

Shelach Lecha **Send For Yourself** **Defeat in the Face of Victory**

Torah: Numbers 13:1-15:41

Haftarah: Joshua 2:1-24

Brit Chadashah: Hebrews 3:7-4:11

Reading: Hannah p. 171, 173 and Ps. 64 Jewish Hero: Abel Torah Carrier: Isaac

Believers are never defeated by any of the obstacles they face, because greater is He who is in us than he who is in the world. The same people who lived through the Exodus and who walked across the Sea of Reeds and who saw the glory of G-d thunder from the mountain, arrived at the entrance to the Holy Land, and only needed to hear the final details of the last stage of their journey before they swept victoriously into the Promised Land.

But there was a problem. There are not many sadder passages in the Bible, than the one we are studying this week, because right on the edge of the final stage of their journey back to the Holy Land, the people believed a lie, instead of trusting in the L-rd. Twelve eminently qualified men, leaders of the people, were sent on a fact finding mission, so the people would know what it was exactly they would be up against as they prepared to end their wandering and finally come home to the Promised Land.

Instead of seeing the obstacles they were going to face in the land as opportunities for the power of G-d to overcome, they falsely chose to see their problems as greater than the G-d they served. What they saw in the land was a true picture of what they had to face and they were correct in stating that they were in no way capable in themselves of overcoming what lay ahead. Everything they said was true except for one thing – the G-d who had called them out of Egypt was more than capable of overcoming any obstacle which dared to stand in the way of His promises. He is just as capable in our lives today, no matter what we are facing.

The people waited for the spies to give their report. They were camped around the mighty presence of G-d, which covered the camp in a cloud during the day and lit up the night sky as they slept. They knew that their journey home had three stages: the Exodus, the Holy Mountain and the Conquest.

None of their clothes wore out on the journey home, and they feasted on manna every morning and always had enough water to drink for themselves and for their flocks. They had seen their greatest enemies drowned before their eyes and none of the diseases which tormented the Egyptians had any effect on their camp.

They had been prepared for over a year to live in the land they were about to enter and all they were waiting for were the final details so that they see how G-d was going to provide for them in the final stage of their journey out of captivity into the Promised Land. The twelve spies spent a long time getting an accurate picture of what was to be their permanent home and it should have been an exciting time as the people heard their report. But what went wrong?

Ten of the spies falsely reported that the land presented obstacles that the people of G-d would never be able to overcome. What they said was true, except for one crucial detail. We must never forget that greater is He who is in us, than anything the flesh, the world or the enemy can

throw at us. Never allow doubt to define how you live your lives.

They lamented the fact that they had not died in Egypt and that they had not died in the wilderness and they wanted to name a new leader and return to their former slavery with their tails between their legs. They even wanted to stone Moses and they refused to listen to Caleb and Joshua, who said that as long as they walked with G-d, there was no mountain high enough or no valley deep enough to keep them from seeing the promises of G-d fulfilled right before their eyes.

Even as the spies spoke with the people, the cloud hovered over them and that very morning they had gathered their daily supply of manna. What they were really saying is that they did not believe that the G-d who had faithfully led them this far, was able to finish the job and lead them victoriously into the Land which He had promised to give to the children of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. They were not so much expressing doubt in themselves as they were expressing their disbelief in G-d and in His ability to be faithful to His Word. How about you?

Just before they carried through on their threat to stone Moses and Aaron, something happened and the hovering cloud suddenly turned into the glory of G-d and Moses was recalled into the tent of meeting. The people may have thought that G-d had heard them and would come up with a better deal for them, since it was obvious to them that proceeding to the Promised Land was no longer feasible. They were in for a great shock.

G-d initially told Moses to stand aside while He consumed this rebellious people, but Moses again successfully interceded for them. Instead of killing them, they would be allowed to get what they wanted and would all die in the wilderness and not have to go into the Promised Land. But G-d was not finished with His people, or with the promises He had given to them.

Later on in the Haftarah portion, we see that the new generation was going to walk into this same land without being afraid of what they would encounter. In the New Testament portion we see that unbelief is the one sin which cuts us off from the promises of G-d, because we either believe what G-d's Word says or are rejected by the One who spoke these promises. Believing in what G-d says in His Word is the straight and narrow path we are to walk and it is the gate through which our lives must pass. Which path and which gate is in your life?

It is never because of who we are and what we are not ever going to be able to be capable of accomplishing in our own strength, that will determine the success or failure of our walk with the L-rd. It is simply a matter of believing that G-d will always be able to accomplish what He says in His Word. What is His Word accomplishing in your life?

The people were actually rejecting G-d and His Word and it is only because of His great mercy that their children were spared the deadly fate which now awaited them. There are two more points to consider in this meditation before we get ready to hear what Rabbi Cal has to share with us and they as surprising as they are shocking. Are you ready to be shocked?

The people only repented after they heard the consequences of their disobedience and our passage ends with further instructions on how to walk with the L-rd. Repentance needs to be a conviction that we are ready to do the will of G-d before the consequences of our disobedience overtake us. I know too many people who have destroyed their lives and only get around to seeking His face as they wallow in the ruins of their folly. They are never turned away, but too

often their lives are nearly over before they come to their senses and they cannot go back and undo all the years they spent running away from G-d and making a mess of their lives. Repentance doesn't have to be all about life long regrets, does it?

I am 65 and I have seen so many of my friends walk away from the L-rd and only come to their sense in their old age. I do not want to come to the end of my life and weep about what I could have done if only I had learned to walk with the L-rd as a young person, just starting out in life. The House of Israel had made their choice not to enter the Land and it was only after they were excluded from it that they finally agreed to enter it. Life is all about choices, isn't it?

When they had all of the Promises, it was not good enough for them and they only agreed to enter because they wanted to avoid the punishment they had earned. Once the damage is done, everybody who has suffered, wishes they could go back and change their mind and avoid reaping the folly of their actions. Sincere repentance is based on a commitment to the promises of G-d and, on the Day of Judgment, it will be too late make better choices.

Everybody who has ever lived will stand before the glory of G-d and give an account for their choices, the trick is to do it before the final judgment and not afterwards. I feel both anger and sorrow when I think about the lost generation who died in the wilderness and it is a warning for us to believe in His Word and make good choices, so that we do not reap the folly of those who spend their lives not walking with the L-rd as they stumble towards judgment.

The passage ends with some calm instructions on how to walk with the L-rd. His purposes are never thwarted or even stalled. We will either learn to walk with Him according to His Word or He will wait on the next generation and give them the chance to do what we could have done, but which we failed to do. I could have made lots of different choices in how I lived my life, but the one great choice I will never regret making, happened on March 28th, 1972 when I accepted the L-rd into my heart and life. It continues to make all the difference.

Caleb and Joshua shared the wandering years with the rebels, but they knew that they did not share the same destiny. As we wander through this life, surrounded by rebels who have turned their back on G-d and His Word, let us rejoice that our destiny is not the same as theirs and let us never give up reaching out to them and warning them as long as we have the breath to do so. We need wisdom and perseverance, even when they try and shout us down.

They faced defeat on the verge of victory because they chose to ignore the Promises and trusted in their inabilities. May we never follow suit and may our lives be defined by our faith in His Promises and not by all the obstacles, which can never really get in our way. His Word will either be truth we build our lives on or it will be the rock upon which our lives are shattered when we finally stand before the King we should have spent our lives serving. May each of us share the fate of the two spies and live in hope because His kingdom is coming.