

The Zeal of Phineas

# The Zeal of Phineas

## SLIDE: ZEALOUS FOR GOD

Good morning, saints!

Today's topic is on being zealous God. Did you even think about why we like to see movies where the good guy wins in the end? Whether it be the Rock, or John Wayne or the superheroes – like in Guardians of the Galaxy. Perhaps it is an echo of something that we know it right.

I was sad to hear that (Lawrence Peter) Yogi Berra died Tuesday night at the age of 90. He died on the same day as his MLB debut 69 years ago. Believe it or not, I am old enough to have seen him play, and I had his baseball cards when I was a kid – they'd be worth a lot of money today if my mom hadn't given them away to my cousin when I was away at college.

Even as a Red Sox fan, I always liked him, both for his ability as a player and for his quotes.

A reporter once asked Yogi about why the Yankees had just a mid-summer series to the last-place Kansas City Royals. He replied: "*The lousy teams are good this year.*"

The Zeal of Phineas

- “Always go to other people's funerals, otherwise they won't come to yours.”
- “I usually take a two-hour nap from one to four.”
- “Never answer an anonymous letter.”
- “When his wife asked him where he would like to be buried when he died, he replied “I don't know – surprise me”
- “When you come to a fork in the road take it”
- “Why buy good luggage, you only use it when you travel.”
- “The towels were so thick there I could hardly close my suitcase.”
- About some Fans were running naked across the field: he said: “I don't know (if they were male or female). They had bags over their heads.”
- “Half the lies they tell about me aren't true.”
- “Love is the most important thing in the world, but baseball is pretty good, too.”

~~~~

**SLIDE:** YOM KIPPUR

Also last Tuesday from sundown to nightfall on Wednesday was Yom Kippur. This is known as the Jewish Day of Atonement – Yom means "day" in Hebrew and Kippur comes from a root that means "to atone". It is the anniversary when Moses brought the 2<sup>nd</sup> set of tablets down from Mt Sinai.

The Zeal of Phineas

Leviticus 16:29 mandates establishment of this holy day on the 10th day of the 7th month as the Day of Atonement for sins. “It is the day that the the High Priest entered the Holy of Holies, *the holiest of places which is beyond the dimensions of time and space*, and lays down the ketoret incense offering upon the Foundation stone from which the world was created, and upon which rests the Ark of the Covenant, the bearer of God's eternal covenant with Israel.”<sup>1</sup>

The slide shows a quote from the Talmud (Hebrew commentary on the Scripture) that described several peculiar phenomena associated with Yom Kippur that occurred just before the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem in 70AD.

*“Our rabbis taught: During the last forty years before the destruction of the Temple the lot ['For the Lord'] did not come up in the right hand; nor did the crimson-colored strap become white; nor did the western most light shine; and the doors of the Hekel (Doors into Holy Place) would open by themselves”* Soncino version, Yoma 39b

Notice that the text mentions that these occurrences went on for the 40 years prior to the destruction of the Temple in 70AD. – And what happened 40 years prior to the destruction? The crucifixion of Christ. The quote mentions several things that were effected:

---

<sup>1</sup> The Temple Institute, templeinstitute.org

The Zeal of Phineas

- THE LOT FOR THE LORD: Part of the temple ritual as mandated by Scripture<sup>2</sup> was taking two identical goats and choosing between them by using lots. The word L-YHWH ("For the Lord") was written on one and La-‘Azazel ("For Azazel") on the other. The one for which the Lord’s Lot was drawn would be sacrificed and the blood carried by the High Priest into the Holy of Holies; the other one would be let loose in the wilderness. This was the *scape goat*”, and the priest would lay the sins of the people on its head and then it would be taken away, where it would be pushed off a cliff about 12 miles outside of the city.

The High Priest picked the goats randomly using two stones; the first one in his right hand would be for goat #1, and the second for goat #2. Each year, the selection would have been 50/50 as to which stone was in his right hand. But for forty years in a row after the crucifixion, the High Priest always picked the black stone first! The lot for Azazel, the black stone, contrary to all the laws of chance, came up 40 times in a row from 30 to 70 AD! This was considered a dire event for Israel and signified something had fundamentally changed in this Yom Kippur ritual.

---

<sup>2</sup> Leviticus 16:8

The Zeal of Phineas

- It had – Christ, Whose death made our scarlet sins as white as snow, now prevails, and the sacrificial system was no longer needed for the forgiveness of sins.<sup>3</sup>

- CRIMSON-COLORED STRAP

While not mandated by Scripture, the ritual also involved two pieces of crimson (red) straps. These lengths of wool were specifically dyed crimson on account of the verse which reads, "Though your sins are as scarlet, they shall whiten as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be white as wool" (Isaiah 1:18).

One piece was tied to the scapegoat and one remained with the goat to be sacrificed for sin. It would be tied to the entrance of the Sanctuary where all could see it, high up like a banner. When the scapegoat reached its destination in the desert, this red strap in the Temple would miraculously turn white before the eyes of all Israel, in keeping with the words of the prophet – and thus providing a Heavenly sign that the sins of the people had been atoned for. The belief was that if it turned white, the Lord forgave all their sins for the past year; if it did not turn white, it was an indication of God's displeasure.

---

<sup>3</sup> Note: there is indication in Scripture that sacrificial offerings *may* reoccur after Christ returns, but these would only be a memorial type of offering and not for covering of sins.

The Zeal of Phineas

But the text on the slide noted that the crimson thread never turned white again for 40 years till the destruction of the Temple and the cessation of all Temple rituals!

- WESTERN-MOST LIGHT ON THE MENORAH

The Menorah is one of the three vessels located in the Holy Place, just outside the Holy of Holies. The Menorah, which was placed on the south side in the Holy Place, symbolizes spiritual blessing.<sup>4</sup> The Menorah had seven branches, and a lamp is on top of each branch. The "western lamp" is unique. According to Rabbi Moses Maimonides, the "western lamp" is the middle lamp of the Menorah and it was to burn continuously. All six flames faced the middle one, and the middle flame in turn faced west, in the direction of the Holy of Holies – hence its name, the "western lamp." It is the candles from which all other candles were lighted, and it was lighted by coals from the altar of sacrifice.

