

## Numbers 25 • On the Verge of Victory...

This is background / context – from the long section about Balaam – most famous for his talking donkey / we covered ch. 22–24 on Wednesday – ch. 25 this morning

You'll remember he was trying to curse God's people – but look at what God forced to come out of his mouth instead...

23:7 *And he took up his oracle and said: "Balak the king of Moab has brought me from Aram, From the mountains of the east. 'Come, curse Jacob for me, And come, denounce Israel!'*

8 *"How shall I curse whom God has not cursed? And how shall I denounce whom the LORD has not denounced?"*

23:22 *God brings them out of Egypt; He has strength like a wild ox.*

23 *"For there is no sorcery against Jacob, Nor any divination against Israel. It now must be said of Jacob And of Israel, 'Oh, what God has done!'*

**PRAYER** • "Oh, what God has done for us!" / Jesus has removed every curse / in Him we have our victory / we are more than conquerors / no weapon formed against us can prosper / Lord – sharpen us by your Word for Spiritual Battle / make us wise to our enemy's tactics & strategies against us!"

Have you heard "**snatching victory from the jaw of defeat?**"

We love last second, skin of your teeth, down to the last man / bullet / inch /second / & underdog does the right move / last bit of strength / & WINS!

- **Bottom of 9<sup>th</sup>** / bases-loaded homerun = wins the Pennant / to World Series
- **Or buzzer beating shot** / to win championship in 7<sup>th</sup> game
- **Or any good movie plot** / favorite hero's last second escape

Unfortunately, this morning's study is **opposite** / Israel = "**snatching defeat from the jaws of victory.**" / not nearly as much fun.

A sad debacle / devastating set back / yet, **critical lessons we can learn** / to have victory instead of setback / in a similar situation – we will **now have the upper hand** / We know exactly what the devil is up to...

So – we will look at a "**defeat snatched from the jaws of victory**" – to equip us to be **VICTORIOUS** in our **next battle** w/ devil!

Num. 25 is the last of 4–chapter study. 4 CHAPTERS! = BIG DEAL!

The first three chapters = Balaam & his talking donkey / light hearted, **funny story** for **Sunday School** classroom / yet Balaam's hilarious story has a **dark ending** / not for the kids = it is a horrible, **immoral disaster** for Israel, when they should have been marching to victory...

25:1 *Now Israel remained in Acacia Grove, and the people began to commit harlotry with the women of Moab.*

2 *They invited the people to the sacrifices of their gods, and the people ate and bowed down to their gods.*

3 *So Israel was joined to Baal of Peor, and the anger of the LORD was aroused against Israel.*

SETTING: They have **completed 40 years** of wilderness "refining" / now warriors ready to take

Canaan.

- **Old lusts** for Egypt should be **gone** / the older folks nearly all died
- On their way North to prepare to take the Promised Land
- **They have the Word of God / God's presence** in the Tabernacle / worshipping w/ **sacrifices** / remembering w/ **feasts**. All is in place.

BUT then get wrapped up in sin with a bunch of pagan women who show up / text mentions Moabite / Midianite girls too, later

SHOCKING! UNEXPECTED! / Israel took **40 years STEP BACKWARD** / like Aaron's calf at **Mt. Sinai** = huge, immoral ruckus / so out of control, Joshua thought = a battle in the camp / Moses knew better – a loud, rowdy, crazed orgy!

Then 40 years later, the new generation is at it again – at “Peh-Ohr” / way worse!

*So, God commands Moses to kill those who worshiped Baal. It is brutal and bloody...*

4 *Then the LORD said to Moses, “Take all the leaders of the people and hang the offenders before the LORD, out in the sun, that the fierce anger of the LORD may turn away from Israel.”*

5 *So Moses said to the judges of Israel, “Every one of you kill his men who were joined to Baal of Peor.”*

“**JOINED to Baal of Peor**” = explains their defeat / When marching to battle w/ Yahweh was their King and God – unstoppable.

Worshipping Baal complete **treason** against Yahweh! “Just a party” (innocent play, adult pleasures) = switching sides right before a war!

