

# Shavua Tov



*A Rood Awakening!* Torah Commentary  
By Glenn Mc Williams

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Torah Portion: *Pinchas*

פִּינַחַס

“Phineas”

**Pinchas (a son of Eleazar and grandson of Aaron the priest) was the one who zealously took up My cause among the Israelites and turned My anger away from them, so that I did not destroy them in My demand for exclusive worship.**

**Pinchas ben-El'azar ben-Aharon hakohen heshiv et-chamati me'al beney-Yisra'el bekan'o et-kin'ati betocham velo-chiliti et-beney-Yisra'el bekin'ati.**

Scripture for Study:

*Bamidbar* (Numbers) 25:10 - 30:1

Haftorah Portion:

*Yirmiyahu* (Jeremiah) 1:1 - 2:3

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Our Torah portion this week is in many ways the final transitional passage between the murmuring, complaining, rebellious, backward-looking generation that came out of Egypt under the leadership of Moses, and the forward-looking, wilderness-hardened, ready to enter and conquer the land generation under the leadership of Joshua. The opening story of our portion is the conclusion of the story of Pinchas, which concluded last week's portion.

We may ask why the sages who divided the Torah into portions saw fit to separate the conclusion of the story from the story itself. I believe that clues to the answer to this question are found in the breaking of a particular pattern which sets the first generation (those coming out of Egypt) from the second generation (those going into the land). As we shall see, the conclusion of the story of Pinchas rightfully belongs to the second generation. Let us now go back to last week's portion and put the whole story in context so we can glean from its many truths.

The story of Pinchas truly begins with Balak, the king of Moab, trembling in fear at the approaching host of the children of Israel. Balak had already seen and heard what the children of Israel had done to Arad, king of the Canaanites, Sihon, king of the Amorites, and Og, the king of Bashan.<sup>i</sup> Now this great and victorious army was approaching Moab.

*Numbers 22:1 And the children of Israel set forward, and pitched in the plains of Moab on this side Jordan by Jericho. <sup>2</sup>And Balak the son of Zippor saw all that Israel had done to the Amorites. <sup>3</sup>And Moab was sore afraid of the people, because they were many: and Moab was distressed because of the children of Israel. <sup>4</sup>And Moab said unto the elders of Midian, Now shall this company lick up all that are round about us, as the ox licketh up the grass of the field. And Balak the son of Zippor was king of the Moabites at that time.*

Recognizing that there was more than military might involved in Israel's victories over their enemies, Balak sought to turn the tide by hiring the heathen prophet Balaam in order to invoke a crippling curse upon the army of Israel, and in turn give Moab and Midian the military advantage.

*Numbers 22:5 He sent messengers therefore unto Balaam the son of Beor to Pethor, which is by the river of the land of the children of his people, to call him, saying, Behold, there is a people come out from Egypt: behold, they cover the face of the earth, and they abide over against me: <sup>6</sup>come now therefore, I pray thee, curse me this people; for they are too mighty for me: peradventure I shall prevail, that we may smite them, and that I may drive them out of the land: for I wot that he whom thou blessest is blessed, and he whom thou cursest is cursed.*

Three times Balaam tried to earn his keep by cursing the children of Israel for King Balak, but three times YHWH, the Elohim of Israel, used this pagan prophet to reveal the blessing that rested upon the children of Israel.

*Numbers 23:8 How shall I curse, whom Elohim hath not cursed? or how shall I defy, whom YHWH hath not defied? <sup>9</sup>For from the top of the rocks I see him, and from the hills I behold him: lo, the people shall dwell alone, and shall not be reckoned among the nations. <sup>10</sup>Who can count the dust of Jacob, and the number of the fourth part of Israel? Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his!*

*Numbers 23:19 Elohim is not a man, that He should lie; neither the son of man, that He should repent: hath He said, and shall He not do it? or hath He spoken, and shall He not make it good? <sup>20</sup>Behold, I have received commandment to bless: and He hath blessed; and I cannot reverse it. <sup>21</sup>He hath not beheld iniquity in Jacob, neither hath He seen perverseness in Israel: YHWH his Elohim is with him, and the shout of a king is among them. <sup>22</sup>Elohim brought them out of Egypt; He hath as it were the strength of an unicorn. <sup>23</sup>Surely there is no enchantment against Jacob, neither is there any divination against Israel: according to this time it shall be said of Jacob and of Israel, What hath Elohim wrought! <sup>24</sup>Behold, the people shall rise up as a great lion, and lift up himself as a young lion: he shall not lie down until he eat of the prey, and drink the blood of the slain.*

