

מקראות גדולות

The
COMMENTATORS'
BIBLE

THE JPS MIQRA'OT GEDOLOT

NUMBERS במדבר

*With the 1917 and 1985 English translations of
the Jewish Publication Society TANAKH, the questions of Abarbanel,
the commentaries of Rashi, Rashbam, Ibn Ezra, and Nahmanides,
and selections from the Masorah and from the commentaries of
Bekhor Shor, Kimhi, Hizkuni, Gersonides, Abarbanel, and Sforno*

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NJPS ¹⁰The LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ¹¹“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.

¹²Say, therefore, ‘I grant 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.’”

RASHI ¹¹ Phinehas, son of Eleazar son of Aaron the priest. The tribes were speaking disparagingly of him: “Look at this Phinehas ben Putil! His maternal grandfather, Putiel, [A] fattened calves to sacrifice to an idol, and he dared to kill an Israelite tribal chieftain!” So the text makes sure to associate him with his paternal grandfather, Aaron. **By displaying among them his passion for Me.** Not his passion, but his “jealousy”: He was “very jealous for My sake” (OJPS)—more literally, “he acted jealously out of My jealousy.” That is to say, he took My revenge, he displayed the anger that I should have displayed. — This word “jealousy” indicates one who is burning with anger to get revenge.

¹² **My pact of friendship.** More literally, “I grant him My covenant in peace.” It should be a covenant of peace for him. — The phrase expresses the feelings of one who is grateful to someone who does him a good turn. Here too the Holy One is expressing His gratitude.

¹³ **It shall be for him.** This pact of friendship. **A pact of priesthood for all time.** Though the priesthood had already been conferred on Aaron and his descendants, it was given only to those whom Aaron and his sons would father after they had been anointed. Phinehas, who had already been born and was not anointed, did not fall into this category. B. Zev. 101b tells us this plainly: “Phinehas did not become a priest until he [A] See Exod. 6:25 and Rashi’s comment there.

NAHMANIDES ¹⁰ **The LORD spoke to Moses.** The Holy One informed Moses that he must recompense Phinehas well for his passion on behalf of his God and for his good deed in making expiation for the Israelites, so that they did not all die in a plague.

¹² **Say, therefore.** Say it to the Israelites, to inform them that Phinehas would be a priest for all time.

¹³ **It shall be for him and his descendants after him a pact of priesthood for all time.** Notice that this is *not* what Aaron’s other priestly descendants were told—that their anointing would “serve them for everlasting priesthood throughout the ages” (Exod. 40:15). Rather, God gave Phinehas “the covenant of an everlasting priesthood” (OJPS)—“My covenant, with peace” (as the phrase in v. 12 is correctly understood). God would

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS ¹⁰ **Phinehas.** The Hebrew name is always spelled, unusually, with a ך except for once, in 1 Sam. 1:3—but that is the original spelling; the ך, initial of the Tetragrammaton, was added to the name in honor of Phinehas’s passion for his God (Jacob b. Hayyim). Note that “Phinehas” is an Egyptian name; compare Jer. 43:7, “They went to Egypt ... and they arrived at Tahpanhes” (Abarbanel).

¹¹ **Phinehas ... has turned back My wrath from the Israelites.** They should therefore not feel enmity toward him for killing Zimri (Bekhor Shor). The plague would have finished them off (Abarbanel). The others stood by and did nothing to stop the transgressors (Sforno). **By displaying among them his passion for Me.** Elijah, who displayed a similar passion (see 1 Kings 19:10 and 19:14), may have been a descendant of Phinehas (Abarbanel).

¹² **I grant him My pact of friendship.** The ך of the last word in the verse, *shalom* (“peace” or “friendship”) is broken in half (Masorah). Even if the Israelites do feel enmity toward him, he has nothing to fear, either from them or from Cozbi’s relatives (Bekhor Shor). Since a priest who has killed someone may not offer the Priestly Benediction, Phinehas was worried that he would lose his priestly status; the Holy One assured him that he would keep it, since he had acted for the sake of heaven (Hizkuni). Rather, “My Pact—protection” from the angel of death. This is why Phinehas lived so long (Sforno).

¹³ **It shall be for him and his descendants after him a pact of priesthood for all time.** The High Priesthood remained in the family of Phinehas as late as the early Second Temple period (Hizkuni). The priesthood would pass to his descendants anyway; this is a promise that he will not cease to *have* descendants—and also that he would outlive his father Eleazar and attain the High Priesthood (Gersonides).

OJPS ¹⁰And the LORD spoke unto Moses, saying: ¹¹“Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, hath turned My wrath away from the children of Israel, in that he was very jealous for My sake among them, so that I consumed not the children of Israel in My jealousy. ¹²Wherefore say: Behold, I give unto him My covenant of peace; ¹³and it shall be unto him, and to his seed after him, the covenant of an everlasting priesthood; because he was jealous for his God, and made atonement for the children of Israel.”

10 וַיְדַבֵּר יְהוָה אֶל-מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר: 11 פִּינְחָס בֶּן-אֱלֶעָזָר בֶּן-אַהֲרֹן הַכֹּהֵן הֵשִׁיב אֶת-חַמְתִּי מֵעַל בְּנֵי-יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּקַנְאוֹ אֶת-קְנָאֹתַי בְּתוֹכְכֶם וְלֹא-כִלִּיתִי אֶת-בְּנֵי-יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּקַנְאוֹתַי: 12 לְכֹן אֶמַר הַנְּיִי נִתַּן לֹו אֶת-בְּרִיתִי שְׁלוֹם: 13 וְהָיְתָה לוֹ וּלְיִרְעוֹ אַחֲרָיו בְּרִית כְּהֵנָּה עוֹלָם תַּחַת אֲשֶׁר קָנָא לְאֱלֹהָיו וַיִּכְפַּר עַל-בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל:

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS + What exactly was the “pact of friendship” (v. 12) that the Holy One gave to Phinehas?

