

CHAPTER H3

THE WHOREDOM OF PEOR

God does all things for our good. For example, He took steps to protect His people from leaven if they married pagan wives. He knew the carnal mind would think freedom of religion was good and that His people would want to permit their pagan wives to continue at least some of their pagan practices, which would then cause God's people to admire some of their worship ceremonies and to incorporate them into Christianity. And then, like Saul with Thanksgiving and David with a "better" temple, the carnal mind would rise up and do what it honestly thought was right by inventing ways to "please" and "serve" God. It is important to understand why the incorporation of pagan ceremonies into Christianity and the invention by Christians of other ways to celebrate God are offensive to Him. We must realize He wants us to do *only what He says* – no more and no less (**Dt 12:29-31**). Why does the Lord say the nice pagan practices used by His people to worship Him are abominations? Because they came from independent minds thinking on their own, because no matter how good the ideas may be they are carnal ideas that are an affront to Him, and because they challenge and resist His prerogative as the one and only Godhead.

We've already seen a number of examples of what happens when we are carnal, such as when the grapes of Eshcol turned sour when God let His carnal Christians go fight by themselves and lose. We cannot win without the arm of the Lord; He is our strength. And if we are carnal He quits helping us because we are glorifying Satan. If we do that which is *right* in our own opinion we shall lose the war.

Pagan **King Balak** saw that God's people were unstoppable; no one could figure out how to defeat them because the Lord fought their battles. So King Balak contacted one of God's prophets, **Balaam**, and asked him to curse God's people (**Nu 22:4-6**). God told Balaam not to curse them (**v.12**). When offered many enticements, however, Balaam finally decided he could serve two masters: He would satisfy God's requirement by not being the one to curse God's people, and get King Balak's reward by telling him the only way God's people could be defeated. In order to view the Christians the two men went up on a high place called Peor (**Nu 23:28**). And there Balaam told King Balak that God's people could not be defeated as long as they were in good with God because He fought for them. Therefore, Christianity had to be defeated from *within*; the people had to become leavened. Because they were special people they were supposed to live peculiar lives, lives that would glorify God by deliberately and obviously relying on Him. That included everything – even their thinking. Living that way was a struggle for them because it was contrary to human Nature and required that invisible element called faith. But if King Balak could somehow penetrate the Hebrews' strict wall of separation from the world by putting the pagan world into their daily lives, human Nature would do the rest. The reason pagans do the things they do is those things seem good and right to them. Therefore if humanistic practices and ideas could be introduced to the Hebrews, at least some of God's people would eventually accept them. And then, seeing sin in the camp, God would leave them to their own devices and they'd become just as vulnerable as any Gentile group. Just as Eve was the best way to get to Adam, said Balaam, so were pagan women the best way to get to Hebrew men.

King Balak took Balaam's advice and ordered the women of his nation to cater to Hebrew men, acquire a reputation for better looks and better sex, become known as less argumentative and more submissive, and be prized as good wives, mothers, and companions. As a result it wasn't long before Israel found itself in deep Shittim (**Nu 25:1**) because of the daughters of Moab.

God, Moses, and Phinehas saw that cutting off the infected members for the good of the rest of the body was necessary (**Nu 25:3-9**). Phinehas became a hero (**Nu 25:10-13; Ps 106:30,31**). God's people went to war in an attempt to eliminate the problem (**Nu 31:7**). And the prophet Balaam was executed for his role in the affair (**v.8**). But while the Hebrews killed all the men (**v.7**), they decided to save the women (**v.9**)! That really angered Moses because he knew the women, in carrying out Balaam's counsel to King Balak up on Peor, caused the Hebrews to "trespass against the Lord" (**vv.14-18**).

How did they "trespass against the Lord"? Certainly they in some way participated in various pagan practices they deemed acceptable (**Nu 25:2,3**). Does that mean they attended pagan religious ceremonies every Wednesday night? Did they pray to false deities? In some cases they probably did, but the majority of God's people didn't realize they'd been suckered into being unfaithful to God, suckered into prostituting themselves, suckered into whoredom. To see what I mean look at Ps 106. Verse 30 says "Then stood up Phinehas, and executed judgment:" *Then* refers to the previous verse that says God's people angered Him with "their inventions." If they had angered Him by attending pagan ceremonies to worship false gods it would say they angered Him with "pagan inventions." Because it says Christians angered God with their inventions we can't help but wonder if these were more carnal "good" ideas like Thanksgiving.

Notice **Ps 106:28** says they joined themselves unto "Baalpeor." Was I correct when I said Balaam advised King Balak to defeat Israel by getting them to use their Natural Reason in order to offend God? Apparently so: According to **v.13** Christians stopped waiting for God to reveal His will and started *thinking for themselves*. And **v.29** says God was angry because they used their fertile brains to come up with "good" stuff *on their own!*

What "heathen works" did Israel learn (**v.35**)? What "idols" were a snare unto them (**v.36**)? How did they sacrifice their children to devils (**v.37**)? By teaching them to live by "their own works" and by "their own inventions" (**v.39**), and to live by "*their* counsel" (**v.43**). *That* is the carnal mind, it is Reason, it is humanism, it is enmity against God.

And that is all that is required for Satan to win. That is the doctrine of devils, the leaven of the Pharisees – "serving" God in accordance with human Reason instead of according to what He *says*. And, in spite of everything God did to teach, to correct, and to protect His people from their own fertile minds, they were quickly suckered into the kind of ideological whoredom recommended by Balaam up on Peor.