*Numbers 24:5 How goodly are thy tents, O Jacob, and thy tabernacles, O Israel! <sup>6</sup>As the valleys are they spread forth, as gardens by the river's side, as the trees of lign aloes which YHWH hath planted, and as cedar trees beside the waters. <sup>7</sup>He shall pour the water out of his buckets, and his seed shall be in many waters, and his king shall be higher than Agag, and his kingdom shall be exalted. <sup>8</sup>Elohim brought him forth out of Egypt; He hath as it were the strength of an unicorn: he shall eat up the nations his enemies, and shall break*

*their bones, and pierce them through with his arrows. <sup>9</sup>He couched, he lay down as a lion, and as a great lion: who shall stir him up? Blessed is he that blesseth thee, and cursed is he that curseth thee.*

Needless to say, King Balak was not very pleased with Balaam's prophecies. While Balaam could not satisfy Balak's request for a crippling curse upon the children of Israel, Balaam had nonetheless discovered both the strength and the weakness of the people of Israel. Within these three prophecies or blessings Balaam had discerned some measure of truth. Let us now look at these three blessings and discover what Balaam learned and related to Balak.

In the first of the three responses given above, Balaam discovered that the strength of the children of Israel was not natural. Balaam realized that the people of Israel's strength was directly connected to their relationship with YHWH ELOHIM. It was the will and disposition of Elohim that determined the success or failure of the children of Israel.

*Numbers 23:8 How shall I curse, whom Elohim hath not cursed? or how shall I defy, whom YHWH hath not defied?*

Balaam likewise realized that there was a spiritual and physical aspect to the children of Israel. We should take note how Balaam repeatedly used the name "Jacob" to describe the physical reality, and "Israel" to denote the spiritual reality.

*Numbers 23:10 Who can count the dust of Jacob, and the number of the fourth part of Israel?*

Balaam also realized that Israel's righteousness was the key factor to the victory-giving relationship.

*Numbers 23:10 ... Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his!*

In Balaam's second response we again see the revelation of the physical and spiritual reality of the children of Israel, as well as the protective power of their righteousness.

*Numbers 24:20 Behold, I have received commandment to bless: and He hath blessed; and I cannot reverse it. <sup>21</sup>He hath not beheld iniquity in Jacob, neither hath He seen perverseness in Israel: YHWH his Elohim is with him, and the shout of a king is among them.*

Finally, in Balaam's last response to Balak we again hear the reality that Israel's moral and righteous living was a determining factor to their success.

*Numbers 24:5 How goodly are thy tents, O Jacob, and thy tabernacles, O Israel! <sup>6</sup>As the valleys are they spread forth, as gardens by the river's side, as the trees of lign aloes which YHWH hath planted, and as cedar trees beside the waters.*

Through these insights Balaam realized the source of Israel's strength, and therefore was able to reveal to Balak the proper means of attacking Israel. If the source of the people of Israel's

strength was their relationship with YHWH ELOHIM, and the key to this relationship was their righteousness; then if one could cause the children of Israel to stray from the Torah, he would cause YHWH to curse them. So Balaam gave Balak the simple truth: if you can't curse them, corrupt them! This concept of corrupting the people of Israel through temptation in order to weaken them became known as the "doctrine of Balaam."

*Revelation 2:14 But I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balac to cast a stumblingblock before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication.*

This is exactly what Balak and the elders of Midian did.

*Numbers 25:1 And Israel abode in Shittim, and the people began to commit whoredom with the daughters of Moab. <sup>2</sup>And they called the people unto the sacrifices of their elohim: and the people did eat, and bowed down to their elohim. <sup>3</sup>And Israel joined himself unto Baalpeor: and the anger of YHWH was kindled against Israel.*

So great was the anger of YHWH against the children of Israel that He commanded Moses to hang the heads of this rebellious people up before them as a warning against any who would further this idolatrous rebellion.

