

7-27-24 Message to Roeh Israel Abilene
Torah Portion: Numbers 25:10 – 29:40 *Pinchas* (“dark skinned”)
Haftarah: 1 Kings 18:46-19:21
Suggested Acheron K’tuvim: John 2:13-18

Under the Law – Part 12 – Where is the Zeal?

Central question of this message: Why does the body if faith lack the zeal that is appropriate for our faith?

We are in parasha *Pinchas*. *Pinchas* means “dark skinned”. The parasha takes its name from the 6th word in the Hebrew, and the eighth word of the parasha in the English translation.

Num 25:10-13

10 Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, 11 "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. 12 Therefore say, 'Behold, I give him My covenant of peace; 13 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."

										10
						וַיְדַבֵּר	יְהוָה	אֶל־	מֹשֶׁה	לֵאמֹר:
						And spake	the Lord	unto	Moses,	saying,
						1696	3068	413	4872	559
										11
מֵעַל	חֲמָתִי	אֶת־	הַשִּׁיב	הַכֹּהֵן	אַהֲרֹן	בֶּן־	אֶלְעָזָר	בֶּן־	פִּינְחָס	
from	my wrath		hath turned away	the priest,	Aaron	the son of	Eleazar,	the son of	Phinehas,	
5921	2534	853	7725	3548	175	1121	499	1121	6372	
אֶת־	כָּלִיתִי	וְלֹא־	בְּתוֹכָם	קָנָאתִי	אֶת־	בְּקִנְאוֹ	יִשְׂרָאֵל	בְּנֵי־		
853	3615	3808	8432	7068	853	7068	3478	1121		
	I consumed	that not	among them,	my sake		while he was zealous for	Israel,	the children of		
						בְּקִנְאוֹתִי:	יִשְׂרָאֵל	בְּנֵי־		
						in my jealousy.	3478	1121		
						7068				
										12
			שְׁלוֹמִ:	בְּרִיתִי	אֶת־	לּוֹ	נָתַן	הִנְנִי	אֹמֵר	לָכֵן
			peace:	my covenant of		unto him	give	Behold, I	say,	Wherefore
			7965	1285	853	3807a	5414	2005	559	3651
										13
וְחַתֵּי אֲשֶׁר	עוֹלָם	כְּהֹנָת	בְּרִית	אֲחֵרָיו	וְיִזְרְעוּ	לּוֹ	וְתִתֶּנָּה			
because	everlasting	an priesthood;	the covenant of	even	after him,	and his seed	it,	And he shall have		
834 8478	5769	3550	1285	9999	310	2233	3807a	1961		
		יִשְׂרָאֵל:	בְּנֵי	עַל־	וַיַּכְפֹּר	לְאֱלֹהָיו	קָנָא			
		Israel.	the children of	for	and made an atonement	for his God,	he was zealous			
		3478	1121	5921	3722	430	7065			

What we have in this parasha is a story of a hero. Pinchas is one who was willing to stand alone for G-d, and risked his life doing so. Let's read the account of his actions in Scripture.

Num 25:1-9

25 While Israel remained at Shittim, the people began to play the harlot with the daughters of Moab. 2 For they invited the people to the sacrifices of their gods, and the

people ate and bowed down to their gods. 3 So Israel joined themselves to Baal of Peor, and the Lord was angry against Israel. 4 And 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." 5 So Moses said to the judges of Israel, "Each of you slay his men who have joined themselves to Baal of Peor."

6 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. 7 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; 8 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. 9 And those who died by the plague were 24,000.

Was Pinchas within the law by killing these two? If he was not, did he commit murder? The death penalty is mandated by Torah. We find a number of examples in Lev 20:1-16. We find another very interesting death penalty punishment in Devarim (Deuteronomy).

