The Lord spoke to Moses, saying, “Phinehas, son of Eleazar son of Aaron the priest, has turned back My wrath from the Israelites by displaying among them his passion for Me, so that I did not wipe out the Israelite people in My passion. Say, therefore, ‘I grant wipe out the Israelite people

IDOLATRY AND EXPIATION AT BAAL-PEOR

THE PACT WITH PHINEHAS (25:10–18)

11. passion Hebrew: kin•ah, a feature of God (el kanna; Exod. 20:5) that is shared by zealous advocates like Phinehas and Elijah (1 Kings 19:14). The passion displayed by Phinehas matched God’s in that he alone obeyed God’s command to kill the leaders (25:4).

12. Say Tell the people in the form of an oath.

25:11. Phinehas killed an Israeliite man and Moabite woman because their flagrant immorality profaned God’s name. The Torah seems to approve of Phinehas’s extreme act; some modern as well as ancient commentators follow suit. Thus Hirsch, for example: “Anyone who wages war on the enemies of what is good and true is a champion of the Covenant of Peace on earth while engaged in war.” The Hatam Sofer praises Phinehas for showing the same zeal and energy to do right that the sinning Israelites displayed in doing wrong.

Some postbiblical commentators, however, have been uncomfortable with the zealous vigilantism of Phinehas, criticizing his fanaticism as a dangerous precedent. The Talmud claims that, had Phinehas asked the rabbinical court if it was permitted to kill Zimri and Cozbi, citing halakhah to justify his request, the court would have told him: “The law may permit it but we do not follow that law!” (BT Sanh. 82a).

Moses of Coucy notes that although the previous parashah ends with Phinehas’s deed and the death of 24,000 Israelites (it is unusual for a parashah to end on such a negative note), Phinehas’s reward is not proclaimed until the beginning of this parashah. This teaches us to never rush to reward extremism. We are to wait until later events clarify whether the zealot’s intention was indeed pure.

In the text of the Torah scroll, the letter yod in Phinehas’s name in the second verse (v. 11) is written smaller than the other letters. When we commit violence, even if justifiable, the yod in us (standing for the name of God and for y’hudi, “Jew”) is diminished thereby. In verse 12, the letter vav in shalom in the Torah scroll is written with a break in its stem. This is interpreted homiletically to suggest that the sort of peace one achieves by destroying one’s opponent will inevitably be a flawed, incomplete peace.

Other commentators understand God’s granting the priesthood to Phinehas and his descendants, not as a reward for his extremism but as an antidote for it. “He will have to cure himself of his violent temper if he is to function as a kohen” (K’tav Sofer). This will protect Phinehas from the destructive impulse within him. Perhaps serving as a kohen will give him ways of atoning for having taken two lives. A person is never the same after he has shed blood, no matter how justifiable the cause.

One commentator who sees Phinehas in as favorable a light as the Torah seems to, deems his replacing Aaron as part of a generational shift in leadership. Just as the stern and demanding Moses was balanced by Aaron, who avoided quarrels and confrontations, the more moderate Joshua will be balanced by the fervor of Phinehas as high priest.

The tradition generally considers moral threats to be more dangerous for national survival than physical threats. Although the Egyptians and the Edomites threatened Israel’s physical existence, we are commanded not to hate them. We are told to wipe out the Midianites, however, for they tried to undermine Israel’s moral standing.
him My pact of friendship. 13It shall be for him and his descendants after him a pact of priesthood for all time, because he took impassioned action for his God, thus making expiation for the Israelites.”

The name of the Israelite who was killed, the one who was killed with the Midianite woman, was Zimri son of Salu, chieftain of a Simeonite ancestral house. 15The name of the Midianite woman who was killed was Cozbi daughter of Zur; he was the tribal head of an ancestral house in Midian.

The Lord spoke to Moses, saying, 17“Assail the Midianites and defeat them—18for they assailed you by the trickery they practiced against you—because of the affair of Peor and because of the affair of their kinswoman Cozbi, daughter of the Midianite chieftain, who was killed at the time of the plague on account of Peor.”

My pact of friendship God’s covenant meant that Phinehas received divine protection against the revenge that would be sought by Zimri’s clan.

13. a pact of priesthood for all time Phinehas is awarded the high priesthood for suppressing apostasy, just as the Levites were awarded the priesthood (Exod. 32:29). God promises that his line, later called the Zadokites (see Ezek. 44:15–16), will be the exclusive officiants in the Temple (see 1 Chron. 5:30–34).

making expiation By means of his passion, Phinehas assuaged God’s wrath.

14–15. A postscript stating the names and pedigrees of the culprits.

ancestral house That is, a household, the basic unit of the clan.

17. Why are the Midianites assailed, because it was Moabite women who seduced the Israelites? This may simply reflect different sources or traditions. Alternatively, this episode may reflect the period when Moab was part of a Midianite confederation that embraced all of Transjordan as its protectorate (see Josh. 13:21). When Israel conquered Sihon’s territory, it severed the king’s highway (Num. 21:22) and thereby threatened the Midianites’ hold on the vital spice trade. Thus Midian, Israel’s erstwhile ally (10:29–32), now became its implacable foe.

18. for they assailed you Alternatively, “they are hostile,” indicating both past and continuing hostility.

their kinswoman Thus the Midianites now felt obligated to avenge her death.

18. for they assailed you At first, the nations of the world resented and hated the Israelites because their ways of worship were different from those of the nations and at a higher moral level. Even when the people Israel tried to imitate gentile practices, though, their enemies continued to resent them. According to the Talmud (BT Sanh. 106a), Balaam was impressed by Israel’s moral purity and realized that the only way to defeat them would be to compromise their moral excellence. It was his idea to lure the Israelites into participating in the orgiastic Midianite cult [Num. 31:16]. The Midianites were so desperate to defeat Israel that they encouraged their daughters to engage in sexual orgies to lead the Israelites astray.
When the plague was over, the Lord said to Moses and to Eleazar son of Aaron the priest, “Take a census of the whole Israelite community from the age of twenty years up, by their ancestral houses, all Israelites able to bear arms.”

