perpetual priesthood throughout their generations." Exodus 40:15

It was secured as a gift: "I give your priesthood as a gift...." Numbers 18:7

However, this covenant expressed here in Numbers 25 was not just an affirmation of the prior, but was a more precise directing of it to the line of Phinehas (son of Eleazar, son of Aaron).

The priestly line is narrowed from Aaron's sons, to Phinehas' sons, and later to Zadok's sons. Note that it is the sons of Zadok who serve as priest in the yet to be realized Temple in the Millenium as described in magnificent detail by the priest and prophet Ezekiel, thereby affirming this perpetual priesthood.

"And he said to me, "This chamber that faces south is for the priests who have charge of the temple, and the chamber that faces north is for the priests who have charge of the altar. These are the sons of Zadok, who alone among the sons of Levi may come near to the LORD to minister to him." Ezekiel 40:45-46

"And he said to me, "Son of man, thus says the Lord GOD: These are the ordinances for the altar: On the day when it is erected for offering burnt offerings upon it and for throwing blood against it, you shall give to the Levitical priests of the family of Zadok, who draw near to me to minister to me, declares the Lord GOD, a bull from the herd for a sin offering." Ezekiel 43:18-19

"But the Levitical priests, the sons of Zadok, who kept the charge of my sanctuary when the people of Israel went astray from me, shall come near to me to minister to me. And they shall stand before me to offer me the fat and the blood, declares the Lord GOD." Ezekiel 44:15

"This shall be for the consecrated priests, the sons of Zadok, who kept my charge, who did not go astray when the people of Israel went astray, as the Levites did." Ezekiel 48:11

Phinehas' act also made atonement for Israel, an atonement not by the sacrifice of an animal or even through the burning of incense, but through the death of two people - two people exemplifying the vulgarity of the offense of idolatry and unholy assimilation.

### **25:14, *The guilty parties – leadership among the peoples.***

The name of the guilty Israelite is provided, and it identifies him as a chief within the tribe of Simeon and therefore an object of the prescribed judgment of God through Moses (subject to execution before The LORD).

It is important to remember at this time that Phinehas was not being a vigilante, he was being obedient in the most demanding and loving way. We have certainly not been called to a like act of obedience, but what we have been instructed in throughout the New Testament Scriptures, in ways that are quite clear, is to demand obedience in the most loving way within the church.

### **25:15-18, *The guilt of the Midianites in the offense of Baal of Peor.***

The name of the Midianite is also provided and it identifies her as the daughter of a tribal head within Midian. This was a dual blow to both nations for their wicked offense and whereas 24,000 in Israel died (25:9), Midian would now be struck down by Israel under the authority and command of The LORD.

### ***Subsequent References to this Incident***

"And now, O Israel, listen to the statutes and the rules that I am teaching you, and do them, that you may live, and go in and take possession of the land that the LORD, the God of your fathers, is giving you. You shall not add to the word that I command you, nor take from it, that you may keep the commandments of the LORD your God that I command you. Your eyes have seen what the LORD did at Baal-peor, for the LORD your God destroyed from among you all the men who followed the Baal of Peor. But you who held fast to the LORD your God are all alive today." Deuteronomy 4:1-4

"Then they yoked themselves to the Baal of Peor, and ate sacrifices offered to the dead; they provoked the LORD to anger with their deeds, and a plague broke out among them. Then Phinehas stood up and intervened, and the plague was stayed. And that was counted to him as righteousness from generation to generation forever." Psalm 106:28-31

"Like grapes in the wilderness, I found Israel. Like the first fruit on the fig tree in its first season, I saw your fathers. But they came to Baal-peor and consecrated themselves to the thing of shame, and became detestable like the thing they loved." Hosea 9:10

Even Revelation 2:14 has the presumption that the account of Numbers 25 is known...

"And to the angel of the church in Pergamum write: 'The words of him who has the sharp two-edged sword. 'I know where you dwell, where Satan's throne is. Yet you hold fast my name, and you did not deny my faith even in the days of Antipas my faithful witness, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells. But I have a few things against you: you have some there who hold the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, so that they might eat food sacrificed to idols and practice sexual immorality. So also you have some who hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans. Therefore repent. If not, I will come to you soon and war against them with the sword of my mouth.'" Revelation 2:12-16

### ***A tale of two passions: Levi and Phinehas.***

*Whereas* the unrestrained anger of Levi (and Simeon) put Israel in grave danger, it was Phinehas' jealousy for The LORD that preserved Israel, and whereas Levi (and Simeon's) anger is cursed, Phinehas' passion is blessed.

*Whereas* the unrestrained anger of Levi (and Simeon) scattered their posterities, it was Phinehas' jealousy for The LORD that gave his posterity a sure and enduring line and a promise of high service as priest.

*Whereas* the unrestrained anger of Levi (and Simeon) was unrestrained vengeance, it was Phinehas' jealousy for The LORD that was secured in just obedience. John Calvin speaks to this and provides wise counsel.

