Parasha Shelach Lecha

וַיְדַבֵּר יְהוָה אֶל-מֹשֶׁה לֵּאמֹר: שְׁלַח-לְךָ אֲנָשִׁים וְיָתֻרוּ אֶת-אֶרֶץ כְּנַעַן אֲשֶׁר-אֲנִי נֹתֵן לִבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל

The narrative of Parasha Shelach Lecha unfolds like a grand drama set in the wilderness. It takes place during the Israelites' journey to the Promised Land, a journey fraught with moments of profound trust and staggering fear. The Divine command to send scouts to explore the land of Canaan becomes the hinge upon which the Israelites' future swings. God initiates this exploration, instructing Moshe to send leaders from each tribe to scout the land He has promised. This mission underscores a fundamental truth: the task was designed not just as reconnaissance but as a test of faith. Could the Israelites trust the promise that the land "flows with milk and honey"? As the scouts' venture into Canaan, they witness the land's richness, a palpable reflection of divine provision. However, their journey is marked by an encounter with formidable adversaries, described in Scripture as giants. This encounter stirs the deep-seated fears lying dormant within their collective psyche. Upon returning, the scouts present a divided report. Caleb, a figure of unwavering faith, urges immediate conquest, confident in God's promise. Yet, ten of the scouts paint a daunting picture, their narratives infused with fear. They emphasize the giants and fortified cities, allowing their fears to eclipse the promise. This tension between faith and fear resonates through the Israelite camp. The people, gripped by fear, lament their situation, preferring a return to Egyptian oppression over facing the uncertainties of God's promise. The Israelites' rebellion marks a pivotal moment. Their cries for retreat reflect a deeper distrust and ingratitude for past deliverance. In response, God decrees that this generation, save Caleb and Joshua, will not enter the Promised Land. This edict stands as a sobering reminder of the consequences of disbelief. Yet, within this judgment, there is mercy. God ensures that the promise remains intact for their descendants, demonstrating His enduring faithfulness and the opportunity for a future generation to embrace faith over fear. Do you see giants in your spiritual journey?

Let's remember from last week's parasha that chapter 12 ends with the incident of Aaron and Miriam complaining against Moshe; the result being that Miriam was afflicted with *Tzara'at*, a skin disease that was caused as a direct divine judgment upon her by God. And, out of respect for Miriam, the entire camp of Israel decided to wait (rather than move on) during the 7-day purification period from her Tzara'at, in which she was put outside the camp and could not come into contact with anyone. Once the purification period passed, the Israelites moved on to the area of the Paran desert. It is widely assumed that all that will occur in Numbers 13 and 14 happens while they are camped at Kadesh… also called Kadesh-Barnea… also called Ein-Mishpat.

This is an enormous and lush oasis on the desert's edge, on the southern border of the Land of Canaan. It is difficult to understate the enormity of the rebellion against the Lord, and the catastrophe that is described here. And as we get into chapter 14 we'll see the consequences begin to unfold. Like the story of Joseph a pattern and type is set up here that is at once true and historical with meaning and poignancy all to itself; as well as being prophetic and a metaphor; a type that will (in so many ways) be repeated not just by the Israelites in later eras but by fellowships in Mashiach. What we witness here is nothing less than an event we could call the first fall of Israel. What should have been a wonderful story about triumph and prosperity…a tale of Israel inheriting the Land and all the goodness that Adonai had prepared for them, instead turns into a tragic narrative about disbelief, failure, weakness, and a direct repudiation of God's grace. In its effect this story is not completely unlike Adam and Eve, and the Fall of Man. Adam and Eve had no sooner been created by the Master Potter than they succumbed to their evil inclinations and fell from grace. In our story Israel had only days and weeks earlier been consecrated by God, given His Torah, and were basking in the constant presence of Adonai; but now they throw it all away to obey their own fears and desires. So you should grasp that we are seeing of one of those history-changing moments of mankind. Israel had trekked right up to the edge of fulfilling centuries of promise, and then they quit. Just as victory was in their grasp they drew back in fear. They turned back and refused to enter into that promise. Oh, how on a razor's edge we all had lived until that moment we accepted God's Messiah; and we had no idea of the danger we were in.

