

Shlach L'kha

שלח-לך

“Send on your behalf”

Numbers 13:1 – 15:41

Torah Together



This *Torah* portion tells the story of the spies that the Israelites sent into the Promised Land. It provides a good lesson on trusting God and knowing when to take action. The reports of the spies and the subsequent actions of the people led to catastrophic consequences for the Israelites.

1. Exploring Canaan - 13:1-25

a) According to verses 1-3, whose idea was it to send the 12 spies into Canaan? How does this compare with **Deuteronomy 1:19-25**? Can you explain the differences?

Verse 2 says that God told Moses to send some men to explore the land. However, Deuteronomy 1:19-25 indicates that the people suggested that the spies be sent out first. This seems consistent with the people's lack of faith.

b) Of the leaders who were sent, who went from the tribes of Judah and Ephraim? What else do we know about the leader from Judah? Was he a native Israelite?

From Judah, Caleb son of Jephunneh went and from Ephraim, Hoshea (later changed to Joshua by Moses) son of Nun went. Caleb was a Kenizzite (see Genesis 15:19), not an Israelite. Eventually, Caleb (and the tribe of Judah) got Hebron and the southern part of what became Israel. (See Joshua 14:6-15 for more info.)

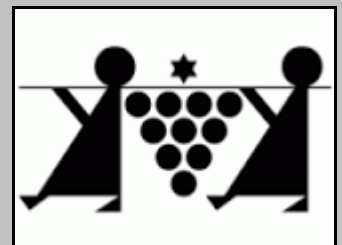
c) What information were they to bring back from their mission? What else were they to try and bring back? Why do you suppose Moses requested this?

The spies were to bring back information on the people living in the land (many or few, strong or weak), the cities (walled or fortified), and the land itself (good or bad, fertile or barren, trees, etc.) They were also to try to bring back some of the produce. Moses probably hoped to encourage the people.

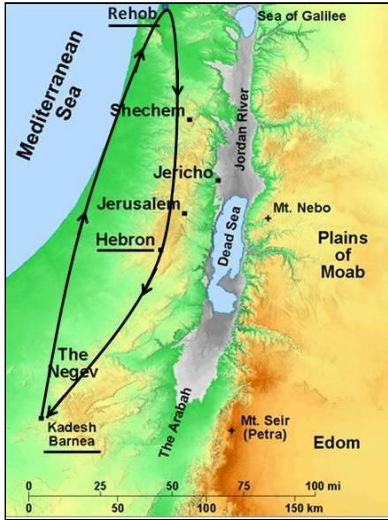
A Name Change

In this passage, we are told that Moses changed the name of his faithful assistant from **Hoshea** (which means “saves”) to **Joshua** (which means “God saves”). Although the reason for this is not given, many people think it is to recognize the change in Joshua’s status to Moses’ second-in-command.

Israeli Tourism



This is the logo that the Israeli Ministry of Tourism uses on all of its official documents. Can you see what inspired the design?



d) Can you trace where they went on their mission? Why do you think Hebron was specifically mentioned? What was significant about Ahiman, Sheshai, and Talmi?

The spies went north from Kadesh Barnea (in the southern Negev) to Lebo Hamath (northern border of Israel). Hebron has always been important to the Hebrews - they probably wanted to bury Joseph's bones there with Abraham and Isaac. Ahiman, Sheshai, and Talmi were Anakites, giants (see 2 below).

e) How long were the spies gone on their mission? What did they bring back?

The spies were gone 40 days and on the way back they picked a large cluster of grapes at Eschol (southwest of Beer Sheba) to bring back. The symbol of 2 men carrying a pole of grapes is Israel's Tourism logo (see note on page 21).

2. Report on the Exploration - 13:26-33

a) Verses 26-29 relate the facts brought back by the 12 spies. What were the facts? What was Caleb's proposal in verse 30? Why do you think he was so confident?

The spies reported that the land was rich, flowing with milk and honey. But the people who lived there were powerful and the cities were large and fortified. All the spies agreed that this was true. Caleb proposed that the Israelites proceed immediately to take the land. He was confident that God had given it to them and all they had to do was to take it.

b) The 10 remaining spies disagreed with Caleb's assessment. What were their reasons?

The other 10 spies spread a bad report saying that the land devoured those living in it and it was full of giants.

c) Who were the Nephilim from which the Anakites were descended (see **Genesis 6:4**)? Do you know of any other famous Anakites?

The Nephilim were the offspring produced when the "sons of God" slept with the "daughters of man" (Genesis 6:4). Tradition has it that they were physically large, giants. Goliath was probably an Anakite.