Deut 13:6-11

6 "If your brother, your mother's son, or your son or daughter, or the wife you cherish, or your friend who is as your own soul, entice you secretly, saying, 'Let us go and serve other gods' (whom neither you nor your fathers have known, 7 of the gods of the peoples who are around you, near you or far from you, from one end of the earth to the other end), 8 you shall not yield to him or listen to him; and your eye shall not pity him, nor shall you spare or conceal him. 9 But you shall surely kill him; your hand shall be first against him to put him to death, and afterwards the hand of all the people. 10 So you shall stone him to death because he has sought to seduce you from the Lord your God who brought you out from the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. 11 Then all Israel will hear and be afraid, and will never again do such a wicked thing among you.

And we find also some specific direction for judges which speaks to what we see happening in today's parasha.

Deut 16:18-17:7

18 "You shall appoint for yourself judges and officers in all your towns which the Lord your God is giving you, according to your tribes, and they shall judge the people with righteous judgment. 19 You shall not distort justice; you shall not be partial, and you shall not take a bribe, for a bribe blinds the eyes of the wise and perverts the words of the righteous. 20 Justice, and only justice, you shall pursue, that you may live and possess the land which the Lord your God is giving you.

21 "You shall not plant for yourself an Asherah of any kind of tree beside the altar of the Lord your God, which you shall make for yourself. 22 Neither shall you set up for yourself a sacred pillar which the Lord your God hates.

17 "You shall not sacrifice to the Lord your God an ox or a sheep which has a blemish or any defect, for that is a detestable thing to the Lord your God.

2 **"If there is found in your midst, in any of your towns, which the Lord your God is giving you, a man or a woman who does what is evil in the sight of the Lord your God, by transgressing His covenant, 3 and has gone and served other gods and worshiped them, or the sun or the moon or any of the heavenly host, which I have not commanded, 4 and if it is told you and you have heard of it, then you shall inquire thoroughly. And behold, if it is true and the thing certain that this detestable thing has been done in Israel, 5 then you shall bring out that man or that woman who has done this evil deed, to your gates, that is, the man or the woman, and you shall stone them to death. 6** On the evidence of two witnesses or three witnesses, he who is to die shall be put to death; he shall not be put to death on the evidence of one witness. 7 The hand of the witnesses shall be first against him to put him to death, and afterward the hand of all the people. So you shall purge the evil from your midst.

The act of having sex within the pagan temples of Baal was part of the worship of Baal. It was the doctrine of Baal worshippers that the man who was having sex with the temple prostitute would have fertile animals and a productive crop in his fields.

So, what was happening as an abomination in the pagan temples of Peor was now happening within the Tent of Meeting right in front of Moses.

In the case of Pinchas, this procedure was not followed. Pinchas was the witness (as many others were), Pinchas was the judge, and then the executioner.

So, what paralyzed Moses, so that he didn't have the courage to act to stop this abomination by his own hand? Was it because he himself was married to a Midianite woman? Did he not see what this man was doing, right there in the courts of the Tent of Meeting?

Some have suggested that the eyes of Moses were blinded to this, so that Pinchas might act, and be found righteous in the eyes of the Lord.

Moses could have (and some argue, should have) thrust the spear himself. Aaron the same. All the judges the same. The crime being committed was far worse than the simple act of being “joined to Baal of Peor”, it was spitting in the face of G-d Himself.

Pinchas took action. And his quick and decisive action is not only approved by G-d, but secures for him (and his children after him) a special blessing.

Num 25:10-15

10 Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, 11 "**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. 12 Therefore say, 'Behold, I give him My covenant of peace; 13 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.'**"

14 Now the name of the slain man of Israel who was slain with the Midianite woman, was Zimri the son of Salu, a leader of a father's household among the Simeonites. 15 And the name of the Midianite woman who was slain was Cozbi the daughter of Zur, who was head of the people of a father's household in Midian.

Pinchas then becomes the first of a small group of biblical heroes who will commit audacious acts to preserve G-d's holiness... they have been called the “zealots”.

Elijah was also zealous for G-d during a time much later in Israel's history when the people were again seduced by Baal worship, and departed from G-d. His actions in killing the prophets of Baal were parallel to the actions of Pinchas in our parasha today.

Again, there is no Beit Din, no trial, no witnesses. Elijah simply carries out immediately the righteous judgment of G-d against the prophets of Baal.

