

שֵׁלַח-לְחָד

SHELACH LECHA/SEND FORTH Bemidbar/Numbers 13:1-15:41

Much of parashat **Shelach Lecha** is taken up with the story of the **scouts**, however in **chapter 15** we read a very brief account concerning the **man gathering sticks** on the **Sabbath**:

***Bemidbar 15:32** Now while the children of Israel were in the wilderness, they found a man gathering sticks on the Sabbath day.³³ And those who found him gathering sticks brought him to Moshe and Aharon, and to all the congregation.³⁴ They put him under guard, because it had not been explained what should be done to him.³⁵ Then **יהוה** said to Moshe, "The man must surely be put to death; **all the congregation shall stone him with stones outside the camp**."³⁶ So, as **יהוה** commanded Moshe, all the congregation brought him outside the camp and stoned him with stones, and he died.*

It will be our **goal** to connect the **story of the scouts** and the **account** of the **man gathering sticks**. The **first parallel** between the events is the usage of the phrase "**to Moshe and Aharon, and to all the congregation**" - אֶל-מֹשֶׁה וְאֶל-אַהֲרֹן וְאֶל כָּל-הָעֵדָה. This exact phrase is only found **twice** in the **entire Torah**. Once is in **Bemidbar 15:33** above, and the **second time** is in the **story of the scouts**, after their **return** from the **Promised Land**:

***Bemidbar 13:26** Now they departed and came back to Moshe and Aharon and all the congregation of the children of Israel in the Wilderness of Paran, at Kadesh; they brought back word to them and to all the congregation, and showed them the fruit of the land.*

The **second parallel** between the two stories can be found in the **description** of the **actions of the people**. In the story of the **wood gatherer**, the **congregation** was "**to stone him with stones**". Sadly, it is reported **after Yehoshua and Caleb's report of the Land**, that the **congregation** was ready "**to stone them with stones**" (**Bemidbar 14:10**).

How did it come to this? The **scouts** were men that **Moshe** had **hand-picked**, **12 men** from **each tribe** of **Israel**. All were **prominent leaders**:

***Bemidbar 13:1** And **יהוה** spoke to Moshe, saying,² "**Send men to spy out the land of Canaan, which I am giving to the children of Israel; from each tribe of their fathers you shall send a man, every one a leader among them.**"*

The **Israelites** were on the verge of **entering** the **Promised Land**, but the **disastrous chain of events beginning** with the **slandering report** from **ten of the scouts ruined it all**. **יהוה** decreed that the people would **remain in the wilderness** for a total of **40 years** until the **entire generation died** and another took its place. However, there were **two scouts** who **stood apart** from the others. We know the **most** about **Yehoshua**. He was **Moshe's "right-hand man"** and he was the one who would **eventually take over leadership** and **lead** the people into the **Promised Land**. It seems fairly odd then, that **Yehoshua remains silent** when the **scouts give their initial report**. It is actually **Caleb** who **speaks up**:

Bemidbar 13:30 Then Caleb quieted the people before Moshe, and said, "Let us go up at once and take possession, for we are well able to overcome it."³¹ But the men who had gone up with him said, "We are not able to go up against the people, for they are stronger than we."

Caleb bravely stands against ALL of the others. Why do we not hear from Yehoshua? It is only later that Yehoshua speaks:

Bemidbar 14:5 Then Moshe and Aharon fell on their faces before all the assembly of the congregation of the children of Israel.⁶ But Yehoshua the son of Nun and Caleb the son of Jephunneh, who were among those who had spied out the land, tore their clothes;⁷ and they spoke to all the congregation of the children of Israel, saying: "The land we passed through to spy out is an exceedingly good land."

