

Parashah 37

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?

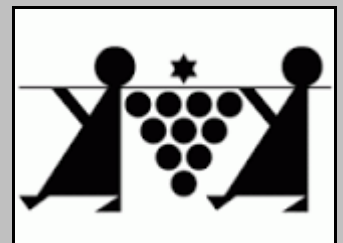
b) Of the leaders who were sent, who went from the tribes of Judah and Ephraim? What else do we know about the leader from Judah? Was he a native Israelite?

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?

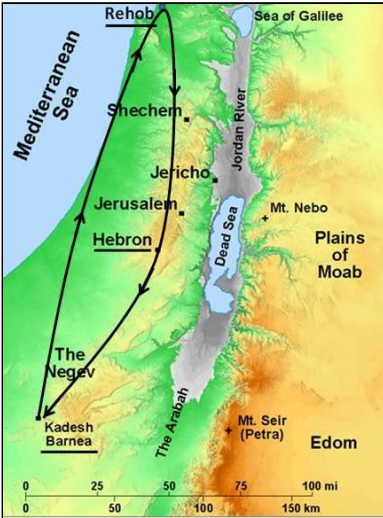
A Name Change

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 Talmai?

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

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 Raphaite, 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.

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?

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

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

"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?

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?

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?

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?

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?

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?

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)?

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?

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?

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

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*?

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?

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?

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?

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?

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?

For further study, see

Haftarah : Joshua 2:1-24

Brit Hadashah : Hebrews 3:7-19