

Pinchas
“Phineas”

Torah Reading: Numbers 25:10-30:1

Haftarah Reading: I Kings 18:46-19:21

Study Notes

Why was the Torah likened to a fig tree? Because, while the fruit of most trees- the olive tree, the vine, and the date tree – is gathered all at once, that of the fig tree is gathered little by little; and it is the same with the Torah. One gathers little learning today and much tomorrow, for it cannot be learned in a year nor in two years. (Bemidbar Rabbah 21.15)

In this parasha we find ourselves back in the camp of the Israelites after God has turned the curses of Balaam into blessings. Now the Holy One must fully prepare a new generation to take possession of the Promised Land.

The Aftermath of the Baal- Peor Incident

In the end of the last sidra, we left as the Israelites were having immoral relations with Midianite women. God sent a plague into the camp to punish both the physical and spiritual harlotry of Israel. During the plague an Israelite named Zimri brought a Midianite woman named Cozbi into the camp to have immoral relations, Phineas, the son of Eleazar the high priest took his spear and pierced the bodies of both Zimri and Cozbi; thus ending the plague that had killed 24,000. Notice that the names of the immoral have saved throughout history just like the cases of good men. It is suggested that this is done so that no one would want to suffer the same humiliation ever again. For the role the Midianites played in the corruption of Israel, Moshe was instructed to harass and smite the Midianites.

Phineas found favor in the eyes of the Lord for what he had done, not because he carried out a punishment without due process, but because he had a passion for the Lord. Because of this passion God made a “covenant of peace” with Phineas, this covenant protected him from revenge of family members as well as from the wrath of God. God also established a covenant that Phineas and his descendants would have a covenant of lasting priesthood, a similar covenant was made with King David (Jeremiah 33:17-18).

The Accounting of a New Generation

In Numbers 26 God instructs Moshe to conduct a census, there are two main suggestions for this census, the first was to show that God had kept His promise concerning the fate of the generation of Israelites who came out of Egypt would not enter the Promised Land because of their sin; the second was to see how many able men they had to form an army. Another could be to provide closure for Moshe for he conducted a census before leaving Egypt and now as his time was drawing near he was instructed to conduct another one.

This census also aided in the division of the nation, tribes with larger populations were given larger portions of land, and the boundaries were decided by lots. The land was

given to the first born son, if there was no son the land was to be given to the daughters or the next of kind, these verses were used to show that God was not willing to see the daughters of His people exploited or deprived of their legitimate holdings.

The Appointment of a New Leader

True to His word God reminded Moshe that because of the events at Kadesh Maribah, he was not going to lead the people into the Promised Land. Instead God told Moshe to climb a high mountain and look into the land, but not to enter it. Moshe did not dwell upon the fact that he would not enter the Promised Land, but instead asked God to appoint a true Sheppard for His people.

God chose Joshua and instructed Moshe to lay his hands upon him in front of Israel so they would know the man Moshe designated to succeed him. When Moshe placed his hands upon Joshua, he placed some of his majesty upon him.

Second, even though God had singled out Joshua and made his choice known to Moshe, the Lord told Moshe and Eleazar to visibly seek God's confirmation; this was so Israel would see that Joshua was not only Moshe's choice but God's.

The remainder of the reading is to remind the Israelites of the offerings they need to make on daily, weekly, monthly, and yearly bases until the coming of the Messiah, His crucifixion, and resurrection.