But, the flame on the western lamp, which symbolized spiritual blessing on Israel, would also blow out unexpectedly over this 40 years period.

---

<sup>4</sup> The Menorah, [http://www.templeinstitute.org/illustrated/menorah\\_description.htm](http://www.templeinstitute.org/illustrated/menorah_description.htm)

The Zeal of Phineas

- DOORS OF THE TEMPLE

Finally, the massive outer doors of the Temple into the Holy Place would periodically swing open, indicating that God's presence was no longer there and that the Temple would soon be destroyed.<sup>5</sup>

Amazing...

Today, we're again in chapter 25 of the Book of Numbers. This chapter raises several significant topics for us, among them is God's statement that...

- He is a jealous God – He is jealous for His Glory and His Name, His Reputation.
- We saw that it's easy to get into a spirit of compromise when interacting with other religions and end up denying the One Who saves you. And then,...
- Chapter 25 sets forth the incident where Phineas, the son of the High Priest Eleazar, gets furious over an insult to God's Holiness and takes it upon himself to kill two people, & he is commended by God for doing it.

---

<sup>5</sup> The Jerusalem Talmud states: "Said Rabban Yohanan Ben Zakkai to the Temple, 'O Temple, why do you frighten us? We know that you will end up destroyed. For it has been said, 'Open your doors, O Lebanon, that the fire may devour your cedars' " (Zechariah 11:1)' (Sota 6:3).

The Zeal of Phineas

We looked at the topic of God’s Jealousy for His Glory last time, so I want to look at the incident with Phineas today. **But, I want to point out that THIS incident also is about God’s Glory.** Please keep this in mind as we discuss what happened, because the fact that God commended Phineas’ aggressive zeal to protect His Glory is controversial – both throughout history and even today.

➤ How much zeal for God is good? How far should we go today? How far are we allowed to go as Christians? Should zealots who commit violent acts in the name of God today be commended?

Now – just to let you know, there is more than one Phineas in Scripture – there’s another one 400 hundred or so years later at the time of Saul and David, but he was corrupt. The Phineas here in Numbers chapter 25 is not.

To set this up, I want to briefly review the main point of the previous presentation – the fact that GOD IS JEALOUS (PROTECTIVE) OF HIS GLORY.

Here’s a slide from last time...

**SLIDE:** Do you remember the first *City Slickers* movie with Billy Crystal and Jack Palance? It’s about a group of guys from the city who go on a cattle drive to escape their troubles. Billy Crystal plays the lead city slicker (Mitch Robbins) and Jack Palance plays Curley



The Zeal of Phineas

Washburn, a tough old cowboy. Great dialogue in one particular scene:

Curly (Jack Palance) asks Mitch (Billy Crystal): Do you know what the secret of life is? [and Curly holds up one finger]

Mitch: Your finger?

Curly: One thing. **Just one thing**. You stick to that and the rest don't mean horse pucky.

Mitch: But, what is the **"one thing?"**

Curly: [he smiles] That's what you have to find out.

**'ONE THING!'** That should be the real title of the last presentation.

➤ *What's the One Thing we're to pursue in life?*

It may not be **exactly** what we think.

**SLIDE:** PROTESTANT CATECHISM

For those of you who grew up in denominational protestant churches like the Presbyterians, Question #1 of the Westminster Catechism is:

**What is the chief end of man?**

The Zeal of Phineas

<CLICK>: Answer: *Man's chief end is to **GLORIFY GOD** and to enjoy Him forever.*<sup>6</sup>

Our chief END is to Glorify God.

OK – what does it mean by the word ‘end’? It definitely does not mean it in the same way that we would speak of the end of a jar of peanut butter or the end of a TV show; it isn’t referring to the end of our life either. The Westminster Catechism was written in 1647, and the word ‘end’ here is an old fashion way of saying what a person hopes to accomplish, the PURPOSE of why someone is doing something. “*To what end*” is a modern phrase that captures this concept. To speak of the *end of man* is to speak of our goals, our **purposes**, and the things that we want to accomplish.

Of course, we have many *ends* (plural) in our daily life, don’t we? Some of us work in order to provide for our families – and some of us are retired and spend the day trying to avoid the honey-do lists. From my perspective, both of these ends are valid and commendable.

But some ends are more important than others. The question in the catechism is: “*What is the CHIEF end of man?*” The chief end is that end which is *most important*. It is the one end that should be the compass for guiding the pursuit of *all* other ends.

---

<sup>6</sup> Question #1 Westminster Shorter Catechism [http://www.shortercatechism.com/resources/wsc/wsc\\_001.html](http://www.shortercatechism.com/resources/wsc/wsc_001.html)

The Zeal of Phineas

Well, the chief end of man – the chief **purpose** of our life – is to Glorify God. This is NOT what the *world* would choose for us: such as captured on the bumper sticker that reads “*the one with the most toys when he die wins*”. And, the chief end of man is not the choice that we – on our own *without* Christ – would chose for ourselves. And, perhaps as a surprise, it’s also *not* the choice that we often make *as Christians*. We’re not to obey the commands because we’re supposed to – although that certainly is be a worthwhile choice; we are to obey the commands **because He said to and we glorify Him** when we do so. It’s about motivation! The Pharisees obeyed the commands but many just saw their action as self-righteousness, as a way to demonstrate *their own glory*. We are to glorify God Alone.

The only valid chief end of man is **the end that God has chosen**. And that is to “glorify Him”. We have many other ends in our daily life, but the Glory of God should guide HOW we pursue them. We were **made to glorify Him**, to **reflect His glory** and **announce it to the world**.<sup>7</sup>

What goes our giving Glory to Him entail? (see pdf of last presentation on website). That God be acknowledged as Sovereign, Holy. That His Name be honored, hallowed – that no evil, deceit or untruthfulness be associated with His Reputation.; that credit for all good goes to Him; that credit for salvation goes 100% to Him.

