

PHINEHAS' REMINDERS

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Phinehas was the son of Eliezer, and grandson of Aaron, the first two High Priests in Israel (Num 25:7,11). Thus, Phinehas was the third High Priest in Israel. In Joshua 22:13-15, Phinehas and the princes from each of the ten tribes west of the Jordan river went to Gilead and met with the children of Reuben, Gad and the half tribe of Manasseh. They accused them of rebellion against God in the building of their altar (Josh 22:16), and used two examples from Israel's past in their rebuke. In actuality, the rebuke was not needed in this case, and a potential civil war involving the tribes of Israel was averted. However, Phinehas' warning remains a very appropriate one against the potential influence and consequences of sin.

Israel and Peor

Phinehas first reminded the Israelites of the "iniquity of Peor." Balaam instructed Balak to send women into the camp of Israel to entice them to commit fornication and idolatry and God sent a plague and killed 24,000 Israelites (Num 25; 31:16; Deut 4:3; Hos 9:10; 1 Cor 10:8; Rev 2:14). Phinehas himself stopped the plague by spearing Zimri and Cozbi while they were in the act of fornication (Num 25:7-15; Psa 106:28-31). In Joshua 22:17-19, Phinehas and the ten princes of Israel said, "*Is the iniquity of Peor too little for us, from which we are not cleansed until this day, although there was a plague in the congregation of the Lord, but that ye must turn away this day from following the Lord?* and it will be, seeing ye rebel to day against the Lord, that tomorrow he will be wroth with the whole congregation of Israel. Notwithstanding, if the land of your possession be unclean, then pass ye over unto the land of the possession of the Lord, wherein the Lord's tabernacle dwells, and take possession among us: but rebel not against the Lord, nor rebel against us, in building you an altar beside the altar of the Lord our God."

Israel and Achan

Next, Phinehas reminded his fellow Israelites of the trespass of Achan. Achan took of the cursed things from Jericho and brought them into the camp of Israel and caused Israel to run before the people of Ai where 36 Israelites were killed (Josh 7). Phinehas and the ten princes said, "*Did not Achan the son of Zerah commit a trespass in the accursed thing,*

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(continued)

and wrath fell on all the congregation of Israel? and that man perished not alone in his iniquity” (Josh 22:20). Both of the examples that Phinehas and the princes used illustrated the point that the sinful actions of a few or even one man in Israel could cause God’s anger to be against the entire nation and result in the punishment of all or many in the nation.

The value of the Old Testament

A lesson we learn from this is that God has left us many examples in the scriptures to learn from. The purpose of many of God’s actions and for preserving a record of those actions in His word is to teach all future generations of His people not to repeat the mistakes made by others. All of these examples from both the Old and Testaments still serve this purpose for us today. The “holy scriptures” that Timothy learned as a child (2 Tim 3:15) were the Old Testament scriptures. These Old Testament scriptures are able to make us wise unto salvation. He says that the salvation is found in Christ Jesus (in the New Testament). But the Old Testament, especially by the examples found therein, is able to make us wise unto that salvation that is in the New Testament. That fact makes it very valuable and necessary to study the Old Testament. Several accounts from the Old Testament, particularly relating to the sins committed by the Israelites in the wilderness, are mentioned in 1 Corinthians 10:5-10. Verse 11 of that chapter says, *“Now all these things happened unto them for examples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come.”* Hebrews 3:7-4:11 again uses Israel’s unfaithfulness in the wilderness to warn us not to “fall after the same example of unbelief” (Heb 4:11). Sodom and Gomorrha are “set forth for an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire” (Jude 7), and “an example unto those that after should live ungodly” (2 Pet 2:6). There are many, many other examples of examples being used in God’s word, including the New Testament, to teach us what not to do. (There are also many positive examples we are given to follow, James 5:10-11). Romans 15:4 sums this up by saying, *“For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope.”*