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The Selection of the Spies

13: 1-16

The selection of the spies DIG: Isra'el was on the brink of realizing their dream of the Promised Land. How do you think they felt? Why send out spies to explore the Land (see Deuteronomy 1:20-23)? Why do the names of the ten faithless spies become markers of sadness? Who stands out in the list of names? Why did Moshe change Hoshea's name to Joshua?

REFLECT: Isra'el was on the edge of an adventure in Canaan. Where are you in your exploration of the Promised Land? Thank God that He is always faithful to His promises. What encourages your faith in God? Who can you tell about it this week? Have you ever been selected to participate in a ministry? How did you handle it? What did you learn?

Parashah 36: Sh'lach L'Cha (Send on your behalf) 13:1 to 15:41

(See my commentary on Deuteronomy, to see link click [Af](#) - Parashah)

The Key People are Moshe, one spy from each tribe (Caleb, Igai, Hoshea, Palti, Gaddiel, Gaddi, Ammiel, Sethur, Nahbi, Geuel), Amalek, Hittites, Jebusites, Amorites, Canaanites, Nephilim, the whole nation of Isra'el, Aaron, and a Shabbat wood gatherer.

The Scene is the Desert of Paran, Canaan from the Desert of Zin to Rehob, Hebron, the Valley of Eshcol, Kadesh, the Tent of Meeting, and Hormah.

The Main Events include sending spies, a bad report, God's desire to destroy the nation, Moshe intervening, the 40-year delay, changing minds too late, defeat, mitzvot about offerings, a man stoned for gathering wood on the Sabbath, and tsitisit (a fringe that was put on a garment) to remind the Israelites to follow the commands of ADONAI.

The twelve spies discovered nothing that God hadn't already told them.

There are several turning points in **Isra'el's** history. The parashah before us is one that gives an account of one of these times. It is one of the most famous stories in the Torah; but it is also one of the most tragic. For, in this parashah, we find **Isra'el** on the threshold of the Promised Land.²²⁶ After long weeks of travel through the scorched wilderness, **the children of Isra'el** arrived at **Kadesh** in **the Paran Desert**. It was a vast wasteland of dry and choking land, but **Kadesh** was a well-watered oasis of life in its midst. Several springs burst forth with a generous supply of water. At **Kadesh**, the wilderness was green.

The oasis of **Kadesh** was poised to the southwest of the Negev, between the Arabah and the coast. From there, several options were open to **Isra'el**. **They** might have moved up directly into the Negev and began to occupy and settle **the Land** at once. **They** might have swept over to the Mediterranean coast and begun the assault on the fortified coastal cities, establishing them as a base from which to take the higher lands of the hill country and Galilee. **They** might have crossed the Arabah into the Transjordan, encountering Edomites, Amorites, and Moabites. All of those options were possible. Which was best?

ADONAI didn't expect **Isra'el** to enter **the Land** unprepared or to take it by blind faith. Rather, **they** were to **spy** it out, assess the strategic situation and create a plan for conquest. The faith component was to trust in **God** for the victory - and even this was not blind faith. **They** had seen Pharaoh's army destroyed. **They** had seen Amalek defeated. **Ha'Shem** is a warrior (**Joshua 5:13-15**). **His** Sh'khinah glory was a visible presence in **their** midst (**to see link click Bk - The Pillar of Cloud and Fire**). **Theirs** was not a blind faith at all.²²⁷



ADONAI said to Moshe, “Send men on your behalf to spy out the land of Canaan, which I am giving to the people of Isra’el (13:1-2). This is all in keeping with the Abrahamic Covenant (see the commentary on [Genesis Eg - I AM the LORD, Who Brought You Out of Ur of the Chaldeans to Give You This Land](#)). Years after these events, **Moses** reflected on them. As **he** recounted the story in **his** speech in **Deuteronomy** to the sons and daughters of those who lived the account, **he** filled in some details this chapter omits. **Moshe’s** words to **the people** were to **rise up**, to **go up**, to **begin the attack**, and to **seize the Land (Deuteronomy 1:21)**. But **the people** petitioned **him** first to send in **spies** to discover the best routes for making **their** assault successful. Basically, **Moses** basically got talked into it by **the people** (see the commentary on [Deuteronomy Am - Sending in the Spies](#)). Why did they need to investigate what **YHVH** had already given to **them**? **They** should have known better. **Ha’Shem** had taken **them** out of Egypt, through the Sea of Reeds and given **them** the Tabernacle and the priesthood. The Canaanites should have been afraid of **THEM** like they were forty years later (**Joshua 2:9-11**)!

But when we return to **Numbers 13:1-2**, we see that the command to send **the men** was also made by **YHVH**. It is likely that **Deuteronomy 1:21-23** presents the story from the point of view of **the people**, and that **Numbers 13:1-2** presents the same account from **the divine** perspective. When **the people** requested that the **men** be sent, **Moses** decided, on the basis of the will of **God**, to grant **their** request. Both accounts melt into one. What we gain from putting the two accounts together, however, is the idea that sending **men** to

scout out the Land was a further example of **the LORD's** grace to **the people**.²²⁸

From each ancestral tribe send someone who is a leader in his tribe." Moshe dispatched them from the Paran Desert as ADONAI had ordered; all of them were leading men among the people of Isra'el (13:3). As in the records of the first ten chapters, the story begins with the compliance of Moses with the will of YHVH. He did just as God commanded in selecting one worthy individual from each tribe to represent his people on the scouting mission. The names mentioned here in verses 4-15 are different from those given for the tribal leaders in Chapters 1, 2, 7, and 10. Presumably the tribal leaders in the four earlier lists were older men. The task of the special agents called for men who were younger and could endure the rigors and dangers involved in spying out the Land. However, as physically capable as they might have been, their lack of spiritual maturity proved to be fatal to the Exodus generation when they refused God's gift of the land of Canaan (see [By - The Report of the Spies](#)).

