**Moab Seduces Israel**

Of the many scandals that have plagued politicians for centuries, sex scandals seem to be the ones most prevalent. Beginning with George Washington, some of the most notorious sex scandals involved presidents and several politicians with presidential aspirations were forced to abandon their campaigns after extramarital affairs became public. This is not unique to American politicians as scandals have rocked other countries as well. Former Italian prime minister Silvio Berlusconi was barred from office as a result of an affair with a 17 year old girl. While female politicians are not immune, it seems that men are overwhelmingly caught up these scandals. In our study of Numbers chapter 25, sexual immorality was the root cause of an incident that provoked God’s anger. As the chapter begins, we learn that Israelite men had been invited by Moabite women to join them in sexual activity and sacrifices to their gods. They succumbed to the temptation and worshipped the false god Baal causing God’s anger to burn against them. Last week we concluded our study of how Balak had failed in his attempts to have Balaam bring curses on Israel. While Balaam could not go against God and curse Israel, he still found a way to help Balak by having the Israelites bring curses on themselves. The achilles heel of some of the Israelite men was their promiscuity so Balaam advised Balak to have Moabite women seduce them causing them to participate in sexual immorality and idol worship (see Rev. 2:14). God told Moses to put to death the leaders of the men who participated (the KJV says the all the heads of the people) and Moses in turn ordered the judges to execute those who joined in worshipping Baal.

An Israelite man brazenly brought a Midianite woman into the camp and apparently they even went to the Tent of Meeting. Phineas who was the grandson of Aaron killed them both with one thrust of his spear. His actions stopped God’s anger and the plague was stopped but 24,000 died. God recognized Phineas for his zeal and renewed his covenant of a lasting priesthood for the descendants of Aaron. The chapter ends with God telling Moses to punish the Midianites for their role in causing the Israelites to sin. Matthew Henry pointed out that apparently none of the Midianites suffered the plague that was visited on Israel. God seems to have reserved their judgment to be meted out in battle.

While sexual promiscuity often causes downfall, not everyone is afflicted by that. There are countless other temptations out there and we all have our weaknesses. Gambling, drugs and alcohol are common culprits and pride is often at the center of our problems. The apostle John wrote “for all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but of the world” (1st John 2:16). This verse makes it clear that temptations come from this world and Satan and not from God. Indeed, God provides means for our escape from temptations (see 1st Cor. 15:13).