ED: THE FRUITS OF PEOR

Two and a half tribes of Israel were granted permission to stay and live on the east side of the Jordan River. There they built a great unauthorized altar (**Josh 22:10**). Neither Moses (who was dead) nor Joshua ordered it built, and God had given specific instructions about where altars were to be built (**Dt 12:13,14**) and doesn't like it when His servants become independent.

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When the rest of Israel heard what the two and a half tribes had done, they declared war and put the hero of Nu 25, Phinehas, in charge along with other dedicated princes of Israel (**Josh 22:11-14**). Phinehas delivered a great speech to the two and a half (**vv.16-20**) in which he said the unauthorized building of the altar constituted 1) a trespass against God, 2) turning away from *following* God, 3) rebellion against God, and 4) the iniquity of Peor (which the altar showed still hadn't been cleansed from Israel). Phinehas was absolutely correct on all points.

Now, pay attention to the specious defense by the offending two and a half tribes, and remember, the issue was the *unauthorized* building of the altar. The issue was *not* whether or not the altar was a "good" idea: The two and a half began in **v.23** by addressing *why* they built the altar because the carnal mind doesn't think the road to hell is paved with *good* intentions. They said, "Oh, you guys think we've built this altar to turn away from God, but we've built it for the exact opposite reason. Since the Jordan River separates us we don't want your children to someday think our children aren't part of God's special people. So the altar is a reminder, a witness, to future generations that we are all Christians. We even call it *Ed* because that means *witness*" (**vv.24-29,34**).

Now notice as you read the rest of Josh 22 that Phinehas and the other Christians used Reason rather than discernment: *They* were pleased, *they* perceived the Lord was among them, and *they* blessed (thanked) God. (If you don't know *blessed* can mean *thanked* check out **1 Ch 29:10,13,20**). Also notice nowhere does the chapter say *God* was pleased. The point being it is so easy for us to think that whatever *we* think is good will also please God. For example, no matter what great words were thrown around, Josh 22:26 shows the altar was built not for God but for "us." That's why the building in Babel (**Ge 11:4**) displeased God. Again, thoughtfully compare **1 Ch 23:5** with **Am 6:5**.

Because of the carnal mind's whoredom of Peor (doing what we think is right and good), there are many "Eds" in Christianity. King Manasseh and his people, for example, wouldn't listen to God (**2 Ch 33:1-10**). So the Lord punished Manasseh and got his attention (**vv.11-13**), whereupon Manasseh got rid of all unauthorized ways of worship (**v.15**) and commanded Christians to serve the true God (**v.16**). The word *Nevertheless* in **v.17** indicates Christians, when they sacrificed in the high places, were *not* serving the true God. OK, that's easy to understand because the Lord never authorized high place sacrifices, but the last phrase *yet unto the LORD their God only* is quite revealing. It, combined with the meaning of *Nevertheless*, shows the unauthorized worship was not worshipping the true God – *even though it was directed at and intended to glorify the true God*. In other words, because God gave them specific instructions on where to offer sacrifices, and because He said not to "Christianize" pagan celebrations or to carnally invent "Christian" celebrations (**Dt 12:30-32**), it didn't matter if His people honestly and sincerely wanted, intended, and thought they were glorifying God: "Christianized" pagan celebrations such as sacrificing in the high places to Jesus Christ and celebrating Xmas in honor of Jesus Christ are not only carnal and disobedient abominations to God, they are also complete wastes of time because the Bible shows the celebrations are *not* honoring the true God. They are the whoredom of Peor – God's people doing that which *they think* will please God. They are nothing but more Eds. When we "fear" God with our Eds, we are *not* fearing God: **2 Ki 17:32-34,41**.

Because of what we've just learned we have cleared up an "error" in the Bible: Did King Jehoshaphat take away the high places (**2 Ch 17:6**) or did he not take them away (**1 Ki 22:43**)? If the verses are mutually exclusive one of them *must* be an error. How can both verses be correct? Let's say there were fifteen high places, eleven of them were in honor of pagan deities, and four were (intended and thought to be) in honor of the true God. Jehoshaphat, therefore, may have only considered the eleven to be true high places because a high place was *pagan*. The four other places were *Christian* (he thought) and therefore weren't really high places. And that interpretation is quite possible based on what we learned about the way God's people used high places to (they thought) glorify Him. Therefore 2 Ch 17:6 could be correctly praising Jehoshaphat for taking away the eleven high places, while 1 Ki 22:43 correctly says he failed to take away the four. (Note the similar high place "contradiction" in **2 Ch 14:3** and **15:17**. And then apply what we just learned by noting in v.3 the operative word is "strange.")

At any rate, we need to be more like King Jehoshaphat for the two reasons in **2 Ch 17:3,4**: First, his Christian walk was proper because he lived it by consulting God through His word. Second, he avoided the ways of our old friend Balaam from Peor. It is quite possible Jehoshaphat erred and allowed the four high places to remain because, even though he wanted to avoid the whoredom of Peor (and was generally successful in doing so), he just didn't understand how Ed could be bad and didn't understand how the four could be bad. That should illustrate how subtle and deceptive our carnal minds can be. We truly do have to develop a servant's mentality and hang on our Lord's every word in order to more perfectly know His will, and in order to understand the whoredom of Peor is a big problem for Christians today – and its subtlety is ruining the church from within.