So Moses and Eleazar the priest, on the steppes of Moab, at the Jordan near Jericho, gave instructions about them, namely, those from twenty years up, as the Lord had commanded Moses.

The descendants of the Israelites who came out of the land of Egypt were:

Reuben, Israel’s first-born. Descendants of Reuben: [Of] Enoch, the clan of the Enochites;

The central theme of the final 11 chapters of the Book of Numbers is the occupation of the Promised Land. In sharp contrast to the faithlessness of the Exodus generation, the following generation is loyal to God and courageous; it is successful in battle and deemed worthy to conquer the Land.


All able-bodied men above the age of 20 are registered for the ultimate purposes of dividing the Land among the tribes and providing a militia for the forthcoming war against Midian.

DIRECTIONS FOR TAKING A CENSUS (vv. 1–4)

1. God’s command for the first census was given to Moses and Aaron. After Aaron’s death, his successor, Eleazar, takes his place. This is the only time God speaks to Eleazar directly.

RESULTS OF THE CENSUS (vv. 5–51)

This section enumerates the clans, the number of able-bodied men in each tribe, and their total sum.

CHAPTER 26

This chapter, like chapter 1, contains a census, suggesting that all of the chapters they enclose deal with one extended period of time, during which the generation that left Egypt treks through the desert and ultimately dies there. Although the ostensible purpose of this census was to learn about the relative land requirements of each clan and tribe, the commentators refuse to leave it at that. They envision God counting the Israelites after the plague of Baal-peor as an act of love, “like a shepherd numbering his flock after wolves have attacked it” [Rashi]. Hirsch suggests that, after the embarrassment of Baal-peor, the chastened Israelites were led to regain a sense of self-worth by reflecting on who their ancestors were. (Or is God scolding them after Baal-peor by asking them, “What would your parents and grandparents say about what you just did?”)
of Pallu, the clan of the Palluites; 6 of Hezron, the clan of the Hezronites; of Carmi, the clan of the Carmites. 7 Those are the clans of the Reubenites. The persons enrolled came to 43,730.

8 Born to Pallu: Eliab. 9 The sons of Eliab were Nemuel, and Dathan and Abiram. These are the same Dathan and Abiram, chosen in the assembly, who agitated against Moses and Aaron as part of Korah’s band when they agitated against the LORD. 10 Whereupon the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them up with Korah—when that band died, when the fire consumed the two hundred and fifty men—and they became an example. 11 The sons of Korah, however, did not die.

12 Descendants of Simeon by their clans: Of Nemuel, the clan of the Nemuelites; of Jamin, the clan of the Jaminites; of Jachin, the clan of the Jachinites; 13 of Zerah, the clan of the Zerahites; of Saul, the clan of the Saulites.

14 Those are the clans of the Simeonites; [persons enrolled:] 22,200.

15 Descendants of Gad by their clans: Of Zepho, the clan of the Zephoites; of Haggi, the clan of the Haggites; of Shuni, the clan of the Shunites; 16 of Ozni, the clan of the Oznites; of Eri, the clan of the Erites; 17 of Arod, the clan of the Arodites; of Arel, the clan of the Arelites.

11. The Korahite clan survived to become an important levitical clan of Temple singers (see, e.g., the opening verses of Pss. 44–49). They also served as temple guards at the most prestigious location—the entrance.

9. Apparently the rebels Dathan and Abiram had an older brother, Nemuel, who did not join them in their nefarious activities. Coming from the same environment, he resisted taking the path they chose.

11. The sons of Korah . . . did not die Some say that they carried on their father’s quarrel-some ways, so that in every generation there are some people who seek to cause divisiveness in the community. Others disagree, saying that they learned their lesson and repented, and later composed and sang half a dozen psalms. These include Psalm 47, recited before the sounding of the shofar on Rosh ha-Shanah, and Ps. 49, read in a house of mourning. This demonstrates that repentance is possible, that people can change their ways as they confront mortality, a lesson the descendants of Korah may well have learned from their ancestor’s fate. Like Nemuel [v. 9], they represent the capacity of people to rise above the circumstances of their birth and upbringing.
18Those are the clans of Gad’s descendants; persons enrolled: 40,500.

19Born to Judah: Er and Onan. Er and Onan died in the land of Canaan.

20Descendants of Judah by their clans: Of Shelah, the clan of the Shelanites; of Perez, the clan of the Perezites; of Zerah, the clan of the Zerahites. 21Descendants of Perez: of Hezron, the clan of the Hezronites; of Hamul, the clan of the Hamulites. 22Those are the clans of Judah; persons enrolled: 76,500.

23Descendants of Issachar by their clans: [Of] Tola, the clan of the Tolutites; of Puvah, the clan of the Puvites; 24of Jashub, the clan of the Jashubites; of Shimron, the clan of the Shimronites. 25Those are the clans of Issachar; persons enrolled: 64,300.

26Descendants of Zebulun by their clans: Of Sered, the clan of the Seredites; of Elon, the clan of the Elonites; of Jahleel, the clan of the Jahleelites. 27Those are the clans of the Zebulunites; persons enrolled: 60,500.

28The sons of Joseph were Manasseh and Ephraim—by their clans.

29Descendants of Manasseh: Of Machir, the clan of the Machirites.—Machir begot Gilead.—Of Gilead, the clan of the Gileadites. 30These were the descendants of Gilead: [Of] Iezer, the clan of the Iezerites; of Helek, the clan of the Helekites; 31[of] Asriel, the clan of the Asrielites; [of] Shechem, the clan of the Shechemites; 32[of] Shemida, the clan of the Shemidaites; [of] Hepher, the clan of the Hepherites.—33Now Zelophehad son of Hepher had no sons, only daughters. The names of Zelophehad’s daughters were Mahlah, Noah, Hoglah, Milcah, and Tirzah.—34Those are the clans of Manasseh; persons enrolled: 52,700.
These are the descendants of Ephraim by their clans: Of Shuthelah, the clan of the Shuthelahites; of Becher, the clan of the Becherites; of Tahan, the clan of the Tahanites. These are the descendants of Shuthelah: Of Eran, the clan of the Eranites. Those are the clans of Ephraim’s descendants; persons enrolled: 32,500.