Perhaps **last week's Torah portion** provides the **key** to our **mystery**. In **Bemidbar 11**, we read of the **Spirit of Moshe** being **given to 70 elders** who began to **prophesy**. Do you **remember Eldad and Medad** who **remained apart** from the others and **began to prophesy** in the **camp**? It was **Yehoshua** who was **not happy** with this situation:

*Bemidbar 11:26 But two men had remained in the camp: the name of one was Eldad, and the name of the other Medad. And the Spirit rested upon them. Now they were among those listed, but who had not gone out to the tabernacle; yet they prophesied in the camp.²⁷ And a young man ran and told Moshe, and said, "Eldad and Medad are prophesying in the camp."²⁸ So Yehoshua the son of Nun, Moses' assistant, one of his choice men, answered and said, "Moshe my lord, forbid them!"²⁹ Then Moshe said to him, "Are you zealous for my sake? Oh, that all **יְהוָה's** people were prophets and that **יְהוָה** would put His Spirit upon them!"*

Why was Yehoshua so bothered by Eldad and Medad prophesying? We understand from **Moshe's response**, that **Yehoshua** was **zealous for Moshe/Torah**. Did **Yehoshua's distress** have something to do with the **message contained in Eldad and Medad's prophesy**? According to **ancient teachings (Sanhedrin 17a)** the **prophecy** said, "**Moshe dies, and Yehoshua leads to the Land.**" Now **Yehoshua's outburst** is **understandable**. He thought this **terrible prophesy** must be a **lie!** And yet, **Moshe's response** is indicative of the **humble man** that he was. For he **understands** that the **prophecy is true**, and for some reason **he will not be able to enter the Promised Land (Zohar 155b)**. Yet, he tells **Yehoshua not to be zealous for his sake**. He **accepts** that the **will of the Almighty is more important** than his **desires**. **Wow!**

Okay, now let's return to our **10 scouts**. What could they have possibly been thinking? They also would have been **aware** of the **dreadful prophesy of Eldad and Medad** that **Moshe would not enter the Land**. Plus, they would have known of **Moshe's reaction to Yehoshua**. Although **confusing and heartbreaking**, it may have had an **effect on their analysis** of the **Land** and their **recommendations for entrance** into it.

Consider their circumstances. Would they really want to **enter the Land without their beloved Moshe**? The people had already shown themselves to be **complainers** and **prone to idolatry**. How could they possibly **overcome the physical and spiritual challenges** that would **certainly precede conquering the Land**? Did these **10 men** make an "**executive decision**" (since they may have **thought**

they'd be in charge after the demise of Moshe) to attempt to **buy more time in the wilderness with Moshe** where they could all **benefit from his teaching** and become **more prepared** for the **challenges** that they would **certainly face**? **DID THEY PREFER TO LEARN TORAH IN EXILE?!!** They did seem to **appreciate the goodness of the Land**:

*Bemidbar 13:27 Then they told him, and said: "We went to the land where you sent us. **It truly flows with milk and honey, and this is its fruit.***

For a moment, friends, **think about our own situation**. We are often a bunch of **complainers, not always solid** in our **faith in Yeshua**, and **somewhat dependent on Moshe/Torah**. **Will WE be fearful of entering the Land** when יהוה says **GO?!!** Will we **rationalize** and **make the decision to stay** in the **exile** in order to **learn more from Moshe**? Are we **forgetting** that we are meant to be **connected to the vine** (who is Yeshua)? Notice how **large the fruit** is when it's **connected to the vine IN the Promised Land**:

*Bemidbar 13:23 Then they came to the Valley of Eshcol, and there cut down a branch with **one cluster of grapes; they carried it between two of them on a pole.** ...*

*John 15:5 "I am the vine, you are the branches. **He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.***

Before the men were sent out to scout the Land, Moshe changed Hoshea's name to Yehoshua:

*Bemidbar 13:16 ... And Moshe called **Hoshea** (הוֹשֵׁעַ) the son of Nun, **Yehoshua** (יְהוֹשֻׁעַ).*

Why did Moshe single out Yehoshua among the twelve spies for special consideration? **Hoshea** (הוֹשֵׁעַ) means "**salvation**", and **Yehoshua** (יְהוֹשֻׁעַ) means "**Yah is salvation**". Was **Moshe** attempting to **set Yehoshua up** as the **future leader** of the **Israelites** and at the same time make sure that he was **aware that salvation came from Yah**, as the new **name** indicated?

