

בס"ד

THE RASHI OF THE WEEK

Week of

Parshas Pinchos

21 Tammuz, 5784 – July 27, 2024

Compiled from the works of
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An Outline of the Rebbe's Explanation of Rashi Parshas Pinchos

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Rashi in His Own Words

במדבר כ"ו, א': וַיְהִי אַחֲרֵי הַמַּגֵּפָה (פ באמצע פסוק) וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה וְאֶל אֶלְעָזָר בֶּן־אַהֲרֹן הַכֹּהֵן לֵאמֹר:

במדבר כ"ו, א': רש"י ד"ה ויהי אחרי המגפה וגו' : משל לרועה שנכנסו זאבים לתוך עדרו והרגו בהן והוא מונה אותן לידע מנין הנותרות. דבר אחר כשיצאו ממצרים ונמסרו למשה, נמסר לו במנין, עכשיו שקרב למות ולהחזיר צאנו, מחזירם במנין:

Bamidbar 26:1: It was after the plague, that Hashem spoke to Moshe and to Elozor the son of Aharon the kohen, saying.

Bamidbar 22:11: Rashi Heading - It was after the plague: This can be compared to a shepherd whose flock was intruded by wolves who killed some of them [his sheep]. He counted them to know how many were left. Another interpretation: When they left Egypt and were entrusted to Moshe, they were delivered to him with a number. Now that he was close to death and would soon have to return his flock, he returns them with a number.

Synopsis

This week's Torah portion, Pinchos, tells us that Balak, the king of Moav, was afraid of the Jews. He, therefore, hired Bilaam, the gentile prophet, to curse the Jews. When this did not work, Bilaam decided to incite the Jews to commit immoral behavior and idolatry. As a result, Hashem sent a plague that killed 24,000 people¹. After the plague, Hashem commanded Moshe and Elozor to count the Jews². Rashi cites the words "it was after the plague" and explains it as follows: "This can be compared to a shepherd whose flock was attacked by wolves who killed some of them (his sheep). He counted them to know how many were left. Another interpretation: When they left Egypt and were entrusted to Moshe, they were delivered to him with a number. Now that he was close to death and would soon have to return his flock, he returned them with a number."

Rashi already explained the reason for counting the Jews twice³. Why does he need to explain it yet a third time? Furthermore, why does Rashi need to offer a second explanation here? In Rashi's explanation in Shemos, he says that the sheep's owner conducted the census; here, he says it was the shepherd. Also, in Shemos, Rashi writes that it was a pestilence that killed the sheep, while here, he writes that it was wolves.

1. Our Parshah, Bamidbar 26:3-8.

2. Ibid, ibid 26:1-2.

3. Parshas Ki Siso, Shemos 30:16 and Parshas Bamidbar, Bamidbar 1:1.

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The explanation is that there were two forms of punishment that the Jews received. During the plague, 24,000 people died. Later, the judges executed 176,000 Jews⁴. This being the case, why didn't Hashem wait until after the 176,000 Jews were killed? Why count the Jews because of the plague and not the 176,000 Jews, which is a far greater number?

Rashi answers this by telling us of the shepherd's census. An owner and a shepherd count their flock for entirely different reasons. The owner counts the sheep because he wants to know how many complete and healthy sheep he has. Conversely, a shepherd will take a census when he feels responsible for what happened. He intends to do his job better by protecting his flock, but he can do nothing to prevent pestilence.

Rashi's Explanation

This week's Torah portion, Pinchos, tells us that Balak, the king of Moav, was afraid of the Jews. He, therefore, hired Bilaam, the gentile prophet, to curse the Jews. When this did not work, Bilaam decided to incite the Jews to commit immoral behavior and idolatry. As a result, Hashem sent a plague that killed 24,000 people⁵. After the plague, Hashem commanded Moshe and Elozor to count the Jews⁶. Rashi cites the words "it was after the plague" and explains it as follows: "This can be compared to a shepherd whose flock was intruded on by wolves. They killed some of them (his sheep). He counted them to know how many were left. Another interpretation: When they left Egypt and were entrusted to Moshe, they were delivered to him with a number. Now that he was close to death and would soon have to return his flock, he returned them with a number."

Difficulties in Understanding Rashi

Rashi already explained the reason for counting the Jews twice. In the first verse of Bamidbar, he writes⁷, "Because they were dear to Him, He counted them often." Regarding the census after the sin of the Golden Calf, Rashi writes⁸, "This can be compared to a flock of sheep, treasured by its owner, which was stricken with pestilence. When the pestilence was over, the owner said to the shepherd, 'Please count my sheep to know how many are left to make it known that he treasured the flock.'" Why does he need to explain it here yet a third time?

Not only that, but all three explanations are different. Why does Rashi need to add a parable here

4. Our Parshah, Bamidbar 25:5. See Rashi.

5. Ibid, ibid 26:3-8.

6. Ibid, ibid 26:1-2.

7. Parshas Bamidbar, Bamidbar 1:1.

8. Parshas Ki Siso, Shemos 30:16.

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involving a shepherd? Why does Rashi need two explanations here? Rashi writes two explanations because there is a slight problem in the first answer, which the second answer addresses. However, the first answer is closer to Peshat.

