

wrought among the Israelites in chapter xxv was due to Balaam's evil counsel. He had spoken exactly what God wanted him to say and had performed the part of a true prophet, yet his heart was evidently far from right. Although bound by his determination not to prophesy anything which God did not command, he sought some other way to win the rich rewards that Balak had offered. Not fully realizing the great truth that salvation cannot be earned, but is a gift of God's free grace (Eph.ii.8), he reasoned that the Moabites and Midianites might gain their end through seducing the Israelites into such immorality and idolatry that a holy God would have to wipe them out of existence. His logic was correct to this extent, that God did destroy great numbers of Israelites who fell into this trap. But the carrying out of God's plans is not dependent on the righteousness of man. God intervened to check the progress of the seduction, and accomplished the purposes which He had determined and which Balaam had himself predicted. Baal-peor (3,5) was a deity worshipped with immoral rites, particularly on Mount Peor. It is no wonder that the anger of the Lord was kindled, when the people committed such wickedness.

Verses 4 and 5 contain Moses' orders for cleansing the camp. To modern ears the commands in these two verses may seem barbarous. Yet we hang murderers, and the sin of these people, if not checked, would have brought misery and death to great numbers of Israelites. If a surgeon is justified in cutting off a limb to save a life, the action of destroying such wickedness to save the nation was even more justified. Certain facts, however, should be remembered, before making any general application to our own day. First, the destruction of these malefactors was specifically ordered by God. Human governments, being made up of sinful and fallible men, are apt to err, and we do well to give each man freedom of thought, since God alone is the lord of the conscience. Second, this was involved in a special act of God, in bringing His people into the Promised Land, as a centre