

**TORAH STUDY**  
**June 29, 2024**  
**Parashat Shelah-Lekha**  
**Numbers, chapters 13-15**  
(Plaut pp 1107-1125)

**Chapters 13-14, Overview:** The Israelites camp at the Wilderness of Paran near the border to the Promised Land. God instructs Moses to send out men to scout the land of Canaan. Moses chooses 12 men, all leaders from the various tribes. One of the men is Hosea from the tribe of Ephraim. Moses changes his name to Joshua.

The instructions are to go up from the Negev to the hill country and see what's going on. Check out the people, the land, the towns and bring back some samples of fruit. The 12 scouts depart and are gone for 40 days. When they return they go straight to Moses to give their report. At first the report is very positive. They show a sample of grapes they harvested which are huge. They tell Moses that the land does indeed flow with milk and honey. But, then the report turns decidedly negative.

Ten of the scouts report that the people that inhabit the country are powerful, the cities are fortified and very large. But another of the scouts, Caleb from the tribe of Judah, indicates that the Israelites can overcome these people and gain possession of the land. The 10 scouts disagree and state that the land would devour the new settlers because the people there are of great size. They state: "The Anakites are so big that we looked like grasshoppers to ourselves compared to them."

Needless to say, this panics the people and once again they complain to Moses and Aaron about God leading them to die in the wilderness. They would rather go back to Egypt. Moses and Aaron are so upset by this reaction that they literally fall on their faces. Joshua and Caleb, the two scouts with a positive view, are so upset with the people's reaction that they tear their clothes as if in mourning. They plead that the land is a good land and that the Israelites should have no fear as long as God is with them. However, the community is so upset that they begin to pelt Joshua and Caleb with stones.

At this point, God steps in and is really irate. God tells Moses it's time to wipe out all of the Israelites and start over again with a new nation for Moses to lead.

Moses reminds God that wiping the Israelites out would make God look bad to the other nations, especially the Egyptians. After all, what good were all the miracles and promises of redemption in Egypt if God in the end chose to slaughter the Israelites before they reached the promised land?

God relents and pardons the people but not without consequences. The Eternal realizes that this slave generation is nowhere near ready for freedom. Therefore, none of the people over 20 years old will live to see the promised land except for Joshua and Caleb. Everybody else is doomed to die in the wilderness during 40 years of wandering – one year for each day that the land was scouted.

The 10 scouts that Moses sent out who muttered against him die by plague, by the will of God. The next morning the people, full of grief, defiantly march toward the crest of the hill country without the presence of the Ark of the Covenant nor Moses himself. Without God's protection, the Israelites are dealt a shattering blow by the residents of the hill country. Thus ends one of the saddest episodes in the whole Bible.

**Chapter 15, Overview:** This chapter serves as a bit of a breather in the narrative between the rebellion of the people over the scouts' report and the upcoming rebellion of Korah's revolt in chapters 16-17.

God instructs Moses on the various sacrifices to be made when the Israelites will eventually enter the Promised Land (40 years later!). These sacrifices include setting aside the first yield of baking as a gift to God (challah). Also included is a precautionary tale of a man who was caught gathering wood on shabbat. God orders that the man be put to death by stoning, a sentence carried out by the whole community. Lastly, God instructs Moses on the making of fringes (Tsitsi's) for the corners of garments.

### QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. Why did Moses change the name of Hosea to Joshua?
2. What was God's real purpose in sending out the scouts?
3. Which tribe was not represented in the scouting party? Why?
4. What was the failure of the 10 dissenting scouts?

5. What was the failure of the Israelite people?
6. What are the reasons for giving God human-like feelings? Can this be a problem?
7. Why include the episode of the man gathering wood on shabbat who gets stoned to death?
8. What is the significance of fringes (Tsitsi's)?