RASHBAM [A]

[A] We do not have Rashbam’s commentary on the weekly portion of Pinhas.

IBN EZRA ¹¹ **By displaying among them his passion.** The lack of the expected double *n* in the Hebrew *b’kan’o* (for ease of pronunciation) permits it also to be read *b’kono*, “for his Creator.” But what the Hebrew literally says is that “he jealously enacted My jealousy.” “For I the LORD your God am a jealous God” (Exod. 20:5)—had he not acted jealously for Me, I would have wiped out all Israel with pestilence in My jealousy.

¹² **My pact of friendship.** The Hebrew implies “My pact—a pact of friendship.” For another example of this grammatical phenomenon (which is common) see “your divine throne” (Ps. 45:7). What the “pact” meant in practical terms was that Phinehas had nothing to fear from Zimri’s relatives (though he was the chieftain of an ancestral house) and that he and his descendants would have the priesthood for all time. In fact, the High Priests would descend from him, though it is reasonable to suppose that Eleazar had other sons beside Phinehas.

¹³ **His descendants after him.** “After him” shows that he did in fact die. He could not, therefore, have been Elijah (as some think). He did, however, live well into the period of the judges (see Judg. 20:28) but not as late as the time of David (see my

NJPS ¹⁴The 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.

¹⁶The 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.”

RASHI killed Zimri.” For his God. That is, “on his God’s behalf.” Compare “Are you wrought up on my account?” (11:29); “I am very jealous for Zion” (Zech. 8:2).

14 The name of the Israelite who was killed. The text has waited to identify the wicked man, in disparagement of him, until it identifies the righteous man, in praise of him. **Chieftain of a Simeonite ancestral house.** One of the five Simeonite ancestral houses of 26:12–13. Another reading: This is said in praise of Phinehas. Despite the fact that this man was a chieftain, Phinehas did not refrain from acting zealously when God’s name had been desecrated in this fashion. That is why the text tells you who the slain man was.

15 The name of the Midianite woman who was killed. This is to tell you how much the Midianites hated the Israelites. To get an Israelite to sin, they prostituted a king’s daughter. **He was the tribal head.** Literally, he was “head of the people” (OJPS). In fact, he was one of the five kings of Midian: “Evi, Rekem, Zur, Hur, and Reba, the five kings of Midian” (31:8). He was the most important of them all, but was demoted to third in the list because he debased himself by prostituting his daughter. **An ancestral house.** Midian had five ancestral houses: “The descendants of Midian were Ephah, Ephraim, Enoch, Abida, and Eldaah” (Gen. 25:4). He was king of one of them.

17 Assail the Midianites. Technically the verb form is an infinitive, expressing an ongoing obligation—“to assail” the Midianites (or more precisely “to be enemies” to them). Compare the usage of the form in “Remember the sabbath day” (Exod. 20:8) and “Observe the sabbath day” (Deut. 5:12).

18 For they assailed you by the trickery they practiced against you—because of the affair of Peor. They displayed their enmity to you when they prostituted their daughters in order to mislead you into following Peor. Notice that God did *not* command them

NAHMANIDES give him a covenant to which peace was inextricably attached. But Aaron was granted the priesthood “for dignity and adornment” (Exod. 28:2). That is why we are reminded here that Phinehas **took impassioned action for his God.** One who is enlightened will understand. [A]

14–15 The name of the Israelite ... The name of the Midianite woman. They are identified to show that he deserved this great reward, for not being afraid to act even though they were an Israelite chieftain and the daughter of a Midianite tribal head.

17 The LORD spoke to Moses. Having been told to reward the righteous, Moses is now told to punish the guilty and to **assail the Midianites.** (But see my comment to v. 19.)

18 By the trickery they practiced against you. As I explained in my comment to v. 1, it was the elders of Midian who had come up with this nefarious scheme. The intent was to use their daughters to lure the Israelites sexually, yoke them to the service of Baal-peor, and lead them astray from God. We know from 22:4 that the Moabites took counsel with them, and that is when this plan was hatched,

[A] “Dignity” (*kavod*) and “adornment” (*hifret*) are two of the *sefirot*. But no *sefirot* are mentioned in connection with Phinehas, so the reason for this covenant—his impassioned action—had to be emphasized.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **14 The one who was killed with the Midianite woman.** Had he separated from her, he would not have been killed (Hizkuni). **He was the tribal head of an ancestral house in Midian.** We see that Phinehas was taking his life in his hands when he killed these two (Gersonides).

17 Assail the Midianites. This is not a command to do so immediately—that command is not given until 31:2—but a statement meant to reassure the Israelites that they would have the opportunity to take revenge on the Midianites for the plague they had caused (Hizkuni). Since the Israelites had killed their king’s daughter, it was clear that if they did not assail them at once, the Midianites would attempt to injure them by any means possible. And they would be able to do a better job of it while Moses was still alive, for Joshua would not be able to fight the same kind of miraculous wars that Moses could (Gersonides).

18 For they assailed you. This is the source of the rabbinic dictum, “If someone is trying to kill you, make sure to kill him

OJPS ¹⁴Now the name of the man of Israel that was slain, who was slain with the Midianitish woman, was Zimri, the son of Salu, a prince of a fathers’ house among the Simeonites. ¹⁵And the name of the Midianitish woman that was slain was Cozbi, the daughter of Zur; he was head of the people of a fathers’ house in Midian.

¹⁶And the LORD spoke unto Moses, saying: ¹⁷“Harass the Midianites, and smite them; ¹⁸for they harass you, by their wiles wherewith they have beguiled you in the matter of Peor, and in the matter of Cozbi, the daughter of the prince of Midian, their sister, who was slain on the day of the plague in the matter of Peor.”

