



Shabbat Table Talk Page

Overview

- **Parashah: Pinchas (פִּינְחָס, "Phinehas")**
- **Chapters: Numbers 25:10-30:1**



בְּרִיךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו, וְצִוָּנוּ לַעֲסוֹק בְּדִבְרֵי תוֹרָה

– Torah Study Blessing –

Synopsis

Last week's reading (Balak) introduced us to Phinehas (i.e., Pinchas), the son of Eleazar the priest (and grandson of Aaron), who, during the rebellion at Baal Peor, zealously removed evil from Israel by driving a spear through a tribal prince who was fornicating with a Midianite princess. On account of Pinchas' zeal, God stopped the plague and Israel was delivered from destruction.

This week's portion begins with the LORD rewarding Pinchas by granting him a "covenant of peace" and officially promising to incorporate him into the priestly line of Israel. This promise was remarkable because Pinchas was technically not qualified to be a priest, since he was already born when the original promise was given to Aaron and his sons, and since his father Eleazar was married to an "outsider" – namely, the daughter of Jethro (also called *Putiel*, Exod. 6:25).

After Pinchas was honored before the people of Israel, the LORD commanded Moses and Eleazar to conduct another census of the people (this was 39 years after the Exodus from Egypt), with the result of 601,730 men between the ages of twenty and sixty (1,820 less than the original census taken at the start of the journey). Moses was then instructed on how the land was to be divided by lottery among the tribes and families of Israel. The daughters of Zelophehad then petitioned Moses that they be granted the portion of the land belonging to their father, who died without sons, and God accepted their claim and incorporated it into the laws of inheritance.

The LORD then commanded Moses to climb mount Abarim to "see the land which I have given to the children of Israel," though he was forbidden to enter it because he struck the rock twice at Kadesh. God then told Moses to appoint Joshua bin Nun as his successor who would lead the Jewish people into the Promised Land.

The portion concludes with a detailed list of the various "communal offerings" that were to be brought to the Sanctuary when the people entered the land. Daily, weekly, and monthly sacrificial offerings are described, as well as the additional offerings that were offered on the major festivals of the Jewish year (i.e., Passover, Shavuot, Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, Sukkot and Shemini Atzeret). It is noteworthy to realize that the most constant of all the offerings described in the Torah was the daily sacrifice of a defect-free male lamb, along with unleavened bread and wine. This is described as "My offering, My bread..." which was ordained at Sinai (Num. 28:2-8).



Parashah Questions

1. What was Pinchas' *full* name? ¹
2. God said that Pinchas turned His wrath away from the people. What did Pinchas do and who were the main characters involved? ²
3. Why did God bless Pinchas with a "covenant of peace"? ³
4. What did God tell Moses to do regarding the Midianites – and why? ⁴
5. If both the Moabites (Balak) and Midianites (Balaam) sought to harm Israel, why did God command only the Midianites to be destroyed? ⁵
6. God commanded two persons to take a census. Who were they? Who was to be counted? ⁶
7. What were two reasons for the census? ⁷
8. How was it to be determined which tribe got which land? ⁸
9. How much land were the Levites to get in the land? ⁹
10. What was remarkable about the tribe of Simeon in the census? ¹⁰
11. Who was Zelophehad, and why is he important? ¹¹
12. Explain the basic laws of inheritance... ¹²



¹ Pinchas ben Eleazar ben Aaron ha-Kohen.

² He killed Zimri ben Salu (a prince of the tribe of Simeon) and Cozbi, a Midianite princess, who were acting "improperly" in front of the whole camp.

³ To alleviate his fears that members of the tribe of Simeon would seek revenge for the death of Zimri.

⁴ God told them to harass and smite the Midianites, because through their wives they seduced the Jewish people and caused them to sin terribly against God.

⁵ Because Ruth - great grandmother of David - was to descend from Moab, and her merit preserved the entire nation.

⁶ Moses and Aaron's son, Eleazar were to count everyone over 20, by tribe.

⁷ To plan for war and to determine how much land each tribe inherited.

⁸ It was decided by lot.

⁹ None – though they were given the Cities of Refuge and their outskirts.

¹⁰ The original census showed they had 59,300 men, but after the sin of Baal Peor, only 22,220 men. Apparently many men from this tribe followed the example of their tribal leader Zimri and were killed during the plague.

¹¹ He was a man of the tribe of Manasseh who died in the desert who had no sons to inherit the land. His five daughters asked Moses if they could inherit their father's land rather than have it go to their father's brothers. His case is important because it showed that God's law could be "changed" or "updated" in light of new circumstances.

¹² If there were no sons or daughters in a family to receive an inheritance, the brothers of the deceased were to receive it. If there were no brothers of the deceased, then brothers of the deceased's father (i.e., uncles on the father's side) were to receive it, and so on.