Perhaps now we can better understand **Yehoshua's initial silence** upon the **return of the scouts**. Had he **spoken out** and **expressed desire to enter the Land**, he could have been **accused of seeking power**, since the **prophecy** was out there that **Moshe would not be entering the Land**. On the other hand, **he could not support the report of the scouts**. He would have to **remain humble** until his time:

*James 4:10 **Humble yourselves in the sight of Adonai, and He will lift you up.***

Now let's go back and take a look at one of the **reasons Moshe gave for checking out the Land**:

*Bemidbar 13:20 "whether the land is rich or poor; and **whether there are forests (etz - עֵץ) there or not.** Be of good courage. And bring some of the fruit of the land....*

The **scouts** were sent to **inspect the Land**, to see whether it was "**rich or poor**" and **literally** "**whether there is a tree (etz - עֵץ) in it or not**". This is **different** than the **translation** that is **given above** and likely different than whatever translation you are using.

According to the **Zohar**, **Moshe** is asking about a **specific tree**, i.e. the **Tree of Life**. Was **Moshe** looking for the **Garden of Eden** in the **Promised Land**? Remember the **Torah** and **Yeshua** are both represented by the **Tree of Life**. The **spies** may have been **confused** when they **did not find the Tree of Life** or the **Garden of Eden** in the **Promised Land**. In their **disappointment** in what they found, they give a **“bad report”**:

***Bemidbar 13:31** But the men who had gone up with him said, "We are not able to go up against the people, for they are stronger than we."³² And they gave the children of Israel a bad report of the land which they had spied out, saying, "The land through which we have gone as spies is a land that devours its inhabitants, and all the people whom we saw in it are men of great stature.*

It is these **slandrous words against the Land** that **provokes יהוה** to **anger**:

***Bemidbar 14:36** Now the men whom Moshe sent to spy out the land, who returned and made all the congregation complain against him by bringing a **bad report** of the land,³⁷ **those very men who brought the evil report about the land, died by the plague before יהוה**.*

And because the **Israelites believed the 10 scouts with the “bad report”**, instead of **Caleb** and **Yehoshua**, **they also suffered a grievous sentence**:

***Bemidbar 14:29** The carcasses of you who have complained against Me shall fall in this wilderness, all of you who were numbered, according to your entire number, from twenty years old and above.³⁰ 'Except for Caleb the son of Jephunneh and Yehoshua the son of Nun, you shall by no means enter the land which I swore I would make you dwell in...³³ 'And your sons shall be shepherds in the wilderness forty years, and bear the brunt of your infidelity, until your carcasses are consumed in the wilderness.*

It is a tragic time as now an **entire generation will die in the wilderness** and another will take its place to enter into the **Promised Land**. In the **immediate aftermath** of this situation, we are introduced to the **incident of the man gathering sticks on the Sabbath**. This takes us back to our **original thought**. Why is there a **connection** between **this story** and the **story of the spies**?

Ancient Torah teachers point out something of **interest** in this verse:

***Bemidbar 15:32** Now while the children of Israel were in the wilderness, they found a man gathering sticks on the Sabbath day.*

Ordinarily the **Torah** would simply state that **“there was a man gathering sticks”**. The words **“they found”** implies that they were **“looking”**. It is taught that at this point, **following** the **incident** of the **scouts**, **Moshe posted watchmen** to look for any **violations** of the **Sabbath**. **Moshe knew** that the **Israelites readiness to accept the slanderous report** of the **scouts reflected a collective failure of trust** in **יהוה** and **His providence**. It is in the **observance of Sabbath** that one **reinforces and gives testimony** to **יהוה** as we **remember His Creation and His salvation from bondage to slavery** (also **bondage to sin**).

Shemot 20:8 "Remember the Sabbath day...¹¹ For in six days אלהים made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore אלהים blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it.

