

Lesson Text

Numbers 25:10-13 (NIV)

¹⁰ The Lord said to Moses, ¹¹ “Phinehas son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron, the priest, has turned my anger away from the Israelites. Since he was as zealous for my honor among them as I am, I did not put an end to them in my zeal. ¹² Therefore tell him I am making my covenant of peace with him. ¹³ He and his descendants will have a covenant of a lasting priesthood, because he was zealous for the honor of his God and made atonement for the Israelites.”

1 Samuel 2:30-36

³⁰ “Therefore the Lord, the God of Israel, declares: ‘I promised that members of your family would minister before me forever.’ But now the Lord declares: ‘Far be it from me! Those who honor me I will honor, but those who despise me will be disdained. ³¹ The time is coming when I will cut short your strength and the strength of your priestly house, so that no one in it will reach old age, ³² and you will see distress in my dwelling. Although good will be done to Israel, no one in your family line will ever reach old age. ³³ Every one of you that I do not cut off from serving at my altar I will spare only to destroy your sight and sap your strength, and all your descendants will die in the prime of life.

³⁴ ““And what happens to your two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, will be a sign to you—they will both die on the same day. ³⁵ I will raise up for myself a faithful priest, who will do according to what is in my heart and mind. I will firmly establish his priestly house, and they will minister before my anointed one always. ³⁶ Then everyone left in your family line will come and bow down before him for a piece of silver and a loaf of bread and plead, “Appoint me to some priestly office so I can have food to eat.””

Today’s Lesson Aims

- **Learning Fact:** To understand how God responded differently to the priestly ministries of the son of Eleazar, and the sons of Eli.
- **Biblical Principle:** To know that God has clear consequences for unfaithfulness.
- **Daily Application:** To identify and correct unfaithfulness and unkept commitment in your own life.

Power Hour Lesson
Summary for
November 5, 2017

**“Faithful God,
Unfaithful People”**

Lesson Text:
Numbers 25:10-13;
1 Samuel 2:27-36

Background Scripture:
Numbers 25;
1 Samuel 2:27-36

Devotional Reading:
Psalm 44:1-8, 13-19, 26

INTRODUCTION

Since 1977, Gallup has been asking people to rate the trustworthiness of various professions. Clergy has usually ranked near the top in these polls. For example, in the 1980s about two of every three Americans agreed that ministers have “high” or “very high” moral standards. In 2013, however, fewer than half of those polled responded in that way. “The Catholic priest abuse stories from the early 2000s helped lead to a sharp drop in Americans’ ratings of clergy, a decline from which the profession has yet to recover fully,” wrote one analyst.

There are some people we instinctively trust and others we do not. When those in vocational ministry misuse their authority, it is not only they who suffer. There is collateral damage when trust is violated. The Bible shows that some of God’s priests were trustworthy, while others were not. As is true today, this made a difference in lives other than their own.

LESSON BACKGROUND

Time: 1405 B.C.; 1011 B.C.

Place: Shittim; Jerusalem

Phinehas #1

Numbers 25:1-9 gives the background to the story of a certain man’s zeal for God and commitment to the covenant of Mount Sinai (the law). The Israelites were camped at Shittim, the final place stopping place before crossing the Jordan (Joshua 2:1; 3:1) and before Moses’ death on Mount Nebo (Deuteronomy 32:48-52). Shittim was about 10 miles east of Jericho.

But tragedy struck when a plague killed 24,000 Israelites because of disobedience to God’s covenant laws (Numbers 25:9). The idolatrous worship of Baal, the main fertility cult, was an abomination to God in combining what today would be considered forms of pornography, idolatry, sexual immorality, and worship of nature (See 25:1-3). Of the Ten Commandments broken, that episode violated at least the first (no other gods), the second (no idols), and the seventh (no adultery). No wonder God’s wrath was poured out against the leaders who encouraged God’s people to yoke themselves to Baal of Peor! (See Numbers 25:4, 5; Deuteronomy 4:3; Hosea 9:10). God’s wrath was withdrawn only when Phinehas intervened in a deadly way (See Numbers 25:6-13). The year was about 1405 B.C.

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Phinehas #2

The second part of the lesson jumps ahead about 400 years to consider another man by the name of Phinehas. He, his brother Hophni, and their father Eli were priests (1 Samuel 1:3). The brothers were corrupt, and they are called “wicked” (2:12).

Their actions in taking advantage of worshippers was a great sin in God’s sight (1 Samuel 2:17). They added to their sin by seducing women who served at the entrance to the tent of meeting and by ignoring their father’s rebuke (2:22-25); they therefore knowingly broke at least the fifth, seventh, and eighth of the Ten Commandments, perhaps others as well (Exodus 20:1-17; Deuteronomy 5:7-21).

The life of godly Samuel sharply contrasts with theirs (see 1 Samuel 1-4). At some point during young Samuel’s formative years, an unnamed “man of God” came to Eli and condemned the unpriestly way that man and his two sons were conducting themselves (2:27-29). The zeal of Phinehas #2 was certainly not like that of Phinehas #1!

What Do You Think?

- What are some ways to be fervent for God today?
- What are some ways your church can promote peace without getting political?
- What specific improvements can Christians make in bestowing honor?
- How would you respond to someone who says that God’s statement in 1 Samuel 2:31 wasn’t fair to future generations?
- Which spiritual disciplines are most helpful to you for remaining faithful? Why?

POINT TO PONDER

- We must realize that our response to God’s faithfulness to us is to be faithful to Him!

CONCLUSION

Unfaithful to Commitments

The apostle Paul used Israel’s experience in the wilderness as a warning against failure in this in our commitment to God (see 1 Corinthians 10:1-10). He exhorts his readers to “not lust after evil things, as they also lusted” (10:6). In other words, Christians are to avoid idolatry, sexual immorality, grumbling against God’s will, etc. When we commit such sin, we are in danger of losing it all! Since we are the ones “on whom the culmination of the ages has come”(10:11), the stakes could not be higher.

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Today, if only you would hear his voice, “Do not harden your hearts as you did at Meribah, as you did that day at Massah in the wilderness, where your ancestors tested me; they tried me, though they had seen what I did. For forty years I was angry with that generation; I said, ‘They are people whose hearts go astray, and they have not known my ways.’ So I declared on oath in my anger, ‘They shall never enter my rest.’”

God rewards those who are faithful to His covenant, and He punishes those who are unfaithful. Let us be aware of our continuing need to examine ourselves in this regard and repent when necessary.

PRAYER

- Heavenly Father, forgive us the sin of unfaithfulness to our priestly covenant responsibilities! Grant us hearts for keeping our commitments to You. May we by Your grace continue to be counted in the community of the committed. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

THOUGHT TO REMEMBER

- Others see God’s faithfulness when we are proven to be faithful!

ANTICIPATING THE NEXT LESSON

- Next week’s lesson is the **“Promise of the New Covenant,”** where God writes His covenant on the hearts of men, women, and children. Study Jeremiah 31:27-34.

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