13. From which mountain did Moses see the land? ¹³
14. Describe the sacrifice that was to be offered daily upon the altar. ¹⁴
15. Why was Moses not allowed to enter the Promised Land? ¹⁵
16. Who killed the wicked magician Balaam? ¹⁶
17. Why did Moses change Hoshea's name to Joshua? ¹⁷
18. From what tribe was Joshua? ¹⁸
19. Why did God choose Joshua to be the next leader of Israel? ¹⁹
20. How does Jewish tradition tend to regard Joshua? ²⁰
21. How do we know that tempting someone to sin is worse than killing him? ²¹
22. Can you list all of the "appointed times" listed in this portion? ²²
23. Why were two lambs sacrificed for korban Shabbat? ²³
24. Why were 70 bulls and 98 lambs sacrificed on Sukkot ("Tabernacles")? ²⁴



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- ¹³ Mount "Abarim" (עֲבָרִים), the range of crossing; the word "Hebrew" (עִבְרִי) shares the same root (עָבַר). It is also called Mount Nebo in Deut. 34:1. It is the place where Moses could not cross over to enter the Promised Land.
- ¹⁴ The sacrifice of a defect-free male lamb, along with unleavened bread and wine, which was offered both in the morning and at twilight (korban tamid). In effect, the sacrifice of the lamb was constantly occurring upon the altar.
- ¹⁵ Because of the sin of striking the rock twice at Kadesh (at a place later called Meribah, "strife").
- ¹⁶ According to Jewish tradition, Pinchas killed Balaam in the battle against the Midianites using the tzitz of the Kohen Gadol that displayed the Name of the LORD (Targum Yonathan Bamidbar).
- ¹⁷ Because he was afraid that Hoshea's humility would make him susceptible of being influenced by the spies. Hoshea means "YHVH has saved," and Moses added the Yod to the front of his name to indicate that YHVH *will* save.
- ¹⁸ He was from the tribe of Ephraim (a son of Joseph).
- ¹⁹ Because of his primary characteristic of humility. Joshua was always studying Torah, serving Moses at the Tabernacle, and was the captain of the armies of Israel.
- ²⁰ They see him as an inferior successor to Moses: "Moses shone like the sun, but Joshua shone like the moon."
- ²¹ The nations that tried to seduce Israel to sin (i.e., Midian) were to be annihilated, whereas those that simply fought against Israel in battle were allowed to convert and join the nation (i.e., Moab).
- ²² Appointed times for sacrifices include: 1) morning and evening (daily) sacrifices, Shabbat (weekly) sacrifices, Rosh Chodesh (monthly) sacrifices, and sacrifices that followed the seasonal course of the year: Passover, Unleavened Bread, and Firstfruits (spring), Shavuot (summer), Yom Teru'ah, Yom Kippur, and Sukkot (fall).
- ²³ They correspond to the two commandments to "remember" (zachor) and "guard" (shamar) the Sabbath.
- ²⁴ The 70 bulls were offered for the 70 nations, and the 98 lambs were offered to spare Israel from the 98 curses mentioned in Deuteronomy for those who do not obey the Torah.



Discussion Topics

1. “Zeal” can be defined as an emotional response to perceived value and truth – which can be either a good thing or bad thing, of course, depending on the heart’s motivation and the nature of reality. After all, there are many people who are entirely *sincere* in their convictions, but they are sincerely *wrong*. Discuss.
2. Each of us is responsible for how we choose to “walk” the road of life. We all have a particular zeal, desire, and passion regarding what we deem to be our “ultimate concern,” but the question is how is that zeal *directed*? How does our passion take down the road of life? Discuss the idea that “reason” is often the slave of our passions...
3. Abraham Heschel once wrote, “In a controversy, the instant we feel anger, we have already ceased striving for truth and have begun striving for ourselves.” Anger is a signal, a message. Sometimes it used to disguise fear, though it is often related to *lust* (or control). When we sense that we are not in control, we get angry. Discuss...
4. Jealousy is a complex emotion that primarily centers on the fear of losing the affection of the beloved. Hence the LORD is called the “Zealous God” (אֱלֹהֵינוּ זָלוּס), an anthropomorphic description that evokes the image of a loving and protective groom (or even a “jealous lover”) who is passionately concerned with our heart’s reciprocal affections. Discuss.
5. It was the “zeal for God’s house” that “ate Jesus up” and caused his undoing, at least from a worldly perspective (Psalm 69:9). He overturned the tables at the Temple and stopped the daily sacrifice for the sake of our salvation. Discuss this, especially in light of the required daily sacrifice of a defect-free lamb.
6. The case of the “daughters of Zelophehad” suggest that the law of God was subject to change, even in Moses’ day. Discuss the traditional Jewish view of Torah’s immutability, especially in light of this case law designed to fit new circumstances. Does the idea of God’s law as being something absolutely static comfort or threaten you?
7. Discuss how both Pinchas and Joshua foreshadow Yeshua...
8. The great revelation at Mount Sinai centered on the Tabernacle, and the central sacrifice upon the altar was the daily sacrifice of a defect-free male lamb, along with unleavened bread and wine. Discuss how this foretold the coming of the Lamb of God to Israel.
9. Discuss the textual oddities that occur in a Torah Scroll regarding the promise that God would give Pinchas a “covenant of peace” (Num. 25:12). How might the “broken Vav” (in the word “shalom”) and the undersized Yod (in “Pinchas”) reveal the Messiah?

For Next Week:

- Read Parashat **Mattot** (Numbers 30:2-32:42)
- Read the Haftarah (Jeremiah 1:1-2:3)
- Read the New Testament (Matt. 5:33-37)