Scripture Link:

The Nephilim, from whom Anak was said to be descended, are mentioned in **Genesis 6:1-5**, before the Flood of Noah. There is speculation concerning the origins of the Nephilim, but they were known to be large, strong people. **Deuteronomy 2:10-11** mentions that the Anakites were considered Raphaites, again an obscure race of large, strong people. Whatever their origins, the distinguishing feature of the Anakites (or Anakim) were their large and powerful physical appearance.

"We seemed like grasshoppers in our own eyes, and we looked the same to them."

Numbers 13:33

3. The People Rebel - 14:1-45

a) What complaints did the people express in verses 1-4? What did they think they should do? What do you think motivated these complaints?

The people said it would have been better to die in Egypt or in the desert than to die in battle. They wanted to choose a new leader and return to Egypt. They were fearful because they lacked the faith to believe God's promise.

b) What did Moses & Aaron do? What did Joshua & Caleb do? Why did they feel confident that the Israelites would be successful? How did the people respond?

Moses and Aaron "fell facedown" and prayed. Joshua and Caleb tore their clothes and begged the people to have faith and not to rebel against God. Both Joshua and Caleb knew that they could succeed if God was with them. But the people began to talk about stoning them.

c) What did God say about the people's response (verses 10-12)? What did He propose to do with the Israelites? Had He proposed this to Moses before?

God said the people "treated Him with contempt" by not believing Him after they had seen His miracles. He proposed to destroy the people and start over with Moses. (A similar thing happened with the golden calf, Exodus 32:10.)

d) How did Moses respond to God's proposal? Do you recognize the words that Moses spoke to God in verse 18? What did Moses pray for the people? Does this reflect Moses' humility?

Moses argued that God's name would be discredited if he destroyed the Israelites. Verse 18 is what God spoke to Moses when He passed in front of Moses on Mount Sinai (Exodus 34:6-7). Moses prayed that God would forgive the people.

e) Did God forgive the Israelites? What did God say would be the consequence of their sin? Who was exempt from this consequence? What happened to the 12 spies? Can you draw any conclusions from this story for your own life?

God did forgive the people, but the consequence of their sin would be that they would indeed die in the desert. All that generation would die in the next 40 years except Joshua & Caleb. The other 10 spies died of a plague.

The land . . . devours those living in it

This is how the ten spies described the land of Canaan. There has been a nearly constant struggle for control of this key geographical area over the centuries, even up to today. It seems an apt description to say that the land "devours" its inhabitants.

Scripture Link:

Notice the essence of Moses' argument to persuade God not to destroy the Israelites: "The Egyptians and the inhabitants of the land will say that you were not able to bring this people into the land." In **Numbers 14:18**, Moses reminds God of His great love and forgiveness. Moses uses the exact words that God used to describe Himself in **Exodus 34:6-7**

Forgiveness and Consequences

Partly because of Moses' intercession, God did forgive the Israelites. This insured that He would not destroy them nor would He leave them. However, they were still required to suffer the consequences of their lack of faith and their rebellion. It is important to remember that forgiveness does not necessarily mean the removal of consequences.

The Amalekites defeat the Israelites

The sin committed by the Israelites was lack of faith in God and rebellion against His leadership. After admitting their sin (and receiving God's gracious forgiveness), the Israelites then imagined that they could continue on as if there were no consequences. So they essentially replaced one form of disobedience (lack of faith) with another (presumption of God's leading and protection). When the Israelites went up against the Amalekites, was their defeat a likely outcome?

f) What did the people do the next day? What was wrong with their effort? What was the final outcome? What principal can you draw from this event for your own life?

The next day the people admitted their sin and decided that they would go up against the Amalekites and try to take the land. God had already found them guilty of their sin and had pronounced their punishment. They were outside His will by trying to take the land. They failed miserably.

4. Supplementary Offerings - 15:1-21

a) Specifically what offerings are addressed in this passage? What did these offerings have in common? When did God say these regulations were to be obeyed (verse 2)?

The offerings addressed here are the burnt offerings, offerings for special vows or freewill or festival offerings. They were all offerings given freely out of devotion to God. These were to be done "after you enter the land I am giving you," a confirmation that God was still going to honor his promise to the Israelites.

b) Several times in this passage the phrase "an aroma pleasing to Yahweh" is used. Why do you think God was pleased with the aroma?

The "aroma" that was pleasing to God was probably the person's obedience and desire to offer a sacrifice to God.

c) In addition to the animal sacrifices, what else was offered to God? Why do you think these items are emphasized at this point in the story of the Israelites?

Each offering also included a grain offering and a drink offering. It could be that the grain and wine offerings were emphasized to remind the people that they were eventually going to enter Israel with all its good produce.

d) Were only the native-born Israelites allowed to bring these offerings? What does this reveal about God?

Aliens as well as native-born Israelites were to bring the offerings. God always accepts those willing to love, honor, and obey Him, even if they aren't of His "chosen" people.

