

Zealous Like Phinehas Numbers 25:1-13

Zeal is the characteristic that we might describe as being overly passionate about something. We sometimes say someone “is on fire” about an idea; that is zeal. Is zeal a virtue? It seems as though our world would say it is not; many are uncomfortable by zeal. But we see in Scriptures that God desires zealous servants.

Numbers 25 is preceded by the record of Balak hiring Balaam to curse the Israelites. It backfires because God protects His people, and ultimately Balaam blesses them instead. But between chapter 24 and 25 something happened; “.....the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit sexual immorality.” (Revelation 2:14). So chapter 25 begins with that degradation. Phinehas preserved the nation of Israel by acting on zeal and slaying the offenders before the whole congregation. God rewarded him with a covenant of peace.

God desires zealous servants. David was worked up for God, and God was pleased with David.

Psalm 69:9 *Because zeal for Your house has eaten me up, And the reproaches of those who reproach You have fallen on me.*

Psalm 119:139 *My zeal has consumed me, Because my enemies have forgotten Your words.*

Later these same passages were observed to be prophetic of Jesus when He entered the Temple in John 2:13-17. Consider how the idols of Athens provoked Paul’s spirit to proclaim the Gospel in Acts 17:15-17. Consider too the Corinthians zeal in repentance when they were confronted with error in II Corinthians 7:5-11.

Let’s face it; we have a great need for zeal. We need it in the church according to Revelation 3:14-20. We also need it in our lives and works in Titus 2:11-14. Without the virtue of zeal we are apathetic.

When David recounted the events of Numbers 25, he said:

Psalm 106:30-31 *Then Phinehas stood up and intervened, And the plague was stopped. And that was accounted to him for righteousness to all generations forevermore.*

It is not often that we see the expression “accredited for righteousness”. Abraham is the other person in scripture we see with that expression. It ought to impress us that zeal is a credit of righteousness. Simply put, God expects us to be offended for Him. There are many things that are an offense to God. David pointed out that it insulted him when men insulted God. God is zealous for us; oughtn’t we return the favor?