*Numbers 25:4 And YHWH said unto Moses, Take all the heads of the people, and hang them up before YHWH against the sun, that the fierce anger of YHWH may be turned away from Israel.*

But even while Moses was seeking to stem the tide of this moral plague, Zimri the Simeonite took Cozbi, the daughter of one of the princes of Midian, and fornicated with her in the Holy Place.

*Numbers 25:6 And, behold, one of the children of Israel came and brought unto his brethren a Midianitish woman in the sight of Moses, and in the sight of all the congregation of the children of Israel, who were weeping before the door of the tabernacle of the congregation.*

When Pinchas, a Levite, saw this great abomination, he zealously picked up a spear, followed them into the tent, and ran them both through the belly.

*Numbers 25:7 And when Pinchas, the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, saw it, he rose up from among the congregation, and took a javelin in his hand; <sup>8</sup>and he went after the man of Israel into the tent, and thrust both of them through, the man of Israel, and the woman through her belly. So the plague was stayed from the children of Israel. <sup>9</sup>And those that died in the plague were twenty and four thousand.*

This is where our Torah portion begins. We see that Pinchas was blessed and rewarded mightily by the Holy One for his zealousness in protecting and defending both the Holy Place

and the holiness of YHWH, as well as in defending the children of Israel from the doctrine of Balaam.

***Numbers 25:10** And YHWH spake unto Moses, saying, <sup>11</sup>Pinchas, the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, hath turned My wrath away from the children of Israel, while he was zealous for My sake among them, that I consumed not the children of Israel in My jealousy. <sup>12</sup>Wherefore say, Behold, I give unto him My covenant of peace: <sup>13</sup>and he shall have it, and his seed after him, even the covenant of an everlasting priesthood; because he was zealous for his Elohim, and made an atonement for the children of Israel.*

Given the current events in the land of Israel at the present time and the exiled status and division among the two houses of Israel, there are several important truths that we need to realize in this story.

First let us take to heart what Balaam realized – that YHWH was (and still is today) the strength and protector of Israel.

***Psalm 121:4** Behold, He that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep.*

***Exodus 15:2** YHWH is my strength and song, and He is become my salvation: He is my Elohim, and I will prepare Him an habitation; my father's Elohim, and I will exalt Him.*

***2 Samuel 22:33** Elohim is my strength and power: and He maketh my way perfect.*

***Psalm 18:2** YHWH is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer; my Elohim, my strength, in whom I will trust; my buckler, and the horn of my salvation, and my high tower.*

***Psalm 28:7** YHWH is my strength and my shield; my heart trusted in Him, and I am helped: therefore my heart greatly rejoiceth; and with my song will I praise Him.*

***Psalm 62:7** In Elohim is my salvation and my glory: the rock of my strength, and my refuge, is in Elohim.*

***Psalm 118:14** YHWH is my strength and song, and is become my salvation.*

***Isaiah 12:2** Behold, Elohim is my salvation; I will trust, and not be afraid: for YAH YHWH is my strength and my song; He also is become my salvation.*

***Jeremiah 16:19** O YHWH, my strength, and my fortress, and my refuge in the day of affliction, the Gentiles shall come unto Thee from the ends of the earth, and shall say, Surely our fathers have inherited lies, vanity, and things wherein there is no profit.*

It was not in the strength of horse, man, diplomacy, or technology that the people of Israel were to put their faith, but in YHWH ELOHIM alone. YHWH had warned Israel against the vain hope of trusting in the strength of men, technology (chariots), horses, and allies. Military might was not what protected Israel then, and not what protects Israel today.

**Isaiah 30:1** *Woe to the rebellious children, saith YHWH, that take counsel, but not of Me; and that cover with a covering, but not of My Spirit, that they may add sin to sin: <sup>2</sup>that walk to go down into Egypt, and have not asked at My mouth; to strengthen themselves in the strength of Pharaoh, and to trust in the shadow of Egypt!*

**Isaiah 31:1** *Woe to them that go down to Egypt for help; and stay on horses, and trust in chariots, because they are many; and in horsemen, because they are very strong; but they look not unto the Holy One of Israel, neither seek YHWH! <sup>2</sup>Yet He also is wise, and will bring evil, and will not call back His words: but will arise against the house of the evildoers, and against the help of them that work iniquity. <sup>3</sup>Now the Egyptians are men, and not Elohim; and their horses flesh, and not spirit. When YHWH shall stretch out His hand, both he that helpeth shall fall, and he that is holpen shall fall down, and they all shall fail together.*

