

SHELACH

FUSION
WITH RABBI JASON



with
Rabbi Jason Sobel

5785 - THE YEAR OF OPEN WINDOWS

TORAH PORTIONS
Parashat Shelach



THIS WEEK'S TORAH PORTIONS

NUMBERS 13:1-15:41

Parashat Shelach / פרשת שלח-לך

In this weeks guide...

COMMENTARY..... 1

Rabbi Jason invites us to revisit the tragedy of the ten spies who brought back a bad report that unleashed weeping and grumbling in the camp. Where did everything go wrong? Why did Israel send out spies in the first place? Exploring these questions, Rabbi Jason provides practical yet challenging wisdom for us today.

NEW TESTAMENT TIE-IN..... 2

Let's talk about money. More specifically, giving offerings to ministry. Intrigued? Uncomfortable? No need to worry! We're going to expound on the deeper significance of a comment the Apostle Paul made at the conclusion of one of his letters. It has the potential to recalibrate and revitalize your approach to giving!

HEBREW WORD STUDY..... 3

The title of this week's *parsha* is also a rather compelling Hebrew term. On a fundamental level, the idea of "sending out" is foundational to our faith—whether we think about the "Great Commission" in Matthew 28 or *Yeshua's* instructions in Acts 1. And all of this makes sense because in John's Gospel, *Yeshua* (repeatedly!) referred to God as "the One who **sent** Me."



OVER VIEW

Shelach is an imperative verb that means "send out." This portion's name comes from the first few words of its second verse: "*Send out* for yourself men so that they may spy out the land of Canaan" (Numbers 13:2). What unfolds, of course, is the tragic saga of ten spies spreading fear and discouragement by sharing a bad report of the Promised Land. The Children of Israel rebelled against the Lord, refusing to enter Canaan. As a result of their disobedience, God relegated that generation to wander in the wilderness for forty years. We are called to be a people who trust God, despite the circumstances, and regardless of our feelings. After all, "greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world" (1 John 4:4).

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Weekly Torah Portions – *Parashat Shelach* / פרשת שלח-לך | with **Rabbi Jason Sobel**

Rabbi Jason Sobel

COMMENTARY

“The Lord spoke to Moses saying, ‘Send forth men for yourself, if you please, to let them spy out the land of Canaan that I will give to the Children of Israel; one man from his ancestral tribe shall you send, every one a leader among them’” – Numbers 13:1-2 (*translation mine*)

The focus of this week’s reading is the twelve spies who were sent to scout the Promised Land for forty days. Ten of the twelve spies came back with a bad report and convinced the people that they could not take the Land. As a result, Israel wandered for forty years in the wilderness. They spent one year wandering for each of the days of the spies’ mission until that adult generation (that came out of Egypt) died in the wilderness. The Lord exempted Joshua and Caleb, of whom the Lord said, “a different spirit is with him and he is wholeheartedly behind Me” (Numbers 14:24)

Why did this scouting mission fail so horribly? The reason is that it was rooted in a lack of faith and trust in the Lord. The Hebrew of Numbers 13:1 says, “*Shlach lecha*” or “Send for yourself, if you please.” The Lord did **not** tell Moses to send spies. It was the leaders of Israel who wanted to send spies so they could be prepared militarily. God gave them the option because He knew their hearts. Moses instructed the twelve spies to come back with the following information:

“See what the Land is like and whether the people who live there are strong or weak, few or many. What kind of Land do they live in? Is it good or bad? What kind of towns do they live in? Are they unwalled or fortified? How is the soil? Is it fertile or poor? Are there trees in it or not? Do your best to bring back some of the fruit of the Land.”
– Numbers 13:18-20 (NIV)

This decision by Moses and Israel’s leaders camouflaged their lack of faith and trust in the Lord. They were not willing to rely upon the Lord and His promises alone. They wanted more assurance. They wanted to see for themselves. It seemed logical and sensible, but was it spiritual? Not according to Deuteronomy...

“Then all of **you came to me** and said, ‘Let us send men ahead to spy out the land for us and bring back a report about the route we are to take and the towns we will come to.’ **The idea seemed good to me**; so I selected twelve of you, one man from each tribe” – Deuteronomy 1:22-23 (NIV)

We should be careful to note that the proposal to send the spies pleased Moses. Some things seem right in our eyes but are not pleasing in God’s. We must learn to discern between a *good idea* and a *God idea*. Discernment must accompany faith. Ten of the spies wanted to minimize and manage the risk, which was wrong because it was rooted in fear and a lack of faith. When God directly calls you to do something, you must go for it without making excuses and rationalizations—they only mask one’s fear.