---

<sup>7</sup> Isaiah. 43:6–7

The Zeal of Phineas

This may sound strange, but “**Evangelism isn’t the ultimate goal of the church: worship is.**”<sup>8</sup> Evangelism exists because worship doesn’t. Evangelism isn’t the end but a means to the end, which is God’s glorious rescue of His people to know Him truly, worship Him purely, enjoy Him fully, and glorify Him eternally. **We evangelize in order that God might gather for Himself worshipers from every tribe, tongue, and nation for His glory.** Evangelism is a temporary necessity, but worship abides forever.

OK – NOW, LET’S GET TO THE PHINEAS INCIDENT.

Balaam a famous pagan sorcerer, was hired by Balak, the king of the nation of Moab, to curse the Israelites who are camped in his back yard. Balaam tries three times to do so, but instead of cursing them, God has Balaam bless them.

Well, after being humiliated for the third consecutive time in front of all the leaders of Moab and its ally Midian, King Balak is furious. He snarls at Balaam, telling him that had intended to pay handsomely but now he won’t get anything, and that Balaam can blame the Lord (Yehovah) for this. Instead of a bag full of money and the title of the world’s greatest negotiator with the gods, he will leave with nothing. Balak glares at Balaam, and with clenched lips, he tells him flee – literally ‘flee for yourself’ – and go home. In other words, I might just kill you here and now if you don’t leave.

---

<sup>8</sup> John Piper, Let the Nations Be Glad!, The Supremacy of God in Missions:

The Zeal of Phineas

The last line in Chapter 24 says:

“Then Balaam arose and departed and returned to his place, and Balak also went his way.”

We get the impression that Balaam disappeared without accomplishing his goal. Under threat of physical harm, Balaam returns to his home in Mesopotamia.

**SLIDE: I’VE GOT ANOTHER IDEA**

But, he’s not happy. He realizes that his reputation as a world-famous sorcerer is shot. **This is not going to look good on a resume.** He wants the money and he wants his reputation back, and he eventually comes up with the plan that will cause Israel to sin and be punished by God for their idolatry.<sup>9</sup> Balaam goes to the Midianites with the scheme instead of to king Balak, probably because he feared to face Balak again. His plan plays out in Chapter 25.

**SLIDE: Ok – let’s read **NUMBERS CHAPTER 25:****

“While Israel was staying in Shittim, the men began to indulge in sexual immorality with Moabite women, who invited them to the sacrifices to their gods. The people ate the sacrificial meal and bowed down before these gods. So Israel yoked themselves to the Baal of Peor. And the Lord’s anger burned against them.

---

<sup>9</sup> Numbers 31:16, Revelation 2:14

The Zeal of Phineas

The Lord said to Moses, "Take all the leaders of these people, kill them and expose them in broad daylight before the Lord, so that the Lord's fierce anger may turn away from Israel."

So Moses said to Israel's judges, "Each of you must put to death those of your people who have yoked themselves to the Baal of Peor."

Then an Israelite man brought into the camp a Midianite woman right before the eyes of Moses and the whole assembly of Israel while they were weeping at the entrance to the tent of meeting. When Phinehas son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron, the priest, saw this, he left the assembly, took a spear in his hand and followed the Israelite into the tent. He drove the spear into both of them, right through the Israelite man and into the woman's stomach. Then the plague against the Israelites was stopped; but those who died in the plague numbered 24,000.

The Lord said to Moses, "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. Therefore tell him I am making my covenant of peace with him. 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."

The name of the Israelite who was killed with the Midianite woman was Zimri son of Salu, the leader of a Simeonite family. And the name of the Midianite woman who was put to death was Cozbi daughter of Zur, a tribal chief of a Midianite family." NIV

*May the Lord be on my mind, on my lips and in my heart,  
that I might present the Gospel of Jesus in a manner that  
glorifies Him.*

The Zeal of Phineas

OK – Israel is still camped in the land of Moab across the Jordan River from Canaan. The Israelites (including Moses) were *still* blissfully unaware of the King of Moab’s ongoing intention to destroy them.

Along come attractive Moabite and Midianite women who make friends with the Israelite men. The plan is to have them seduce the Israelite men into worshipping their god Baal, and their tactic is to invite them to sacred banquets where sacrifices are offered to the god Baal accompanied by ritual prostitution. The plan succeeds.

Yehovah is furious at this cosmic treason and instructs Moses to have the leaders of the tribes killed and hung up. Moses *revises* the order to lessen its severity and tells the judges of each tribe to have the ringleaders killed. But, nothing is done, so God takes action Himself with a plague.

This incident of idolatry less well known than the Golden Calf indecent, but it is more significant. After the Golden Calf incident, only 3,000 people died – and they were all offenders. But here on the Plains of Moab, 24,000 people died in the plague after the idolatry, and it is doubtful that *all* of them were guilty of the transgression. **God’s punishment for idolatry here in Moab is much more severe than that for the Golden Calf.**<sup>10</sup> Why???

---

<sup>10</sup> Samson Raphael Hirsch in his commentary to this chapter of the Torah

The Zeal of Phineas

- Well, at Mt. Sinai, the people were in the infancy state of their relationship with Yehovah, they thought Moses had died on the Mountain and they wanted something tangible to follow and reassure them. The Golden Calf was definitely forbidden; Aaron tried to remind them of Yehovah<sup>11</sup>, the people saw it as an idol of the gods who took them out of Egypt<sup>12</sup>. It was wrong, but monotheism was all new for many of them.
- But at Peor, after almost 40 years of God's provision, they intentionally worshipped another god – Baal – that's why it was more serious.
- Much of this 2<sup>nd</sup> generation of Israelites is actually more spiritually corrupt than the first one.

**SLIDE: MAP OF ENCAMPMENT & INDECENT**

Here's a slide showing the Israelite Encampment. The Tabernacle is in the center, with the Levites clans camped around it to protect it from trespassers, and the tribes camped father out in four divisions of three tribes each.

<CLICKS>

- MOSES AND THE LEADERS GATHER AT THE ENTRANCE TO DISCUSS AND MOURN THE SITUATION.

---

<sup>11</sup> Exodus 32:5 – Aaron said, "Tomorrow will be a feast to the Lord."

<sup>12</sup> Exodus 32:4 - "Then they said, 'These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt.' "



The Zeal of Phineas

- <click> The Levites camped around the Tabernacle to protect God's Holiness. No unauthorized person was allowed near here under pain of death.