At first, the punishment seems harsh, until you jump down and read vs. 9 =

9 *And those who died in the plague were twenty-four thousand.*

**24K Israelites died in a plague** because of their sin / way more than died 40 years earlier at Sinai!  
*No wonder – 4 chapters to lead up to this!*

*Before we dive into some application – let's read how this horrible episode was brought to an end...*

6 *And indeed, one of the children of Israel came and presented to his brethren a Midianite woman in the sight of Moses and in the sight of all the congregation of the children of Israel, who were weeping at the door of the tabernacle of meeting.*

So CALLOUSED = guy **openly cavorts** with pagan girlfriend, even as a crowd pleads & repents at Tabernacle to end the plague

BTW, our culture = people **flaunt sin**, openly, outdoors, in broad daylight / no longer any shame / Boast in their sin right to God's face! / Jeremiah = *“the people have forgotten even how to blush.”*

**7-15** • The hero in this chapter is Phinehas – who is zealous for God's holiness. We don't have time to go into depth his actions / but there is a critical lesson we need to glean for spiritual battle = fall so in love with the Holiness of God that you could never compromise with sin.

There are other critical lessons we have to get to later in the chapter / we could preach a whole sermon just on Phinehas, but we don't have the time...

Let's jump down to vs 16 / critical, practical TRUTHS for spiritual attack...

16 Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying:

17 "Harass the Midianites, and attack them;

18 for they harassed you with their **schemes** by which they **seduced** you in the matter of Peor and in the matter of Cozbi, the daughter of a leader of Midian, their sister, who was killed in the day of the plague because of Peor."

So -whole debacle was a **SCHEME of Midianites!** How? The answer = Numbers 31:16...

Numbers 31:16 • Look, these women caused the children of Israel, through the counsel of Balaam, to trespass against the LORD in the incident of Peor, and there was a plague among the congregation of the LORD.

**The Plan was introduced by Balaam** (from ch. 22–24) / *We don't have time...* but BIG POINT = he couldn't CURSE Israel / God was restraining him

But he really **wanted the reward** / **instead** of VERBALLY cursing / more **PRAGMATIC** curse – seducing them!

The women casually wandering into camp to “party” weren't there for innocent fun / sent as **spiritual assassins!**

Confirmed in Revelation 2:14, to the city of Pergamos...

But I have a few things against you, because you have there those who hold 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.

And so, he JOINED THEM to Baal, instead of Yahweh – and judgment fell

Key truth Balaam **could NOT CURSE Israel**, no matter how hard he tried

**Stymied by God's power** / all he could do was bless / For two chapters!

Hired by the king of Moab & wanted the payout! / Couldn't do it through SORCERY – **so used SEDUCTION!**

**Balaam is a TYPE of the Devil.** Satan has no direct power through spiritual means of touching us / we can truly never say, “The devil made me do it” / so He seduces us with schemes of temptation

God might *allow* Satan to cause trouble (like Job), but God has Satan under final control / God takes his evil & turns it around = for testing, refining, training, growth!

Like Balaam: **Satan can't** condemn or **curse** us / so many passages / a few...

Isaiah 54:17 • No weapon formed against you shall prosper, And every tongue which rises against you in judgment You shall condemn.

Romans 8:37–39 • Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor **angels** nor **principalities** nor **powers...** shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

**Though** 1 Peter describes Satan as a **lion seeking** someone to devour, he says Satan **can be**

**resisted** as we are steadfast in our faith – & as we humble ourselves under GOD’S mighty hand! / as James says – “Submit to God, resist the devil and he **will flee** from you”

My friends: Satan is a roaring lion – but **he’s all bark and no bite!**

Aren’t you stoked about the victory you have in Christ? Then, how do explain how Israel is “Snatching defeat from the jaws of victory” at PeOr? Or Christians who unexpectedly get caught up in devastating sins?

*Here’s the **critical flipside** –*

**Balaam** figured out a **more effective way** to “curse” Israel **send** Moabite and Midianite **women** into the camp in order **to seduce** them!

