

Numbers 25:11

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, hath turned my wrath away from the children of Israel, while he was zealous for my sake among them, that I consumed not the children of Israel in my jealousy.

Analysis

God's commendation of Phinehas reveals the principle of righteous zeal for God's glory. The phrase 'hath turned my wrath away' uses the Hebrew 'heshiv chamati' (הִשִּׁבֵּתִי), meaning to turn back or avert My burning anger. Phinehas' decisive action (executing an Israelite man and Midianite woman engaged in flagrant immorality and idolatry, 25:7-8) demonstrated the kind of jealousy for God's honor that satisfied divine justice. The phrase 'while he was zealous for my sake' translates 'beqano et-qinati' (בְּקָנָא אֶת-קִנָּתִי), literally 'in his being zealous with my jealousy'—Phinehas' zeal reflected God's own jealous love for His people's purity. This prevented God from consuming Israel 'in my jealousy' (25:11). God's 'jealousy' isn't petty envy but passionate commitment to His people's exclusive devotion, like a husband's rightful expectation of marital faithfulness. Phinehas' reward was a covenant of perpetual priesthood (25:12-13). This narrative is difficult for modern readers who value tolerance above holiness, but it demonstrates that God's people must actively oppose sin that defiles the community and dishonors God.

Historical Context

Numbers 25 records Israel's apostasy at Shittim on the plains of Moab, just before entering Canaan. Balaam's inability to curse Israel (Numbers 22-24) was followed by his evil counsel: seduce Israel into immorality and idolatry with Midianite and

Moabite women (Numbers 31:16, Revelation 2:14). The plague killed 24,000 Israelites (25:9). Phinehas, Aaron's grandson and son of Eleazar the high priest, executed summary judgment on an Israelite chief and Midianite princess engaged in public fornication and Baal worship (25:6-8, 14-15). This bold action stopped the plague and earned Phinehas God's covenant of peace and eternal priesthood (25:12-13). Later, Phinehas served as high priest and is commended in Scripture for his zeal (Psalm 106:30-31, 1 Maccabees 2:26, 54). His action illustrates the principle that love for God sometimes requires opposing evil decisively.

Related Passages

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

James 2:17 — Faith and works

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

Study Questions

1. How can we cultivate zeal for God's glory without falling into self-righteous judgmentalism?
2. What does God's commendation of Phinehas teach about the place of holy anger against sin?
3. How should church discipline function today to protect God's honor and the community's purity?
4. In what ways does this passage challenge contemporary tolerance that accommodates sin?
5. What is the difference between godly jealousy (for God's honor) and sinful jealousy (self-centered envy)?

Interlinear Text

פִּינְהָס | בָּנִי | אֶלְעָזָר | בָּנִי | הַכֹּה | אֶפְרָאֵל |
Phinehas from the children of Eleazar from the children of Aaron the priest
H6372 H1121 H499 H1121 H175 H3548

בְּקָרְבָּתִי | מֵעַל | בָּנִי | בָּנִי | יְשָׁרָאֵל | בְּקָרְבָּתִי |
away my wrath from the children of Israel for my sake
H7725 H853 H2534 H5921 H1121 H3478 H7068

בְּקָרְבָּתִי | אֶלְאֶת | בָּנִי | כָּל | יְהִי | אֶת | בָּנִי |
for my sake among them that I consumed from the children
H853 H3808 H3615 H853 H1121

בְּקָרְבָּתִי | יְשָׁרָאֵל |
of Israel for my sake
H3478 H7068

Additional Cross-References

Psalms 78:58 (Parallel theme): For they provoked him to anger with their high places, and moved him to jealousy with their graven images.

Deuteronomy 32:21 (Parallel theme): They have moved me to jealousy with that which is not God; they have provoked me to anger with their vanities: and I will move them to jealousy with those which are not a people; I will provoke them to anger with a foolish nation.

Deuteronomy 32:16 (Parallel theme): They provoked him to jealousy with strange gods, with abominations provoked they him to anger.

Exodus 20:5 (Parallel theme): Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me;

1 Corinthians 10:22 (Parallel theme): Do we provoke the Lord to jealousy? are we stronger than he?

2 Corinthians 11:2 (Parallel theme): For I am jealous over you with godly jealousy: for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ.

1 Kings 14:22 (Parallel theme): And Judah did evil in the sight of the LORD, and they provoked him to jealousy with their sins which they had committed, above all that their fathers had done.

Zephaniah 1:18 (Judgment): Neither their silver nor their gold shall be able to deliver them in the day of the LORD'S wrath; but the whole land shall be devoured by the fire of his jealousy: for he shall make even a speedy riddance of all them that dwell in the land.

Zephaniah 3:8 (Parallel theme): Therefore wait ye upon me, saith the LORD, until the day that I rise up to the prey: for my determination is to gather the nations, that I may assemble the kingdoms, to pour upon them mine indignation, even all my fierce anger: for all the earth shall be devoured with the fire of my jealousy.

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