

# TORAHSCOPE: Pinchas (Phinehas)

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Numbers 25:10-30:1[29:40]  
1 Kings 18:46-19:21

## “Consuming Zeal”

Our Torah reading for this week, *Pinchas*, is entitled for the son of the high priest Eleazar, whose actions were actually more fully detailed in the closing verses of *Balak* (Numbers 25:1-9). As you begin your study, you might wonder why the incident regarding Phinehas was separated into these two different readings. The episode is described in detail at the end of *Balak*, and the resultant blessings that ensued for Phinehas are described in the *parashah* which bears his name. I would simply say that those who follow the annual Torah cycle are given two opportunities to reflect upon Phinehas—both his righteously indignant actions, and how the Lord promised him perpetual favor:

“Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ‘Phinehas the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, has turned away My wrath from the sons of Israel in that he was jealous with My jealousy among them, so that I did not destroy the sons of Israel in My jealousy. Therefore say, “Behold, I give him My covenant of peace; and it shall be for him and his descendants after him, a covenant of a perpetual priesthood, because he was jealous for his God and made atonement for the sons of Israel”’ (Numbers 25:10-13).

With *Balak* having concluded with Phinehas’ stoppage of a potentially wide sweeping plague, *Pinchas* records how a census of Israel is taken after the initial plague is stopped.<sup>1</sup> Following this are instructions regarding inheritance of property<sup>2</sup> and some of the specific offerings and sacrifices that are to be made during special days and the appointed times.<sup>3</sup> Although these are important passages, much of the focus for our *parashah* will understandably be considering the effects of the righteous deeds of Phinehas by stopping the spread of sin in the camp of Israel.

## Balaam’s Advice

In *Balak*, our Torah portion from last week, the prophet-for-hire Balaam declared three distinct blessings over Israel (Numbers 23:7-10, 18-24; 24:3-9)—which were not well received by his benefactor, King Balak. Later in Numbers 31:16 it is stated that the council of Balaam to Balak was to get the Israelite men to curse themselves, which did occur as many of them consorted with Moabite prostitutes. The scene of Numbers 25:1-9 plays a role for further instruction that Yeshua’s delivers to the assembly at Pergamum in the Book of Revelation. Apparently, there were teachers in Pergamum who taught things that would have the same negative effect of people cursing themselves, by cavorting in idolatrous places where sexual immorality was practiced:

“But I have a few things against you, because you have there some who hold the teaching of Balaam, who kept teaching Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols and to commit *acts of immorality*” (Revelation 2:14).

Balaam’s advice was simple, as He instructed Balak to encourage Moabite prostitutes to present themselves to the males of Israel. *Human nature and biology being what they are, many would fall into temptation.* Within a short period of time, the men of Israel will fall into sexual sin and gross idolatry, cursing themselves by demonstrating extreme disloyalty to their God. Sadly, as Moabite prostitutes entered into the camp of Israel, they had a considerable amount of success. Phinehas comes onto the scene, as an Israelite man and one of the prostitutes prepare to fornicate adjacent to the Tent of Meeting. He takes action and executes them both with a spear:

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<sup>1</sup> Numbers 26:1-65.

<sup>2</sup> Numbers 27:1-14.

<sup>3</sup> Numbers 28:1-29:40.

“While Israel remained at Shittim, the people began to play the harlot with the daughters of Moab. For they invited the people to the sacrifices of their gods, and the people ate and bowed down to their gods. So Israel joined themselves to Baal of Peor, and the LORD was angry against Israel. The LORD said to Moses, ‘Take all the leaders of the people and execute them in broad daylight before the LORD, so that the fierce anger of the LORD may turn away from Israel.’ So Moses said to the judges of Israel, ‘Each of you slay his men who have joined themselves to Baal of Peor.’ Then behold, one of the sons of Israel came and brought to his relatives a Midianite woman, in the sight of Moses and in the sight of all the congregation of the sons of Israel, while they were weeping at the doorway of the tent of meeting. When Phinehas the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, saw it, he arose from the midst of the congregation and took a spear in his hand, and he went after the man of Israel into the tent and pierced both of them through, the man of Israel and the woman, through the body. So the plague on the sons of Israel was checked. Those who died by the plague were 24,000” (Numbers 25:1-9).

Reflecting on this scene, we see that the base desires and instincts of the flesh were inflamed. The Moabite women enticed the Israelite men with the promise of sexual pleasure. These acts of flagrant disobedience infuriated the Lord, and the punishment communicated to Moses was to be very swift and severe. The judges of Israel were to take the leaders, who succumbed to the Moabite women and joined themselves to Baal of Peor, and slay them. This direct judgment was to take place immediately, because the “the LORD’s anger burned against them” (NIV) in the form of a plague that would ravage Israel.

As this command was given to the weeping judges at the doorway of the Tent of Meeting, the epitome of blatant sin was being exhibited right before their eyes. One of the young princes of Israel, from the tribe of Simeon, flagrantly brought a young Midianite woman right in front of Moses and those assembled at the Tent of Meeting. Then in an act of total disregard for his elders and the instructions of God, he took her aside to engage in sexual intercourse.

Our hero Phinehas jumped into action. He grabbed a spear and went over to the tent where the sin was taking place. He goes inside and impales both sinners. This dramatic execution astonished the crowd, but most importantly, it pleased God greatly. Almost immediately, the plague was stopped and only a limited number of Israelites died from the Divine fury.

