

בס"ד

THE RASHI OF THE WEEK

Week of

Parshas Shelach

25 Sivan, 5781 – June 5, 2021

Compiled from the works of
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Vaad L'Hafotzas Sichos
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**An Outline of the Rebbe's Explanation of Rashi
Parshas Shelach**

Likkutei Sichos Volume 23, Pages 92 – 95

Rashi in His Own Words

במדבר י"ג, ב': שלח לך אנשים ונתרל את־אֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן אֲשֶׁר־אֲנִי נֹתֵן לְבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֵיֵשׁ אֶחָד אֵיֵשׁ אֶחָד לְמִטָּה אַבְתִּיר תִּשְׁלְחוּ כָל
נְשִׂיא כְהֹנָם:

רש"י ד"ה שלח לך: לדעתך, אני איני מצווה לך, אם תרצה שלח. לפי שבאו ישראל ואמרו (דברים א', כ"ב) נשלחה אנשים לפנינו, כמה שנאמר (שם) ותקרבוני אלי כלכם וגו', ומשה נמלך בשכינה. אמר אני אמרתי להם שהיא טובה, שנאמר (שמות ג', י"ז) אעלה אתכם מעני מצרים וגו'. חיייהם שאני נותן להם מקום לטעות בדברי המרגלים למען לא יירשוה:

Bamidbar 13:2: "Send out for yourself men who will scout the Land of Israel which I am giving to the Jews. You shall send one man each for his father's tribe. Each one shall be a prince among them."

Rashi Heading: Send for yourself: According to your understanding. I am not commanding you (to do so), but you may send (them) if you wish. Since the Jews had come (to Moshe) and said,¹ "Let us send men ahead of us," as it says², "All of you approached me..." Moses³ consulted with the Shechinah. Hashem said, "I told them that it is good, as it says³, 'I will bring you up from the affliction of Egypt...' By their lives⁴! Now I will allow them to err through the words of the spies so that they do not inherit it."

Synopsis

This week we read the Torah portion of Shelach. It tells us of the ill-fated twelve spies who Moshe sent to scout out the land of Israel. Their mission was to go into the land and see what it was like before conquering the land by the Jews. The Torah tells us that Hashem told Moshe to send the men "for yourself." Rashi explains that G-d did not command Moshe to send them; Hashem left it at Moshe's discretion. It seems evident that this is the reason that the story had a tragic ending.

However, we need to understand what the problem was with Moshe's actions. This is especially so in light of the fact that the Torah said that Moshe sent the spies "*by the word of Hashem.*" Furthermore, Rashi says that at the time that Moshe sent the spies, they were virtuous. Why did they suddenly become derelict in their mission? What caused the rapid change in these emissaries of Moshe?

1. Parshas Devorim, Devorim 1:22.

2. Ibid.

3. Parshas Shemos, Shemos 3:17.

4. This is an expression which connotes an oath.

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We must first understand that there were two parts to the spies' mission. They had to find out what we needed to conquer Israel. They also had to find out the nature of the land itself. To fulfill this second part of their mission, Moshe told them to bring fruit from the land upon their return. This doesn't seem easy to understand. Carrying fruit of the land back to the wilderness could have made it evident that they were spies? Didn't the Jews believe what Hashem said, that the fruit of the land was good? What need was there to put the spies' lives in danger?

The explanation is that when we received the Torah, we first said "נעשה" - Na'aseh – We will do" and then "נשמע" – Nishmah – We will understand." We had to subjugate ourselves to G-d by first accepting upon ourselves to do as He commands. But then we had to understand with our minds.

The same was true of the land of Israel. Of course, we believed Hashem that we would succeed in our conquest and that the land was good. However, our understanding needed to be involved. Moshe had to send the scouts based on his understanding. They had to bring the land's produce for the Nation to see. They also had to use their faculties to determine *how* to conquer the land. However, they made the mistake of going one step too far; they decided they would be incapable of conquering Israel from the Canaanites.

Rashi's Explanation

This week we read Parshas Shelach. It tells of Moshe sending twelve spies into Israel and the tragic result which this action caused. As is the case with so many stories and laws in the Torah, it begins by telling us that⁵ "Hashem spoke to Moshe saying." However, when it follows that up by telling us what Hashem said to Moshe, we are in for a surprise. Hashem did not tell Moshe to "send men who would scout the land." Instead, He told him to "send men *for yourself* men who will scout the land."

What is the meaning of Moshe sending these spies "*for himself*?" Rashi quotes the Sages⁶ and explains that Hashem told Moshe to send them "according to your own (Moshe's) understanding. I am not commanding you (to do so), but you may send (them) if you wish.

5. Parshas Shelach, Bamidbar 13:1.

6. See the Talmud Sotah 34, Side b. Similarly see the Midrash Tanchumah on our Parshah at the end of Section 5. See also Bamidbar Rabbah Chapter 16, Section 8.

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Difficulties in Understanding Rashi

The Torah tells us that Hashem Himself calls Moshe His trusted servant⁷. This makes it clear that if Moshe wanted to send spies, his Master agreed! Furthermore, we find that the Torah explicitly says that⁸ "Moshe sent them ... *by the word of Hashem*." Sending the scouts in and of itself was something positive.