- <click> The Tribe of Simeon is camped on the south side of the encampment, closest to Moab people.
- <click> Zimri – the son of a clan leader of the tribe of Simeon, and Cosbi – the daughter of a Midianite clan leader – stroll into camp. Their appearance can be plainly seen by Moses and the other leaders, and Zimri doesn't care. He sees nothing wrong with intermarriage with idolaters or other gods, and he obviously wants to force the issue using his status as the son of a clan leader. They enter the family tent in order to have sexual relations.
- <click> Phineas grabs a spear, follows them into the tent and kills both of them.

Now, just walking into the camp was a violation of the Law. Gentiles were considered unholy and unclean, they weren't *allowed* into the camp, yet Zimri does the unthinkable by bringing his pagan finance into the camp in proximity to the Tabernacle 'in the sight of congregation' – meaning the leaders and those in the vicinity.

But, Moses and the other leaders just sit there and do nothing.

The Zeal of Phineas

**SLIDE: PINCHAS**

Phineas, who is the grandson of Aaron and the son of the present High Priest Eleazar, gets enraged at this insult to God. There are several versions of the name Phineas: in Hebrew, it is Pinchas; in English, it is Phineas, Phinehas and other variations.. [Note: parashet is pronounced 'parachet'] - it is a weekly Torah portion.

Whatever his mother wanted to call him, he was incensed. He was jealous for the Glory of God that was being undermined and mocked. And, he acted. There's no trial; there's no warning; there's no arrest warrant. There is just immediate death. Phineas grabs a spear and follows the couple into the tent and kills them while they're in the very act.

Now, God doesn't normally give spiritual leaders the job of killing their sheep, killing members of the congregation. **I'm certainly glad of this today... [especially after I challenged the outcome of the last Chili Cook-off.]**

Regarding Phineas' action, we need to recall that the tribe of Levi – who were no wimps – had responsibility for protecting God's Holiness in the Tabernacle, and killing an intruder was their mandate; in fact, if they *knowingly* allowed an unauthorized person *near* the Tabernacle compound, they forfeited their own lives.

The Zeal of Phineas

Since Phineas was a priest, he also from the tribe of Levi, so he too was charged with protecting God's Holiness.

What's different here is that Phineas does not kill a would-be trespasser at the Tabernacle, but an idolater in the camp. But, God's Holiness – His Name and His Reputation – was being attacked. Phineas' action is quite compatible with the biblical concept of priesthood; priests represented God before men. A priest's life, his character, must reflect the character of God. When Phineas expressed God's jealousy, His anger, he was just following his calling.

Spiritual adultery, not merely physical adultery, is at the heart of this story. As the context makes clear, Zimri's action was designed as part of a plot to draw Israel into the Midianite religion of Baal worship. And Zimri's act of apostasy was blatant. He and Cozbi did NOT sneak into the tent – they brazenly walked in front of the leaders and Moses. Zimri was directly challenging Yehovah's sovereign right to the exclusive worship of Israel.

- **Phineas knew what he had to do because he knew what his chief end in life was – the Glory of God!**

**SLIDE: THE DESTROYER**

What was the plague? Scripture doesn't say specifically, but it probably was an appearance of something called The Destroyer. In several places of Scripture, we find a supernatural agent of

The Zeal of Phineas

destruction, or destroying angel known as "ha-mashchit" [the Destroyer]. This angelic being or beings acts out God's judgments, sometimes thru plagues and storms, sometimes thru death of those in its path. This is not Satan, even though he also is called the destroyer.

- 1) In Exodus 12:23, we see the "destroyer" who killed the 1<sup>st</sup>-born in Egypt.<sup>13</sup>
- 2) In Job 33:22, we see "the destroyers" (literally, "they that cause to die") = the angels of death that are ready to take away a man's life during severe illness.
- 3) In 2Samuel 24:11–17, a destroying angel kills 70,000 Israelites by a plague because David messed up in taking an unauthorized census.
- 4) In 1Corinthians 10:10, "the destroyer" is the angel to whom Paul attributes an earlier plague in Numbers 16:46–49.
- 5) And in Revelation 7:3, destroying angels are instructed: "Do not harm the land or the sea or the trees until we put a seal on the foreheads of the servants of our God."

Jewish scholars sometimes call this Destroyer "*the Angel of Death*"<sup>14</sup> that can take several forms like I mentioned: earthquakes or plagues. **Once it is let loose, the Destroyer acts without distinguishing between good and bad, innocent or guilty; it is an**

---

<sup>13</sup> Hebrews 11:28 references "the destroyer" in the Passover incident.

<sup>14</sup> Rashi

The Zeal of Phineas

amoral force that simply destroys what is in the path that it was set upon. Here in Numbers 25, 24,000 people die of the plague, and it is doubtful that all 24,000 people killed by the plague participated in the sin of idolatry.

There is nothing one can do to avoid the Destroyer except: (1) completely remove oneself from that place in order to escape, as Noah did in the Ark; or (2) ritual intercession. As for ritual intercession, there seem to be three basic forms that stay the hand of the Destroyer. One is incense, specifically Aaron's incense, as recounted in Numbers 17:12–13.6 Another is sacrifice. Such sacrifices are described in II Samuel 24:15–25, where David gives offerings in Jerusalem. The third involves blood, and is described in Exodus 12:23: For when the Lord goes through to smite the Egyptians, He will see the blood on the lintel and two doorposts, and the Lord will pass over the

**SLIDE: MY JEALOUSY**

"... 'Phineas... was jealous with My jealousy among them, so that I did not destroy the sons of Israel in My jealousy.' " Verse 10–11

**<Click>**: God says – "Phineas... was jealous with MY jealousy". So, God HAS jealousy, and evidently it is possible for us also can have a Godly jealousy!

The Zeal of Phineas

The Hebrew word for jealousy is Qin'ah – which does mean jealously, and it also means **zeal for what belongs to you or your spouse**.<sup>15</sup> In describing the word, The Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament states – “*Idolatry is spiritual adultery and merits death. Phineas played the faithful lover by killing a man and his foreign wife, and thus stayed the wrath of divine jealousy.*”<sup>16</sup>

So, God, thru Phineas, was acting as a faithful lover to protect His people from the spread of spiritual adultery.