IBN EZRA comment to 1 Chron. 9:20. [A] Because he took impassioned action for his God, thus making expiation for the Israelites. Out of his love for God, he did Israel a good turn as well. But midrashically, this can be read to say that he “made expiation” for the Israelites on an ongoing basis—his sons would now do so just as their father did.

14 Chieftain of a Simeonite ancestral house. Of which there were five; see 26:12–13. But the “head” of the ancestral house was the chieftain of the entire tribe, a higher rank (see 7:2).

15 Zur. He was one of the kings of Midian mentioned in 31:8. They too, like the chieftains of the Simeonite ancestral houses, were five in number.

18 They assailed you. The present tense of “they harass you” (OJPS) is what

[A] We do not have this comment. But that verse says, “Phinehas son of Eleazar was the chief officer over them in time past.”

14 וְשֵׁם אִישׁ יִשְׂרָאֵל הַמְּכָה אֶשֶׁר הָבָה
אֶת־הַמְּדִינִית זִמְרִי בֶן־סָלוּא נְשִׂיא בֵּית־
אָב לְשִׁמְעוֹנִי: 15 וְשֵׁם הָאִשָּׁה הַמְּכָה
הַמְּדִינִית כּוֹזְבִי בַת־צֹר רֵאשׁ אֲמוֹת בֵּית־
אָב בַּמְדִּינָה הַזֹּאת: פ
16 וַיְדַבֵּר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר: 17 צְרוּר
אֶת־הַמְּדִינִיטִים וְהַפִּיתֵם אוֹתָם: 18 כִּי
צָרִימִם הֵם לָכֶם בְּנִבְלֵיהֶם אֲשֶׁר־נִבְּלוּ
לָכֶם עַל־דְּבַר־פְּעוֹר וְעַל־דְּבַר כּוֹזְבִי בַת־
נְשִׂיא מְדִינָן אֲהוּתָם הַמְּכָה בְיוֹם־הַמַּגֵּפָה
עַל־דְּבַר־פְּעוֹר:

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ♦ Since in 31:2 Moses will be commanded to “avenge the Israelite people on the Midianites,” what is the point of telling him now to “assail the Midianites” or rather, as it really means, “make the Midianites your enemy” (v. 17)?

NJPS ⁶³These are the persons enrolled by Moses and Eleazar the priest who registered the Israelites on the steppes of Moab, at the Jordan near Jericho. ⁶⁴Among these there was not one of those enrolled by Moses and Aaron the priest when they recorded the Israelites in the wilderness of Sinai. ⁶⁵For 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 Manassite family—son of Hopher 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. ²They stood before Moses, Eleazar the priest, the chieftains, and the whole assembly, at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting, and they

RASHI ⁶⁴ 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. Literally, "not a man of them" (OJPS). For the decree of death that resulted from the spies episode of ch. 13 did not apply to the women, for they loved the land. If you read the Hebrew carefully, you will see that it was only the men who said, "Let us head back for Egypt" (14:4). By contrast, the daughters of Zelophehad said, "Give us a holding among our father's kinsmen!" (27:4). That is why their story immediately follows this passage about the apportionment of the land.

27:1 Of Manassite family. See OJPS, which follows the order of the Hebrew text more closely here: We are first told that Zelophehad was a descendant of Manasseh, and then again that he and his daughters were "of the families of Manasseh the son of Joseph." The purpose is to tell you that Joseph too loved the land. Remember that he made the sons of Israel swear: "When God has taken notice of you, you shall carry up my bones from here" (Gen. 50:25). Now we find his great-great-granddaughters saying, "Give us a holding among our father's kinsmen!" (v. 4). Another purpose of this extra comment is to tell you that everyone in this long list of names was righteous. For if the text takes special care to give a genealogy for someone when we know little or nothing about some of the ancestors in the chain, if it is a praiseworthy context, it is to tell you that they are righteous people descended from a righteous person. But when we are given additional ancestors for someone doing evil, like Ishmael son of Nethaniah son of Elishama (2 Kings 25:25), it is for certain that everyone named in the list was just as evil. **Mahlah, Noah, Hoglah, Milcah, and Tirzah.** In 36:11 they are listed as Mahlah, Tirzah, Hoglah, Milcah, and Noah. The text lists them in a different order to tell us that they were all of equal importance.

2 They stood before Moses, Eleazar the priest. This tells us that they did not do so until the 40th year, when Aaron was already dead and Eleazar had succeeded him. The text seems to suggest that they first posed this question to Moses and then to Eleazar. But if Moses did not know the answer, how would Eleazar know? R. Josiah says: Explain the verse as if the names were reversed. Abba Hanan says in the name of R. Eleazar: Moses, Eleazar, and the rest were sitting in the house of study, and they stood before them all at the same time.

NAHMANIDES ⁶³ These are the persons enrolled by Moses and Eleazar. "These" refers to the rest of the Israelites—not to the Levites, to whom v. 64 does not apply. For (as our Sages said) the decree that the wilderness generation must die out did not apply to the Levites. The fact that Eleazar and Phinehas are still alive at this point is evidence enough of this.

⁶⁴ Among these there was not one of those enrolled by Moses and Aaron. For Joshua and Caleb, though still living, were not enrolled in the count made here, being older than 60; only those between 20 and 60 were counted. As Lev. 27:3 shows us (and as the Sages explain), those are the years in which one is in the prime of life and can perform military service.

⁶⁵ Not one of them survived, except Caleb son of Jephunneh and Joshua son of Nun. Who were counted in the original census, but (unlike the others) had not died.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS ⁶⁵ Not one of them survived, except Caleb son of Jephunneh and Joshua son of Nun. They survived because God granted them exceptionally long lives (Gersonides).

27:1 The daughters of Zelophehad ... came forward. Seeing that Hopher's sons had been counted, but his son Zelophehad had not been included in the count (Hizkuni).

