



# International Bible Lessons Commentary

Uniform Sunday School Lessons Series

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## Numbers 25:10-13 & 1 Samuel 2:30-36 New International Version November 5, 2017

The [International Bible Lesson](#) (*Uniform Sunday School Lessons Series*) for **Sunday, November 5, 2017**, is from **Numbers 25:10-13 & 1 Samuel 2:30-36**.

**Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further** follow the verse-by-verse *International Bible Lesson Commentary*. **Study Hints for Discussion and Thinking Further** will help with class preparation and in conducting class discussion: these hints are available on the [International Bible Lessons Commentary](#) website along with the *International Bible Lesson* that you may want to read to your class as part of your Bible study. You can discuss each week's commentary and lesson at the [International Bible Lesson Forum](#).

### **Numbers 25:10-13**

**(Numbers 25:10) The LORD said to Moses,**

After the Israelites committed sexual immorality with the Moabite women and sacrificed to and bowed down to their gods, they joined themselves to Baal. As the LORD was telling Moses how discipline the Israelites for their sins, an

Israelite man brought a Midianite woman into the camp before the eyes of Moses and all the people to engage in sexual immorality with her. Phinehas entered the tent and killed them both with a spear, and the plague against the Israelites was stopped (see Numbers 25:1-9). Therefore, the LORD spoke to Moses about Phinehas, what he did, and the consequences.

**(Numbers 25:11) “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.**

Aaron was Moses’ brother and a priest. Phinehas was Aaron’s grandson. Phinehas honored the LORD as a priest when, as a leader of the Israelites, he enforced the just discipline or penalty required by the Law of God according to God’s commands to Moses: “If a man commits adultery with another man’s wife—with the wife of his neighbor—both the adulterer and the adulteress are to be put to death” (Leviticus 20:10). In this situation, the couple were involved in both idolatry and sexual immorality, and the Israelites needed to learn that the LORD is holy and the LORD will enforce His laws through His appointed leaders. They became an example of what not to do. God’s anger involved His emotions, but His anger did not (and does not) influence the LORD to act arbitrarily, in haste, or unrighteously; rather, the LORD will enforce just punishment for rebellion when necessary, especially when

it is in the public interests to stop the spread of evil. As a deterrent to sin, God also allows the natural consequences of sin to result in personal suffering from immoral behavior (see Romans 1:18-32). If Phinehas had not enforced God's law, the people probably would have plunged into worse sins with greater frequency. God told Moses that both He and Phinehas were zealous to honor the name of the LORD, our holy God; therefore, the LORD did not destroy all the Israelites who had dishonored Him. However, enough died (24,000) from the plague for all to see that the LORD would uphold His holy law and forgive all who turned from their sin and returned to honoring and obeying the LORD (see Numbers 25:1-9). Witnessing the act of Phinehas and the plague probably deterred some from future acts of idolatry, immorality, and rebellion against God.

**(Numbers 25:12) Therefore tell him I am making my covenant of peace with him.**

The LORD did not speak to Phinehas directly, but as the supreme leader of the Israelites, the LORD spoke to Moses and told him to tell Phinehas that He was making a covenant of peace with him. The covenant of peace included the message to Moses and Phinehas that Phinehas had honored the LORD by his actions; therefore, in his zeal as a leader of the Israelites Phinehas had done what was right. Phinehas did not "take the law into his own hands." He was not to be punished for what he had done. He had not murdered anyone. He had carried out

God's just judgment according to the Law of God. The LORD commended Phinehas for his actions as a leader and priest. The covenant of peace included the LORD's assurance to Phinehas that He would extend compassion and mercy to him, and Moses and the people were to do the same. The Israelites needed to know that Phinehas had done what was right according to the LORD and the law.