Those are the descendants of Joseph by their clans.

The descendants of Benjamin by their clans: Of Bela, the clan of the Belaites; of Ashbel, the clan of the Ashbelites; of Ahiram, the clan of the Ahiramites; of Shephupham, the clan of the Shuphamites; of Hupham, the clan of the Huphamites. The sons of Bela were Ard and Naaman: [Of Ard,] the clan of the Ardites; of Naaman, the clan of the Naamanites. Those are the descendants of Benjamin by their clans; persons enrolled: 45,600.

These are the descendants of Dan by their clans: Of Shuham, the clan of the Shuhamites. Those are the clans of Dan, by their clans. All the clans of the Shuhamites; persons enrolled: 64,400.

Descendants of Asher by their clans: Of Imnah, the clan of the Imnites; of Ishvi, the clan of the Ishvites; of Beriah, the clan of the Beri­ites. Of the descendants of Beriah: Of Heber, the clan of the Heberites; of Malchiel, the clan of the Malchielites.—The name of Asher’s daughter was Serah.—These are the clans of Asher’s descendants; persons enrolled: 53,400.

Descendants of Naphtali by their clans: Of Jahzeel, the clan of the Jahzeelites; of Guni, the clan of the Gunites; of Jezer, the clan of the Jezerites; of Shillem, the clan of the Shillemites.

Asher’s daughter was Serah. She is the only female in the genealogical lists; see also Gen. 46:17 and 1 Chron. 7:30. There is a tradition that her father died without sons. That places her in the same category as the daughters of Zelophehad (see 27:1–7) and might explain why she is mentioned here. Otherwise, her presence remains a mystery.
Those are the clans of the Naphtalites, clan by clan; persons enrolled: 45,400.

This is the enrollment of the Israelites: 601,730.

The Lord spoke to Moses, saying, among these shall the land be apportioned as shares, according to the listed names: with larger groups increase the share, with smaller groups reduce the share. Each is to be assigned its share according to its enrollment. The land, moreover, is to be apportioned by lot; and the allotment shall be made according to the listings of their ancestral tribes. Each portion shall be assigned by lot, whether for larger or smaller groups."

This is the enrollment of the Levites by their clans: Of Gershon, the clan of the Gershonites; of Kohath, the clan of the Kohathites; of Merari, the clan of the Merarites. These are the clans of Levi: The clan of the Libnites, the clan of the Hebronites, the clan of the Mahlites, the clan of the Mushites, the clan of the Korahites.—

**HOW TO APPORTION THE LAND**

(vv. 52–56)

The procedure seems to involve two irreconcilable methods: by lot and by the size of each tribe. In fact, the location of tribal territory is determined by lot, but that territory’s size is a function of the tribe’s census count. These prescriptions will apply only to the 9½ that settle in Cisjordan, the western side of the Jordan (34:13–15). The 2½ Transjordanian tribes arrange to have their territory (already conquered) awarded to them by Moses (32:33).

Land was allotted only to those whose names were entered in this second census—not those who were counted in the first census and who died in the wilderness.

**larger groups** Refers to the more populous tribes, as indicated by the tribal totals in this second census.

Each . . . its . . . its Alternatively, “Each person . . . his . . . his”; that is, each person receives his allotment within his clan, not elsewhere.

The assignment of property by lot was also practiced elsewhere in the ancient Near East during the 2nd millennium B.C.E.

**according to the listings** Literally, “according to the names.” Each person will take his share within the territory assigned to his tribe by lot.

Each portion Literally, “its portion.” That is, each tribe’s portion.

**whether** Each tribe, irrespective of its size, will be assigned its territory by lot.

**LEVITICAL CLANS**

(vv. 57–62)

The clans of Levi are listed separately because they are not entitled to any share of the Land (v. 62; see 18:23–24). Because they do not serve in the army, there is no need to limit their census to males above 20. The reason for this census is not given; it is most likely for the purpose of assigning the Levites their tabernacle duties.

The Gershonites, Kohathites, and Merarites make up the three traditional clans of Levi who are assigned to their respective guarding and transport duties in the tabernacle.

Libnites Libnah, a town in the territory of Judah, was assigned to the Aaronides.

Hebronites Hebron, a major city of Judah, was assigned to the Aaronides.

Mahlites This name survives on a cosmetic burner found on the site of the ancient city La-chish.

Korahites See Comment to 26:11.
Kohath begot Amram. The name of Amram’s wife was Jochebed daughter of Levi, who was born to Levi in Egypt; she bore to Amram Aaron and Moses and their sister Miriam. To Aaron were born Nadab and Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar. Nadab and Abihu died when they offered alien fire before the Lord.—Their enrollment of 23,000 comprised all males from a month up. They were not part of the regular enrollment of the Israelites, since no share was assigned to them among the Israelites.

63 These are the persons enrolled by Moses and Eleazar the priest who registered the Israelites on the steppes of Moab, at the Jordan near Jericho. Among these there was not one of those enrolled by Moses and Aaron the priest when they recorded the Israelites in the wilderness of Sinai. For the Lord had said of them, “They shall die in the wilderness.” Not one of them survived, except Caleb son of Jephunneh and Joshua son of Nun.

27 The daughters of Zelophehad, of Ma-

Kohath begot Amram Thus Moses and Aaron (Amram’s sons, v. 59) are totally separated from the Kohathites, having been singled out from among them (3:27) because of their leadership responsibilities.

59. Jochebed daughter of Levi Because she is the aunt of Amram, Levi’s grandson, she is forbidden to him in marriage by the law of Leviticus (18:12, 20:19). This law, however, was not in force before the revelation at Mount Sinai. For examples of similar pre-Sinaitic practices, see Gen. 20:12 and 38:24–26.

in Egypt According to this tradition (Levi–Jochebed–Moses), only two generations were slaves in Egypt. This differs from the 400-year tradition for Egyptian bondage in Gen.15:13 (see Gen. 15:16, Exod. 6:14ff.).