**SLIDE: ATONEMENT**

“So it will be to him and his descendants after him a covenant of a permanent priesthood, because he has been zealous for his God, and **has made atonement** for the Israelites.”

Numbers 25:13

The death of the Israelite Zimri, who brazenly insulted the Holiness of God, served as atonement. In fact, his death would be the ONLY thing that could atone for his sin. You see, under the Levitical system, it wouldn't be good enough to offer an animal sacrifice to cover what he did. An animal's death could only atone for the unintentional sin of a person.<sup>17</sup> But a high-handed sin, a sin that you did with full knowledge of the fact that what you would

---

<sup>15</sup> #7068 in Stonng's Exhaustive Concordance.

<sup>16</sup> Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament, (Qanna #2038), p.802.

<sup>17</sup> Numbers 15

The Zeal of Phineas

offend God but you did it anyway, that was intentional sin and there was no atonement for that except your own death!

- The only possible atoning for intentional sin under the Law would be on Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, and that was in the future. – [Jesus High Priest and entered Holy of Holies]

Phineas executed God's death sentence against this one leader, and God's anger was satisfied. *Why just one Israelite death and not more?* Well, I think that there are two great messages here:

- First, I think that it was an *act of grace*, and by this act of grace, God was demonstrating that one sinner's death could atone the sins of many.
- This is an echo of the cross; the difference is that Zimri was *not* innocent; Jesus *was* innocent but was made to be sin on our behalf, and He took God's wrath to stop the plague of spiritual death; and He too received a spear thrust into His body that made sure He was dead.
- The other great message of the incident is that God shows what He wants in His followers: the willingness to act to protect His Honor and Glory.

\*\*\* So again, the main issue here was GOD'S HOLINESS, His Name, His Reputation among the people. Verse 11: "when he (Phineas) manifested **such zeal for my sake** among them."

The Zeal of Phineas

- Phineas showed **leadership**, while those in charge, the supposed leaders, just sat there and complained about how bad things had become.

LEADERS... George Burns – who was a comedian with a very dry sense of humor – if you're old enough to remember George Burns and Gracie Allen – used to joke, *"How come all the people who know how to run the country are cutting hair and driving cabs?"*

What qualities do we look for in a leader? It's unfortunate that we tend to elect national leaders for their ability to articulate what is wrong, just like Moses did here. What is really needed, which few possess, is the understanding of how to make things right!

SLIDE: SEARCH COMMITTEE: Years ago, I was on a search committee for a church looking for a new pastor. We received a number of resumes to our advertisement. Christian churches desire leaders who are dynamic, educated, and entertaining. **But, it is highly unlikely you will ever see 'jealous to protect God's Glory' as one of the desired qualities of leaders within the church.** We certainly didn't have such a criteria when we did it then.

- However, jealousy to protect the Glory of God is one of the PRIMARY ATTRIBUTES of the great leaders in the Bible.



The Zeal of Phineas

Phineas' zeal was motivated by a zeal to protect God's holiness and honor. And after commending Phineas, God says:

"I hereby grant him my covenant of peace. It shall be for him and for his descendants after him a **covenant of perpetual priesthood**, because he was zealous for his God, and made atonement for the Israelites." Numbers 25:12-13

God rewarded Phineas for his actions, somewhat similar to several parables of Jesus. To the servant entrusted with talents who did well, the master said: "'**Well done**, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!'"<sup>18</sup>

Psalm 106 addresses this incident. The Psalm begins with a well-known verse:

"Praise the Lord!  
Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good!  
His faithful love endures forever. "

Then, starting in verse 28, it reads:

**SLIDE: PSALM 106**

"Then they attached themselves to Baal Peor, and ate the sacrifices of the dead. And they angered Him with their behavior, and a plague broke out among them. And Phineas arose and executed judgment, and the plague was halted. **It**

---

<sup>18</sup> Matthew 25:23

The Zeal of Phineas

was accounted to him as a righteous deed, for all generations, forever." Psalm 106:28-31

Psalm 106 remembers the story of what happened at Peor and that God commended Phineas for his action. We are *not* specifically told here that he killed two people – we are told that he “executed judgment”. And it was the *zeal for God’s Name, God’s Reputation as the Holy One*, which motivated him to act.

He executed judgment – this means that this was NOT a jealous RAGE but the same CONTROLLED jealousy that God Himself has.

What would have happened if God *hadn’t* weighed in by making a covenant of peace with Phineas? If He hadn’t, Phineas and his descendants would have been the object of a blood feud with the members of Zimri’s family and perhaps with others in the tribe of Simeon. Now, it’s hands-off Phineas.

The Phineas story is not primarily about an illicit sexual act. I can’t emphasize it enough – this was about protecting the Glory of God. The plague was about God acting to protect His Own Glory, and Phineas’ act was also about protecting His Glory.

Spiritual adultery, not merely physical adultery, is at the heart of this story. As the context makes clear, Zimri’s action was

The Zeal of Phineas

designed as part of a plot to draw Israel into the Midianite religious of Baal worship. And Zimri's act of apostasy was blatant. He and Cozbi did not sneak into the tent – they brazenly walked in front of the leaders and Moses. Zimri was directly challenging Yehovah's sovereign right to the exclusive worship of Israel. Phineas knew what his chief end in life was – the Glory of God!

But – as I said, God's approval of Phineas' conduct is a controversial issue and it has troubled Rabbis down thru the ages.

**SLIDE: IS PHINEAS A HERO OR A VIGILANTE?**

Phineas' extreme act always brings about some sort of reaction. God's statement of reward definitely stated that he approved of what Phineas did. Some Jewish commentators also approved it, praising him for his zeal to follow God in the face of outright profanity of His Name. In fact, Phineas was looked upon as a hero during the revolt of the Maccabees against Greek occupation of Israel that culminated in the miracle of Hanukah.

However, the most common reaction of Jewish rabbis down thru the ages is one of *uneasiness* – that, despite the fact that God is approved of it, they were leery that Phineas' action would inspire others to act as vigilantes.