**Psalms 33:17** *An horse is a vain thing for safety: neither shall he deliver any by his great strength. <sup>18</sup>Behold, the eye of YHWH is upon them that fear Him, upon them that hope in His mercy; <sup>19</sup>to deliver their soul from death, and to keep them alive in famine. <sup>20</sup>Our soul waiteth for YHWH: He is our help and our shield.*

**Psalms 147:10** *He delighteth not in the strength of the horse: He taketh not pleasure in the legs of a man. <sup>11</sup>YHWH taketh pleasure in them that fear Him, in those that hope in His mercy.*

The second truth that we should come to understand from the circumstances surrounding Balaam, Balak, and Pinchas is that to a large extent, we determine by our choices the degree of intimacy and protection we enjoy with our Creator. This becomes quite clear in the Torah's teachings on blessings and curses.

**Deuteronomy 28:15** *But it shall come to pass, if thou wilt not hearken unto the voice of YHWH thy Elohim, to observe to do all His commandments and His statutes which I command thee this day; that all these curses shall come upon thee, and overtake thee.*

**Deuteronomy 28:45** *Moreover all these curses shall come upon thee, and shall pursue thee, and overtake thee, till thou be destroyed; because thou hearkenedst not unto the voice of YHWH thy Elohim, to keep His commandments and His statutes which He commanded thee.*

**Deuteronomy 29:20** *YHWH will not spare him, but then the anger of YHWH and His jealousy shall smoke against that man, and all the curses that are written in this book shall lie upon him, and YHWH shall blot out his name from under heaven. <sup>21</sup>And YHWH shall separate him unto evil out of all the tribes of Israel, according to all the curses of the covenant that are written in this book of the law.*

**Deuteronomy 30:7** *And YHWH thy Elohim will put all these curses upon thine enemies, and on them that hate thee, which persecuted thee.*

**Deuteronomy 30:15** See, I have set before thee this day life and good, and death and evil; <sup>16</sup>in that I command thee this day to love YHWH thy Elohim, to walk in His ways, and to keep His commandments and His statutes and His judgments, that thou mayest live and multiply: and YHWH thy Elohim shall bless thee in the land whither thou goest to possess it.

**Deuteronomy 30:19** I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live.

Since the testimony of Scripture tells us that YHWH never changes, we must understand that it is YHWH'S constant desire to bless, protect, and commune with us. Since YHWH is eternal and has no limits in time and space, it is not the Holy One that comes and goes from this saving relationship, but we who change our disposition toward Him by our obedience or lack thereof. This truth becomes quite evident in the above passage of Scripture.

What YHWH put before the children of Israel was the option of dealing with a gentle, loving YHWH if they were obedient, or dealing with the rod of YHWH, who out of love would chastise them if they were disobedient. We should be clear to understand that both responses on the part of YHWH are inspired by His love for us. We will see this truth confirmed for us again a little later in our portion.

The third truth that we should clearly understand is our calling to love YHWH with all of our heart. Here we must recall an earlier story involving both Simeon and Levi. When Jacob and his family first came to the land of promise, they settled in the valley of Shechem. It was in Shechem that Dinah, the daughter of Leah, went out to see what the people of the land of Shechem were like. She quickly found out when Shechem kidnapped and raped her. This event stirred the hearts of her brothers, who sought a way to rescue her from the house of Shechem. The brothers deceived the men of the town into circumcising themselves.<sup>ii</sup> When the men of Shechem were too sore to move, the sons of Jacob pillaged the town and rescued Dinah. Two of the sons, however, acted impulsively, and slaughtered all the men of Shechem.

**Genesis 34:25** And it came to pass on the third day, when they were sore, that two of the sons of Jacob, Simeon and Levi, Dinah's brethren, took each man his sword, and came upon the city boldly, and slew all the males. <sup>26</sup>And they slew Hamor and Shechem his son with the edge of the sword, and took Dinah out of Shechem's house, and went out.

This impulsive behavior won for them their father's dire rebuke.