Our account opens with Adonai instructing Moshe to send a group of men to scout out the Land of Canaan. And that group was to consist of but ONE man from each of the 12 tribes of Israel. Immediately, however, we run into a bit of a Scriptural dilemma. Because, later in Deuteronomy, we're told this in *Deuteronomy 1:22-23, "Then all of you approached me and said, 'Let us send men before us, that they may search out the land for us, and bring back to us word of the way by which we should go up, and the cities which we shall enter.' "And the thing pleased me and I took twelve of your men, one man for each tribe.* Do you see the dilemma? Numbers 13 says God told Moshe to send spies, yet Deuteronomy 1 says that the <u>people</u> of Israel approached Moshe and said that <u>they</u> wanted to send spies, and Moshe thought it was a good idea, so he handpicked the 12 men. What are we to make of this? The answer according to a rabbinical writing is contained in a key Hebrew word used in Numbers 13:1, the Hebrew word for "send". In Hebrew the word is Shelah-lecha; which literally means, "send for yourself ". In other words God is telling Moshe, *"if you want to send some spies, you have my permission".* What we see in verse 1 is not God, on His own impetus, just suddenly saying: *"Hey, Moshe, come here a minute… I want you to send out some scouts.."*

Rather it is that God was responding to a request from Moshe, and Moshe was responding to request of the people by taking the matter to the Lord; so Adonai tells Moshe to go ahead and satisfy himself (and the people's request) by sending out these scouts. After all God knew what was there in the Land of Canaan. It was the people of Israel who were unsure. Let's be clear on something: there is a difference between spying and scouting. Some bible versions say the 12 were scouting, others spying. It's a little like the difference between shoplifting and shopping. What was instructed in Numbers was to go scout out and see the land in order to reassure the people. It was like searching for a new community to buy a house, not like the preliminary to a military operation. And if it had been a military operation, most certainly the leaders of the tribes would not have gone, and they wouldn't have sent 12; 2 or 3 would have been more appropriate because stealth would have been key; and later in the Bible when we see actual military "spying" it will indeed usually be 2 or 3 men at most.

Now the leaders chosen for this mission are very high leaders, but not necessarily the prince, or Chief, of each tribe. But notice that there is <u>one</u> tribe that is left completely out of the mix: Levi. This is but further confirmation that the split between the priestly tribe of Levi and the other tribes of Israel was complete; complete enough that Levi wasn't referred to as a normal part of Israel anymore. Anyhow, Moshe instructs the group of 12 to go up through the Negev (a barren desert) into the hill country. In essence they weren't really scouting out the Negev, as it was simply a place that had to go through to reach their goal… the hill country. Or, really, it indicates the general area surrounding Hebron. And their mission is to determine several things as referenced in verses 18 – 20. So, the scouts were to check out the people, check out the land, check out the towns, see if there are wooded areas, and see how well things grow in the soil. Most of the great Hebrew sages agree that this was all about things like climate, fertility of the soil, and the availability or natural resources. Whether the people of Canaan were fierce warriors was not really the issue as far as Moshe was concerned, though certainly it was important to know under any circumstances. After all, under no circumstances were the Canaanites going to be thrilled when 3 million Hebrews showed up with an eviction notice. And we're given the season in which this scouting mission happened: the time of the first grape ripening, which means it was in the summer, in the July/August time frame. It was going to be hot going through the Negev. So, in verse 21 off they go; and they look the place over; and it's a big place. They began by taking a route through the low-lying desert and then on up into Hebron, and then eventually they travel all the way to a place called Lebo-Hamath. There is some disagreement over the exact location of that place, but for sure it was well north… even into what would eventually be called Syria and Lebanon, an area that would, under Kings David and Solomon, actually be an official part of Israel.

