

***Pinchas* (Numbers 25:10-30:1)**

Nathan Abrams

As I have explained previously, on Shabbat (Friday sundown to Saturday sundown), in the synagogue, when we Jews gather to meet and pray, we read a weekly portion from the *Torah* (the first five books of Moses).

The portion (in Hebrew ‘parashah’), which will be read this Shabbat, is taken from *Bemidbar* (Hebrew: ‘In the Wilderness’), which is known in English as Numbers and is the fourth book of the Bible. It covers chapters 25:10–30:1.

The parashah is called ‘*Pinchas*’. Its name is taken from the first significant name or phrase in the chapter which opens with the words ‘The LORD spoke to Moses, saying, Pinchas.’

Bemidbar as its name suggests recalls the wandering of the Children of Israel in the desert after their liberation from slavery in Egypt but just before they the Promised Land.

Why is the parashah called Pinchas? Because he was a priest, the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron (the brother of Moses and High Priest), who ended a plague that God had imposed to punish the Children of Israel for their idolatrous behaviour. Remember that in the Bible, the Israelites were monotheistic and did not tolerate the worship of other Gods or idols or any rituals associated with them. Because of Pinchas’ actions, God ended the plague and he is rewarded by having the parashah named after him.

Talk of a plague has parallels with our own time as we still endure measures designed to lessen the impact of Covid-19. While there is no suggestion that we should copy Pinchas’ actions to end our plague, we should still be vigilant to protect ourselves and others.