

Shelah Lekha

Rabbi Eliot Malomet June 25, 2022 Sivan 26 5782

במדבר י"ג:ב' שְׁלַח-לְךָ אֲנָשִׁים וַיִּתְּרוּ אֶת-אֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן אֲשֶׁר-

אָנִי נֹתֵן לְבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אִישׁ אֶחָד אִישׁ אֶחָד לְמִטַּה אֲבֹתָיו תִּשְׁלַחוּ כָל נָשִׂיא בָּהֶם: Numbers 13:2 Send for yourself men, that they may scout out the land of Canaan, that I am giving to the Children of Israel. One man, one man per tribe of their fathers, you are to send, each one a leader among them. This story is the turning point of Israel's sojourn in the desert. While the tradition calls this story, the story of the מרגלים-spies the word מרגל-spy doesn't occur in it. They are תייררים-scouts, pathfinders, explorers. But why does God tell Moses dispatch them? When Moses retells this story 38 years later in Deuteronomy (1:22) he recounts: Then you came near to me, all of you, and said: Let us send men before us that they may explore the land for us... In other words, that the mission was the people's idea. Rashi conflates the two versions. The people asked Moses, Moses turned to God, and God said to Moses, Send for yourself men... according to your own judgement: I do not command you, but if you wish to do so send them. In other words, It's up to you. You decide. Was this a set-up for failure or another way to motivate the people for the challenges ahead? Commentators are divided. Rashi: a set-up for failure. Ramban: A way to motivate the people. י"ג:ו' לַמַּטֵּה יְהוּדָה כָּלֵב בֶּן-יִפְתָּה: אֵלֶּה שְׁמוֹת הָאֲנָשִׁים אֲשֶׁר-שָׁלַח מֹשֶׁה לְתוֹר אֶת-הָאָרֶץ וַיִּקְרָא מֹשֶׁה לְהוֹשִׁיעַ בֶּן-נּוּן הַיֹּשֻׁעַ:

13:6, 16 From the tribe of Judah, Caleb son of Jephunneh...Those were the names of the participants whom Moses sent to scout the land; but Moses changed the name of Hosea son of Nun to Joshua. Who are these two, Caleb and Joshua? Caleb is from Judah. Joshua is Ephraim. It is not lost on us that these two tribes are the dominant tribes of the divided monarchy. Moreover, we already know that Joshua is Moses' "body man" and according to tradition, Caleb is Moses' brother-in-law because he was married to Miriam. So what does this mean? It means that Moses has his own people, (plants!) inside this group. Theoretically, because they would already have had Moses' trust, they could observe the others and report back to Moses what transpired. The two have a different view of the land than the others, but they also have an "in" with Moses.

י"ג:ט' וְמָה הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר-הוּא יֹשֵׁב בָּהּ הַטּוֹבָה הֲיָא אֶם-רַעָה וְמָה הָעָרִים אֲשֶׁר-הוּא יֹשֵׁב בָּהֶנָּה הַבְּמִקְנָיִם אִם בְּמִבְצָרִים:

13:19 Is the country in which they dwell good or bad? Are the towns they live in open or fortified? Moses' charge to the scouts is a poem, complete with rhythm, parallelism, repetition, assonance and more. It just so happens that there are 56 words in this charge, and the core words at the center of the text are הַטּוֹבָה הֲיָא. In my reckoning, this (like so many other examples of texts in which the pivoting central word or phrase discloses the core idea) is the key point of the charge: to see that the land is good. The good land-הטובה הארץ echoes in Deuteronomy and is everywhere in modern Hebrew. Think, Naomi Shemer's על כל אלה:

Do not upright that which is planted; don't forget the hope, return me and I will return, to the good land.	אל נא תעקור נטוע אל תשכח את התקווה, השיבני ואשובה אל הארץ הטובה.
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י"ג:כ' וְמָה הָאָרֶץ הַשְּׂמֵנָה הֲיָא אֶם-רְזָה הַיִּשְׁפָּה עַל אִם-אֵין וְהַתְּחַזְקֶם וְלַקְחֶתֶם מִפְּרֵי הָאָרֶץ וְהַיְמִים יָמֵי בְּכוּרֵי עֲנָבִים:

13:20 Is the soil rich or poor? Is it wooded or not? And strengthen yourselves and take of the fruit of the land."—Now it happened to be the season of the first ripe grapes. Why does he say this to them? Commentators highlight that they will be stealing of the produce, and therefore would have to defend themselves. Would Moses have instructed them to steal? Perhaps he is not asking them to take fruit from cultivated land, but wild fruit from uncultivated land. Strengthen yourselves hints that this is a journey that will require at points both physical and psychological fortitude. There are bound to be obstacles and challenges. As in all journeys, you will need to overcome some very challenging moments.