Furthermore, in Shemos, Rashi says that the sheep's owner conducted the census; here he says it was the shepherd. Also, in Shemos, Rashi writes that the pestilence killed the sheep, while here, he writes that it was wolves.

The Explanation

The explanation is that there were two forms of punishment that the Jews received. During the plague, 24,000 people died. Later, the judges sentenced to death and killed 176,000 Jews. This being the case, why didn't Hashem wait until after the 176,000 Jews were killed to count the Jews? Why count the Jews after the plague and before the 176,000 Jews, which is a far greater number?

That is why Rashi uses the allegory of a shepherd and tells us that he took the census. An owner and a shepherd count their flock for entirely different reasons. The owner counts the sheep because he loves them. In his mind, there is no difference in how they died, and he wants to know how many complete and healthy sheep remained.

Conversely, a shepherd will take a census when he feels responsible for what happened, and he wants to be a better shepherd and make sure that it does not happen again. Here, Rashi uses the allegory of wolves attacking because pestilence is beyond his control.

Moshe is our shepherd and could not do anything about the execution of the 176,000 people. That was a court-ordered execution. But while the plague occurred, Zimri challenged Moshe about the law regarding having relations with a gentile woman. However, Moshe could not remember the law! It wasn't until Pinchos killed Zimri that the plague stopped. That was why Moshe felt (at least partially) responsible for the plague.

This occurred close to Moshe's passing. If counting the Jews was to ensure their future protection, why didn't Yehoshua, their future leader, participate? Because of this question, Rashi gives a second answer. However, it is not as good as the first because it doesn't explain why Moshe counted the Jews after the plague.

Why was the census done on the volition of the shepherd, Moshe, and not at the discretion of the sheep owner, Hashem? Hashem could have done so to know the number remaining and show how precious the Jews were to Him. If that were so, the numbers of those remaining after the plague and those remaining after the instruction, "let each man kill his men," would have both been relevant. As mentioned above, the sheep owner does not care (in the context of counting) how the sheep were lost.

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The explanation is as follows. At that time, the Jewish people transgressed the sin of having relations with a gentile woman. The law, in this case, is, as Rashi has already mentioned⁹, "zealots may kill him" (without first hearing the testimony and going to court, etc.). Therefore, the beginning student already understands how terrible this sin is, to the extent that it brought nearly two hundred thousand Jews to death. Rashi writes¹⁰, "The G-d of the Jewish people hates promiscuity." Thus, there cannot be room for a census motivated by dearness.

The Perspective of Jewish Law

This idea will become more satisfying when considered from the perspective of Halachah, Jewish Law. Having relations with a gentile woman is a sin that¹¹ "leads to a detriment that has no parallel among all forbidden relations. A child conceived from any other forbidden union is considered the father's son concerning all matters and a member of the Jewish people. A son conceived by a gentile woman, by contrast, is not considered his son...."

The Rogotchover Gaon explains that through this sin^{12 13}, "he removes souls from the nation of Israel, for the offspring follows the mother." This means that if a person transgresses any other sin, no matter which, he does not breach the boundaries that Hashem created between Jews and non-Jews, and even after sinning, he remains a Jew. When a person engages in relations with a non-Jew, the child, who should have been from among "the souls of the nation of Israel," is sent "to follow the mother." He becomes a non-Jew. Thus, measure for measure, Hashem considers the sinner (regarding Hashem's affection for the Jewish nation) as an outsider compared with his flock of sheep. Rambam continues, "This matter causes one to cling to the gentile nations from whom the Holy One, blessed be He, has separated us...." Thus, knowing "the number remaining" is not feasible since those who did not sin are not regarded as the "remainder" of those who did. Instead, Hashem considers it as if they have no relationship (concerning affection).

On the other hand, we see that Moshe Rabbeinu — the faithful shepherd of the Jewish nation who had self-sacrifice for every Jew — devoted himself to caring for the needs of and providing "protection from wolves" for even these Jews. This was true to the extent that they, too, were counted as part of his flock. And he counts them "to know the number remaining" since they, too, are part of his.

Through our faithful shepherd Moshe and the Moshe of every generation, we will reach the

9. Parshas Balak, Bamidbar 25:7.

10. Parshas Balak, Bamidbar 24:14.

11. Hilchos Issurei Biah, Chapter 12, Paragraph 7.

12. Rabbi Yosef Rosen, (1858-1936). He was also known as "Rogotchover Gaon," being a Gaon, Talmudic genius, and of the city of Rogotchov. Also known as Tzafnas Paneach, the title of his foremost work.

13. See his commentary on Torah, Parshas Pinchas, pg. 262.

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complete and true redemption now!

(Adapted from a talk given on Shabbos Parshas Pinchos 5734)

I hope you gained as much by reading this as I did by translating and adapting it.

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May they merit to be a source of Chassidic pride
to their family and a Torah light to their community

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May she go from strength to strength
in health, happiness, Torah, and mitzvot

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