The spies may have had “faith” in the Lord, but they lacked “trust” in Him and His promises. **Faith** knows the Lord is real, but **trust** is faith in action. Like the spies, many believers today have faith but not trust. We see this lack in the disciples. There were twelve disciples in the boat when *Yeshua* came walking on the water. Only one of them had enough faith and trust to step out of the boat and walk on the water with Him. Without faith and trust, we remain stuck in the boat, and similar to the spies, we will “die in the desert” without fully entering the Promised Land.

We can’t live in fear of failure or the future. We must move from fear to faith and from faith to trust. This challenge was the very essence of the failure of those ten spies. Tragically, they decided to focus on the problem before them (GIANTS) instead of the person and promises of God. Those giants were not meant to instill fear but rather breed faith. The ability to see the possibilities in our problems determines the level of our promotion. God has made promises to you, but you must boldly step out in faith to possess them. Now is the time for breakthrough!

New Testament Tie-In

Unlike the proverbial “spanking” he delivered in 1 Corinthians, the Apostle Paul took a decidedly more joyful and affectionate tone in his epistle to the believers in Philippi. He concluded the letter by talking about their financial contributions to his ministry. Paul experienced financial abundance as well as lack, concluding that he could “do all things through Messiah who strengthens me” (Philippians 4:13). He could do all things— “live with humble means, and...in prosperity” (v. 12)—because he was content.

But Paul’s contentment did not negate the exceptional goodness of the Philippians’ generosity. They contributed to his apostolic work when no one else did: “no church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving except you alone” (v. 15 NASB). He also noted that the Philippians were repeat givers, inherently generous towards him. An isolated act of generosity might deserve recognition, but a pattern of generosity points to spiritual maturity (i.e., freedom from Mammon/greed). The beautiful—and terribly important—thing is that Paul wasn’t looking for their money, but the fruit their giving would produce in them (cf. v. 17).

What did the apostle mean by “fruit”? One commentator suggests, “In the context of his entire letter the term ‘fruit’ points to ‘the blessing which is continually accruing to faithful ministry in the rich development of Christian character. Every act of Christian ministry develops and enriches him who performs it.’”¹ Ultimately, this expectation of fruitfulness suggests that Paul understood their financial gifts as being given to God, not just him (cf. 1 Corinthians 3:5-7). John Chrysostom (4th c. theologian and bishop) paraphrased Paul’s sentiment:

“It is not I,” he says, “who have received but God through me. So I personally have no need of your gifts. Let this not concern you. And God himself has no need either. Yet he accepts these gifts.”²

The apostle’s understanding of the Philippians’ offerings is almost certainly anchored in this week’s *parsha*. You see, he described their financial offering as “a fragrant aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God” (v. 18b). Compare his language with Numbers 15:1-3...

Again *Adonai* spoke to Moses saying, “Speak to *Bnei-Yisrael* and say to them: When you enter the land that I am giving you where you will make your homes, and you are presenting a fire offering to *ADONAI* —a burnt offering or a sacrifice to mark fulfilling a vow, a freewill offering, or during *moadim*—to present a **pleasing aroma** to *ADONAI*, from the herd or from the flock. (*emphasis added*)

With the destruction of the Second Temple in A.D. 70, Israel’s sacrificial system essentially came to an end. But in the new covenant, sacrifices continue! In addition to the “sacrifice of praise—the fruit of lips giving thanks to His name” (Hebrews 13:15), our generosity toward the work of the kingdom is just as much a lovely aroma as any burnt offering ever was. It would be wise to give offerings like the Israelites offered their sacrifices, given where God commanded them to be and received by human representatives. Offerings given in obedience and genuine devotion have always been received *by God*, not the person facilitating it.

Hebrew Word Study

shalach [שלח] / “to send”

At His last Passover Seder, *Yeshua* engaged in a mysterious dialogue with his disciples: “If you have come to know Me, you will know My Father also. From now on, you do know Him and have seen Him. Philip said to Him, ‘Master, show us the Father, and it is enough for us.’ *Yeshua* said...‘He who has seen Me has seen the Father’” (John 14:9). What did *Yeshua* mean when He said, “He who has seen Me has seen the Father?” If the Bible tells us that God is not physical³ and that no one has ever truly seen Him,⁴ how would a first-century Jewish man understand this seemingly blasphemous language? Perhaps when we explore the concept of a “*shaliach*” we can uncover some helpful context to understand our questions above.