2 They stood before Moses, Eleazar the priest, the chieftains, and the whole assembly, at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting. They had been given the runaround—Moses sent them to Eleazar, Eleazar sent them to the chieftains (that is, the heads of thousands and hundreds and so forth), and the latter told them, "It is too difficult for us—ask Moses." So they waited until they were all gathered at the entrance of the Tent and then posed their question (Abarbanel).

OJPS ⁶³These are they that were numbered by Moses and Eleazar the priest, who numbered the children of Israel in the plains of Moab by the Jordan at Jericho. ⁶⁴But among these there was not a man of them that were numbered by Moses and Aaron the priest, who numbered the children of Israel in the wilderness of Sinai. ⁶⁵For the LORD had said of them: "They shall surely die in the wilderness." And there was not left a man of them, save Caleb the son of Jephunneh, and Joshua the son of Nun.

אֵלֶּה פְּקוּדֵי מֹשֶׁה וְאֶלְעָזָר הַכֹּהֵן אֲשֶׁר פָּקְדוּ אֶת־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּעֶרְבַת מוֹאָב עַל יַרְדֵּן יַרְחוֹ: ⁶⁴ וּבְאֵלֶּה לֹא־הָיָה אִישׁ מִפְּקוּדֵי מֹשֶׁה וְאֶהֱרֹן הַכֹּהֵן אֲשֶׁר פָּקְדוּ אֶת־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּמִדְבַּר סִינַי: ⁶⁵ כִּי־אָמַר יְהוָה לָהֶם מוֹת יָמָתוֹ בְּמִדְבַּר וְלֹא־נֹתַר מֵהֶם אִישׁ בִּי אִם־כָּלֵב בֶּן־יִפְתָּח וְיֹהוֹשֻׁעַ בֶּן־נּוּן: ט

כו וּתְקַרְבֶּנָה בָנוֹת צֶלְפָחָד בְּנֵי־חֹפֵר בֶּן־גִּלְעָד בְּנֵי־מַכִּיר בְּנֵי־מְנַשֶׁה לְמִשְׁפַּחַת מְנַשֶׁה בְּנֵי־יוֹסֵף וְאֵלֶּה שְׁמוֹת בָּנוֹתָיו מַחֲלָה נָעִה וְהֹגְלָה וּמִלְכָּה וְתִרְצָה: ² וַתַּעֲמִדְנָה לִפְנֵי מֹשֶׁה וּלְפָנֵי אֶלְעָזָר הַכֹּהֵן וּלְפָנֵי הַנְּשִׂאִים וְכָל־הָעֵדָה פְּתַח

27 Then drew near the daughters of Zelophehad, the son of Hopher, the son of Gilead, the son of Machir, the son of Manasseh, of the families of Manasseh the son of Joseph; and these are the names of his daughters: Mahlah, Noah, and Hoglah, and Milcah, and Tirzah. ²And they stood before Moses, and before Eleazar the priest, and before the princes and all the congregation, at the door of the tent of meeting,

IBN EZRA ⁶⁴ Among these. "These" refers back to "the enrollment of the Israelites" (v. 51).

⁶⁵ Except Caleb son of Jephunneh and Joshua son of Nun. Caleb is mentioned first just as when "the Lord had said [this] of them" in 14:30.

NJPS 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. ⁴Let not our father’s name be lost to his clan just because 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, ⁷“The plea of Zelophehad’s daughters is just: you should give them a hereditary holding

RASHI 3 He was not one of the faction, Korah’s faction, which banded together against the LORD. Since they were going to admit that he had died as a result of sin, it was imperative that they make clear that he was not one of the people who had grumbled about Moses nor part of Korah’s faction, who agitated Israel against the Lord.

But died for his own sin. He did not cause others to sin. R. Akiva says he was the man who gathered wood on the Sabbath in 15:32–36; R. Simeon says he was one of those who marched defiantly against the

Amalekites in 14:44 despite having been warned not to do so.

4 Let not our father’s name be lost to his clan. For we stand in place of his son. If women are not considered “offspring,” then you must have our mother given in levirate marriage! [E] **Just because he had no son.** If he had had a son, they would not have demanded anything. Their mentioning this circumstance tells us how intelligent they were.

5 Moses brought their case before the LORD. The correct ruling eluded him—a punishment for his having assumed power by telling the Israelites, “Any matter that is too difficult for you, you shall bring to me and I will hear it” (Deut. 1:17). Another reading: this passage ought to have been another of the commandments issued by Moses himself, but Zelophehad’s daughters were rewarded by having it written as a result of their coming forward.

7 The plea of Zelophehad’s daughters is just. Rather, as OJPS translates, “the daughters of Zelophehad speak right,” that is, correctly. Happy is the one with whose words the Holy One agrees! “Thus this passage is written before Me on high!” This tells us that their eye saw what the eye of Moses did not see. **You should give them.** Literally, “you are to give, yes, give them.” The repetition indicates that they were to be given two portions—that of their father as one of those who left Egypt, and the one he was entitled to as one of the sons of Hopher. [F] **Transfer their father’s share to them.** *Ha’avarta*, “transfer,” is connected with *evrah*, “anger,” against one who

[E] See Deut. 25:5–10. [F] The land was apportioned to those who entered it, but as if they had inherited it from those who left Egypt. See Rashi’s comment to 26:55.