"For this they chiefly urge, that it would have been wickedness to allow such disgrace in the elect and holy people: but they themselves, through the hatred of one sin, rush furiously forward to greater and more intolerable crimes. There we must beware, lest, after we have become severe judges in condemning the faults of others, we hasten inconsiderately into evil. But chiefly we must abstain from violent remedies which surpass the evil we desire to correct."<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> John Calvin; Calvin's Commentaries, Volume 1 – Genesis. Baker Books, 2003. Pg.221



## **Phinehas' Passion for God**

### **Finding Phinehas in *The Book of Numbers***

#### **Phinehas, son of Eleazar, son of Aaron**

##### Numbers 26

A second census or numbering of all the tribes, except Levi, was ordered by The LORD. This was a completely new group of people as the prior generation died under judgment in the wilderness with the exception of Joshua and Caleb. Eleazar would also be in their company except that he is of the tribe of Levi, not counted in the census.

The original census 603,550 (2:32) and the service census 601,730 (26:51) - just less than 2,000 person difference - Levites excluded.

##### Numbers 27

The LORD directed Moses to make Joshua his successor as leader of Israel since Moses would not continue to lead Israel into the Promised Land himself on account of his sin of failing to treat The LORD as holy before the people.

Moses will die outside of the Promised Land.

##### Numbers 28-29

Instructions for sacrifices that The LORD required of Israel.

##### Numbers 30

Instructions for vows and headship/submission expressed with vows.

##### Numbers 31

The LORD commands Moses to have Israel avenge themselves against the Midianites for their prior offense.

Phinehas was sent into the battle with the vessels of the sanctuary and the trumpets for the alarm. It appears that he has assumed the role of priestly responsibilities under the leadership of his father, Eleazar, who is now the high priest.

Directions for a distinction to be made for both the high priest and the Levites regarding the spoil of the conquered Midianites.

##### Numbers 32

Gad, Reuben, and the half-tribe of Manasseh requested the land of Gilead for their inheritance (East of the Jordan) - this was permitted to them so long as they join with the other tribes in the conquest of the Promised Land.

The terms of this agreement were secured by Moses and would be enforced by Eleazar and Joshua.

##### Numbers 33

A detailed log of Israel's travel through the wilderness - with the particular inclusion of Aaron's death.

Instructions regarding the conquest: destroy the idols and drive out the inhabitants.

"Speak to the people of Israel and say to them, When you pass over the Jordan into the land of Canaan, then you shall drive out all the inhabitants of the land from before you and destroy all their figured stones and destroy all their metal images and demolish all their high places." Numbers 33:51-52

No assimilation or integration... this idolatrous culture must be stamped out.

## Numbers 34

Boundaries are provided for the Promised Land. This was a matter of no small consequence... this was the land promised to the Patriarchs and down through their descendants for this very moment.

Those who were to divide the allotments were Eleazar the high priest, Joshua the chief leader of the people, and the chiefs among the respective tribes.

## Numbers 35

Cities of refuge are explained - function, number, locations, and rules. These are among the allotments for the Levites.

One who is guilty in the death of another man remains in the city of refuge until the death of the high priest.

Note that the sure death of the high priest secures a prescribed order/structure - it was plain that he would die...

## Numbers 36

Case law was established to preserve the integrity of each tribe's inheritance - even females with special inheritance rights must respect prescribed safeguards to keep the tribal inheritances true.

## **Phinehas' Passion for God**

### **Phinehas' Passion Continues to Burn Strong**

#### **Phinehas, son of Eleazar, son of Aaron**

## Joshua 22

Phinehas' passion ran deep, it was not a momentary zeal... this is observed in the incident that was recorded in Joshua 22 where the two and a half tribes that chose to settle on the opposite side of the Jordan were released from their military service to the other tribes, having fulfilled their duty, and who were thought to be making an idolatrous altar when really it was an altar of remembrance to identify them with the whole of Israel. It was at this time when it was presumed that an idolatrous faction had arisen that Phinehas and chiefs among the tribes took action, fearing that there was to be a like offense as occurred at Peor as recorded in Numbers 25.

"And the people of Israel heard it said, 'Behold, the people of Reuben and the people of Gad and the half-tribe of Manasseh have built the altar at the frontier of the land of Canaan, in the region about the Jordan, on the side that belongs to the people of Israel.' And when the people of Israel heard of it, the whole assembly of the people of Israel gathered at Shiloh to make war against them. Then the people of Israel sent to the people of Reuben and the people of Gad and the half-tribe of Manasseh, in the land of Gilead, Phinehas the son of Eleazar the priest, and with him ten chiefs, one from each of the tribal families of Israel, every one of them the head of a family among the clans of Israel. And they came to the people of Reuben, the people of Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh, in the land of Gilead, and they said to them, 'Thus says the whole congregation of the LORD, 'What is this breach of faith that you have committed against the God of Israel in turning away this day from following the LORD by building yourselves an altar this day in rebellion against the LORD? Have we not had enough of the sin at Peor from which even yet we have not cleansed ourselves, and for which there came a plague upon the congregation of the LORD, that you too must turn away this day from following the LORD? And if you too rebel against the LORD today then tomorrow he will be angry with the whole congregation of Israel. But now, if the land of your possession is unclean, pass over into the LORD's land where the LORD's tabernacle stands, and take for yourselves a possession among us. Only do not rebel against the LORD or make us as rebels by building for yourselves an altar other than the altar of the LORD our God.'" Joshua 22:11-19