POSTSCRIPT (vv. 63–65) The postscript explains that this census did not include those counted in the previous census who (with the exception of Caleb and Joshua) had perished in the wilderness at God’s command (14:29–32).

THE LAW OF SUCCESSION IN INHERITANCE (27:1–11) The census taken for the purpose of dividing the Promised Land among the tribal clans (chap. 26) is followed by a problematic case: What if the deceased leaves daughters but no sons? Note that the daughters of Zelophehad are referred to again in chapter 36. Chapters 27 and 36, then, bracket the
nassite family—son of Hepher son of Gilead son of Machir son of Manasseh son of Joseph—came forward. The names of the daughters were Mahlah, Noah, Hoglah, Milcah, and Tirzah.

2 They stood before Moses, Eleazar the priest, the chieftains, and the whole assembly, at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting, and they said,

3 “Our father died in the wilderness. He was not one of the faction, Korah’s faction, which banded together against the Lord, but died for his own sin; and he has left no sons. Let not our father’s name be lost to his clan just because

plead that, unless they can inherit, their father's name will be wiped out.

2. the entrance of the Tent of Meeting
Where they presented their case.

3. not one of . . . Korah’s faction
This implies that the participants in the Korahite rebellion were denied the right to inherit the Land.

died for his own sin
That is, in the punishment meted out to the entire nation after the scout episode (14:29).

4. Underlying this statement are the assumptions that a name exists as long as it is attached of settling the Promised Land, the daughters of Zelophehad came forward to claim their share of it.

3. He was not one of . . . Korah’s faction
Upon hearing these words, Moses refers the request to God. This is not because he does not know the law, but because he could no longer trust himself to be impartial after being told “our father was on your side during the rebellion.” In the Talmud, Akiva identifies Zelophehad as the man who was executed for gathering wood on Shabbat (Num.15:32ff.). The Sages rebuke him: “Akiva, if Zelophehad was innocent, then you have libeled an innocent man. If he was guilty and the Torah chose not to reveal his name, why should you shame him?” (BT Shab. 96b).
he had no son! Give us a holding among our father’s kinsmen!”

5Moses brought their case before the LORD.
6And the LORD said to Moses, "The plea of Zelophehad’s daughters is just: you should give them a hereditary holding among their father’s kinsmen; transfer their father’s share to them.

Further, speak to the Israelite people as follows: ‘If a man dies without leaving a son, you shall transfer his property to his daughter.

9If he has no daughter, you shall assign his property to his brothers.

10If he has no brothers, you shall assign his property to his father’s brothers.

11If his father had no brothers, you shall assign his property to his nearest relative in his own clan, and he shall inherit it.’ This shall be the law of procedure for the Israelites, in accordance with the LORD’s command to Moses.”

THE LAW OF SUCCESSION (vv. 8–11)

For ancestral property, a man’s natural heirs are his sons. If he has no sons, his daughters become his heirs. If he has no children, his brothers are his heirs, and in the absence of brothers, his father’s brothers are. If the father had no brothers, the inheritance passes on to the next of kin. Thus the patrilineal principle of succession through the father’s male line is preserved. A daughter does not really inherit; she transfers the inheritance from father to grandson, and thereby keeps the ancestral land in the father’s line.

8. his property This refers to inherited, landed property.

9. brothers Also of his mother (Ibn Ezra).

11. in his own clan Refers to his male relatives and assumes that the land remains in the clan.

7–8. God honored the daughters of Zelophehad for their faith in the Land by arranging for them to cause a law to be added to the Torah; that is why this law was not included in the original revelation at Sinai. In the same way, God honored those Israelites who did not want to miss the Pesah celebration, by letting them be the cause of a new law (see 9:6–14) [Sifre].
12 The Lord said to Moses, “Ascend these heights of Abarim and view the land that I have given to the Israelite people. 13 When you have seen it, you too shall be gathered to your kin, just as your brother Aaron was. 14 For, in the wilderness of Zin, when the community was contentious, you disobeyed My command to uphold My sanctity in their sight by means of the water.” Those are the Waters of Meribath-kadesh, in the wilderness of Zin.

15 Moses spoke to the Lord, saying, 16 “Let the Lord, Source of the breath of all flesh, appoint someone over the community 17 who shall go out before them and come in before them, and who shall take them out and bring them in, so that the Lord’s community may not be like sheep that have no shepherd.” 18 And the Lord answered Moses, “Single out Joshua son of Nun, an inspired man, and lay your hand upon him. 19 Have him stand before Eleazar the priest and before the whole community, and commission him in their sight. 20 Invest him with some of your authority, so that the whole Israelite com-

THE SUCCESSION OF MOSES BY JOSHUA (27:12–23)

Moses is commanded to ascend the mountain. From there he will see the Promised Land and then die. The fulfillment of this command is postponed (Deut. 34), for Moses has yet many laws and a lengthy testament to give to his people.

12. heights of Abarim The peak of this mountain chain is identified as Mount Nebo in Deut. 32:49. At a height of 2740 feet (843 m), it offers a wide view of Cisjordan.

13. as your brother Aaron Aaron ascended a mountain to die; this is also the purpose of Moses’ ascent.

16. Confronted with the finality of God’s decision that he will not enter the Promised Land, Moses’ first response is not self-pity but concern for his people’s future. Realizing that the next Israelite leader will face different challenges, Moses urges God to appoint someone who will “go out before the people and come in before them,” i.e., a military leader who will lead the charge instead of remaining behind in safety. The Midrash pictures Moses urging God to appoint a leader able to relate to every Israelite, even those with whom he disagrees (Tanḥ. 10). Is Moses seeking to balance the zealotry of Phinehas?

18. an inspired man Literally, “a man in whom there is spirit.” He was a courageous and skillful military leader.

your hand Hebrew: yadkha, which should be read as a plural (“your hands”). Authority and power could be transferred only by the laying on of both hands (v. 23; cf. Num. 8:10, Lev. 16:21).