The twelve spies traveled about five hundred miles during the forty days of the survey of Canaan, but they discovered nothing that God hadn't already told them! They already knew the names of the pagan nations that lived in the Land (Gen 15:18-21), that it was a good land (Ex 3:8), and a rich land flowing with milk and honey (3:8 and 17). They saw the incredible fruit of the land and brought back a huge bunch of grapes for the people to see. They even visited Hebron, where the patriarchs of Isra'el were buried with their wives (Numbers 13:22; Genesis 23:2 and 19, 49:29-31, and 50:13). But, did the reminder of the faith of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph encourage their own trust in God? For ten of the spies, the answer was a resounding "No!"²²⁹

There is a symmetry in this chapter, as we have seen in other occasions. The whole impression is orderly and straightforward, thus granting a sense of importance and dignity. The travel of the spies begins in the Desert of Paran (in verse 3), and it was to that wilderness that they returned (in verse 26). The text comes full circle geographically. But the men who came back were not the same as the men who left. Presumably they left in confidence, with a spirit of adventure; but they returned in fear, groveling before mere human beings and no longer trusting in the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Here are their names: We meet Caleb for the first time in 13:6, but he will be mentioned thirty-one more times in the TaNaKh. He and Hoshea (Joshua) were the only members of the Exodus generation to enter the Promised Land. The rest of them died in the wilderness. Thus, because of the failure of the majority, their names become markers of sadness, as do the names of the places of Isra'el's judgment. For example, Tev'erah (11:3)

meaning *burning* because **ADONAI's fire** broke out against **them**, and **Kivrot-HaTa'avah** meaning *graves of greed*, because there **they buried the people who were so greedy** (11:34).²³⁰

from the tribe of **Reuben**, Shamua the son of Zakur;
from the tribe of **Simeon**, Shafat the son of Hori;
from the tribe of **Judah**, Caleb the son of Jephunneh;
from the tribe of **Issachar**, Yig'al the son of Yosef;
from the tribe of **Ephraim**, Hoshea the son of Nun;
from the tribe of **Benjamin**, Palti the son of Rafu;
from the tribe of **Zebulun**, Gadi'el the son of Sodi;
from the tribe of **Joseph**, that is, from the tribe of Manasseh, Gadi the son of Susi;
from the tribe of **Dan**, 'Ammi'el the son of G'malli;
from the tribe of **Asher**, S'tur the son of Mikha'el;
from the tribe of **Naphtali**, Nachbi the son of Vofsi; and
from the tribe of **Gad**, Ge'u'el the son of Makhi (13:4-15).

These are the names of the men Moshe sent out to spy out the Land. Moshe gave to Hoshea the son of Nun the name Joshua (13:16). The particular significance of Joshua is noted here. We have already discovered that Joshua was an attendant of Moses from his youth and was especially concerned about his master's reputation when it seemed threatened by the independent prophesying of Eldad and Medad (11:27-28). Here, we learn that Joshua's name was first known as Hoshea, but Moses changed it to Joshua. This parenthetical statement anticipates the later prominence of Joshua. The reader is altered to the significance of this name among those of the spies; here is a man of great destiny. The Hebrew word Hoshea means *salvation*; the new form of the name Joshua means *ADONAI saves*. So the new name tells us who is actually responsible for this *salvation*. Both forms are foundations of the Hebrew spelling for the name of Yeshua.

Moshe's act of changing Hoshea's name to Joshua was a mark of a special relationship between the two men. This change of name, which is slight - something of a play on words - is a fatherly action on Moses' part; it is also a prophetic action. It is as though Moshe had adopted his young aide and marked him for greatness. We are reminded of the way the LORD changed the name of Abram to Abraham (Genesis 17). The names are related, but in the changing of the name, a new relationship results.

It is notable that the two agents who gave a report that was faithful to the promise of God represented the two tribes that would later become the most prominent in the Land.

Joshua was from the tribe of **Ephraim**, the **tribe** that would become dominant in the north; and **Caleb** was from the tribe of **Judah**, the dominant **tribe** in the south. There is something helpful in this fact as well - **the two men** who stood for faithfulness in **God** came from prominent **tribes**.²³¹

*Dear Heavenly **Father**, Praise **You** for always being **faithful**! **Your love, ADONAI, is in the heavens, Your faithfulness up to the skies (Psalms 36:5)**. What a comfort it is, **Your** promise to always care for me. **Cast your burden on ADONAI, and He will sustain you. He will never let the righteous be shaken (Psalms 55:22)**. What a joy that **You** tell me to not be anxious, but to give **You** my requests with **thanksgiving**. **Do not be anxious about anything - but in everything, by prayer and petition with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God (Philippians 4:6)**.*

*When I **pray with thanksgiving** before requesting anything, **the thanksgiving** readjusts my view so the problem seems smaller and my heart is comforted by knowing that **You**, my all-powerful and all-wise Heavenly Father, have control over all situations. Amazing that not only do **You hear** my requests but **You, the Sovereign Almighty Ruler** of the world, promise to accomplish **Your** will in me. **Now this is the confidence we have before Him - that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us - whatever we ask - we know that we have the requests we have asked from Him (First John 5:14-15)**. Thank **You** for being such a wonderful and loving **father** who can easily conquer any giants in my life! In the holy **Name of Messiah Yeshua** and the power of **His** resurrection. Amen*