

## Notes for Parsha Pinchas: Numbers 25:10 – 30:1

In this parsha we see Phinehas / Pinchas being rewarded for his zeal, we see another census of the Israelites along with a census of the Levites. Caanan is apportioned among the tribes, including the daughters of Zelophehad. The laws of daily and festival offering are also covered in this reading.

This parsha opens with the reward for Pinchas' zeal in killing the Moabite woman and her Israelite lover at the end of the last parsha. It would seem logical that this opening section would be included as part of parsha Balak, but it's not. Pinchas' reward comes not because he slew the couple, but because he saved the Israelites from God's wrath that was incurred because of their immoral behavior. God's wrath came in the form of a plague that was stayed only because of Pinchas killed the offending Israelite and the Moabite woman.

This narrative is immediately followed by the taking of another census to record the men age twenty and up who are eligible for military service. We now longer use a census to gather this information today. Instead, our young people register with the Selective Service. Yet the purpose remains the same - tracking the number of young men available for military service. The census is taken tribe by tribe in the names of the Israelites ancestral houses and a listing of these clans and numbers of potential soldiers appears as an archival record in this reading. The census includes the number of Levites although, as their job is to serve the priests in the Tabernacle, they are not eligible for military service.

In Bamidbar / Numbers 27, we find the narrative about the daughters of Zelophehad who were descendants of a Manassite family. Zelophehad had died without leaving any sons – just daughters and the daughters were questioning what would happen to their father's share of the Promised Land. Moses took the question to God who said to give the daughters their father's portion. This expands into a law for the Israelite people that when a man, without sons, dies, his property is inherited by his daughter. If there are no daughters, the property is inherited by his brothers. If there are no brothers, his property is inherited by his uncles. If he has no uncles, the property is inherited by the nearest relative in his clan. As we have seen with other laws, this law is to be for all time through the ages.

Verse 16 of chapter 27 has Moses addressing God by a name that was not given by God but by the people. **יש** יהוה אלהי הרחות לכל בשר **איש** "God, God of Breath (Breathing) of all man (human) flesh." It is by this opening that Moses asks about his successor. God appoints Joshua and asks that Moses ordain him in front in the entire community. Joshua is also to appear before the priest Eleazar who will consult the Urim oracle for a decision. We really don't know what the purpose of either the Urim or the Thummim were in the bible, but apparently their usage had to do with divination, a practice frowned on by Torah. Even though Moses had no need for such an oracle, it appears that Joshua will need this assistance.

The parsha ends with a reminder of God's holy festivals along with the instructions of when and how to observe them. Instructions are given for Rosh haShannah – 29:1 and Yom Kippur 29:7. Neither of these observed dates are given names in the Torah, just the instructions on how to observe them. In 29:12, the

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instructions are given for the observance of Sukkot and all its intermediary days as well as the observance of the eight day.

The last sentence shows Moses speaking all these words to the Israelites as he'd been commanded by God.