20. Invest him Literally, “place upon him.” Moses thus establishes a physical conduit for the transfer of his authority.

with some of your authority Moses is empowered to transfer to Joshua only his authority,
munity may obey. But he shall present himself to Eleazar the priest, who shall on his behalf seek the decision of the Urim before the LORD. By such instruction they shall go out and by such instruction they shall come in, he and all the Israelites, the whole community."

Moses did as the LORD commanded him. He took Joshua and had him stand before Eleazar the priest and before the whole community. He laid his hands upon him and commissioned him—as the LORD had spoken through Moses.

The LORD spoke to Moses, saying:

Command the Israelite people and say to them: Be punctilious in presenting to Me at stated times offerings, at the set time I have appointed to you. 

The LORD spoke to Moses, saying:

2 Command the Israelite people and say to them: Be punctilious in presenting to Me at stated times offerings, at the set time I have appointed to you. By such instruction they shall go out and by such instruction they shall come in, he and all the Israelites, the whole community.

22 Moses did as the LORD commanded him. He took Joshua and had him stand before Eleazar the priest and before the whole community. He laid his hands upon him and commissioned him—as the LORD had spoken through Moses.

THE CALENDAR OF PUBLIC SACRIFICES (28:1–30:1)

With the division of the Land and the succession to Moses now determined, the Torah turns to the establishment of the religious calendar that will prevail in the Land. Thus the Israelites’ first duty upon settling in their land is to institute the proper lines of communion with the Lord through the medium of the sacrificial system. This catalog of public offerings concludes with a reminder (in 29:39) that each Israelite could also bring private offerings.

As the moon reflects the light of the sun [BT BB 75a], God commands Moses to “lay your hand upon” Joshua (v. 18), but Moses lays both hands on him (v. 23), transferring power without reservation or ambivalence, a rare gesture for a man who has been accustomed to authority for so long. What must have been going through Moses’ mind as he reflected on the achievements and frustrations of the past, and the awareness of all that he yearned to do and would never be able to do?

CHAPTER 28

The list of offerings in chapters 28 and 29 is familiar to many as the maftir readings from a second Torah scroll on the festivals. They are read in sequence during the summer, in the weeks preceding Tish‘ah b’Av, the anniversary of the Temple’s destruction. Tradition teaches that God counts our reading of these passages as the equivalent of our bringing offerings to the Temple.

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times the offerings of food due Me, as gifts of pleasing odor to Me.

3Say to them: These are the gifts that you are to present to the LORD:

As a regular burnt offering every day, two yearling lambs without blemish. 4You shall offer one lamb in the morning, and the other lamb you shall offer at twilight. 5And as a grain offering, there shall be a tenth of an ephah of choice flour with a quarter of a hin of beaten oil mixed in—the regular burnt offering instituted at Mount Sinai—a gift of pleasing odor to the LORD.

7The libation with it shall be a quarter of a hin for each lamb, to be poured in the sacred precinct as an offering of fermented drink to the LORD. 8The other lamb you shall offer at twilight, preparing the same grain offering and libation as in the morning—a gift of pleasing odor to the LORD.

9On the sabbath day: two yearling lambs without blemish, together with two-tenths of a measure of choice flour with oil mixed in as a grain offering, and with the proper libation—a burnt offering for every sabbath, in addition to the regular burnt offering and its libation.

DAILY OFFERING (vv. 3–8)

Called “tamid” from biblical times on, the daily offering consisted of a burnt offering of a lamb together with its grain and wine adjuncts. It was offered twice daily, morning and evening.

3. The tamid offering is to be financed by all the people, not merely by the leaders or by the rich (Neh. 10:34).

4. at twilight The time between sunset and darkness.

5. ephah See Comment to Exod. 16:36.

bin See Comment to Exod. 29:40.

beaten Hebrew: katit, “pressed in a mortar.” Hence it was pure oil.

7. with it Refers to the lamb (v. 4, as in v. 8).

SHABBAT OFFERING (vv. 9–10)

The sacrifice for a special day, called musaf in Rabbinic Hebrew, is in addition to the daily tamid and is offered immediately after it. Because the Shabbat offering is the same as the tamid, adding musaf gives Shabbat double the number of offerings of a weekday.

10. regular burnt offering Refers to the
11. On your new moons you shall present a burnt offering to the Lord: two bulls of the herd, one ram, and seven yearling lambs, without blemish. 12. As grain offering for each bull: three-tenths of a measure of choice flour with oil mixed in. As grain offering for each ram: two-tenths of a measure of choice flour with oil mixed in. 13. As grain offering for each lamb: a tenth of a measure of fine flour with oil mixed in. Such shall be the burnt offering of pleasing odor, a gift to the Lord. 14. Their libations shall be: half a hin of wine for a bull, a third of a hin for a ram, and a quarter of a hin for a lamb. That shall be the monthly burnt offering for each new moon of the year. 15. And there shall be one goat as a purification offering to the Lord, to be offered in addition to the regular burnt offering and its libation.

16. In the first month, on the fourteenth day of the month, there shall be a passover sacrifice morning tamid, because there could be no offering after the tamid of the evening. It should be noted that purification sacrifices are never brought on Shabbat, because intimations of human wrongdoing are not permitted on this joyous day.

ROSH HODESH, THE NEW MOON (vv. 11–15)

In early Israel, this was an important festival celebrated by families and clans in a state of ritual purity at the local sanctuary. 14. Only here are the libation quantities specified. Because they are always the same, they need not be repeated.

burnt offering Use of this term implies the auxiliary grain offering and libation.

new moon Hebrew: hodesh, “new moon,” as in 29:6. (The word can also mean “month.”)

PASCHAL SACRIFICE AND UNLEAVENED BREAD (vv. 16–25)

The day of the paschal offering and the seven-day Festival of Unleavened Bread originally were separate and distinct holidays (cf. Lev. 23:5–6). The fact that the paschal offering is mentioned here

15. purification offering to the Lord Hebrew: battat l’Adonai. Noting that this is the only place in the Torah where this phrase occurs, the Talmud understands it to mean “a purification offering for the Lord.” It is brought on God’s behalf on Rosh Hodesh (when the new moon appears) as an apology to the moon for having made it smaller and less consequential than the sun [BT Hull. 60b]. Did the Sages here picture God apologizing for all the unfairness of life—to people who are born less healthy, gifted, or fortunate than others? Given the traditional identification of Rosh Hodesh as a woman’s festival, did the Sages imagine God expressing regret to women for having a less prominent role than men for so much of history?