Devarim 5:12 ' Observe the Sabbath day, to keep it holy...¹⁵ And remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and אלהים your Elohim brought you out from there by a mighty hand and by an outstretched arm; therefore אלהים your Elohim commanded you to keep the Sabbath day.

Moshe suspected their lack of trust stemmed from a lax attitude toward Sabbath observance. Therefore he posted watchmen to warn those who were breaking the commandment and apprehend any violators. It was by raising the general level of Sabbath observance in the aftermath of the scouts that Moshe addressed the people's deficiencies.

So...it seems that the **story of the man gathering sticks is not so much a story about the sin of an individual, as it is a story about the entire congregation of Israelites. Three times it is written that it was "the congregation" that was involved with this man:**

Bemidbar 15:33 And those who found him gathering sticks brought him to Moshe and Aharon, and to all the congregation.

Bemidbar 15:35 ... all the congregation shall stone him with stones outside the camp."

Bemidbar 15:36 ...all the congregation brought him outside the camp and stoned him with stones...

What can we learn from this? The **congregation has made spiritual progress. Despite** the fact that an **entire generation has been condemned to die in the wilderness**, they have **decided as a community to seek to observe and fulfill יהוה's word.** They have decided that it is important that **EVERY individual should behave in accordance with His commandments.** This is why the "*entire congregation*" takes the **responsibility for stoning the man gathering sticks on the Sabbath.**

Let's take **another look** at that **man gathering sticks in Bemidbar 15:32.** It literally says they found "*a man gathering trees on the Sabbath*". Hmmmm...was the man **attempting to put together the "Tree of Life" with the "Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil"?! Was he putting his own spin** (this is **what we sometimes do** when we eat from the **Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil**) on what was **offered from the "Tree of Life" (i.e. Torah/Yeshua)?** If so, then he was **manipulating the Word.** And this, my friends, is **exactly what the scouts did when they chose to evaluate the Land through their own eyes!**

Now, let's go just a little further with this. **What did the wood-gatherer intend to do with the wood? Rashi states that the primary use of wood is for construction.** What if the **wood gatherer intended to build a wooden house?** The Israelites had been **living in tents.** Faced with **40 years in the desert**, did the **man think a wooden house would be more secure and more comfortable than a tent?** Was he seeking "**security**", because **he lacked trust in יהוה?** **This is what caused the disaster of the scouts! They did not trust in the plan of the Almighty and instead opted for their own more "secure" plan!**

As a result, the **wood gatherer** was put to **death** by the “*congregation*” with “*stones*”. “*Stones*” represent the **components** of the **house** **יהוה** is **building**. Those who are used in the **building of HIS house** had to **destroy the one** who was **tearing it down** through his **disobedience**:

1 Peter 2:5 you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house...

Right after the episode of the **wood gatherer**, the **Torah commands the placement of tzitzits**:

Bemidbar 15:37 Again יהוה spoke to Moshe, saying,³⁸ "Speak to the children of Israel: Tell them to make tzitzits on the corners of their garments throughout their generations, and to put a blue thread in the tassels of the corners."³⁹ "And you shall have the tzitzit, that you may look upon it and remember all the commandments of יהוה and do them, and that you may not follow the harlotry to which your own heart and your own eyes are inclined,⁴⁰ "and that you may remember and do all My commandments, and be holy for your Elohim."⁴¹ "I am יהוה your Elohim, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, to be your Elohim: I am יהוה your Elohim."

Clothing is a person's most **immediate physical protection**, and the **tzitzits** attached to the corners of their garments would **continually remind the wearer** that **יהוה is the true provider for all their needs**. Because the **Israelites forgot this**, it led to the incidents of both the **scouts** and the **wood-gatherer**. **By wearing the tzitzits**, one is **reminded** that he must be **prepared** to live a **life of discipline**, and **of limits** - even when it is **uncomfortable**, for our **gracious Abba will always provide**. And it is all because of **love**....

John 14:15 "If you love Me, keep My commandments.

Shabbat Shalom!

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