NAHMANIDES 27:3 He was not one of the faction. What Rashi’s comment does not explain is why they did not simply say, as they ought to have, “Our father died in the wilderness, and he has left no sons.” The Sages say they were forced to point out that he was not part of “the faction” because Korah’s faction did not inherit a portion in the land. (This rumor had spread among the people from Moses’ court.) Ibn Ezra explains it this way too. But in my view what they thought was that Moses hated Korah’s faction more than any of the others who had sinned in the wilderness, since their actions had been directed against him personally. They thought that, out of his hatred for Korah and his faction, Moses would think, “May no one show him mercy; may none pity his orphans ... May God be ever mindful of his father’s iniquity” (Ps. 109:12,14). They therefore made sure to inform him that their father was not one of them, and (furthermore) hinted that he was not one of those who had perished in the various plagues, but had simply died in his bed. **But died for his own sin.** This simply means that he died in the wilderness and did not merit to live long enough to enter the land. Or perhaps it is to be understood as does the poet Judah Halevi of blessed memory. [J]

[J] See the comment of Ibn Ezra.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS 3 He was not one of the faction. Rather, “he was not one of the congregation”—he was not yet 20 years old at the time, so the decree did not apply to him (Hizkuni). **Korah’s faction, which banded together against the LORD.** They emphasized this because according to 16:26 and 32 all the possessions of Korah’s faction were forfeit (Sforno). **But died for his own sin.** They were explaining why he left no sons. For every punishment is linked in one way or another to sin (Gersonides).

4 Let not our father’s name be lost to his clan. He has already paid for his sin by his death (Bekhor Shor). **5 Moses brought their case before the LORD.** He explained, “They have argued thus and so” (Bekhor Shor). Moses knew perfectly well that daughters should inherit in this case; what he did not know was whether they had a claim to their father’s double share as a first-born (Hizkuni). He felt sorry for them and promised to argue their case before the Lord (Abarbanel).

7 The plea of Zelophehad’s daughters is just. Rather, “so speak the daughters of Zelophehad”—in another words, “Say no more. You are just repeating what they themselves said” (Abarbanel). **You should give them a hereditary holding among their father’s kinsmen.** This is one of three cases where “their father” uses the masculine pronoun even though “they” are feminine; the others are 36:6 (also with Zelophehad’s daughters) and Job 42:15 (Masorah). “Them” also has the masculine ending (Hizkuni).

OJPS saying: ³“Our father died in the wilderness, and he was not among the company of them that gathered themselves together against the LORD in the company of Korah, but he died in his own sin; and he had no sons. ⁴Why should the name of our father be done away from among his family, because he had no son? Give unto us a possession among the brethren of our father.”

⁵And Moses brought their cause before the LORD.

⁶And the LORD spoke unto Moses, saying: ⁷“The daughters of Zelophehad speak right: thou shalt surely give them a possession of an inheritance among their

IBN EZRA 27:3 He was not one of the faction, Korah’s faction, which banded together against the LORD. They were afraid that the children of those who had banded together against the Lord would not inherit their fathers’ property. **But died for his own sin; and he has left no sons.** Judah Halevi says these two clauses go together—just as people say today, “Such-and-such happened to So-and-So on account of his sins.” This is not implausible.

7 The plea of Zelophehad’s daughters is just. More precisely, they “speak right” (OJPS), they speak the truth. Literally, the word means “so”—as they speak, “so”

אֶהְיֶה לְמוֹעֵד לְאָמֶר: ³ אָבִינוּ מֵת בְּמִדְבָּר
וְהוּא לֹא־הָיָה בְּתוֹךְ הָעֵדָה הַנוֹעֲדִים
עַל־יְהוָה בְּעֵדֶת־קֶרַח כִּי־בָחֲטְאוּ מֵת
וּבָנָיִם לֹא־הָיוּ לוֹ: ⁴ לְמָה יִגְרַע שֵׁם אָבִינוּ
מִתּוֹךְ מִשְׁפַּחְתּוֹ כִּי אֵין לוֹ בֶּן תְּנַהֲלֵנוּ
אֶחָדָה בְּתוֹךְ אֶחָי אֲבִינִי:

⁵ וַיִּקְרַב מֹשֶׁה אֶת־מִשְׁפָּטָן * לִפְנֵי
יְהוָה: ⁶ וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה לְאָמֶר: ⁷ בֵּן בְּנוֹת
צִלְפַּחֲדָה הַדְּבָרָת נָתַן תִּתֵּן לָהֶם אַחֲזָתַי

5. וְרַבְחִי

ABARBANEL’S QUESTIONS + What did the daughters of Zelophehad have to gain by telling Moses, “Our father died in the wilderness. He was not one of the faction, Korah’s faction” (v. 3)?

NJPS among their father's kinsmen; transfer their father's share to them.

⁸Further, 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."

¹²The LORD said to Moses, "Ascend these heights of Abarim and view the land

RASHI leaves no son to inherit from him. Another reading: The "transfer" wording is used because if a woman leaves her property to her son or her husband this sometimes results in transferring property from tribe to tribe. For the prohibition of such transfers [G] applied to this generation alone. See also "If a man dies without leaving a son, you shall transfer his property to his daughter" (v. 8). Everywhere else, the Hebrew simply uses the word "give." But in the case of daughters, it uses "transfer."

11 His nearest relative in his own clan. Remember that clans were always organized by paternal descent.

12 Ascend these heights of Abarim. Why does this passage about Moses' death follow the story of Zelophehad's daughters? When God told him, "You should give them a hereditary holding" (v. 7), Moses thought, "He told me to give it to them! Perhaps the decree has been canceled, and I am going to enter the land after all!" The Holy One told him, "My decree stands." Another reading: As soon as Moses entered the lands of the Gadites and the Reubenites, [H] he said joyfully, "Apparently the vow that I would not

[G] See 36:7. [H] Which were on the east bank of the Jordan, where Moses was; see ch. 32.

NAHMANIDES **9 If he has no daughter, you shall assign his property to his brothers.** Our Sages received a tradition that if a man dies without offspring, his father inherits his property. The text does not mention this because it is a recognized principle that inheritance works equally in both directions: those whose property would go to a certain relative would under other circumstances be able to inherit that relative's property. So once the text tells us that a son can inherit from his father, it is a given that the father can inherit from the son. Furthermore, inheritance descends in the direct line—it cannot be transmitted "sideways" to someone of the same generation. So property that goes to one's brothers is technically inherited (as it were) by one's father in the grave and then passed back down from him to the brothers. The text does not make this explicit because it wishes to speak in words of blessing and not mention an inheritance from one's dead child. And of course it could be that among those who entered the land—whom the text is specifically addressing—it did not occur that a father inherited his son's property in this way.