What Balaam **can’t accomplish in two chapters** – he accomplishes in the **first three verses** = sending in TEMPTATION / defeating Israel **by their lusts**

**If Satan appeared** / demonic sneer / brandishing some devilish weaponry / horde of minions ready to tear you to pieces = **battle over** in a **split second** / as you simply called on the Name of Jesus! He would **have to flee**.

Might be frightened – until you remember God’s promises of victory / Satan **doesn’t** stand a **chance** against one of God’s kids in a straight up, **head to head battle**. He will **lose** every time.

So – instead of a hostile threat / **little knock on the door** / take a look = surprise, surprise, a bunch of young, attractive, scantily dressed exotic women / inviting themselves in with beer in hand, just trying to be friendly / welcoming the newcomers to town / “Gee – there’s **no danger here, right?** It is just a little innocent fun!”

Satan’s greatest weapon is LIES (father of lies) / biggest lie = Sin is fun. It won’t hurt you. You deserve it. God doesn’t really care. You can ask for forgiveness later. Don’t worry about. YOLO!

A little drink of this / a little smoke of that / a little lie here / a little lust there / a little look of this / a little dabble in that / a little steal here / a little speedy there

*You have a **solid fortress** in **God’s presence** – so don’t go opening up the **backdoor** and **letting the enemy in** through your **own LUSTS**.*

BTW NO “resting” in Acacia Grove

As Israel **rested** at Acacia Grove, they **let their guard down**. There are **no spiritual “VACATIONS”** from Jesus! They needed **physical** rest – but not **spiritual** rest!

**If you are not** in the **Word** daily – then you’ve taken a **spiritual vacation** / & are **weak** – and a **sitting duck** for temptation

But **REALIZE** this – when you are **PHYSICALLY TIRED** – then temptations are always stronger! So, get the rest you need!

There is time to rest at Acacia grove – to regain physical and mental strength – but there is **never** time to go on a **vacation from Jesus!**

So – what do we do? How do we guard ourselves? Read vs 17 & 18 again...

17 “Harass the Midianites, and attack them; for they harassed you with their schemes by which they seduced you in the matter of Peor...”

KJV is fun = “vex the Midianites, and smite them; for they vex you with their wiles, wherewith they have beguiled you in the matter of Peor”

You can **“VEX THE ENEMY”**

Satan’s greatest weapon is lying – so stick to the truth! This will VEX him! If he is **vexing you** with temptation – **vex him** more by **recognizing his schemes!**

Or **Victory starts** by **SEEING** Satan’s **schemes!**

When we are walking with Jesus / in the Holy Spirit / sensitive to Him (zealous for holiness, like Phinehas) we can SEE SATAN’S SCHEMES

Like **playing card game**, able to see opponent’s cards in mirror / glasses / friend behind them? = Spiritual battle can actually be this easy! We KNOW the cards the devil is playing!

Only time God allows CHEATING = be WISE to the devil’s ways & stop his schemes

**Speak the TRUTH about temptation & sin =**

*“This temptation is not something to enjoy! This is a cleverly disguised landmine you set here to fool me! And then, to cripple me!”*

Temptation **looks great** – but it **kills**. Simply truth. We teach it all the time to kids in Sunday School. For adults – think of Satan’s temptations as enemy trip wires, IEDs, hacking your computer, picking your locks = **temptation is terrorism!** It is not a game!

I hate to quote the God-Mocker, **Mark Twain** – he did say something – **actually true** for the Christian = *“There are several good protections against temptation, but the surest is COWARDICE!”*

And then we do as **Paul** warned **Timothy** several times = **“flee temptations & lusts”** / Or as James said – submit to God and resist the devil – and he flees from you / put those together = when we flee temptation, and run to God, Satan runs the other way!

*There another TREMENDOUSLY POWERFUL TRUTH / changes the whole context of spiritual battle Israel is on the **VERGE OF VICTORY** in this passage, right?*

They have **defeated** the various **nations** and tribes that come out against them.

They are **preparing** to **invade** the Promised Land, after 40 years of wilderness wanderings. They are in the home stretch!