"When Phinehas the priest and the chiefs of the congregation, the heads of the families of Israel who were with him, heard the words that the people of Reuben and the people of Gad and the people of Manasseh spoke, it was good in their eyes. And Phinehas the son of Eleazar the priest said to the people of Reuben and the people of Gad and the people of Manasseh, 'Today we know that the LORD is in our midst, because you have not committed this breach of faith against the LORD. Now you have delivered the people of Israel from the hand of the LORD.' Then Phinehas the son of Eleazar the priest, and the chiefs, returned from the people of Reuben and the people of Gad in the land of Gilead to the land of Canaan, to the people of Israel, and brought back word to them. " Joshua 22:30-32

This was almost detrimental 'friendly fire' - thankfully it was averted, but their zeal for the holiness of God was clear!

### **Zeal For God, Applied. Week One.**

We begin 2017 examining a wonderful book of the Old Testament while giving primary attention within that examination to the zeal of a faithful man whose heart burned with God's jealousy. It is my prayer for you that you would begin the year not with resolutions... but with resolve for zeal!

What does that look like? A zeal for God and his kingdom looks like having our affections and passions securely rooted in God and this is accomplished by the following means:

Becoming strong in the Scriptures: reading, musing, listening, and studying.

Being fervent in prayer (a primary emphasis that we will assume this year in Sunday School).

Being aggressive toward sin: mortifying the flesh, fleeing temptation, and consistent in repentance.

By loving Christ's Church: fulfilling love's demands in mutual care and building up of one another, worshipping together, serving together, and growing in grace together.

*Remember, Phinehas was not made in that one moment of passion.* That one moment reflected a life seasoned in holiness, a life witnessing his father's service and participating in service himself, a life of loving the God for whom his passions ran deep.

Remember also that Phinehas was not defined by his bloodline, but he was shaped by it. His life was part of a larger history and so is your own.

So, what is your passion? Depending on how you answer you may need to reprioritize life... put some things to death... and commit to moving forward by driving deep roots in a passion for God.

Having a passion for God (or pursuing one now), consider:

How are you cultivating a passion for God?

How are you sustaining a passion for God?

How are you cultivating a context for others having a passion for God?

Are you being a faithful steward of the 175 years of history that Pray's Mill Baptist Church has enjoyed, and will you cultivate its strength for the years to come so that its people, our legacy, would be a people of passion for God?

Are you being a faithful steward of the 500 years of Reformation... the unique time in church history when, after a tragic season of darkness within the church, the Lord graced his bride with reinvigorated life?

## **Zeal For God, Applied. Week Two.**

Zeal or Passion will cost time, money, and strength - what does that look like for you? Have you so highly valued the Lord that everything else is as but loss....

"I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith—that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead." Philippians 3:8-11

Passion is rooted in faithful obedience: loving God and loving our neighbor - what does that look like for our context? As individual believers, in our homes, in our Sunday School Classes, and in the church as a whole?

How might zeal for God demonstrate itself in the following areas in and through our local church:

Prayer: we will be giving the majority of our time in 2017 to prayer. What will you do with this effort?

Bible Study and Reading: will you commit to being mightier in the Scriptures or simply content to have them readily available for occasional reference and contemplation?

Body Life of the Church: will you commit to being faithful to come and participate in Sunday School, in Worship Services, and Bible Study? Further, will you come prepared – rested, attention focused, and having given prayerful study and attention to the Scriptures that we will examine together?

Pastoral Care: will you submit yourself and your family to the care of the under-shepherds that the Chief Shepherd has providentially put over you in the local church for your shepherding, teaching, correction, and care?

How will you be defined: passion for family and reputation (Genesis 34) or zeal for God (Numbers 25)?

There was substantial emphasis on idolatry and its provoking The LORD to jealousy... idolatry comes in an unimaginable breadth of forms. Will you commit to having your passion or zeal for God be in the destruction and opposing of idols in your life and heart?

Will you walk with wisdom? Remember, it is not that Israel was ignorant of the desires of The LORD. They had the commands of God directly provided to them – the elements of which distinguished them as a priestly nation, a holy people, a people that were called upon to walk in obedience to their covenant God, The LORD. Remember this and watch both yourself and others – we are all prone to wander.

Finally, it is important to remember at this time that Phinehas was not being a vigilante; he was being obedient in the most demanding and loving way. We have certainly not been called to a like act of obedience, but what we have been instructed in throughout the New Testament Scriptures, in ways that are quite clear, is to demand committed obedience in the most loving way within the church. Will you resolve to act in accordance to what love demands, beginning in your own life?