**Genesis 34:30** And Jacob said to Simeon and Levi, Ye have troubled me to make me to stink among the inhabitants of the land, among the Canaanites and the Perizzites: and I being few in number, they shall gather themselves together against me, and slay me; and I shall be destroyed, I and my house.

**Genesis 49:5** Simeon and Levi are brethren; instruments of cruelty are in their habitations. <sup>6</sup>O my soul, come not thou into their secret; unto their assembly, mine honour, be not thou united: for in their anger they slew a man, and in their selfwill they

*digged down a wall. <sup>7</sup>Cursed be their anger, for it was fierce; and their wrath, for it was cruel: I will divide them in Jacob, and scatter them in Israel.*

In the story of the golden calf, however, we witness the descendants of Levi once again acting in a quick and zealous manner, drawing their swords to slay those guilty of bringing a plague upon the children of Israel.<sup>iii</sup>

***Exodus 32:26** Then Moses stood in the gate of the camp, and said, Who is on YHWH'S side? let him come unto me. And all the sons of Levi gathered themselves together unto him. <sup>27</sup>And he said unto them, Thus saith YHWH ELOHIM of Israel, Put every man his sword by his side, and go in and out from gate to gate throughout the camp, and slay every man his brother, and every man his companion, and every man his neighbour. <sup>28</sup>And the children of Levi did according to the word of Moses: and there fell of the people that day about three thousand men.*

Here we witness the Levites using the same violent, zealous nature to serve YHWH and protect the children of Israel from idolatry. It was this ability to marshal their *yetzer hara*<sup>iv</sup> for service unto YHWH that allowed them to truly love and serve YHWH with their whole heart. For this obedience and wholehearted love YHWH sanctified the Levites and blessed them with the honor of protecting His holiness and His sanctuary.

***Numbers 1:53** But the Levites shall pitch round about the tabernacle of testimony, that there be no wrath upon the congregation of the children of Israel: and the Levites shall keep the charge of the tabernacle of testimony. <sup>54</sup>And the children of Israel did according to all that YHWH commanded Moses, so did they.*

***Numbers 3:7** And they shall keep his charge, and the charge of the whole congregation before the tabernacle of the congregation, to do the service of the tabernacle.*

***Numbers 3:10** And thou shalt appoint Aaron and his sons, and they shall wait on their priest's office: and the stranger that cometh nigh shall be put to death.*

***Numbers 3:38** But those that encamp before the tabernacle toward the east, even before the tabernacle of the congregation eastward, shall be Moses, and Aaron and his sons, keeping the charge of the sanctuary for the charge of the children of Israel; and the stranger that cometh nigh shall be put to death.*

This is the true calling for all the children of Israel. We must learn to submit even our carnal nature in zealous love and service to YHWH, thus truly loving Him with our whole heart. By teaching Torah to the children of Israel, the Levites became the true Israeli Defense Force. As long as the children of Israel observed the Torah, YHWH defended them against every weapon formed against them.

In the story of Pinchas and Zimri we again encounter the descendants of Levi and Simeon acting in zealousness. Zimri the Simeonite zealously pursued his carnal nature and satisfied his own lusts with the Midianite princess. Pinchas, on the other hand, fulfilled his calling to protect and defend by picking up the spear and zealously putting Zimri and Cozbi to death. Without

thought of his own peril or emotions, Pinchas acted in love and obedience. This trait is later lauded by Moses himself.

*Deuteronomy 33:8* And of Levi he said, Let Thy Thummim and Thy Urim be with Thy holy one, whom Thou didst prove at Massah, and with whom Thou didst strive at the waters of Meribah; <sup>9</sup>who said unto his father and to his mother, I have not seen him; neither did he acknowledge his brethren, nor knew his own children: for they have observed Thy word, and kept Thy covenant. <sup>10</sup>They shall teach Jacob Thy judgments, and Israel Thy law: they shall put incense before Thee, and whole burnt sacrifice upon Thine altar. <sup>11</sup>Bless, YHWH, his substance, and accept the work of his hands: smite through the loins of them that rise against him, and of them that hate him, that they rise not again.

Would that all of us could so love YHWH ELOHIM that we would put no other care, thought, or concern before the fulfilling of His Word. We should note that as was the case with his ancestors, Pinchas was likewise rewarded for his faithful obedience.