Anyway, it was probably a distance of about 250 miles from Kadesh to Lebo-Hamath. So, it's no wonder it took 40 days for them to go there and back. Now why was Hebron a destination? Simple. Avraham was buried there. It was in Hebron that Avraham was first promised the land. Hebron was where Avraham first settled to any degree in the Land of Canaan, and it was the stomping grounds of all the Patriarchs to one degree or another. It was beautiful and fertile; good for pasture and good for crops. Hebron would be the unnamed capital of Israel for the first few years of their living there; because of the Hebrew history of the place, it therefore was also a sacred place for the Israelites. And the verses say that along the way the scout party ran into 3 men called Anakites. Exactly who or what the Anakites were is uncertain. The one thing we do know is that they were a race of tall people, and they were compared to the Nephilim and Rephaim spoken of in Genesis, pre-Flood. Recall that the Nephilim and Rephaim were a race that Scripture says was caused when sons of Heaven had intercourse with daughters of men. In other words, angel-like creatures had relations with human women, and the result was a line of big, strong, fierce, evil people. Now, were the Anakites the latest version of Nephilim, or were they just being compared to Nephilim in a rhetorical way? Hard to know. Goliath (the giant warrior slain by David) was an Anakite (or, in Hebrew, *Anakim*). In any case, these Anakites made quite an impression on the 12 scouts. Next they go to a place called Eshkol and find grapes of enormous size. So large that a single cluster has to be strung between two poles to be carried. This is not real; it is a metaphor for explaining the extreme fertileness of the land. It is no different than our saying that we found a watermelon the "size of a house". No one in our culture would take that to mean that the watermelon was 30 feet around; it is just a modern saying that explains it was unusually large. Same thing is happening here. It is also interesting to note that the word Eshkol means "cluster", like a "cluster" of grapes. This was a grape growing region, so things were given "grape" names. So, you see how in the Bible the place names and the stories all can intertwine, and sometimes it's hard to know which came first: the story or the name of the place. In other words, did the place get named after something that happened there, or was a story developed around the name of a place. All this was handed down word-of-mouth for centuries.

Anyway, these tribal leaders return almost 6 weeks later, and they go straight to Moshe and Aaron and report what they encountered. They first tell Moshe what they saw and then tell "the whole community" of Israel. This does NOT mean all of the Israelites. It just means the elders and leaders of Israel. And we don't have to read too far before we get a little hint of the bent of these scouts because they say, "we came to the land <u>where you sent us".</u> Not the land Adonai promised or the land that was sworn to Avraham. In other words, they disassociated themselves from the Promise, from the covenant, and from God. For them this was simply a political/economic matter. And in the first part of their report the group of scouts offers a very positive view.

Oh, yes, they say, it IS a land flowing with milk and honey. And this is in response to Moshe's instruction as they were preparing to go on their mission to determine if the land was fertile. And they also show Moshe the fruit they brought back; this is in response to the question of "was the land wooded", meaning, did it support larger plants and not just underbrush. But in answering the question about the strength of the people of Canaan, they answered that they were powerful; as for the cities, they were large and well defended. And, by the way, that was not an exaggeration. Most of the walls of the walled Canaanite cities that have been excavated have been found on average 30 to 50 feet high, and 10 to 15 feet thick. The scouts also say that the "tall people", the Anakites are present there. And the Amalekites, thought to be the dominant people (wanderers) of the desert regions of Canaan and the Sinai, were also there in great number. The Hittites, a highly advanced civilization with its center in modern day Turkey; the Jebusites, the original builders of the city of Jerusalem; and the Amorites, probably Avraham's original tribe, a very fierce group who sought power and dominance and was always a bother to their neighbors. The Canaanites, a conglomerate of many of the offspring of Noach's grandson Canaan tended to live along the coastal plains of the land. All of these groups were there, and well entrenched. And, they undoubtedly had no interest in turning their city-states over to these Hebrews. Let's understand something: the scouts' assessment was well balanced and not exaggerated. They were telling the truth, and the truth was scaring the daylights out of the leaders and elders of Israel who had gathered around them to hear the scouting report. We can easily imagine the rising clatter of the people expressing anxiety and fear; a growing commotion of complaint and rebellion. Because verse 30 says, *"Caleb hushed the people..."* Caleb told them to quiet down and settle down. And Caleb says, okay, enough reality. We know what we're up against; now let's go and take the land because surely we'll overcome all of these obstacles.