**(Numbers 25:13) 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 actions of Phinehas when he enforced God's just law on the disobedient couple meant that all the Israelites would not need to suffer God's just punishment for their sins. Phinehas had “made atonement” in the sense that his public action that had enforced God's law and honored the LORD as holy were a substitute for God's just enforcement of His law on all the Israelites for their sins, for their previous sins of idolatry and immorality. Phinehas' bold actions in executing the penalty required by the law would serve as a deterrent to further sins on the part of the Israelites for an undetermined period of time. This act of atonement prefigured the atonement of Jesus Christ: by His death on the cross for our sins, those who believe in Him will not perish but receive the gift of everlasting life. Remembering His death for us serves as a partial deterrent for us when we are tempted to sin (the Lord being our Helper). Because of our great love for Jesus and what He

did in our behalf, we do not want to sin against our loving heavenly Father. The covenant of lasting priesthood would last until Phinehas' descendants dishonored and disobeyed the LORD; thus, leading to their just punishment. If the covenant of peace was broken by Phinehas descendant's, then the LORD would need to execute His just punishment upon them and make a public display of the fact that God will not allow open rebellion against His kingdom to remain unpunished forever.

### **1 Samuel 2:30-36**

**(1 Samuel 2:30) “Therefore the LORD, the God of Israel, declares: ‘I promised that members of your family would minister before me forever.’ But now the LORD declares: ‘Far be it from me! Those who honor me I will honor, but those who despise me will be disdained.**

Though Eli was a priest and descendant of Phinehas, the LORD rejected Eli's household for their sins (see 1 Samuel 2:27-29). Eli's sons, Hophni and Phinehas (named after the Phinehas in Numbers 25:11), did evil in the sight of the LORD and the people of Israel at the tabernacle (the tent of meeting that housed the ark of the covenant) which was at Shiloh. They dishonored God by eating the sacrifices before these sacrifices had been properly offered to the LORD and as gluttons (1 Samuel 2:12-17). They also committed adultery with the women who came to serve the LORD at the tabernacle (1 Samuel 2:22-26). Thus, they

despised and dishonored their holy God before the whole nation by their unrepentant behaviors; behaviors that in many ways were worse than those of the Israelites when Phinehas made an atonement for them. Their actions disgraced our holy God before all who came to make sacrifices to the LORD; furthermore, they morally and spiritually corrupted the women who had come to the tabernacle to serve the LORD. They treated the only true God, His tabernacle, and His servants the same way the priests who worshiped Baal and served other idols acted. As the leaders of God's people, they were totally corrupt and horrifying examples for other leaders and all the people. For God to uphold His Kingdom, His honor, and His law so the Israelites could be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation (see Exodus 19:6), these evil priests needed to suffer God's just judgment to reveal the holiness of the LORD and to deter others (especially God's leaders) from doing likewise. Our just God will not allow a double standard of behavior for different groups. God does not have a lower and tolerated standard of corruption for the elite and a higher standard of morality with swift punishment for the poor and everyone else. To uphold His Law and government, God had to make a public pronouncement of His just punishment and declare His decision to treat everyone the same under His law. God could no longer honor the descendants of Eli; to keep His promise would have perpetually honored the dishonorable.

**(1 Samuel 2:31) The time is coming when I will cut short your strength and the strength of your priestly house, so that no one in it will reach old age,**

The man of God that came to Eli spoke the words of the LORD and warned him, but that warning did not lead to the repentance of Eli or his two sons. A warning from God implies that God is giving the person warned an opportunity to repent and return to obedience. He foretold the LORD's just punishment if they did not repent. By foretelling God's just judgment, the Israelites would know that the LORD had punished the house of Eli rather than Phinehas' descendants suffering bad luck or God failing to keep His promise. The people would also know why God does not keep His promises to those who rebel and refuse to uphold His law and properly lead His people.

**(1 Samuel 2:32) and you will see distress in my dwelling. Although good will be done to Israel, no one in your family line will ever reach old age.**

Through the man of God, the LORD foretold Eli that he would "see distress in my dwelling" which happened after the Philistines captured the ark of the covenant and Eli's two sons were killed in battle (1 Samuel 4:10-11). When Eli learned of their death, he was more shocked about the fact that the ark had been captured and the man of God's words were fulfilled than by the death of his two sons. When he heard the news, Eli fell over and died of a broken

neck at the age of ninety-eight “he was very heavy” (1 Samuel 4:12-18). The glory of the LORD had indwelt the tabernacle “my dwelling,” and the ark represented the presence of the LORD when Eli’s sons took it into battle. After it was captured and Phinehas’s wife learned of the death of Phinehas, she named her son Ichabod before she died, saying “The Glory has departed from Israel, for the ark of God has been captured (1 Samuel 4:21-22). Everything the LORD did when He enforced His Law and punished Eli’s sons was for the good of Israel, eventually leading to the coming of Jesus the Messiah and the establishment of Jesus as our great High Priest. Though none of Eli’s family would reach old age, that did not mean none of them could faithfully and honorably serve the LORD as long as God gave them strength.