Our sages have determined that these zealots were not bound by the requirement of a Beit Din before declaring the judgment, and taking action on it for one central reason. They are acting as the very hand of G-d – they are doing what G-d Himself would be doing.

And in the latter days, the zealot of all zealots appeared. The account of the event demonstrating His zeal is found several places, but it is best set forth in the writings of John.

John 2:13-18

13 And the Passover of the Jews was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. 14 And He found in the temple those who were selling oxen and sheep and doves, and the moneychangers seated. 15 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 moneychangers, and overturned their tables; 16 and to those who were selling the doves He said, "Take these things away; stop making My Father's house a house of merchandise." **17 His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for Thy house will consume me."**

In the parasha for today, the audacious actions of Pinchas were rewarded by G-d with a special blessing, and that was that he would have "My covenant of peace; and it shall be for him and his descendants after him, a covenant of a perpetual priesthood, because he was zealous for his God, and made atonement for the sons of Israel."

There is also something special in these verses which you can't see in the English. You can't even see it in the printed Hebrew of the Torah. You can only find it in the hand-written Torah scroll.

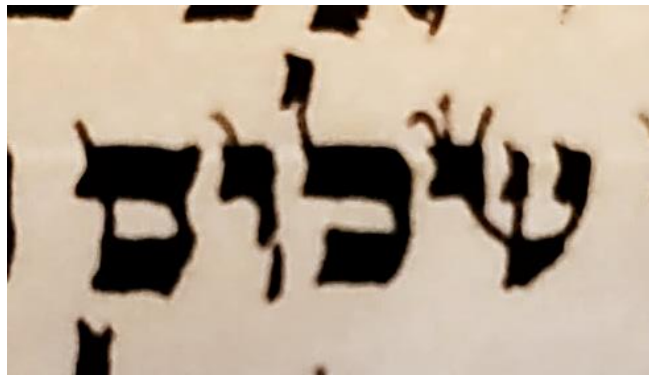
Every Torah scroll has precisely the same words, the same number of letters, and every letter in every scroll is in the same order on every column. Each letter is carefully crafted, and cannot touch another letter. It must not be smudged. It must be clear and crisp. I have read from the scroll of Isaiah penned over 2300 years ago, which was buried at Qumran when the Romans decided to destroy the Temple and scatter the Jews, and which was excavated in 1946, and now on display in Jerusalem in the Shrine of the Book.

A fundamental rule of halakha for scribes is that every letter of every word of Torah must be written as a complete body (Heb. *guf*). If any letter is faded, or not complete, the entire Torah is called "invalid". It can, however, be restored by a sofer (scribe), and be restored to kosher (acceptable) status.

So, you can see how this establishes the meticulous degree of care characterizing the scribes throughout the ages. This is the primary reason we can trust our Torah scrolls as reliable today.

Focus on the word *shalom*, the last word in verse 12. There appears to be, in the third letter of the word *shalom* (the *vav*), a mistake – a slip of the pen. It's not at all a mistake.

This particular way of writing that one particular letter actually has a name. It's called the “broken *vav*”.



Our Sages have speculated regarding the meaning of this “broken *vav*.” Some suggested that this defect in the word “shalom” means that the peace being given to Pinchas was incomplete because of blood on his hands.

This may be valid. I'm not going to speculate on that. But this does lead me into the topic I wish to address today regarding a glaring weakness I see in the body of faith today. That weakness is a lack of zeal and passion for G-d and His ways. And that failing contributes substantially to what I see as a broken state of shalom (peace) in our faith and in our world.

Scripture commands in John 17 that a believer should be characterized – and identified to the world – by our love.

It has been said that the opposite of love is not hate. It is indifference.

Today, I see a widening sea of indifference washing over the body of faith. I believe that indifference – a lack of zeal and passion for G-d and standing up in our society for His ways – is one of the reasons we are not being as much salt and light as we should be in this world.