This is not the same conclusion that those within earshot had already come to. The other scouts, and the elders, had decided that it was suicide to take-on these formidable people of Canaan. To make their point, they abandon their balanced report and say that the Anakites are so big, that <u>we</u> looked like grasshoppers next to them! It was a hopeless situation, in their estimation. But here's the problem. The scouts and the elders were in rebellion not against Moshe, but against Adonai. Their refusal to take God at His word was the greatest affront to His holiness. And there would be grave repercussions. Let me tell you something, often we think that the main thing we're to listen to the Lord about is to <u>not</u> do something that we shouldn't. But equally as often, and as the case in point with the 12 scouts, our rebellion against God is that we <u>don't</u> do things that we clearly <u>should</u> do. Instead, we focus on the obstacles and look away from Him and grow afraid and impatient. We think: well, if it's difficult and dangerous certainly it can't be from the Lord. If God has set this deal up, it's going to be easy and without problems.

If we encounter problems and difficulties and it doesn't go like we envisioned, we must be going against God's will. That kind of thinking has probably snatched more blessings and victories away from individual Believers than any other. It is a false assumption. The consequences for those who seek to thwart God's plan for His people, Israel, to claim their land inheritance is severe. Ten of those 12 scouts were about to find out just how seriously God takes His covenants, His commands, and the rights and duty of His people to assume their place in the Land of Promise. The Church today is also about to find out that the Lord God does not change, and He does not make idle threats, and that He has not gone back on His promise to the set-apart nation He created through Avraham.

How much do you want God to bless you? Then, let me pose a couple questions... *how far are you willing to go with God? How obedient are you willing to be?* You see, the Israelites are poised to enter the Promised Land and Moshe gives orders to send out 12 spies. They spied out the land to see if it fruitful... they spied on the inhabitants to see if they are few or many... weak or strong... and if they dwell in tents or in fortified cities. They then reported back to the people of Israel. The Israelites must have anxiously awaited their report. Would this land be as God had promised... a land flowing with milk and honey... a fertile, productive land? Let us look together at this conundrum and wrap this up. First of all, notice... They brought back word to Moshe, and to the rest of the Israelits. Was this land fertile? Was it productive? Was it flowing with milk and honey the way God had said the answer is yes, yes, yes, and as evidence they brought back a cluster of grapes, supposedly the grapes were so large and heavy that they carried them between two of the men. If the grapes were this big, imagine how big those pomegranates and figs were. The congregation of Israel now had the opportunity that they had all waited for, to occupy the land that had been promised to their forefathers; the opportunity that had been delayed because of their bondage in Egypt. This was it! This was their day! This was their time! It was theirs, God had promised it to them, all they had to do was enter the land and occupy it... God had promised them victory! What could possibly hinder them from taking advantage of such an awesome opportunity? Could anything stand in their way of receiving the promises of God? Yes! Their outlook was pathetically small. After all this time; years in the waiting, the exodus from Egypt, the thirst, and the hunger... all the traveling, nothing was going to stop them now... right? Wrong! Their outlook was small and they were full of fear. They spoke their curse... "We're too small! We can't do it!" The Bible says, *"As a man thinks in his heart, so is he".* Where did they get the idea that they were like grasshoppers? You think you can't do something, then you can't... you think you're too small, then you are... you think you're not talented enough, then you're not... you think you're not smart enough, then you're not... you think you're never going to get out of the bind that you're in... well, then you're not. Many times, we underachieve because we under-believe in ourselves! Then we come up with excuses.