11 This shall be the law of procedure for the Israelites. That is, this shall be the law throughout the generations, not just during this period of apportioning the land. **In accordance with the LORD's command to Moses.** "The LORD" here refers to Himself in the third person—but it is the same as saying "in accordance with My command." See similarly 19:2 and many other cases.

12 Ascend these heights of Abarim. The name of this mountain was Nebo (see Deut. 32:49 and Deut. 34:1). It was also called "Abarim" because it was located at the *ma'abar* ("ford") across the Jordan, where they would "cross" (the basic meaning of *abar*) into Canaan. As is pointed out in the Deuteronomy verses, [K] the mountain was opposite Jericho, and this is in fact where they ended up crossing the Jordan (see Josh. 4:19). **View the land.** We thus see that "ascend these heights" was not given to Moses here as a command—otherwise he would have had to ascend immediately—but to let him know that he would have an opportunity to view the land. Having said, "Among these shall the land be apportioned" (26:53), He now informed Moses, "But it will not be apportioned by you. For

[K] Our texts of Nahmanides' comment say that it is pointed out "here," but this is presumably a copyist's error.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **8 Further, speak to the Israelite people as follows.** Having started the laws of inheritance because of Zelophehad's daughters, He wished to complete the explanation of them (Gersonides). The law of the kinsman and redeemer in Lev. 25:25 proves that all of these rules had already been given to Moses at Sinai. But because of Zelophehad's daughters, and because of the imminent division of the land, Moses was told to proclaim them to the Israelites only now (Abarbanel). **Transfer their father's share to them.** "Transfer" and "give" are synonymous; compare Exod. 13:12 with Exod. 22:28 (Abarbanel).

12 Ascend these heights of Abarim. Having written in v. 8 "if a man dies," the text continues with Moses' own death (Bekhor Shor). **And view the land.** Moses is not being told to do this and die, but to ascend the heights and view the land every day from now on (Abarbanel).

OJPS father's brethren; and thou shalt cause the inheritance of their father to pass unto them.

⁸And thou shalt speak unto the children of Israel, saying: If a man die, and have no son, then ye shall cause his inheritance to pass unto his daughter. ⁹And if he have no daughter, then ye shall give his inheritance unto his brethren. ¹⁰And if he have no brethren, then ye shall give his inheritance unto his father's brethren. ¹¹And if his father have no brethren, then ye shall give his inheritance unto his kinsman that is next to him of his family, and he shall possess it. And it shall be unto the children of Israel a statute of judgment, as the LORD commanded Moses."

¹²And the LORD said unto Moses: "Get thee up into this mountain of Abarim, and behold the land which I have given unto

IBN EZRA it is. **Transfer their father's share to them.** It is to be "transferred" in the sense that what would have been his will now be taken by them instead.

8 If a man dies without leaving a son, you shall transfer his property to his daughter. This is in fact the indication that under ordinary circumstances a son inherits his father's property.

9 His brothers. Whether from his father or his mother.

11 He shall inherit it. The property. I have already explained to you, in my comment to Exod. 21:8, how the Sages understand this phrase. With regard to a father or mother inheriting from their children, or a wife from her husband, we are clearly in need of what tradition has passed down to us.

נחלה בתוך אחי אביהם והעברת את
נחלת אביהן להן
8 ואל בני ישראל תדבר לאמר איש
כי ימות ובן אין לו והעברתם את
נחלתו לבתו 9 ואם אין לו בת ונתתם
את נחלתו לאחיו 10 ואם אין לו אחים
ונתתם את נחלתו לאחי אביו 11 ואם
אין אחים לאביו ונתתם את נחלתו
לשאר הקרב אליו ממשפחתו וירש
אתה והיתנה לבני ישראל לחקת משפט
באשר צוה יהוה את משה 12
12 ויאמר יהוה וראה את הארץ אשר
העברים הנה וראה את הארץ אשר

NJPS that I have given to the Israelite people. ¹³When you have seen it, you too shall be gathered to your kin, just as your brother Aaron was. ¹⁴For, 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.

¹⁵Moses spoke to the LORD, saying, ¹⁶"Let the LORD, Source of the breath of all flesh, appoint someone over the community ¹⁷who shall go out before them and come in before them, and who shall take them out and bring them in, so that the

RASHI enter the land has been canceled!" It is like a king who decrees that his son shall not enter the door of his palace. The king goes through the entrance gate, and his son follows him. He goes through the courtyard, and his son follows him. He enters the reception room, and his son follows him. But as soon as his son tries to go into the bedroom, the king tells him, "Son, from here on you are not allowed to go."

13 Just as your brother Aaron was. It is from here that we know that Moses wanted the same kind of death that his brother Aaron had experienced. Another reading: God is telling him, "You are no better than he. For 'you both broke faith with Me' [Deut. 32:51]. If the two of you had not done so, your time to pass away would not yet have arrived." Wherever their death is mentioned, the reason they deserved it is also mentioned. Since the wilderness generation was condemned to die in the wilderness because they did not trust Him, Moses requested that his own fault also be written in the Torah, so that no one would think he was one of those who had defied the Lord. It is like the story in the Sifrei of the two women being punished by the court on the same day—one of whom had committed adultery, while the other had eaten figs in violation of the sabbatical year. [I] Here too, wherever the deaths of Moses and Aaron are mentioned, their transgression is mentioned as well, to make clear that this was the only thing they had done wrong.

14 Those are the Waters of Meribath-kadesh. Those, and those alone. Moses and Aaron had committed no other transgression. Another reading: "those" who flouted God's command at Marah were "those" who did so at Rephidim, [I] and it was "those" same people who did so in the wilderness of Zin.