That seems strange, doesn't it – God says well done, and the most rabbis would have told Phineas to “cool it”. One of the reasons for this is that the Jews were all too familiar with false

The Zeal of Phineas

prophets and false messiahs claiming to do and say things in the name of God but who were likely just attempting to justify violence as a message from God.

This threat of false prophets and false messiahs existed in Jesus' time. You may recall that one of the twelve apostles was Simon Zelotes<sup>19</sup> who was probably a member of the Zealots. Barabbas was clearly a zealot and it is possible that Judas Iscariot had leanings towards their ideas."<sup>20</sup>

The Zealots were a group of people who believed that all means were justified to attain political and religious liberty.<sup>21</sup> They led the Jewish revolt in 66AD that led to the destruction of the temple (70AD). And we have zealots today.

**SLIDE:** Just recently (July 30, 2015), you may have read about the incident in Jerusalem where an Ultra-Orthodox Jewish man (Yishai Schlissel) stabbed six people at a gay pride parade in Jerusalem. An ultra-Orthodox website called the event "the Parade of Abomination." Schlissel said: "*The struggle isn't over, and the unpure want to contaminate Jerusalem... They want to contaminate the people of Israel.*" ~

WAS THAT RIGHTEOUS ZEAL? ...

---

<sup>19</sup> Mark 3:18

<sup>20</sup> Bible.org, The Religious World of Jesus, #6. Zealots

<sup>21</sup> <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/.../revolt.html>

The Zeal of Phineas

**SLIDE: WHAT WOULD YOU DO?**

And ... what about us Christians? What is appropriate zeal – what are the limits of zeal? **Is Phineas an example for us Christians today?**

I think that he **MUST** be an example because God specifically commended Phineas' zeal to protect His Honor – there's no higher commendation than that.

➤ So, the question is **HOW** – how is Phineas a model of for action today on behalf of God's honor?

JUST FOR A MOMENT, PUT YOURSELVES BACK in the Israelite camp when Zimri brings Cozbi into the camp in praise the false god Baal and as a conscious sign of disrespect to Yehovah.

- If **WE** had been there alongside of Moses and Phineas, *what would we have done?* Would we have acted as Phineas did, or would we just sit there as Moses did? Would we go to the tent and threaten to put their picture on Facebook? What would we do? What *should* we do?

Well, **we obviously live in a different time.** Back then, Phineas acted in response to his clear obligation as a Levite to put to death leaders of apostasy. Phineas acted within God's expectations for a godly man in that time and situation.<sup>22</sup>

---

<sup>22</sup> Godly Jealousy, p. 168 -169

The Zeal of Phineas

OK – in light of this, what are OUR responsibilities in our time and situation? **What would Jesus have us do when God's Holiness and Sovereignty is under attack today, when His Name is being openly profaned?**

Before we start to answer that question, let's look at two other men in Scripture who – like Phineas – were zealous for the Glory of God. The first is David.

**SLIDE: DAVID**

In the 1<sup>st</sup> Book of Samuel, chapter 17, we find a conversation by David as the Israelite army faces the Philistine army and their champion Goliath:

Verse 26. "David asked the men standing near him, "What will be done for the man who kills this Philistine and **removes this disgrace from Israel?** Who is this uncircumcised Philistine that he should defy the armies of the living God?"...

- What this is saying is that when God was mocked, David took it personally.

Verse 43. He (Goliath) looked David over and saw that he was little more than a boy, glowing with health and handsome, and he despised him. He said to David, "Am I a dog, that you come at me with sticks?" And the Philistine **cursed David by his gods.**"...

The Zeal of Phineas

- *Cursed David by his gods* – Goliath’s invoking of his gods showed that would not be just a physical battle – there was a theological nature to it.

Verse 45. David said to the Philistine, “You come against me with sword and spear and javelin, but I come against you **in the name of the Lord Almighty, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied.**”

- The Israelite army viewed was happening from a totally different perspective than David. Their concern was their own safety and not wanting to die; David’s perspective was that God’s honor was at stake, and he was not concerned about dying to defend it.

As we read about David’s life, it is obvious that God’s Honor and Glory were his main goals – it is why he was a *man after God’s own heart*.<sup>23</sup> David’s own reputation was *not* his primary concern in battle. Nor was the success of the army of Israel. He would fight simply because it was scandalous that a worshipper of false gods should insulting the Living God Himself. The Honor and the Glory of God before BOTH nations drove David here.<sup>24</sup>

- That’s the reason why he didn’t kill King Saul, although he had several opportunities to do so and, humanly speaking, it would have been in his best interest to do so. He didn’t kill Saul

---

<sup>23</sup> Acts 13:22

<sup>24</sup> Godly Jealousy

The Zeal of Phineas

because Saul was God's *anointed*, and it would be an insult to God's Reputation if David killed him – it would be a sign to other nations that the people of Israel didn't respect Yehovah's choices.

So... Phineas killed Zimri to protect God's honor, David killed Goliath to protect God's honor, and David *didn't* kill Saul in order to protect God's honor.

- Both David and Phineas realized that the chief end of man is not about their personal wellbeing or reputation; it is about the Glorify of God!

The second person I want to look at regarding the Glory of God is Jesus Himself.

**SLIDE: JESUS & THE MONEYCHANGERS**

John chapter 2: "When it was almost time for the Jewish Passover, Jesus went up to Jerusalem. In the temple courts he found people selling cattle, sheep and doves, and others sitting at tables exchanging money. So he made a whip out of cords, and drove all from the temple courts, both sheep and cattle; he scattered the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. 16 To those who sold doves he said, "Get these out of here! Stop turning my Father's house into a



The Zeal of Phineas

market!" 17 His disciples remembered that it is written: 'Zeal for your house will consume me.'" [John 2:13-17]

This is the SAME Jesus who also said, "Blessed are the peace makers..."

*Zeal for Your House will consume me* – John is quoting from Psalm 69, a Psalm of David, as being the motivation behind Jesus' actions.

Psalm 69:8-9 "I am a foreigner to my own family, a stranger to my own mother's children; for zeal for your house consumes me, and the insults of those who insult you fall on me."