**God** even **defeats** Balak and the **curses** of Balaam – and Israel **didn’t even realize** what God was doing up on this hills with those two clowns

God **spoke blessings** over Israel for **two full chapters** – even from the mouth of a twisted, pagan prophet. God is **totally on their side** – nothing to fear!

It is at **this critical moment** the enemy launched his **best attack** against them = sending in the

## tempting women!

LESSON **When** you are being **tempted** to sin – with the strongest, most appealing, overwhelming, addicting temptation, **realize = you are probably on the VERGE OF VICTORY!**

This was Israel's story at Peor – attacked right on the verge of the Promised Land

*When temptation is knocking at the door, you have to ask "WHY? WHAT IS THE DEVIL SO AFRAID OF?" We see this throughout scripture!*

- **Jesus in the Wilderness** = about to start His ministry / Satan had a confident demeanor – but he knew his kingdom was in big trouble / must have been shaking in his shoes / His only hope = bring out the most lethal weapons of temptation against Jesus.
- **Jesus, again**, near the **end** of His **three-year** ministry / as He was heading up to Jerusalem / but **instead of** appearing in a **demonic form**, the devil used a dear **friend** of Jesus – **Peter!** / Rebuking Jesus, "Surely, Lord, you will NOT go to Jerusalem and die!" / Jesus wasn't fooled for a moment, as he declared, "Get behind me, Satan!"
- **David's armies** were enjoying a **string of victories** and was out **battling the Ammonites** – satan had to bring out the big guns to stop David – stay home, **lazy** in the palace, to see a **girl bathing on her rooftop**. In the aftermath of this disaster, David loses just about everything – except for his heart for God!

**Satan knows** he's running out of time & **getting desperate**/ throwing his best temptations and biggest lies at you.

Romans 16, "The God peace will soon crush Satan under your feet." = The Devil knows this! He's frantic!

**DON'T consider temptation a sign of defeat.** When tempted, don't hang your head and think God has given up on you! = NO! Realize, the **devil** must be really **worried** if he would **attack** you with such a **LOW BLOW** shot!

If you are **feeling defeated** / tempted / weak it is probably because **Satan knows** you are on the **VERGE OF A GREAT VICTORY**, so he is bringing out the big guns against you!

*(I don't mean to sound like an old-timey gospel preacher – but the metaphor is powerful)* = Your **Promised Land** is **right around the corner!**

What is **your Promised Land**?

Throughout Bible, Promised Land **represents** victorious Christian living = **salvation** ("resting" – or, completely trusting in the work of Jesus) / & **victory over** the giants & chariots of the **enemy**

*What might your Promised Land be? What victory is right around the corner?*

Perhaps you are about to **witness** to someone / overcome a life-long sin **habit** / break a **bondage** / heal a **relationship** / make a **commitment** / **learn** a powerful lesson / **teach** someone a transformation truth / go to a new **depth** in relationship with God / obey to a great **adventure** / find **joy** / find **peace** / **serve** others

Don't give up now! If you are being tempted to surrender and walk away from your faith – you have

to ask = "Why is the devil so afraid of me all of a sudden?"

My friends – **if** you are **under attack**, you must be on the VERGE OF VICTORY. **Don't stumble now**. See temptation for what it is – **Satan HATES YOU** and **DOESN'T WANT YOU TO achieve a victory!**

And **don't let** your **guard down** for a minute – walk with Jesus in moment by moment surrender / be enraptured & overwhelmed by His holiness & grace

**The ultimate RULE in Spiritual Battle** is this = Jesus has **already won** the ultimate victory

Jesus snatched victory from the jaw of defeat when He ROSE on Sunday morning / Satan thought he had Jesus beat / the joke was on Him when the stone was rolled away and Jesus was not there!

We are more than conquerors IN Him / So – **stay in Jesus** / looking to Him / obeying Him / hoping in Him / and you'll be walking in His victory day by day!

**CLOSE** – today: let's make a new commitment / new repentance / new surrender / new obedience / new goal / new vision / fresh LOVE for Jesus