15 Moses spoke to the LORD. He spoke about finding a successor for himself. This lets you know that one of the most praiseworthy things about the righteous is that, when they leave this world, they set their own needs aside and deal with the needs of the public. **Saying.** Literally, he spoke to ask the Lord "to say" something. Moses said to Him, "Tell me whether or not You intend to put someone in charge of them or not."

16 Let the LORD ... appoint someone over the community. When Moses heard the Lord tell him to give Zelophehad's hereditary holding to his daughters, he thought, "This is the moment to ask for something for myself—that my sons should inherit my position." The Holy One said, "That is not what I intend to happen. Joshua deserves to be rewarded for never stirring out of the Tent." As Solomon said, "He who tends a fig tree will enjoy its fruit, and he who cares for his master will be honored" (Prov. 27:18). **Source of the breath of all flesh.** Rather, "the God of the spirits of all flesh." What he meant by this expression was this: "Lord of the Universe! The minds of each and every human being are open wide before You, and You know that not one of them is exactly like any other. Appoint a leader for them who will be able to deal with each one of them at his own level."

17 Who shall go out before them. Not like the kings of the other nations, who sit at home and send their troops out to do battle, but as I myself did when I fought Sihon and Og: "Do not fear him, for I give him and all his people and his land into your hand. You shall do to

[I] At her request, the figs were hung around her neck, and they announced, "She is being punished on account of the figs." She did not want people to think she had committed adultery.
[J] Our texts say "the Sea of Reeds," but this seems to be a mistake.

NAHMANIDES you must go up the mountain and die there before the Israelites can leave Moab. You will not reach the land but can only view it."

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS 13 You too shall be gathered to your kin. Knowing this in advance, Moses would try his best to clarify everything the Israelites would need to know before he died (Abarbanel).

15 Moses spoke to the LORD. This expression occurs nowhere else in the Bible (Masorah). His prayer of Deut. 3:24–25 is omitted at this point (Hizkuni).

16 Let the LORD, Source of the breath of all flesh, appoint someone over the community. You—"the God of the spirits of all flesh" (OJPS)—know how to choose the right person, and I do not (Bekhor Shor). God is the one who guides the spirits of all flesh (Gersonides).

17 Who shall go out before them and come in before them. Someone who will be a strong military leader (Abarbanel). **And who shall take them out and bring them in.** Someone who will have good luck in bringing them back from battle safely (Abarbanel).

OJPS the children of Israel. ¹³And when thou hast seen it, thou also shalt be gathered unto thy people, as Aaron thy brother was gathered; ¹⁴because ye rebelled against My commandment in the wilderness of Zin, in the strife of the congregation, to sanctify Me at the waters before their eyes."—These are the waters of Meribath-kadesh in the wilderness of Zin.—

¹⁵And Moses spoke unto the LORD, saying: ¹⁶"Let the LORD, the God of the spirits of all flesh, set a man over the congregation, ¹⁷who may go out before them, and who may come in before them, and who may lead them out, and who may bring them in; that the congregation of the

נִתְּנִי לְבִנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל: ¹³ וְרָאִיתָ אֹתָהּ
וְנִאֲסַפְתָּ אֶל-עַמֶּיךָ גַּם-אֶתָּה בְּאֶשֶׁר נִאֲסַף
אֹתָהּ אֶהְיֶה: ¹⁴ בְּאֶשֶׁר מְרִיתֶם פִּי
בְּמִדְבַר-צִן בְּמִרְיַת הָעֵדָה לְהַקְדִּישְׁנִי
בְּמַיִם לְעֵינֵיהֶם הֵם מִי־מִרְיַת קִדְשׁ
מִדְבַר-צִן: פ
¹⁵ וַיְדַבֵּר מֹשֶׁה אֶל-יְהוָה לֵאמֹר: ¹⁶ יִפְקֹד
יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי הָרִוּוֹת לְכָל-בָּשָׂר אִישׁ עַל-
הָעֵדָה: ¹⁷ אֲשֶׁר-יֵצֵא לְפָנֵיהֶם וְאֲשֶׁר יָבֹא
לְפָנֵיהֶם וְאֲשֶׁר יוֹצִיאֵם וְאֲשֶׁר יְבִיאֵם וְלֹא

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS + Why is Moses told that he is to be "gathered to his kin" (v. 13) when in fact that will not yet happen for some while?

IBN EZRA 13 You too shall be gathered to your kin. Tradition tells us also that this passage follows the section about inheritance because Moses wanted to know who would succeed to his position.

14 You disobeyed My command to uphold My sanctity. The sense of the Hebrew text is that they "rebelled" (OJPS) against upholding God's sanctity. See my comment to 20:8.

16 The breath of all flesh. Rather, "the spirits" of all flesh (OJPS). He knows which spirit is fitting.

17 Who shall go out before them. In wartime. **Who shall take them out.** More precisely, "who shall have them taken out" to war, by someone else.