*Numbers 25:10* And YHWH spake unto Moses, saying, <sup>11</sup>Pinchas, the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, hath turned My wrath away from the children of Israel, while he was zealous for My sake among them, that I consumed not the children of Israel in My jealousy. <sup>12</sup>Wherefore say, Behold, I give unto him My covenant of peace: <sup>13</sup>and he shall have it, and his seed after him, even the covenant of an everlasting priesthood; because he was zealous for his Elohim, and made an atonement for the children of Israel.

The covenant made with Pinchas was a covenant of an eternal priesthood. Here we should understand who Pinchas was. Pinchas was the grandson of Aaron through his son Eleazar.

*Exodus 6:25* And Eleazar Aaron's son took him one of the daughters of Putiel to wife; and she bare him Pinchas: these are the heads of the fathers of the Levites according to their families.

While Aaron and his sons were consecrated to become the set apart *cohanim*,<sup>v</sup> Pinchas remained a Levite and was not consecrated with them. YHWH not only blessed Pinchas with the office of *cohen*<sup>vi</sup>, but assured him that every future *Cohen Gadol*<sup>vii</sup> and *cohen* would be counted through his descendents. This covenant is called a covenant of peace. We may ask why this unconditional covenant is called a covenant of peace. But before we answer this question, we must understand a peculiarity about the word “peace,” or *shalom*, as it appears in the Torah scroll at this point.

Of the twenty-two Hebrew consonants used in the Hebrew alphabet, only two of them are made up of two unattached pen strokes. The letter Hey has a small gap that separates one of the strokes from the rest of the letter. Likewise the letter Kof has a small gap at the top and bottom separating the two pen strokes from each other. If these letters were to be written without the gaps, causing the two pen strokes to touch, it would disqualify the scroll from usage until these errors were corrected. The same is likewise true if a gap would appear in any of the other twenty letters.

Knowing this about the Torah scroll makes the word *shalom* (Shin, Lamed, Vav, Mem) in this passage of considerable interest. This is so because the Vav in this word is broken; that is, it is written with a gap or hole in the middle of it. There are numerous reasons given for this exception to the rule. This broken letter in many ways tells the whole story of Pinchas. We may recall that the letter Vav has the numerical value of 6. Six is the number of man. Therefore what we see in the middle of this word is a picture of man (Zimri) with a whole through his middle. When we divide the Vav into two pieces like this, the top part looks like the letter Yod, which has the same root as the Hebrew word for "hand." The bottom part of the Vav looks like a long spear. So we see the hand of Pinchas and the spear which he used to slay Zimri and Cozbi.

But I want to suggest a different reason for this covenant being called a covenant of peace. We should recognize that the story of Pinchas is the last of several stories of rebellion on the part of the children of Israel while in the wilderness. The rebellion began with Miriam and Aaron rebelling against Moses;<sup>viii</sup> then the rebellion of the spies,<sup>ix</sup> the man gathering sticks on the Sabbath,<sup>x</sup> the rebellion of Korah, Dathan, Abiram, On, and the 250 princes of Israel,<sup>xi</sup> the rebellion of the people against Moses;<sup>xii</sup> and finally the people of Israel's whoredom with the Moabite women,<sup>xiii</sup> their idolatrous rebellion in bowing down to Baalpeor,<sup>xiv</sup> and Zimri the Simeonite bringing the Midianite woman Cozbi into the camp.<sup>xv</sup>

In each and every one of these acts of rebellion there was a corrective measure extended to the children of Israel from YHWH. These chastisements came in various ways, such as *tsara'at*,<sup>xvi</sup> plagues, consuming fires, earthquakes, and fiery serpents. But the stubbornness of the people of Israel often caused them to harden their hearts and reject any sense of personal accountability. Instead, the children of Israel often pointed to the leadership and those that were in truth trying to help them.

In the rebellion of Korah and his friends, we witnessed how several different groups with diverse complaints joined together against Moses and Aaron: disgruntled Levites wanting to be *cohanim*, 250 disgruntled firstborns wanting the place of the Levites, and Dathan, Abiram, and On upset with failing to make it into the promised land. YHWH put down this rebellion and confirmed Moses and Aaron as His anointed leaders in quite a dramatic fashion. The earth opened up and swallowed Dathan and Abiram, while fire from the altar consumed the 250 who presumed to offer incense upon the altar of YHWH. This should have been the end of the rebellion, but it was not.