Since Jesus only did what He saw the Father doing<sup>25</sup> and He only spoke as to what His Father commanded Him to say,<sup>26</sup> the cleansing of the Temple was what The Father wanted to protect His glory, His Holiness and His Name.

When the Zealots of Jesus' day saw this, they must have been drawn to Him as the possible Messiah who would restore the kingdom and independence of Israel. After all, God's pattern up to now had been that He would rise up zealous prophets and leaders – either to chastise the corrupt leadership and people for their corrupt ways, or who lead successful rebellions against the pagan enemies.

But...notice – Jesus didn't use a sword here.

---

<sup>25</sup> John 5:19

<sup>26</sup> John 12:49

The Zeal of Phineas

- In the garden, Jesus had twelve legends of angels at His disposal, but He didn't call upon them because **the Father's Glory would be better served by the Cross.**

WORKING OUT OF ZEAL IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

Had something *changed* today as to the working out of zeal for the Honor of God? YES. Was this entirely unexpected? Had God just changed His mind and instituted a new drill without any prior announcement? NO! There are plenty of OT prophecies pointing to the Messiah Who would be the Prince of Peace Who would die for the sins of the people, as Jesus explained on the road to Emmaus.<sup>27</sup>

THIS IS AN IMPORTANT SCRIPTURAL PATTERN --- God NEVER changes *anything* IN SECRET. He ALWAYS plainly ANNOUNCES if there *would be* a future change in His interaction with mankind or if He was instituting a change at that moment (ex: Noah, God promised that would never destroy the world again by water.<sup>28</sup>)

- This is important because it is one way of identifying a false teaching. If someone claims that they received a *new revelation* from Jesus but it relies on God having secretly changed how Scripture says He operates, **we know FOR SURE that it is a false teaching!** And if the person claims **the mantle of prophet when making the claim, he/she is a**

---

<sup>27</sup> Luke 24:25-27, Road to Emmaus: "And He said to them, "O foolish men and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary for the Christ to suffer these things and to enter into His glory?" Then beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures."

<sup>28</sup> Genesis 9:11

The Zeal of Phineas

**FALSE prophet. If it doesn't say in Scripture that something *will* change, then it *hasn't* changed, and the teaching will only lead you *away* from Christ's sufficiency!**

With the advent of Jesus, the actions of men regarding zeal for God's Honor take a new form, as prophesied. **This was not Plan B** – it happened exactly how and when God had planned for it to occur – *“in the fullness of time”*. Israel at this point in history wasn't involved in the worship of false gods; the Pharisees insured that the Torah would be observed, and so the situation was different than earlier times. The issue now would be about worshipping God in spirit and in truth. Jesus came to bring that about and advance God's plan to dwell with men.

So, the manner in which zeal for God's Glory is pursued has changed for the Christian. Consider the incident in the Garden of Gethsemane as Jesus was being arrested. Peter draws his sword and cuts off the ear of the high priest's servant. Jesus said – that's enough...

“Put your sword back in its place,” Jesus said to him, “for all who draw the sword will die by the sword. Do you think I cannot call on my Father, and he will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions of angels?”<sup>29</sup> – And then Jesus healed the man's ear.<sup>30</sup>

---

<sup>29</sup> Matthew 26:52-53

<sup>30</sup> Luke 22:51

The Zeal of Phineas

You can't help but notice the radical contrast between the picture of God commending Phineas for his use of the spear, on the one hand, and Jesus' rebuke of Peter for his use of the sword, on the other.

But, GOD's overpowering concern for His Honor and Glory *has NOT mellowed* under the NT. What has changed is the TYPE OF RESPONSE expected of us.

Remember, in Acts chapter 10, we see the incident with Ananias and Sapphira who lied about how much money they were giving to God. Peter said:

"Ananias... Why is it that you have conceived this deed in your heart? **You have not lied to men but to God.**" And as he heard these words, Ananias fell down and breathed his last; and great fear came over all who heard of it."<sup>31</sup>

And in Acts 12, we read of the death of King Herod:

21 On an appointed day Herod, having put on his royal apparel, took his seat on the rostrum and began delivering an address to them. The people kept crying out, "The voice of a god and not of a man!" **And immediately an angel of the Lord struck him because he did not give God the glory,** and he was eaten by worms and died.<sup>32</sup>

---

<sup>31</sup> Acts 5

<sup>32</sup> Acts 12:21-23

The Zeal of Phineas

So, God still takes His Own Glory extremely seriously and will act to protect it, often in ways that we never realize because we don't recognize when The Destroyer is acting.

**BUT, we have NO example of Christians acting out zeal by using physical violence after Pentecost.** Based on Jesus' Own example, jealousy for God's Honor is now channeled thru the proclamation of the Gospel. Jesus put the physical retribution for offending the Father's Glory on hold until He Himself unleashes His final judgment.

When James and John wanted to call down fire to consume the inhospitable Samaritans, Jesus said to them: "You do not know what kind of spirit you are of; for the Son of Man did not come to destroy men's lives but save them".<sup>33</sup>

Paul shows us how we are to fight: "For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses".<sup>34</sup>

**I do think that Phineas is an example for Christians today. We are to hate offenses to God's Glory (Reputation, Name, Honor) NO LESS THAN PHINEAS DID, but we are to fight with different weapons.**

---

<sup>33</sup> Luke 9:55-56

<sup>34</sup> 2Corinthians 10:3-4

The Zeal of Phineas

- **Phineas' spear has been replaced by Paul's epistles.**
- The enemies of God should be fought with the same bold indignation of David, but **RIGHTEOUSNESS**, the **GOSPEL OF PEACE**, and **THE SWORD OF THE SPIRIT** have replaced his stones.”<sup>35</sup>

**SLIDE: ZEAL W/O KNOWLEDGE**

In all our actions, we must guard against zeal without knowledge. Paul wrote:

**“I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. For, being ignorant of the righteousness of God, and seeking to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness”** Romans 10:1–3

**'Seeking to establish their own righteousness'**. We all can think of examples where we were put off by people who thought they were upholding God's Honor but were really upholding their own self-righteousness.