HALAKHAH L’MA’ASEH

28:11. new moons The Jewish calendar is based on the cycles of the moon. An extra month (Adar I) is added 7 times in 19 years to make the lunar calendar conform to the solar year. Each Hebrew month begins with the New Moon (Rosh Hodesh); it is announced in synagogue (except for the month of Tishrei) on the preceding Shabbat, in the Blessing of the Month (Birkat Ha-Hodesh). See Comment on Exod. 12:2.
NUMBERS 28:17  pinhas

to the Lord, and on the fifteenth day of that month a festival. Unleavened bread shall be eaten for seven days. 18 The first day shall be a sacred occasion: you shall not work at your occupations. 19 You shall present a gift, a burnt offering, to the Lord; two bulls of the herd, one ram, and seven yearling lambs—see that they are without blemish. 20 The grain offering with them shall be of choice flour with oil mixed in: prepare three-tenths of a measure for a bull, two-tenths for a ram; 21 and for each of the seven lambs prepare one-tenth of a measure. 22 And there shall be one goat for a purification offering, to make expiation in your behalf. 23 You shall present these in addition to the morning portion of the regular burnt offering. 24 You shall offer the like daily for seven days as food, a gift of pleasing odor to the Lord; they shall be offered, with their libations, in addition to the regular burnt offering. 25 And the seventh day shall be a sacred occasion for you: you shall not work at your occupations. 26 On the day of the first fruits, your Feast of Weeks, when you bring an offering of new grain to the Lord, you shall observe a sacred occasion: you shall not work at your occupations. 27 You shall present a burnt offering of pleasing odor to the Lord: two bulls of the herd, one ram, seven yearling lambs. 28 The grain offering with them shall be of choice flour with oil mixed

even though it is a private sacrifice (see Exod. 12:1–11) indicates that by this time the two festivals had become fused.

17. festival Both the paschal sacrifice and the first day of the Festival of Unleavened Bread are observed at the sanctuary, precisely as instituted by Deut. 16:1–6.

18. occupations Hebrew: m’tékhet avodah; literally, “laborious work,” of the sort that is forbidden on Shabbat and Yom Kippur (Num. 29:7; Lev. 23:3,28). The nonlaborious work permitted (by implication) on the festivals is not defined, except for the explicit permission to prepare food on the first and last days of Pesah (Exod. 12:16).

**FEAST OF WEEKS** (vv. 26–31)

This festival, which marks the start of the wheat harvest, does not depend on the lunar calendar. It occurs seven weeks after the beginning of the barley harvest (Lev. 23:15–16). In this regard it is like Shabbat, which is also independent of the lunar calendar.

26. day of the first fruits This day is also called “the Feast of the Harvest” (Hag ha-Katzir) in Exod. 23:16, and “the Feast of Weeks” (Hag [ha-]Shavu’ot) in Exod. 34:22, Deut. 16:10,16, and 2 Chron. 8:13.
In the seventh month, on the first day of the month, you shall observe a sacred occasion: you shall not work at your occupations. You shall observe it as a day when the horn is sounded. You shall present a burnt offering of pleasing odor to the Lord: one bull of the herd, one ram, and seven yearling lambs, without blemish. The grain offering with them—choice flour with oil mixed in—shall be: three-tenths of a measure for a bull, two-tenths for a ram, and one-tenth for each of the seven lambs. And there shall be one goat for a purification offering, to make expiation in your behalf—in addition to the burnt offering of the new moon with its grain offering and the regular burnt offering with its grain offering, each with its libation as prescribed, gifts of pleasing odor to the Lord.

On the tenth day of the same seventh month

FIRST DAY OF THE SEVENTH MONTH
(29:1–6)
The seventh new moon is to the ordinary new moon as the seventh day is to the ordinary day, thereby indicating how the sabbatical cycle was preserved in the lunar calendar. The seventh month is actually the beginning of the agricultural year, as is apparent from the oldest calendars of the Bible (see Exod. 23:16, 34:22). The Jewish religious calendar still preserves the first day of the seventh month as the beginning of the year: Rosh ha-Shanah, "The Head of the Year," or New Year’s Day. The Bible neither mentions it by name nor describes any New Year festival.

1. a day when the horn is sounded Hebrew: yom t’ru•ah, “a day of acclaim,” probably the royal acclaim of God as King and Creator. The horn blowing on this day should not be confused with the prescription that horns should be blown on all festivals (10:10).

TENTH DAY OF THE SEVENTH MONTH
(vv. 7–11)
The day is known as Yom ha-Kippurim, “The Day of Purgation,” which refers to the purgation of the sanctuary following its year-long defilement by mortals. Thus the purgation rituals are entirely within the confines of the sanctuary.

HALAKHAH L’MA’ASEH
29:1. a day when the horn is sounded Maimonides cites this verse as the source for the commandment to listen to the shofar blasts on Rosh ha-Shanah (MT Shofar 1:1).

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you shall observe a sacred occasion when you shall practice self-denial. You shall do no work. 8You shall present to the Lord a burnt offering of pleasing odor: one bull of the herd, one ram, seven yearling lambs; see that they are without blemish. 9The grain offering with them—of choice flour with oil mixed in—shall be: three-tenths of a measure for a bull, two-tenths for the one ram, one-tenth for each of the seven lambs. 11And there shall be one goat for a purification offering, in addition to the purification offering of expiation and the regular burnt offering with its grain offering, each with its libation.

12On the fifteenth day of the seventh month, you shall observe a sacred occasion: you shall not work at your occupations.—Seven days you shall observe a festival of the Lord.—13You shall present a burnt offering, a gift of pleasing odor to the Lord: Thirteen bulls of the herd, two rams, fourteen yearling lambs; they shall be without blemish. 14The grain offerings with them—of choice flour with oil mixed in—shall be: three-tenths of a measure for each of the thirteen bulls, two-tenths for each of the two rams, and one-tenth for each of the fourteen lambs. 16And there shall be one goat for a purification offering—in addition to the regular burnt offering, its grain offering and libation.

and performed exclusively by the high priest (Lev. 16).