*Numbers 16:41* But on the morrow all the congregation of the children of Israel murmured against Moses and against Aaron, saying, Ye have killed the people of YHWH. <sup>43</sup>And Moses and Aaron came before the tabernacle of the congregation. <sup>44</sup>And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, <sup>45</sup>Get you up from among this congregation, that I may consume them as in a moment. And they fell upon their faces.

As soon as one plague was stayed, another began. Here the people again rebelled against Moses and Aaron, claiming that they had killed the children of Israel. Aaron was then instructed to go out among the children of Israel with his censor filled with incense and stop the plague.

*Numbers 16:46* And Moses said unto Aaron, Take a censer, and put fire therein from off the altar, and put on incense, and go quickly unto the congregation, and make an atonement for them: for there is wrath gone out from YHWH; the plague is begun. <sup>47</sup>And Aaron took as Moses commanded, and ran into the midst of the congregation; and, behold, the plague was begun among the people: and he put on incense, and made an atonement for the people. <sup>48</sup>And he stood between the dead and the living; and the plague was stayed.

By sending Aaron out with the incense, the plague and the rebellion were stayed.

In our portion it is Pinchas who stopped the moral plague killing Israel. But even though Pinchas acted according to his calling and in zeal for YHWH, this was not enough to prevent the tribe of Simeon and others from claiming a blood right to avenge the death of Zimri, their kinsman. It would be well within the realm of believability to imagine that the children of Israel, who had already expressed their jealousy and dissatisfaction with the Levites being elevated to a position of honor, would use this lifesaving event for another reason to rebel.

By establishing the priesthood through Pinchas, YHWH protected Pinchas and his descendants from those who might seek to avenge the blood of Zimri. If the children of Israel would have killed Pinchas or his children, they would have shut down the altar, the priesthood, and their only means of atonement before YHWH. Killing Pinchas would have meant killing the priesthood. Without the priesthood, there could not have been an acceptable altar service. Without the altar service, there could have been no atonement. Without atonement, there could not have been communion with Elohim. Without communion with Elohim, there could not have been protection from the nations. Without protection from the nations, Israel would have ceased to exist.

We should understand that this same principle was behind YHWH'S commandments concerning the tithe going to the Levites.<sup>xvii</sup> Had Israel failed to support the Levites, there would not have been any Torah teachers in Israel. Without the Torah, Israel would not have existed. So it is that by connecting the priesthood to Pinchas, YHWH covered him with peace from the fear of those who would seek revenge upon him. We should note that unlike earlier stories of rebellion in the book of Bamidbar/Numbers, this rebellion stops with the covenant. We read of no more incidents of the children of Israel seeking to replace their leaders or trying to return to Egypt. It would seem then that after this incident of Pinchas zealously protecting Israel by protecting the sanctity of the tabernacle, the rebellion was finally put to death.

We also should take note that the very next story in our portion is that of another census being taken. Here we witness the very transition between the rebellious and backward-looking first generation and the forward-looking and faithful second generation. It should not go without notice that within the Hebrew of this text we see the calling upon the children of Israel reaffirmed.

*Numbers 26:1* And it came to pass after the plague, that YHWH spake unto Moses and unto Eleazar the son of Aaron the priest, saying, <sup>2</sup>take the sum of all the congregation of the children of Israel, from twenty years old and upward, throughout their fathers' house, all that are able to go to war in Israel.

Here we see the same language as in the beginning of the book of Bamidabar/Numbers. The literal Hebrew of this passage again states:

*“Lift up (ALEPH TAV - Messiah<sup>xviii</sup>) the head of all the congregation of the children of Israel”<sup>xix</sup>*

We should also note that there was very little change in the overall census of the children of Israel. In the first census taken we are told that there were about 600,000 men that came out of Egypt.<sup>xx</sup> The first census in the wilderness listed a total of 603,550 men of war.<sup>xxi</sup> The census in our portion, taken after numerous plagues, attacks, rebellions, and forty years of wandering, showed a total of 601,730; a decrease of only 1,820 men of war. It should be considered miraculous that given everything that the children of Israel endured, these totals would be so close after forty years. We may also note that the largest decrease of any tribe was that of Simeon, of whom Zimri was a representative. According to the two censuses, the tribe of Simeon lost 37,100 of its men of war. We may also note that once again the Levites were not counted among the children of Israel.

