

Maamarei Mordechai

הסביר לפי ממש פשט

Parshas Pinchas 5785

D. Mordechai Schlachter

The forty years are coming to a close and Hashem commands that a census be taken.

וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה וְאֶל־אַלְעָזֶר בָּן־אַהֲרֹן הַפְּהֵן לְאָמֵר:

“And it was after the Plague. And Hashem said to Moshe and to Elazar, the son of Aharon, the Kohen, saying.” (Bamidbar 26:1).

Which plague is this referring to? Why is there a break in middle of the pasuk?

There is also another anomaly that can be addressed in the same discourse. When counting Bnei Yisroel, the Torah states, “And the sons of Eliav were Nimuel, and Dasan and Aviram. It is this Dasan and Aviram who were called into the congregation, that agitated upon Moshe and upon Aharon, in the Korach congregation, in their agitation upon Hashem.” (Ibid 26:9). Not only that, but the Torah continues. “And the land opened up its mouth and swallowed them, and Korach, in the death of the congregation.” (Ibid 26:10). Why does the Torah bring up the Korach rebellion again? We know Dasan and Aviram and we know that happened to them. Why does it no only reiterate who they were, but gives the punishment and their connection to Korach? It could have just skipped them as they were not around anymore.

Our pasuk ends the narrative about Cozbi and the sin Bnei Yisroel committed with the daughters of Midyan. It also commences the narrative about counting the people at the end of the forty years. The plague it may refer to is the one that followed that took the lives of twenty-four thousand. (Ibid 25:9). When the original sinning was being committed, with the idol, Hashem commanded Moshe to command the leaders to strike down those attached to it. (Ibid 25:4). Then Zimri went and sinned in front of everyone’s eyes. (Ibid 25:6). After, it mentions that Pinchas, who took matters into his own hands, quelled the plague. (Ibid 25:8). The Torah then reiterates that revenge was to be taken on account of the matter of Cozbi – who was struck during the plague. (Ibid 25:18). Later, Moshe calls this matter a plague, again. (Ibid 31:16).

There are many breaks in the narrative. Israel settled in Shittim, sinned; Zimry sinned, and Pinchas saved the day. After a break, Hashem rewards Pinchas with a covenant of peace (ibid 25:11) and Zimry and Cozbi are named. Then after a break, Hashem tells Moshe to take revenge on Midyan because of this incident. Then the Torah comes to our pasuk, stating after the time of the plague, [break] and Hashem commanded Moshe and Elazar to take a census. (Ibid 26:1). As the subject matter is all related, why all the breaks?

Hashem stated he would send a plague on the people for sinning with the Molten Calf that Aharon made. (Shmos 32:35). Interestingly, it does not give the details or the number of people that fell. It also follows a verse where Hashem seemed to forgive the people. (Ibid 32:14). Even though Hashem seemed to be consoled, and did not do what

He intended for them, it still says, "On the day I do the considering, I shall consider upon them their sins." (Ibid 32:34). It seems that the plague was held in abeyance and occurred later. When?

Bnei Yisroel complained about food. (Shmos 16:3). Hashem punished Bnei Yisroel by giving them more quail than they could eat, so they got sick. (Bamidbar 11:32). The Torah calls it a "mako raba" a great strike, not a "nogaf" a plague. (Ibid 11:33). Bnei Yisroel, then at the end of the forty-years, again complained about food. (Ibid 21:5). Hashem sent fiery divinity to attack Bnei Yisroel. (Ibid 21:6). The Torah does not, however, call it a plague. The Torah also does not give the numbers of those that perished.

The Torah does call the fallout after the sin with the slander by the ten scouts a plague. (Bamidbar 14:37). The Torah also states, after the Korach rebellion, that the fallout was a plague. (Ibid 17:11). In fact, it calls it "the plague." (Ibid 17:13). It also calls the punishment after the Midyan disaster "the plague." (Ibid 25:8). Therefore, complaints about food sandwiched the forty years. Plagues, also, sandwiched the forty years.

This can explain why Korach is mentioned again. Our pasuk says, "And it was, after the plague." It is referring to "the plague." It is after the Korach rebellion and the ten scouts and their followers. That combined rebellion resulted in the plague that took the lives of fourteen thousand seven hundred, plus the ten scouts, Korach, Dasan, Aviram, and the two-hundred and fifty followers. The end result, though, was that not only did they perish, but during the next thirty-eight years, that entire generation passed away. Why did fourteen thousand have to die in a plague? It could be that it was the reckoning for the Molten Calf incident. That was the day of reckoning. The remaining generation had a public decree based on Hashem's will.

Then the people of the new generation repeat the mistakes. They are seduced to worship an idol and give up all their morality. Yet, what really causes the plague was Zimry going unchecked and committing a sin publicly. He paraded Cozbi around and then retreated into his tent. It was only after that happened that Pinchas acted. The people did not learn their lesson. They watched Korach quarrel with Moshe. They cried when the ten scouts joined in with their slander of the Land. They did not step up to defend Moshe or to stop Korach. Ten tribes—save for Efraim and Yehuda—watched as their leader slandered the land. Eliav and his eldest, Nimuel, did nothing as Dasan and Aviram joined in and incited two-hundred and fifty followers. Then the new generation watched as Zimry did as he pleased. They sat by, even after Moshe gave the leaders instruction to strike those who were sinning with the idol. Thus, this plague is connected to that plague. Both are called, "the plague." Both had devastating results.

It was after the plague—part one and part two—that Moshe and Elazar took a census. The people were adjourned never to forget the lessons of the past. Never repeat your leader's mistakes. Leaders should lead. But areivim ze la za, collective responsibility for each other, means the masses can overcome bad and sinful leaders who sin publicly, and take the masses with them. They should learn not to listen to negativity about Hashem or our Land. Do not simply follow the leader. Everyone has a mind of his or her own. If the public feels that leadership is failing, it is up to the people to correct. Leaders remain good when the public keeps them in check.