NJPS LORD's community may not be like sheep that have no shepherd." ¹⁸And the LORD answered Moses, "Single out Joshua son of Nun, an inspired man, and lay your hand upon him. ¹⁹Have him stand before Eleazar the priest and before the whole community, and commission him in their sight. ²⁰Invest him with some of your authority, so that the whole Israelite community may obey. ²¹But he shall present himself to Eleazar the priest, who shall on his behalf seek the decision of the Urim

OJPS LORD be not as sheep which have no shepherd." ¹⁸And the LORD said unto Moses: "Take thee Joshua the son of Nun, a man in whom is spirit, and lay thy hand upon him; ¹⁹and set him before Eleazar the priest, and before all the congregation; and give him a charge in their sight. ²⁰And thou shalt put of thy honor upon him, that all the congregation of the children of Israel may hearken. ²¹And he shall stand before Eleazar the priest, who shall inquire for him by the judgment of the Urim

תהיה ענת יהוה בצאן אשר אין להם רעה: ¹⁸ ויאמר יהוה אל משה קח לך את יהושע בן נון איש אשר רוח בו וסמכת את ידך עליו: ¹⁹ והעמדת אתו לפני אלעזר הכהן ולפני כל העדה וצויתו אתו לעיניהם: ²⁰ ונתתה מהודך עליו למען ישמעו כל עדת בני ישראל: ²¹ ולפני אלעזר הכהן יעמוד ושאל לו במשפט האורים לפני יהוה על פיו יצאו

RASHI him as you did to Sihon king of the Amorites who dwelt in Heshbon" (21:34). The same is true of Joshua (see Josh. 5:13) and David (see 1 Sam. 18:16)—both marched at the head of their troops. **Who shall take them out and bring them in.** By virtue of his own merit, he will take them into battle and bring them safely out. Another reading: Please do not treat him as You are treating me. For I took them out, but I am not going to be able to bring them into the land.

18 Single out Joshua son of Nun. Literally, "take" him (OJPS)—entice him by speaking to him as follows: "How fortunate you are to have been chosen to lead the children of the Holy One!" But the literal translation is actually "take for yourself Joshua" (compare OJPS)—one whom you have checked out for yourself, whom you know. **An inspired man.** More precisely, "a man in whom is spirit" (OJPS), just as you asked—that he be able to accord with the spirit of each and every one of them. **Lay your hand upon him.** That is, "ordain him." For this is literally the verb, and the procedure, used to ordain rabbis. "Give him an opportunity to preach [K] while you are still here, so no one will say later, 'He did not dare to lift up his head when Moses was living!'"

19 Commission him. Literally, "command him" about Israel: "Know that they are obstinate and troublesome. Think about it before you accept the job!"

20 Invest him with some of your authority. Literally, "of your majesty," a reference to the radiance of Moses' face. But Moses was to give him only "some" of this radiance. We thus find that Moses' face glowed like the sun, but Joshua's only like the moon. **So that the whole Israelite community may obey.** They must treat him with respect and be in awe of him as they are of you.

21 He shall present himself to Eleazar the priest. Here is my answer to your request. At least this honor shall not budge from your ancestral house. Joshua will still need Eleazar. **Who shall on his behalf seek the decision of the Urim.** When he must go forth to

[K] Literally, "give him a spokesman"—a man with a loud voice who would announce his words.

NAHMANIDES 18 Single out Joshua. As in v. 12, this is not a commandment to be fulfilled immediately but instructions for what to do when the time comes.

19 Commission him in their sight. I don't think Rashi's understanding of this phrase is correct. What he suggests would be better said between Moses and Joshua privately, not "in sight" of the Israelites, where it would be likely to cause a disturbance. If Moses wished to reprove them for being obstinate and troublesome, it would be more proper to say so directly to them. Rather, Moses is indeed being instructed here to "commission" Joshua as the ruler of Israel. This would serve to transfer authority over the Israelites to him and also to charge him to use his best efforts in their service; to fight the battles of the Lord (in which he would now be their commander); and to be most careful to judge them fairly. It would certainly be appropriate to do this "in their sight," so that they would trust and obey him, knowing that (at his master's command) he would be honest and reliable. This is in fact what Moses eventually did (in Deut. 31:7-8); see my comment to v. 22. Despite what the Sifrei says about Moses teaching Torah to Joshua, the instruction to "imbue him with strength and courage" (Deut. 3:28) means encouraging him to be a strong ruler and not fear the people, which are a ruler's duties. To me it seems that the straightforward sense of our verse is that Moses was to appoint Joshua as the Israelites' leader in their presence. It is true that the Hebrew verb here literally means "command," but it is being used here as in "from the day I was commissioned to be governor" (Neh. 5:14) or "ever since I appointed chieftains over My people Israel" (2 Sam. 7:11).

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS 18 An inspired man. Rather, "a man in whom is spirit" (OJPS)—the spirit of God (Gersonides). One who was prepared to receive the light of a King's countenance (Sforno). **Lay your hand upon him.** Idiomatically, this implies conferring the distinction upon him; but the straightforward sense of the text is that Moses was to grasp his hand as an act of physical encouragement (Bekhor Shor). Moses asked God to appoint someone, but God told Moses it would be better if Moses himself appointed him; Joshua had been Moses' flunky for so long that he was not particularly well respected (Abarbanel).

21 But he shall present himself to Eleazar the priest. So that he does not get too full of himself (Hizkuni). **Who shall on his behalf seek the decision of the Urim.** Joshua did not have the same prophetic power as Moses and could not simply get a prophecy whenever he wanted to (Gersonides). But this was only before Moses' death. It was to demonstrate that Joshua was the new leader—for only a king is permitted to consult the Urim and Thummim. As we see from the book of Joshua, after Moses' death he never did

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS + We are told that Joshua will not be a prophet, but must "present himself to Eleazar the priest, who shall on his behalf seek the decision of the Urim before the LORD" (v. 21). Why then is it that no inquiries are made of the Urim and Thummim in the entire book of Joshua, and that they begin only in Judg. 1:1, after Joshua's death?

IBN EZRA 18 An inspired man. Literally, "a man in whom is spirit" (OJPS). Of course, there is a "spirit" in everyone. It is an idiom here, as when David told Solomon, "Be strong and show yourself a man" (1 Kings 2:2). **Lay your hand upon him.** This was to show Israel that he was to be Moses' successor, and that Moses trusted him. [E]

20 Invest him with some of your authority. In order to honor him in front of Israel. **So that the whole Israelite community may obey.** They already believe in you. When they see you honoring him, they will honor him too. For they will act as you do.

[E] The word translated "lay" literally means "to lean on" and therefore "to rely on, to trust."