We may ask why YHWH felt it was necessary to have another census taken. There may be several good reasons. First we see that like the first census, only the men of war were counted. We may assume then that as the children of Israel drew near again to entering the land of Israel, it was necessary to know the size of one’s army. However, our portion specifically gives us a second reason for the numbering of the people.

*Numbers 26:51 These were the numbered of the children of Israel, six hundred thousand and a thousand seven hundred and thirty. <sup>52</sup>And YHWH spake unto Moses, saying, <sup>53</sup>Unto these the land shall be divided for an inheritance according to the number of names. <sup>54</sup>To many thou shalt give the more inheritance, and to few thou shalt give the less inheritance: to every one shall his inheritance be given according to those that were numbered of him. <sup>55</sup>Notwithstanding the land shall be divided by lot: according to the names of the tribes of their fathers they shall inherit. <sup>56</sup>According to the lot shall the possession thereof be divided between many and few.*

Here we witness an implied victory and fulfillment of the promise of YHWH. The children of Israel ARE going to inherit the land, and therefore every provision needs to be made for their victory. So it is that we learn that those who were numbered from among the tribes would be the inheritors of the land.

Yet a third reason behind why another census was taken was to demonstrate the fact that YHWH ELOHIM will indeed chastise His people, but not utterly destroy them. While we have witnessed an entire generation fall to rebellion and plagues, the children of Israel go on. We may see this same reality played out throughout history. YHWH has used many a heathen nation and empire to chastise His children, but He has never utterly forsaken or destroyed them. All that YHWH has done and is doing is to lead us to repentance and the fulfillment of our calling to be the image of YHWH ELOHIM in the world.

## SHAVUA TOV!

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<sup>i</sup> Numbers 21:1-3, 10-35

<sup>ii</sup> Genesis 34:1ff

<sup>iii</sup> Exodus 32:1ff

<sup>iv</sup> Evil inclination

<sup>v</sup> Priests

<sup>vi</sup> Priest

<sup>vii</sup> High Priest

<sup>viii</sup> Numbers 12:1-16

<sup>ix</sup> Numbers 13:1-14:45

<sup>x</sup> Numbers 15:32-36

<sup>xi</sup> Numbers 16:1-40

<sup>xii</sup> Numbers 16:41-50; 21:4-9

<sup>xiii</sup> Numbers 25:1

<sup>xiv</sup> Numbers 25:2-5

<sup>xv</sup> Numbers 25:6-9, 14-18

<sup>xvi</sup> Although usually translated as “leprosy,” *tsara’at* is a divine affliction; the physical symptom of a deeper spiritual condition. The purpose of *tsara’at* is not merely to punish and put away, but to chastise the fallen one that he might repent and be restored. Only YHWH can discern a man’s heart, but once discovered, He begins the process of exposing the hidden sins to the light of day that they may be repented of. The *tsara’at* begins with a small, bean-size bump on the skin, but it may also afflict the beard and hair. For those who stubbornly refuse to repent the plague intensifies, spreading to one’s garments and ultimately to one’s house, causing everything to be brought out of the home and into plain sight. Since YHWH can see what man cannot, *tsara’at* becomes the means by which He exposes even the darkest secrets of a man’s heart and soul. See my study on the Torah portion Metzora for a fuller explanation.

<sup>xvii</sup> Numbers 18:20-32

<sup>xviii</sup> In Revelation 1:8, 11; 21:6; 22:13 Messiah reveals himself to be the “Alpha and Omega.” It is more likely that the Jewish Messiah, speaking to a Jewish disciple, would have spoken in Hebrew and not Greek. If this is so, then what Messiah said was, “I am the ‘Aleph Tav.’” Aleph is the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet, while Tav is the last letter. These two letters appear right before the word “head” in the following Torah passages: Genesis 40:20; Exodus 30:12; Numbers 1:2; 4:2, 22; 5:18; 6:18; 26:2; 31:26; 31:49. In each of these instances there is some connection to the Messiah.

<sup>xix</sup> See my study on the Torah portion Bamidbar for a fuller explanation.

<sup>xx</sup> Exodus 12:37

<sup>xxi</sup> Numbers 1:46