7. you shall practice self-denial Literally, “you shall afflict yourselves,” chiefly by fasting. You shall do no work Literally, “you shall not do any work.” The same phrase is used for Shabbat (Lev. 23:3). It indicates a more severe prohibition of work on these days than on the other festivals.

THE 15th TO THE 21st OF THE SEVENTH MONTH (vv. 12–34)
This sacred occasion is called “the Feast of Booths” (Hag ha-Sukkot) in Lev. 23:34 and Deut.

CHAPTER 29
13. Offerings for the week of Sukkot are staggering in number, a total of 98 lambs and 70 bullocks. (Pesah week requires only 16 bulls; no other holiday requires more than 2.) The Talmud teaches that the 70 bulls represent thanks-giving offerings on behalf of the 70 nations of the world (BT Suk. 55b). In case some nations forget to be grateful to God, Israel brings a bullock offering (the most extravagant of the sacrifices) on their behalf on Sukkot, the festival of thanksgiving. One of Israel’s tasks in the world is to remind other nations to be grateful to God.
Second day: Twelve bulls of the herd, two rams, fourteen yearling lambs, without blemish; 18the grain offerings and libations for the bulls, rams, and lambs, in the quantities prescribed; 19and one goat for a purification offering—in addition to the regular burnt offering, its grain offering and libations.

Third day: Eleven bulls, two rams, fourteen yearling lambs, without blemish; 21the grain offerings and libations for the bulls, rams, and lambs, in the quantities prescribed; 22and one goat for a purification offering—in addition to the regular burnt offering, its grain offering and libation.

Fourth day: Ten bulls, two rams, fourteen yearling lambs, without blemish; 24the grain offerings and libations for the bulls, rams, and lambs, in the quantities prescribed; 25and one goat for a purification offering—in addition to the regular burnt offering, its grain offering and libation.

Fifth day: Nine bulls, two rams, fourteen yearling lambs, without blemish; 27the grain offerings and libations for the bulls, rams, and lambs, in the quantities prescribed; 28and one goat for a purification offering—in addition to the regular burnt offering, its grain offering and libation.

Sixth day: Eight bulls, two rams, fourteen yearling lambs, without blemish; 30the grain offerings and libations for the bulls, rams, and lambs, in the quantities prescribed; 31and one goat for a purification offering—in addition to the regular burnt offering, its grain offering and libations.

Seventh day: Seven bulls, two rams, four-
teen yearling lambs, without blemish; 33 the grain offerings and libations for the bulls, rams, and lambs, in the quantities prescribed; 34 and one goat for a purification offering—in addition to the regular burnt offering, its grain offering and libation.

35 On the eighth day you shall hold a solemn gathering; you shall not work at your occupations. 36 You shall present a burnt offering, a gift of pleasing odor to the Lord; one bull, one ram, seven yearling lambs, without blemish; 37 the grain offerings and libations for the bull, the ram, and the lambs, in the quantities prescribed; 38 and one goat for a purification offering—in addition to the regular burnt offering, its grain offering and libation.

39 All these you shall offer to the Lord at the stated times, in addition to your votive and free-will offerings, be they burnt offerings, grain offerings, libations, or offerings of well-being. So Moses spoke to the Israelites just as the Lord had commanded Moses.

EIGHTH DAY (vv. 35–38)

Although Sukkot is a seven-day festival (v. 12), an eighth festival day is added. Its offerings, however, are not the same as those of the preceding festival; rather, they are the same as those of the 1st and the 10th of this month.

35. On the eighth day This, the eighth day, is an independent celebration, unconnected to the preceding festival. Work is prohibited on this day, thereby making it a “sacred occasion,” as is the first day of Sukkot (v. 12).

39. Personal offerings may be presented in addition to the public offerings stipulated above.

30:1. This verse tells us that Moses informed the Israelites about the religious calendar before addressing them on the next subject.

35. On Sh’mini Atzeret (the Hebrew name of the festival cited), the day immediately after Sukkot week, the offerings are more restrained. The Talmud pictures God as a host, welcoming representatives of all nations who come to pay homage on Sukkot; then, as the festival ends and the other nations depart, God says to Israel: “Stay here with Me a while longer for a more intimate celebration” (BT Suk. 55b).
FIRST HAFTARAH OF ADMONITION
HAFTARAH FOR MATTOT

(Recite on the first Shabbat after the 17th of Tammuz, coinciding with the reading of either Pinhas or Mattot alone.)

This haftarah presents the opening passages of the Book of Jeremiah. His commission as a messenger of God’s word is reinforced by two visionary omens that introduce the themes of divine providence and of imminent doom.

God’s call to prophecy strikes terror in Jeremiah’s heart, a feeling that is countered by the promise of protection and verbal inspiration. The subjective tone of the entire passage draws on a formal literary pattern preserved in the prophetic calls of Moses (Exod. 3:10–12; 4:15), Isaiah (6:6–7), and Ezekiel (2:3–3:11).

The haftarah closes with the prophetic proclamation of Jer. 2:1–3. In verse 2, God recalls Israel’s past devotion, accounting it in the nation’s favor. In verse 3, Jeremiah enunciates the consequences. This results in a prophecy of hope and protection based on past loyalty. The Sages presumably concluded the haftarah here to emphasize the optimism in these verses.

RELATION OF THE HAFTARAH TO THE CALENDAR

The haftarah is not connected to the parashah by theme. It was chosen as the first of three prophetic readings of admonition for the three weeks that precede the fast of Tish‘ah b’Av. Thus on the three Sabbaths preceding that commemoration of the destruction of the First and Second Temples, prophetic passages that warn the people Israel about the consequences of sin are read. These three weeks begin after the fast of the 17th of Tammuz, which marks the first breach in the walls of Jerusalem by the ancient Babylonians during the time of the First Temple. Rabbinic literature refers to the period from the 17th of Tammuz to the 9th of Av as Bein ha-M’tzarim, “Between the Breaches,” after a phrase in Lamentations 1:3.