Moreover, Rashi explains that⁹ "at the time that Moshe sent them, they were virtuous." This ought to be obvious; Moshe himself chose them. Not only were they virtuous Jews, but they were those who were best suited for the job. How is it possible that they changed in such a short amount of time? When they left on their mission, they were righteous people. Yet, they were unsuccessful in carrying out their mission. Not only that, but their negative report caused the entire Jewish Nation to "cry for all generations¹⁰."

The Explanation

We will understand this after a brief preface. There were two parts to the spies' mission. First of all, they had to check the details which concern how they would triumph over the land¹¹; "You shall see ... what sort of people live there. Are they strong or weak? Are there few or many? In what sort of land do they live? Is it good or bad? Are the cities in which they live open, or are they walled fortresses?"

The second part of their mission was to see the nature of the land itself¹²; "Is the land good or bad? What is the soil like? Is it fat or lean? Are there any trees in it or not?" This was true to the extent that Moshe told them¹³ "... *you shall be courageous* and take from the fruit of the land...."

Why was it that taking of the fruit of the land required courage? Simply because carrying fruit back with them would make it evident that they were spies. Nevertheless, it was necessary to do so. They had to bring back the fruit of the land to show their fellow Jews its quality. They had to see the quality of the land with their own eyes.

This does not seem easy to understand. G-d already told them that the land is¹⁴ "...a good and spacious land, to a land flowing with milk and honey ..." The Jews have an inborn trust of G-d. The

7. Parshas Beha'aloscho, Bamidbar 12:7.

8. Parshas Shelach, Bamidbar 13:3.

9 See Rashi's comments to Parshas Shelach, Bamidbar 13:3.

10. See Talmud Taanis 29, Side a.

11. Parshas Shelach, Bamidbar 13:18-19.

12. Ibid. 19-20.

13. Ibid. 20.

14. Parshas Shemos, Shemos 3:8.

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Talmud teaches us¹⁵ that Jews are by their very nature "believers the children of believers." Why was there a need to endanger their lives?

One explanation is as follows. When Hashem asked the Jews to accept the Torah, we first said "נעשה - Na'aseh – We will do" and then "נשמע – Nishmah – We will understand¹⁶." We had to subject ourselves to Hashem. First, we needed to say that we would obey whatever the Torah says sight unseen. However, that did not suffice. After accepting the Torah, we had to study it with our faculties. We needed the "נשמע – Nishmah – We will understand."

The same was true of our entering and inhabiting Israel. We certainly had to have faith in Hashem. However, Hashem also wanted us to appreciate the greatness of the Holy Land with our minds. That is the reason that Hashem commanded the twelve scouts to bring back the fruit of the land. We should not just accept Hashem's word that it is a good and expansive land ("נעשה - Na'aseh – We will do"). We should also appreciate it on our own ("נשמע – Nishmah – We will understand").

This also explains the first part of their mission. They had to see with their own eyes that we could conquer the land¹⁷, "We can surely go up and take possession of it, for we can indeed overcome it."

That also explains why Hashem told Moshe to "send men for yourself," meaning "according to your understanding." That was the point of sending the spies. It had to come about according to the understanding of the Jews, "נעשה - Na'aseh – We will do" and not solely because of G-d's command.

This also clarifies something else. As stated earlier, when Moshe sent the spies, they were virtuous. How was it possible for them to descend so low in such a short time? They said that¹⁸ "We are unable to go up against the people, for they are stronger than we" despite Hashem's promise!

They had to *understand* how we would go about overcoming the Canaanites. It was their conclusion that was incorrect. The facts which they stated were all true. The truth is that based on the laws of nature, it would have been impossible for the Jews to have conquered Israel. In the spies' minds, they successfully carried out their mission. The mistake they made was in offering their conclusion. Moshe never asked them to report whether or not we could successfully conquer the land. He only asked them to report the easiest way to go about the conquest.

15. See Talmud Shabbos 97, Side a.

16. See Talmud Shabbos 88, Side a.

17. Parshas Shelach, Bamidbar 13:30.

18. Ibid. 31.

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A Deeper Explanation of Rashi

The name of our Parshah is Shelach, meaning *send*. It is from the same root as the Hebrew word "שליח – Shliach – Emissary." We must all learn from here how to avoid making the same mistake that the spies did. The way to do this is by always keeping in mind that we are Moshe's emissaries. Hashem does not want us to be robots. He does not want us to stop at "נעשה – Na'aseh – We will do." We also need to use our understanding in carrying out our mission; "נשמע – Nishmah – We will understand." However, we must make sure not to allow our personal motives to get in the way. No matter how much one understands, no matter how intelligent one is, mixing in one's feelings can very easily cause one to come to a false conclusion. It is only by remaining connected to Moshe, the one who sent us on our mission, that we can be sure to stay on a straight path.

By so doing, we will undoubtedly merit the complete and true redemption. At that time, we will achieve the conquest of the entire land of Israel.

(Adapted from a talk given on Shabbos Parshas Shelach 5733)

I hope that you gained as much by reading this as I did by translating and adapting it.

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