- **Ex. “Praise the Lord” with a sneer**
- **Zeal for offering prophetic words and moves of the Spirit, but barking like dogs?**

---

<sup>35</sup> CREDO Magazine, April 2015, p.20

The Zeal of Phineas

It's our human nature to fall into a mind-set that says we must **ADD something to the finished work of Christ in order for us to be truly acceptable to God.**

Yes, we are to do good works, but our good works are not the means by which we make ourselves more worthy. We are accounted worthy only by the righteousness of Jesus, imputed to us by faith alone.

RECOGNIZING TRUE CHRISTIAN ZEAL<sup>36</sup>

How do we recognize Christian zeal? Is constantly going from meeting to meeting seeking an emotional touch from the Spirit or to hear the latest prophetic teaching? How about sitting on lawn chairs in front of Planned Parenthood Clinic in Hudson with signs that try to convince expectant mothers that they're carrying one of God's precious creations? For my money, I would suspect that the latter does more to advance the Gospel than the former.

One of the obstacles we face today is that we can take passion for Jesus in a person or movement as an indication of godly zeal.

**Passion, in and of itself, is NOT a virtue. One can be passionately mistaken. Passion must be directed toward truth, towards advancing God's Glory, not our personal emotional high.**

---

<sup>36</sup> J. C. Ryle, Christian Zeal, © Copyright Tony Capoccia 2001, <http://www.biblebb.com/files/ryle/zeal.htm>

The Zeal of Phineas

It is true that Jesus rebuked the Church at Ephesus for losing its early love for him.<sup>37</sup> But, Jesus also rebuked the church **in Thyatira**. Unlike the church in Ephesus, the church in Thyatira did have great love and passion – and Jesus commended it – but it also tolerated a false prophecy in its midst.<sup>38</sup> And Christ was not pleased.

The lesson from these two churches is that passion **for Jesus is vital, but so is faithfulness to God's Word.**

- IF OUR ZEAL IS TRUE, IT WILL BE A ZEAL GENERATED FROM TRUE MOTIVES.

True zeal will be gentle, especially when dressing the wounds of a brother. Our motivation must not be to hurt but to bring about healing.

- IF OUR ZEAL IS TRUE, IT WILL NOT BE BITTER

If our zeal for the Glory of God is not packaged in His mercy, then it is not a godly zeal, and we have lost touch with God and are hypocrites. True zeal will not be a fierce hatred of people with whom we disagree. It will not be a zeal that is ready to take up the sword and to lash out. True zeal will hate sin, and yet love the sinner. True zeal will hate heresy, and yet love the heretic. True zeal will long to smash the idol, but deeply pity the idolater. True

---

<sup>37</sup> Revelation 2:4

<sup>38</sup> Revelation 2:20



The Zeal of Phineas

zeal will detest every kind of wickedness, but labor to do good even to the worst of sinners.

True zeal will expose false teachers, as Jesus did the Scribes and Pharisees, and yet weep tenderly as Jesus did over Jerusalem when He came near to it for the last time. True zeal will speak truth boldly, like Luther, and not care who is offended; but true zeal will endeavor in its speaking, to "speak the truth in love."

**SLIDE:** Paul wrote: "Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God." 1 Corinthians 10:31

In everything we do, we are to do it for the Glory of God.

But, Paul also wrote: "Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and give no opportunity to the devil." <sup>39</sup>

Be angry – for the Glory of God, but don't sin when you're doing it.

Jesus demonstrated that being angry, in itself, is not evil. Like Phineas, there are times when we must be angry.<sup>40</sup>

- Why – because we are to be "imitators of God". In the Book of Numbers, we see God's statements that He can only be perfectly Holy if He gets angry when His

---

<sup>39</sup> Ephesians 4:26-27

<sup>40</sup> R.C. Sproul, Be Angry, Do Not Sin

The Zeal of Phineas

righteous standards are violated – it's His essence. If He did not get angry at ungodliness, then He would not be the Holy One.

If we are to imitate Him, we too MUST get angry at those things that make God angry. If we have no zeal for the glory of God, then our charity will be superficial, man-centered social programs with no eternal significance.

We must get infuriated when we see the weak and helpless exploited, because Exodus tells us that the Lord's wrath is ignited against the oppressor.<sup>41</sup>

And, we MUST also get angry at hypocrisy in OUR own lives and in the church because of Jesus' anger at those who honor Him with their lips only.<sup>42</sup>

You hypocrites, rightly did Isaiah prophesy of you: 'This people honors Me with their lips, But their heart is far away from Me.'

But, speaking mainly to myself, we must always realize that we must be careful that we *do not sin* in our anger. Every time I am angry, I need to should check myself to see if I are upset at the things God hates, or is it just my personal opinion. Anger is the emotion most prone to sinful abuse,

---

<sup>41</sup> Exodus 22:21–24

<sup>42</sup> Matthew 15:8; 23

The Zeal of Phineas

which is why Paul also tells us to put anger away. It's easy to be angry without just cause and give opportunity to the Devil.

Our anger, even if it is godly at first, can easily be perverted into feelings of spite instead of a longing to see the offenders healed. When this happens, we are in danger of giving root to the bitterness that destroys.<sup>43</sup> We can trick ourselves into thinking our anger is godly when actually it is not pleasing to the Lord in how we are indulging it.<sup>44</sup>

So, if it IS something that God hates, be angry – but sin not.

SUMMARY

In summary – we NT believers should have the desire to protect God's honor just as strongly as Phineas, David and Elijah did. **But we must defer to Christ the kind of swift judgement that He will bring when He returns.** We are not take that violent judgment into our own hands.

“Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.” 1 Corinthians 10:31

---

<sup>43</sup> Hebrews 12:15

<sup>44</sup> R.C. Sproul, Be Angry, Do Not Sin

*The Zeal of Phineas*

- **“May we carry the Spear of Zeal with a hand of grace.”<sup>45</sup>**

**"GLORIA TIBI DOMINE" – "Glory to You, Lord".**

Amem

---

<sup>45</sup> Adam Powers, <https://adampowers.wordpress.com/2009/12/16/may-you-carry-the-spear-of-zeal-with-a-hand-of-grace/>