## Phinehas’ Reward

Now as we continue to this week’s Torah reading, the reward to Phinehas for his actions to terminate the vile behavior is articulated:

“Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ‘Phinehas the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, has turned away My wrath from the sons of Israel in that he was jealous with My jealousy among them, so that I did not destroy the sons of Israel in My jealousy. Therefore say, “Behold, I give him My covenant of peace; and it shall be for him and his descendants after him, a covenant of a perpetual priesthood, because he was jealous for his God and made atonement for the sons of Israel”’” (Numbers 25:10-13).

The Lord is greatly pleased with Phinehas. He states that Phinehas was “jealous with My jealousy,” which elevated the execution of the two sinners to the level that He required for perfect justice to be delivered. As a result of responding with righteous indignation to the sin in the camp, Phinehas receives an eternal reward from God. He and his descendants will have a covenant of peace and be made a perpetual priesthood. The Lord was very moved when witnessing an individual who had the passion and zeal to operate on a level where sin and unrighteousness would be promptly dealt with. Centuries later, the Psalmist will reflect on Phinehas’ actions:

“Then Phinehas stood up and interposed, and so the plague was stayed. And it was reckoned to him for righteousness, to all generations forever” (Psalm 106:30-31).

This is an interesting use of words, because it might remind us of how Abraham’s faith in God was reckoned to him as righteousness:

“Then he believed in the LORD; and He reckoned it to him as righteousness” (Genesis 15:6).

The statement, “credited it to him as righteousness” (NIV), has become one of the most important themes seen throughout the Bible—most especially for those of us who have placed our trust in Messiah Yeshua. The Apostle Paul made use of Genesis 15:6 in his letters to the Galatians and the Romans:

“Even so Abraham BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS RECKONED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS” (Galatians 3:6).

“For what does the Scripture say? ‘ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS CREDITED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS’” (Romans 4:3).

James the Just, half-brother of Yeshua, also quotes Genesis 15:6, in trying to describe how faith in God and the right actions work together:

“You see that faith was working with his works, and as a result of the works, faith was perfected; and the Scripture was fulfilled which says, ‘AND ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS RECKONED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS,’ and he was called the friend of God” (James 2:23).

In many respects, the father of faith, Abraham, had his faith counted to him as righteousness because he fully believed in God’s promises to him and acted accordingly. In a similar manner, Phinehas’ actions to execute the fornicators not only halted a devastating plague upon Israel, but his actions were considered just and righteous. *God is greatly pleased when zealous people stand up and do the right thing.*

## Consuming Zeal

When Believers often think about zeal and zealousness for holy and righteous living, we are rightly reminded of the life and ministry of Messiah Yeshua. The words of Psalm 69:9, “For zeal for Your house has consumed me, and the reproaches of those who reproach You have fallen on me” (Psalm 69:9), may come to remembrance, as it embodies much of what guided Yeshua’s actions. This very verse gives a witness to Yeshua’s outrage with the Temple moneychangers, as they were often found to be shortchanging the people:

“The Passover of the Jews was near, and Yeshua went up to Jerusalem. And He found in the temple those who were selling oxen and sheep and doves, and the money changers seated *at their tables*. And He made a scourge of cords, and drove *them* all out of the temple, with the sheep and the oxen; and He poured out the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables; and to those who were selling the doves He said, ‘Take these things away; stop making My Father’s house a place of business.’ His disciples remembered that it was written, ‘ZEAL FOR YOUR HOUSE WILL CONSUME ME’ [Psalm 69:9]” (John 2:13-17).

In this readily remembered incident, Yeshua is seen to have had a serious problem with the Temple moneychangers who made the House of God into a den of merchandising and business. We can see some definite parallels between Phinehas’ act of summary judgment, and Yeshua taking matters into His own hands with overturning the tables in the Temple complex. The Lord discerned the motives of the enterprise that was being conducted, and without a great deal of warning, takes up righteous judgment on His own accord. Surely others had witnessed some of the hassling and intimidation of those who had come into the Temple to purchase animals for sacrifice, or exchange their foreign currency for Temple standard. Had there been those who had wanted to do something about it, but were too afraid? *Yeshua was not afraid to take actions in the Holy Place.*

## Modern-Day Zeal

As one contemplates the examples of both Phinehas’ and Yeshua’s zeal, it is important for us to consider our own level of passion for righteousness. When we examine *Balak* and *Pinchas* every year in the Torah cycle, do we really reflect on what we might do, when confronted with scenes of unrighteousness? Will we take the necessary action, or will we be scared of potential

harm that might come to us? Admittedly, what Phinehas and Yeshua both did was not popular with many of the people. Yet, Phinehas inherited an eternal covenant of peace!

Perhaps each of us should take a good look at ourselves, before we consider to take action in an assembly. How are you presently dealing with any personal sin that impedes with your walk? Are you pursuing righteousness? Do you ever think about overturning the tables of sinful thoughts and attitudes that might manifest themselves in your heart? Are you willing to impale and execute that old unrighteous person, which may manifest itself from time to time?

The example of Phinehas should be a great inspiration to you as you seek to please our Heavenly Father, serving Him with a pure heart and with honorable motives. Does a zeal for things of the Lord *really* consume your thoughts and actions, or a zeal for self-pleasure, self-interest, and aggrandizement? It my hope and prayer that a zeal for Him occupies your every waking moment!

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