5. Offerings for Unintentional Sins - 15:22-31

a) What were the requirements to make atonement for the unintentional *sins of the community*? What about an *individual's unintentional sin*?

The community's unintentional sins were atoned for with a young bull as a burnt offering (along with the appropriate grain and drink offering) and a male goat as a sin offering. Only a goat as a sin offering was required for an individual.

b) What were the requirements for one who "sins defiantly"? What is the difference between an unintentional and a defiant sin? What is the difference in the sinner's heart attitude? How does repentance fit in? Does **Hebrews 10:26** apply in this case?

A person who "sins defiantly" was to be "cut off from his people," probably put outside the camp. Defiance implies arrogant disobedience of what one knows is God's command. It's as if the person says in his heart, "I know God has commanded that I not do this, but I don't care." If there is no repentance for what has been done, then there cannot be forgiveness.

6. Sabbath-Breaker put to Death - 15:32-36

Describe what happens in this brief passage. According to **Exodus 31:12-17** and **35:1-3**, what was the appropriate punishment for this man? Why do you think that in verse 34 it says "it was not clear what should be done to him"? What are your thoughts about this? ***A man was found gathering wood on the Sabbath and brought to Moses and Aaron. God's regulations dictated that the man be put to death. It appears that Moses and Aaron were not sure what the consequence should be even though they knew the law. Perhaps they were unsure whether the man was "working" or not. Perhaps they were unsure whether or not God would forgive him. Since the man was put to death, we can assume that he had no repentance and was defiant, rebellious to God.***

7. Tassels on Garments (*Tzitzit*) - 15:37-41

The tassels described in this passage are called *tzitzit* in Hebrew. Where were the *tzitzit* to be placed? What was their intended purpose? Was this for men only?

The tzitzit were to be placed "on the corners of your garments." They were to remind the wearer of all God's commandments and to remember to obey them. Although traditionally only men have worn tzitzit, the passage implies that both men and women should wear them.

Scripture Link:

Numbers 15:22-31 is a subset of the rules for the sin offering given in **Leviticus 4:1 – 5:13**.

This passage, however, seems to emphasize the "unintentional" or "inadvertent" nature of the sin. The Hebrew word for "unintentional" means "to wander away," as a sheep might wander from the flock. This might be considered a part of human nature. However, this is in contrast with intentional or defiant sin which is conscious rebellion against God.

A Harsh Punishment?

Recall that the passage immediately preceding this one deals with defiant sin, how it is equivalent to blasphemy. Given this, one might infer that the man caught gathering wood on the Shabbat was not at all repentant about his sin and considered the infraction minor, at worst. It would appear that God, who judges the heart, saw things this way. This should help us understand how God views conscious, active rebellion against Him.

Scripture Links:

How does God feel about those who are “adopted in” to His family versus those who are “native born?” There are many passages that indicate that God accepts those that willingly choose to follow Him as equal to those that are born into the family of Israel. (Doesn’t this seem like an appropriate way for God to act?) Consider the story of **Ruth**, or Rahab (**Joshua chapters 2 & 6**) or the Roman centurion in **Matthew 8:5-13**. God gives an especially strong explanation of His feelings on this subject directly to the prophet Isaiah in **Isaiah 56**. If anyone ever doubts God’s love for His adopted children, this is a great place to go.

Digging deeper

1. Caleb is a good role model in the story of the 12 spies. In addition to his strong faith, what else can you find out about him? Was he a native-born Israelite? How did he fare when he entered Canaan? Where did he end up living in Israel?

Caleb, a Kenizzite, was a non-native Israelite who seemed to have more faith in the God of the Israelites than many of them did. The Kenizzites were one of the people groups that occupied the land of Canaan. Caleb seemed to have a special interest in Hebron and eventually ended up conquering the city. Joshua 14:6-15 tells the story about Caleb after entering the land. It is encouraging to see that Caleb, even though he was not a native-born Israelite, was greatly blessed by God because of his great faith.

2. In **Numbers 13:33**, the 10 spies said, “We seem like grasshoppers in our own eyes, and we looked the same to them.” How does this statement reveal what God calls their contempt for Him? What does it say about their faith? Why was the opinion of Caleb and Joshua so different? Can you learn anything from this that you can apply in your own life?

When the 10 spies said that they “seemed like grasshoppers in our own eyes,” they were really making a statement about their faith. They didn’t trust God to assist them in taking over the land but instead only saw themselves as much inferior to their foes. Caleb and Joshua, on the other hand, believed that God could help the Israelites be successful. When you are sure that God is telling you to do something, it’s important to have the faith that God will see you through it.

For further study, see

Haftarah : Joshua 2:1-24

Brit Hadashah : Hebrews 3:7-19