"The people who dwell there are strong; their giants in statute!" Any attempt at doing the will of God; of moving forward by faith is always going to be met by opposition. There are giants today that would prevent people from coming to Yeshua, from the body of Messiah from moving forward and prevents us from walking by faith and doing the will of God. To anything great there is opposition; any attempt at success is going to be met by giants. Here are some giants that we face today.

The Giant of Self - the biggest giant in my life is me. The biggest giant in the path of those standing on the border of Canaan was not the children of Anak... but it was that own person staring back at them from a mirror. I have met the enemy and it is me.

The Giant of Sin. - What was the root that kept these people from inheriting the promised land? What was keeping them from victory... from the promises of God? What was standing between them, and God's best. SIN! The sin of unbelief; they chose to believe the unbelieving spies rather than the faithful, living God! Unbelief will keep us out of heaven, unbelief is the vehicle that will carry us all the hell, unbelief robs Believers of the joy of being obedient, unbelief stands in the way of synagogues growing, unbelief is the wall that is driven up to keep us from enjoying all the blessings of God!

The Giant of Spinelessness. - They lacked courage! They had no guts... They were paralyzed by fear! We can't do it! We're going to fail! We're all going to die!

The Giant of Subversion. There was a subversion of the authority over them, not only the leadership that God had placed over them, but essentially against God. This was not to be a call for a decision as to whether they would enter Canaan, it was not to see if they thought they could win a battle, it would only for the sake of being prepared, but the will of Lord was subverted! One group compared the giants to themselves, and was defeated, the other group compared the giants to their God, and they were victorious!

The most important thing did not weigh in on their decision; they forgot all about the Omnipotent God! We may be grasshopper, our foes might seem to be giants, but the opportunities that God gives us are great and when He affords us those opportunities it is more than able to give us the victory! We must never leave God out of the equation; if you feel like a grasshopper, and your opposition looks like giants, then your God is too small. God is an all-powerful God and if He leads us, if He wills us to do something, there is nothing that can hinder it from happening, there are not enough demons in hell to keep us from accomplishing God's will for our lives ...if we are faithful to Him! Their lack of faith, their loss to fear, their leaving off of the facts kept them from entering the promised land, they endured Egypt and the flight out of Egypt and all the other trials on the journey, to stand on the verge and to fail. Because of their unbelief, their faithlessness, they were condemned to wander in the wilderness for forty years. Out of all those who came out of Egypt only two would enter in... We know for a fact that there were 603,550 men age 20 and up in the nation of Israel, it has been said that an average of 82 people died a day in the wilderness!

How many people are dying each day after living an incomplete life because you didn't share the gospel with them? The two the entered into Adonai's promise were Joshua and Caleb. They were the only two of the spies to be positive, the only two who wanted to progress, and the only two who believed and trusted in God... and as a result of their faith, they received the promises of God.

Today, great are our opportunities, yet, what Giants are keeping you back? What's keeping you from victory? Are you feeling like a grasshopper? Feeling as if you can't do anything? Remember this day our God of omnipotence. He is all powerful, He can handle the giants in our lives, if we've got Him in our corner! Would you trust Him with your future? Will you believe His promises, take Him at His word? Parasha Shelach Lecha imparts enduring lessons on the human condition. It is a story of divine testing and human fallibility, of courage that stands firm against fear, and the communal consequences of disbelief. It challenges us to consider our own journeys: how often do fears magnify the obstacles before us, dimming the brilliance of divine promises? This narrative invites reflection on how we respond to divine challenges today. It compels us to cultivate a communal faith that lifts each other above fear, aligning ourselves with Joshua's and Caleb's spirit of confidence in God's promises. May we learn to see through the eyes of faith, embracing the journey laid before us with courage and trust and go forth and slay the giants in our spiritual lives.

b'Shem Yeshua, haMelech v'haMashiach Shelanu! Amein.
("in the name of Yeshua, our King and the Messiah! Amein.")