The interval between these two fast days is also designated liturgically as “The Three [Weeks] of Admonition” (t’lata d’puranuta) because of the theme of the haftarot recited during this period.

After this cycle of readings and after Tish‘ah b’Av come seven weeks of prophecies of consolation (shivata d’nehemata). Thus we have a total of 10 readings, which in turn are followed by other haftarah readings connected to themes of the holy days of the New Year. Thus a major liturgical shift begins this week, initiating a period during which the haftarot relate thematically to the religious calendar, not to the parashiyyot.

The choice of admonitions from the prophet Jeremiah is undoubtedly owing to the tradition that he was believed to be the author of the Book of Lamentations (recited on Tish‘ah b’Av).

1 The words of Jeremiah son of Hilkiah, one of the priests at Anathoth in the territory of Benjamin. 2 The word of the LORD came to him in the days of King Josiah son of Amon of Judah,

Jeremiah 1:1. Jeremiah A name derived either from the verb ramah (i.e., “the LORD loosens”) or rum (i.e., “the LORD is exalted”). It is also known from 8th-century-B.C.E. Hebrew seals.
in the thirteenth year of his reign, and throughout the days of King Jehoiakim son of Josiah of Judah, and until the end of the eleventh year of King Zedekiah son of Josiah of Judah, when Jerusalem went into exile in the fifth month.

4The word of the Lord came to me:

5Before I created you in the womb, I selected you;
Before you were born, I consecrated you;
I appointed you a prophet concerning the nations.

6I replied:
Ah, Lord God!
I don’t know how to speak,
For I am still a boy.

7And the Lord said to me:
Do not say, “I am still a boy,”
But go wherever I send you
And speak whatever I command you.

8Have no fear of them,
For I am with you to deliver you
—declares the Lord.

9The Lord put out His hand and touched my mouth, and the Lord said to me: Herewith I put My words into your mouth.

10See, I appoint you this day
Over nations and kingdoms:

2. in the thirteenth year This refers to 627 B.C.E., during the reign of King Josiah. At this time King Nebuchadrezzar I of Babylon revolted against his Assyrian overlord. Gradually, the Assyrian Empire was contained and overcome; Babylon rose to hegemony in the region, dominating Judea and destroying it in 587–586 B.C.E.

5. a prophet concerning the nations Framing the prophetic commission with reference to the nations who will exact divine judgment (v. 10) and the dominance of this theme in the pot image (vv. 13–15) suggest that only the foreign nations are referred to in this verse. As specified here, Jeremiah’s role is to announce the northern enemy and its allies (cf. v. 15) who will destroy Judah because of its sins.

6–9. This scenario of prophetic commission follows a standard structure in the Bible. It includes a divine confrontation and commission, a prophetic objection, and a divine assurance.

speak whatever I command you . . . I put My words into your mouth This echoes Deut. 18:18, where God tells Moses that the true prophet will speak what he is commanded, because the word of God is in his mouth. The allusion establishes Jeremiah as a true prophet in the tradition of Moses.
To uproot and to pull down,
To destroy and to overthrow,
To build and to plant.

11 The word of the Lord came to me: What do you see, Jeremiah? I replied: I see a branch of an almond tree.

12 The Lord said to me:
You have seen right,
For I am watchful to bring My word to pass.

13 And the word of the Lord came to me a second time: What do you see? I replied:
I see a steaming pot,
Tipped away from the north.

14 And the Lord said to me:
From the north shall disaster break loose
Upon all the inhabitants of the land!

15 For I am summoning all the peoples
Of the kingdoms of the north
—declares the Lord.

They shall come, and shall each set up a throne
Before the gates of Jerusalem,
Against its walls round about,
And against all the towns of Judah.

16 And I will argue My case against them
For all their wickedness:
They have forsaken Me
And sacrificed to other gods
And worshiped the works of their hands.

17 So you, gird up your loins,
Arise and speak to them
All that I command you.
Do not break down before them,
Lest I break you before them.
18I make you this day
A fortified city,
And an iron pillar,
And bronze walls
Against the whole land—
Against Judah’s kings and officers,
And against its priests and citizens.
19They will attack you,
But they shall not overcome you;
For I am with you—declares the Lord—to save you.

The word of the Lord came to me, saying,
2Go proclaim to Jerusalem: Thus said the Lord:
I accounted to your favor
The devotion of your youth,
Your love as a bride—
How you followed Me in the wilderness,
In a land not sown.
3Israel is holy to the Lord,
The first fruits of His harvest.
All who eat of it shall be held guilty;
Disaster shall befall them—declares the Lord.

Jeremiah 2:2–3. The positive report of Israel’s youthful past and the marital symbolism of the Covenant echo Hos. 2. Yet this portrait contradicts the repeated episodes of Israel’s faithlessness found in the Torah. Apparently, differing streams of tradition and didactic motives found expression in different passages of the Bible.

Verse 3 turns on another metaphor. Israel’s relation to God is now imagined in terms of the donation of “first fruits.” Jeremiah’s rhetoric is based on the wording of the priestly rule about profaning a sacred donation: “If a man eats of a sacred donation unwittingly, he shall pay the priest for the sacred donation, adding one-fifth of its value” (Lev. 22:14). Jeremiah transforms this warning against desecrating gifts offered to the Lord into a metaphor for God’s relationship to the people: The people Israel is God’s sacred portion, and the nations that consume it are held guilty, with disastrous consequences. This portrays the entire people Israel as sacred.

3. Jeremiah’s depiction of the nation as a holy people articulates the theology of Deuteronomy (see Deut. 7:6), which revises the conditional nature of the people’s holy status found in Exod. 19:4–6. In that context of Exodus, Israel may become holy if it observes God’s teachings. The revision in Deuteronomy deems Israel holy per se and, therefore, obligated to fulfill its covenantal obligations.

In its original context, this verse described past events (see 2:4–8). But as the climax to this haftarah, its meaning shifts; it becomes a prophecy of hope.