I can't tell you how many times I have heard Christian pastors proclaim that Christians are a "kingdom of priests." Disregarding the obvious replacement theology error,¹ what does a "kingdom of priests" do? Such a kingdom provides clear proof to the world that our G-d is the true G-d, and that His ways are right.

I have a dear friend who is a teacher in an adult Sunday School class in a prominent church in a city. He is one of the very few who encourages his class to read the entirety of Scripture. His

¹ Ex 19:4-6 is clear that these words were spoken to Israel only, and that they were preconditioned by the requirement that Israel obey G-d and keep His covenant.

lessons focus on the entirety of G-d's word. He has told me that many in his class comment that his lessons are "very interesting." But after years of teaching, he sees virtually no impact of his teaching on the lives of the people in the class. Why? I suggest that complacency and indifference may have played a part.

There is a religion which expresses an amazing level of zeal for their god. Islam. They are such enthusiastic defenders of their god, and his "prophet" that they inspire fear in people who follow other paths of faith. They have caused their ideas and observances to be honored by schools, and even governments. I do not agree with their acts of violence, but I do point out the effectiveness of their zeal.

An article in BBC entitled The 3.5% rule: How a small minority can change the world, tells us an important fact.²

Nonviolent protests are twice as likely to succeed as armed conflicts – and those engaging a threshold of 3.5% of the population have never failed to bring about change.

² *The '3.5% rule': How a small minority can change the world*, David Robinson, BBC, 13 May 2019

There are, of course, many ethical reasons to use nonviolent strategies. But compelling research by Erica Chenoweth, a political scientist at Harvard University, confirms that civil disobedience is not only the moral choice; it is also the most powerful way of shaping world politics – by a long way.

Looking at hundreds of campaigns over the last century, Chenoweth found that nonviolent campaigns are twice as likely to achieve their goals as violent campaigns. And although the exact dynamics will depend on many factors, she has shown it takes around 3.5% of the population actively participating in the protests to ensure serious political change.

The fact is now proved, that a small percentage of believers in any society has the power – if they are zealous for G-d – to change their society for the good.

But we need not stop at the boundaries of our neighborhood. The Scripture reminds all of us who worship the L-rd of our duty of zeal for G-d.

Ps 96:1-4

96 Sing to the Lord a new song; Sing to the Lord, all the earth. 2 Sing to the Lord, bless His name; Proclaim good tidings of His salvation from day to day. 3 Tell of His glory among the nations, His wonderful deeds among all the peoples. 4 For great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised; He is to be feared above all gods.

Yeshua also spoke on this topic as He was preparing to leave the Earth to take His throne at the right hand of the Father.

Acts 1:6-9

6 And so when they had come together, they were asking Him, saying, "Lord, is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?" 7 He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority; 8 but you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth. "

This makes it clear. They were to be witnesses, both locally and worldwide. If you believe (as I do) that this commandment has

been passed down to later generations, in order to be salt and light in this age, then what does that mean?

It cannot mean that each of us is to be an evangelist. That is a specific gifting that not all have. If you are gifted as an evangelist, then you are to use that gift, following the direction of the Spirit, to advance G-d's kingdom.

If you are not an evangelist, you still have a special gifting from G-d which equips you to do something only you can do with excellence. And that gifting, if applied with zeal for G-d, will advance the kingdom in your home, your community, your city, or maybe beyond.

But regardless of your calling in ministry, if you do not use that gifting – if you are complacent toward G-d's work, or indifferent to others – you are not on G-d's playing field.

Some might be on the bench on the sidelines. Some might be in the stands watching the game. Some might be on the road driving to the stadium. And I believe some might be unaware that there is a game at all.

Pinchas exhibited great zeal for G-d. So did Elijah. Yeshua turned over tables, used a whip, and also gave us the example of how we should apply our giftings to advance the kingdom.

So, we must identify our giftings, and search-out the opportunities that the Spirit provides for us to be part of that 3.5%.

Until we stand in the presence of these great zealots in the World to Come, let us see the broken *vav* as a reminder that the peace that is available to this world is yet incomplete. And it is our duty as believers to advance G-d's kingdom in this world – wherever we are called to serve.