

A FORM FOR THAT **A Devotional Meditation on Pinchas (Phinehas)**

Numbers 25:10-29:40; Jeremiah 1:1-2:3; Luke 7:1-10; Acts 5:1-11, 8:9-24

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Pfc. Jennifer Reynolds fills out in processing paperwork on the back of Pfc. Enrique Baena at Joint Base Lewis-McChord, Washington, after their return from deployment in Iraq, December 6, 2011. Photo: JBLM PAO/Jim Bryant/NW Guardian, [via Flickr](#).

Military culture is one of structure. There is structure in the hierarchy of rank, the organization of units, requirements for promotion, and the daily routine. The structure originates at the highest levels: the President sets priorities for national security, Congress determines how to resource those priorities, and the military leadership acts on the priorities within the resources Congress allocates. The directives issued by the military leadership shape the lives of every warrior down to the lowest ranks, every civilian employed by the national defense establishment, all the families of these military and civilian personnel, and the communities that serve them.

I have heard it said that the Army runs on paper. That's the meaning behind the catch phrase, "There's a form for that." Whatever we did required multiple copies of some form to be filled out and submitted to the proper authority. If we wanted to go on leave, change our pay allocations, order supplies, apply for reassignment, or even get married, the Army required a paper trail to document each action to ensure compliance with orders, regulations, policies, and procedures.

To the outsider, that kind of structure seems burdensome, stifling, and overbearing. Some might say it's legalistic. I would agree had I not experienced this culture for thirty years. It requires indoctrination, which means growing accustomed to the structure and learning how to move within it. In a sense, that means merging an individual's identity with the Army's. After that happened to me, I found the Army's structure liberating. I knew my limits – the extent of my own authority, the power of the authorities over me, the boundaries where my duties and responsibilities intersected with others, and how to handle issues as they arose within the parameters of the Army structure. There was plenty of room for my own initiative, and I could be confident that if I needed reigning in or correction, it would happen in due time from the proper authority.

Not everyone is comfortable with such structure. That's why the Army has detailed policies on what to do with nonconformists. And yes, there are forms for that – many of them. The intent is to do everything possible to transform a man or woman into a good soldier. That involves a lengthy and elaborate process, starting with counseling and remedial training, and escalating as necessary to disciplinary action, even criminal prosecution and elimination from the Army in extreme cases. We would rather not go to those extremes. We would much rather have a smart, well-trained warrior contributing his or her best to the Army's mission and to the welfare of fellow soldiers. However, if we

must, we take steps to deal with incorrigible soldiers to limit the damage they can do and, if possible, pass them on to someone else who might be able to help them.

The U.S. Army did not develop this culture in a vacuum. Successful militaries have operated within such structures from antiquity. That's why one of the most relevant passages of Scripture for me is the one about the Roman centurion who understood authority so well that he had no trouble accepting Yeshua's promise to heal his sick servant. Yeshua commended him for his faith, and as a career soldier, I understand the culture in which that faith developed.

This is not to say that soldiers always make the best Christians, but it does help explain why, in our civilization at least, military culture is a depiction of Kingdom culture. Warriors understand the concepts of Duty, Honor, and Country. In Kingdom terms, that could be understood as loving our neighbors as ourselves in the context of loving our Creator with all our being.

This is one of the most enduring teaching points I gain from studying the history of Israel. The negative examples are just as helpful as the positive ones. One of those negative examples concerns a man named Zimri, a prince of the tribe of Simeon. He's the one who had a sexual liaison with a foreign princess right out in the open in defiance of God's instructions. Phinehas the priest was so angered by this that he grabbed a spear, ran into the tent after the two of them, and killed them both.

What surprises us is God's response:

Then *ADONAI* spoke to Moses saying, "Phinehas son of Eleazar son of Aaron the *kohen* [priest] has turned away My anger from *Bnei-Yisrael* [children of Israel] because he was very zealous for Me among them, so that I did not put an end to *Bnei-Yisrael* in My zeal. So now say: See, I am making with him a covenant of *shalom!* It will be for him and his descendants after him a covenant of an everlasting priesthood—because he was zealous for his God and atoned for *Bnei-Yisrael.*"

Numbers 25:10-13 TLV

Phinehas was carrying out a sentence of judgment God had already passed. It might have been different had Zimri gone through proper protocol to marry his Midianite princess and bring her into the nation. That is what we see in the stories of Rahab and Ruth, foreign women who joined themselves to Israel and Israel's God. It's also what we see with men like Uriah the Hittite, a foreigner who become one of King David's Mighty Men and the first husband of Bathsheba.

Zimri, however, wasn't interested in expanding the scope of Israel's redemption. Obviously, he was interested in sexual gratification, and perhaps he even had some infatuation with this foreign woman, but he was one of many thousands of Hebrew men who fell to temptation and ended up entangled with foreign girlfriends who introduced them to the sex cult protocols of their national religion. These are the same Hebrews who had experienced the tangible presence of the Almighty for 40 years in the wilderness, and who had seen their parents perish because of unbelief in and outright rebellion against that very same Almighty Redeemer. No wonder the nation received a sentence of divine judgment that took the lives of 24,000 people in a plague.

All because men like Zimri chafed under the commands, instructions, and protocols of the God Who had redeemed them and their nation. It seems that, to them, God's ways had become burdensome, stifling, and overbearing. They may have deemed such strict rules as outmoded and inapplicable since they were about to embark on the conquest of the Promised Land. Surely God would not require such antiquated restrictions on His Chosen People since they had evolved through their time in the desert. All those commandments surely didn't apply to them anymore.

Unless we consider the matter from the perspective of the Psalmist who wrote with the benefit of centuries of hindsight:

So He brought forth His people with joy, His chosen ones with singing.
He gave them the lands of the nations, so they inherited the labor of the peoples
so that they might keep His statutes and observe His laws.

Psalm 105:43-46 TLV

This brings up a question: if the Chosen People do not look and think and act like the One Who chose them, are they still really the Chosen People?

As with so much else in the Holy Word, this is a question not only for the Jewish people, but for all who are adopted into the Covenant Nation through our proclaimed allegiance to the Jewish Messiah. Do we proclaim that allegiance so we can gain a kind of galactic fire insurance, and then live as we please? If so, then how are we different from Zimri, the headstrong prince of Simeon? Or from Ananias and Sapphira, the greedy disciples of Yeshua? Or Simon, the Samaritan magician who tried to buy the outpouring of the Holy Spirit so he could have power over others?

Come to think of it, we all exhibit the undesirable traits of these ancient Hebrews. That's why the New Covenant in Messiah's blood is one that transforms us from the inside out rather than from external behavior modification. It's a heart change, and it requires us to do our part. Our Messiah Himself walked out the form for that. Our part is to learn what He said and do as He did.