

# A PROMISE OF PEACE

*by Rabbi Berel Wein*

The Lord promises Pinchas that most valuable and yet the constantly elusive gift - the blessings of the covenant of peace. The world has known very little peace over the long millennia of human existence. Strife and conflict, war and violence, have been the staples of human existence from time immemorial. Many historians and social scientists maintain that war and violence are the natural and constant states of human affairs.

So the promise of peace to Pinchas seems to be a little extravagant, especially since it appears that Pinchas has earned this reward of peace by committing an act of violence and war. Shall we say that a time of peace is merely the absence of war; a negative state of being that only marks the interregnum between wars and continued violence?

We are all well aware how difficult it is to achieve peace and how fragile its existence is when, apparently, it is somehow achieved. Its fragility is attested to in the Torah, where the *vav* in the word *shalom* is broken and incomplete. So, we may certainly wonder what actually and practically was God's promise to Pinchas - and how was it ever to be fulfilled.

This perplexing issue is especially pertinent regarding Pinchas himself, who participated in the wars that Israel conducted against Midian and later against the Canaanite tribes in the Land of Israel during the times of Yehoshua and the Judges. Where is the promise of peace present in the life of Pinchas himself, let alone in the lives of the future generations of his descendants particularly and the Jewish people generally?

Many of the commentators to the Torah defined God's promise of peace to Pinchas and his descendants as being a personal and individual state of inner being, of what we colloquially call "being at peace with one's self." Pinchas is undoubtedly disturbed by the act of violence that he committed and by the widespread criticism of his actions by many of the Jewish people at that time.

Nevertheless, the Lord tells him that he did the right thing and that history will later thank him for his boldness and alacrity in stemming the tide of immorality that threatened to overwhelm the Jewish people. So Pinchas acquires, through God's blessing, the peace of mind and the necessary confident inner conviction of having committed an act that Heaven and history will deem to be justifiable and correct, even if it is currently unpopular in the eyes of much of society.

President Harry Truman is reported to have said that he lost little sleep over the atomic bombing of Japan which concluded World War II because he believed that he saved millions of American and

Japanese lives by his awesome decision. He never again agonized over that decision since he had achieved an inner peace regarding the matter.

Our conscience always disturbs us when we make wrong decisions and pursue failed policies. It never rises to plague us when we have behaved correctly and decided wisely and morally. It is this blessing and reward that the Lord bestowed upon Pinchas and his descendants - the blessing of inner peace and moral contentment.

Shabat shalom

Rabbi Berel Wein

Rabbi Berel Wein- Jewish historian, author and international lecturer offers a complete selection of CDs, audio tapes, video tapes, DVDs, and books on Jewish history at [www.rabbiwein.com](http://www.rabbiwein.com)