י"ג:כ"ז-כ"ט, לג: וַיִּסְפְּרוּ-לוֹ וַיֹּאמְרוּ בְּאָזְנוֹ אֶל-הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר שָׁלַחְתָּנוּ וְגַם זָבַת חֶלֶב וּדְבַשׁ הִיא וְזֶה-פְּרִיָּהּ: אֲפֹס פִּי-עֵז הָעָם הַיֹּשֵׁב בְּאֶרֶץ וְהָעָרִים בְּצֻרוֹת גְּדֹלֹת מְאֹד וְגַם-יְלְדֵי הָעֵמֶק רָאִינוּ שָׁם: עַמְלֵק יֹשֵׁב בְּאֶרֶץ הַגִּבּוֹר וְהַחֲתִי וְהַיְבוּסִי וְהָאֱמֹרִי יֹשֵׁב בְּהָר וְהַכְּנַעֲנִי יֹשֵׁב עַל-הַיַּם וְעַל יַד הַיַּרְדֵּן: וְשָׁם רָאִינוּ אֶת-הַנְּפִילִים בְּנֵי עֲנָק מֵרֵם הַנְּפִילִים וְנָהָי בְּעֵינֵינוּ כַּחַגְבִּים וְכֵן הָיִינוּ בְּעֵינֵיהֶם:

13:27-29, 33: This is what they told him: "We came to the land you sent us to; it does indeed flow with milk and honey, and this is its fruit. However, the people who inhabit the country are powerful, and the cities are fortified and very

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large; moreover, we saw the **Anakites** there. **Amalekites** dwell in the Negeb region; Hittites, Jebusites, and Amorites inhabit the hill country; and Canaanites dwell by the Sea and along the Jordan...we saw the **Nephilim** there—the **Anakites are part of the Nephilim—and we looked like grasshoppers to ourselves**, and so we must have looked to them.” Listen to how the scouts convey their message. They start with the positive and end with the negative. The positive: the land is amazing. Everything that you can imagine. Here is a sampling of its fruit. BUT...and here is a big BUT, there are powerful people there, giants, Amalekites, and Nephilim. Of these, the Israelites already have had a direct experience only with the Amalekites. That left a deep trauma on them. The giants and the Nephilim? These are part of mythology. The people would have been told about them in folklore. It's like saying, *there be dragons* which is what medieval cartographers put on maps to show unexplored and dangerous territory. The Nephilim have a cameo appearance in Genesis 6:4 and we get the feeling from that text that they are, indeed, strange and terrifying human-like creatures. **וַיִּהְיוּ כְּחַגְבִּים וְכִי הָיוּ כְּעִינֵיחָם:** **and we looked like grasshoppers to ourselves**, and so we must have looked to them. This is the line that discloses their self-perception. They are projecting onto the inhabitants of the land how they see themselves. In their own eyes, they are insects. It's an astounding revelation! These scouts were supposed to be the best of the best, the up-and-coming next generation. Most likely, they were younger than the tribal leaders that we have already encountered, the ones who brought the parade of gifts to the sanctuary over the course of twelve days. These would have been men who were going to lead the tribes to the land, and were strong, able, and young enough to undertake a rigorous journey. And listen to how they talk. Rather than "Yes we can!" they are saying, "No we can't!" Did they know how the people would react to this? Either they didn't care or they intentionally wanted to blow up the whole project. Maybe they wanted to go back to Egypt. Maybe they wanted to undermine Moses. Maybe they were resentful of Joshua and Caleb. Maybe they thought that they couldn't live up to the expectations of others. Maybe they lacked faith. Maybe all of the above.

י"ד-י"ז: ויהושע בן-נון וכלב בן-יפנה מן-התרים את-הארץ קרעו בגדיהם: ויאמרו אל-כל-עדת בני-ישראל לאמר הארץ אשר עברנו בה לתור אותה טובה הארץ מאד מאד:

14:6-7 Now Yehoshua son of Nun and Calev son of Yefunne, [alone] from among those who scouted out the land, tore their garments; said to the entire community of the Children of Israel, saying: The land that we crossed through, to scout it out— good is that land, exceedingly, exceedingly! Tearing is a sign of mourning. Reuben upon seeing the empty pit. Jacob upon hearing the news of Joseph. The brothers when Benjamin is taken into captivity by Joseph. This is the gesture of collapse, fracture, and irrevocable calamity. Imagine now, as they stand before the people saying *good is that land, exceedingly, exceedingly!* Sure it might be an exceedingly good land, but here you are standing before us with your clothes torn, as if the divine decree has been set. You are communicating despair and anguish. You are never going to convince us to follow you. It's over for us.

במדבר י"ד:י"ז-כ"ו ועתה יגדל-נא פה אד-ני באשר דברת לאמר: ה' ארך אפים ורב-חסד נשא עון ופשע ונקמה לא ינקם פלד עון אבות על-בנים על-שלישים ועל-רבעים: סלח-נא לעון העם הזה כגדל חסדך וכאשר נשאתה לעם הזה ממצרים ועד-הנה: ויאמר ה' סלחתי כדברך:

Numbers 14:17-20 So-now, pray let the power of my Lord [to forbear] be great, as you have promised, saying: The Lord, long-suffering and of much loyalty, bearing away iniquity and transgression, yet clearing, not clearing [the guilty], calling-to-account the iniquity of the fathers upon the sons to the third and to the fourth [generation]— pray grant-pardon for the iniquity of this people, as your loyalty is great, just as you have been bearing [it] for this people from Egypt until now! The Lord said: I grant-pardon, according to your words. This is such an important moment. Moses in effect challenges God to live up to God's previous self-characterization following the incident of the Golden Calf. *When I asked You to show me your essence, this is what You showed me. That you were compassionate. I ask You now to show Your compassion.* It's no wonder then that these words have imprinted themselves upon Jewish theology. God is a forgiving God. We are the people of the desert. Every Kol Nidre we recite these words, for forgiveness and hope. Shabbat Shalom!

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