**(1 Samuel 2:33) Every one of you that I do not cut off from serving at my altar I will spare only to destroy your sight and sap your strength, and all your descendants will die in the prime of life.**

In fulfillment of the prophet’s words, Eli was blind and weak when he learned that the ark had been captured by the Philistines (1 Samuel 4:15). After the death of Hophni and Phinehas, none of Eli’s descendants would live as long as Eli had lived or serve as priests “before the altar of the LORD.” The LORD passed this judgment as a warning to every priest and person in Israel. Sin can destroy your sight, sap your strength, cause you to die in the prime of life, and have an ill effect on your family, but not all

illnesses and early deaths are the direct result of someone's sins (see especially John, chapter 9, about the man Jesus healed who was born blind and the cause or reason for his blindness). God's judgment on Eli's descendants may have influenced some of them to trust in the LORD and be saved by grace through faith in the Messiah who was to come in fulfillment of the Bible's prophecies up to that time. No translation of this verse from the original Hebrew seems totally satisfactory.

**(1 Samuel 2:34) “And what happens to your two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, will be a sign to you—they will both die on the same day.**

This prophecy was fulfilled in 1 Samuel 4:11, and when Eli learned of it, he also learned that what the man of God had said was assuredly true. Indeed, his descendants would suffer and be denied the right to serve as priests at the altar of the LORD.

**(1 Samuel 2:35) I will raise up for myself a faithful priest, who will do according to what is in my heart and mind. I will firmly establish his priestly house, and they will minister before my anointed one always.**

The LORD continued to speak. The people probably thought of Samuel as the faithful priest that the LORD would raise up to fulfill the words of the man of God. Samuel had been raised by Eli and he was righteous.

Throughout his life, Samuel was a faithful priest, prophet, and judge over Israel. He did what was in the LORD's heart and mind. However, in 1 Samuel 8:1-8, we learn that Samuel's sons were no better than Eli's sons — perhaps Samuel learned all his parenting practices from Eli with the same results — “But his sons did not follow his ways. They turned aside after dishonest gain and accepted bribes and perverted justice” (1 Samuel 8:3). In the Old Testament, we see how an inherited judgeship, an inherited kingship, and an inherited priesthood worked poorly. The “priestly house” may have referred to the Zadokites. Ezekiel wrote: “This will be for the consecrated priests, the Zadokites, who were faithful in serving me and did not go astray as the Levites did when the Israelites went astray” (Ezekiel 48:11). “My anointed one” could have been the kings in David's dynasty. “My Anointed One” also refers to Jesus as the Messiah, who always did what was in his Father's “heart and mind.” He is not a Levite or a Zadokite, but “a high priest forever in the order of Melchizedek” (Hebrews 6:20). “Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them” (Hebrews 7:25).

**(1 Samuel 2:36) Then everyone left in your family line will come and bow down before him for a piece of silver and a loaf of bread and plead, “Appoint me to some priestly office so I can have food to eat.””**

The descendants of Eli could no longer have the inherited office of high priest (or priest and judge as Eli and Samuel were) and serve before the altar of the LORD. Before the coming of Jesus as our High Priest, Eli's descendants would depend on whoever was a high priest or a priest in Israel. Before subsequent priests they could ask for lowly jobs as priests to survive. We do not learn if their pleas for priestly jobs were answered. Priests lived on a rightful, lawful portion of the offerings, but Eli and his son had become gluttons. Their descendants would beg for food and work, which reminds us that our actions can have a harmful effect on our descendants.

### **Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further**

1. What difference did Phinehas make when he expressed his zeal for the holiness of the LORD?
2. What was one benefit for Phinehas when the LORD made a covenant of peace with him?
3. Did the LORD break his promise to Phinehas? Give a reason for your answer.
4. How did Eli experience and see distress in the dwelling of the LORD?
5. Name two faithful priests that fulfilled 1 Samuel 2:35.

Begin or close your class by reading the short weekly  
*International Bible Lesson.*

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