Shaliach (שליח / plural: *shlichim*) refers to an agent or emissary sent on behalf of another. The word derives from the root *shalach* (שלח) meaning “to send,” and the following three consonants comprise it:

- *shin* / ש (300)
- *lamed* / ל (30)
- *chet* / ח (8)

The first biblical examples of *shlichim* are animals⁵ sent on behalf of humans and angels⁶ sent on behalf of the Almighty. Abraham’s servant whom he sent to find a wife for Isaac⁷ was an individual’s first *shaliach*. Additionally, Joseph is an early example of a *shaliach* of the Almighty: “Then Joseph said...it was for preserving life that God sent me here [*shelachani*] before you” (Genesis 45:5). Later in the Torah we read about the concept of *shlichut* regarding priests. The priests served as a *shaliach* of Israel before the Almighty in making offerings on the people’s behalf. Aside from the role of priests, the sages learned the concept of *shlichut* from the legal case of divorce⁸ and the slaughtering of the Paschal offering.⁹ In practice, the sages understood that when someone slaughtered the Paschal offering on behalf of others, he acted as their *shaliach*. This gave rise to the pivotal phrase “*shelucho shel adam kemoto* – a person’s *shaliach* is like him/herself.”¹⁰

The principle of “*shelucho shel adam kemoto*” helps us unravel the mysterious statements *Yeshua* made at His last Passover Seder. When Philip requested *Yeshua* to “show us the Father,” he was asking for access to a revelation similar to Moses’ request of the Almighty, “Show me Your glory!” (Exodus 33:18). *Yeshua* corrected him, “Have I been with you for so long a time, and you haven’t come to know Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father?’” (John 14:9). In its most simple sense, this is language of *shlichut*.

As the Father’s *shaliach*, *Yeshua* perfectly represented the Father’s attributes. On several occasions, *Yeshua* referred to Himself as a *shaliach* of the Father who spoke only the Father’s words.¹¹ On a mystical level, John revealed that *Yeshua* is the Word of the LORD incarnate, and the prophet Isaiah spoke of the LORD’s word as a *shaliach*, “My word will be that goes out from My mouth. It will not return to Me in vain, but will accomplish what I intend, and will succeed in what I sent it for [*shelachti*]” (Isaiah 55:11).

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Rabbi Jason & Fusion Global present
HEBREW WORD STUDY

שלח

שלח / *shalach*: v. send, send away, let go.

The verb *shalach* means “to send,” “to send away,” “to let loose,” “to spread,” used of strife and discord, “to stretch out,” “extend,” used of the hand or a rod, “to extend,” “reach out,” used of roots and branches, and with *esh* “fire,” “to light a fire.”

In the first category a man sends another person somewhere (Gen 28:5; 37:13) or he may send such things as tribute (Jud 3:15) or letters (I Kgs 21:8; II Kgs 5:5).

God is often depicted in a similar way as sending men on an official mission as his envoys or representatives. Thus God often speaks of sending his prophets with great earnestness that they might warn Israel (cf. Isa 6:8; Jer 1:7; Ezk 2:3–4; Jud 6:8). False prophets are not sent by God (Jer 14:14–15). Moses was God’s representative (Ex 4:28, Deut 34:11), as was Gideon (Jud 6:14). The message of the prophets is likewise regarded as being sent from God (Zech 7:12) and will accomplish God’s purpose (Isa 55:11). Most important, God will send his Saviour to bind up the brokenhearted and set the prisoners free (Isa 61:1).

taken from the *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*

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THOUGHTS for REFLECTION

Take some time this week to prayerfully consider and discuss with friends:

- Fear and cowardice are not the same thing. The former is a natural, human response to danger (real or perceived), while the latter is a character trait that keeps us from doing the right thing in the face of danger. While all twelve spies probably experienced fear, only two of them transcended cowardice. Why do you think that was? How can you incorporate this into your life?
- This week we consider Moses and *Yeshua*’s function as mediators. We all appreciate it when we benefit from such graciousness, but do we excel at showing it to those who have wounded us? As you reflect on your life, can you recall moments when you needed to stand up for someone who rejected or criticized you? Maybe you prayed for someone who attacked you? What did you feel? How did that experience affect you? What made it possible?

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NEXT WEEK'S READINGS: *Parashat Korach* / פרשת קורח

TORAH

Sunday / Numbers 16:1-13

Monday / Numbers 16:14-19

Tuesday / Numbers 16:20-17:8

Wednesday / Numbers 17:9-15

Thursday / Numbers 17:16-24

Friday / Numbers 17:25-18:20

Saturday / Numbers 18:21-32

Prophetic Reading (*Haftarah*):

1 Samuel 11:14-12:22

New Covenant Reading:

John 19:1-17

Unless otherwise noted, all biblical passages referenced are in the *Tree of Life Version*.

¹ G. Walter Hansen, *The Letter to the Philippians*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Nottingham, England: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009), 322.

² M. J. Edwards, ed., *Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians*, Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 288.

³ John 4:24

⁴ John 1:18, 6:46

⁵ Genesis 8:7-12

⁶ Genesis 19:13

⁷ Genesis 24:1-9

⁸ Deuteronomy 24:1-3

⁹ See Exodus

¹⁰ See m. *Berachot* 5:5 and b. *Kiddushin* 42a – 43a

¹¹ John 7:16; 8:26; 14:10, 24; 12:49-50; and 17:8