

Sh'lach	Send For Yourselfs	Cowardice and Betrayal
Torah:	Numbers 13:1-15:41	
Haftarah:	Joshua 2:1-24	
Brit Chadashah:	Hebrews 3:7-4:11	

For me, this is one of the saddest portions in the Torah. Our people end up snatching defeat from the jaws of victory. They were camped at what was to have been their last camping spot before their entrance into the Holy Land. Moses did not send the spies into the land to determine if the conquest was feasible, but to see where the best parts of the land were located. They were to examine the fortified towns but he knew that not even these could stand up against the hand of YHVH. Nothing in our lives can either.

Most of the region was loosely under Egyptian control, but the land was frequently invaded and successive waves of people were driven into the hills and the survivors built fortresses to protect themselves from each new wave of invaders. The most powerful country in the ancient world, Egypt, had been defeated. Canaan, even with its fortresses, would be a piece of cake by comparison. How many pieces of cake do you have in your life?

Leaders from each of the tribes were chosen and they included Joshua and Caleb. Manasseh and Ephraim were represented separately, but no one from the tribe of Levi was selected. They went into the land during a time of harvest and came back to the camp with all kinds of fruit. They agreed that it was a land which flowed with milk and honey. But their response was a: "yes, but, approach." Even though the Canaanites were nowhere near as powerful as the Egyptians, ten of the spies said the land was full of ferocious people and they used a term which might need some explaining.

They said it was a land which devoured its inhabitants. This meant at least two things. First of all, no one group was able to dominate all of Canaan and secondly, it was divided up into various groups who were perpetually at war with each other. We learn later that they did gang up to fight a common foe, so it would be unlikely that Israel could pick them off, one group at a time. Their combined military strength likely far out numbered Israel's forces. It was not usual for a smaller force to attack a larger, well defended adversary.

The people did not listen to Caleb and the spies further terrified the people by saying there were also giants in the land before whom the Jews would be like grasshoppers with no hope of overcoming these monsters. There are no monsters in your life which G-d cannot overcome. We should never allow the enemy to terrify us as we walk with YHVH.

The entire assembly, including the seventy elders who were spirit filled, lifted up their voices and cried out. They lamented the fact that they had not died in Egypt or in the wilderness. They wanted to name themselves a new leader and go back to the supposed safety of Egypt, which would mean a return to slavery. They even spoke of stoning Moses and Aaron and probably also Joshua and Caleb. Joshua said that they should not fear the Canaanites who would serve as fertilizer (poop) with no shade to cover them.

The glory of G-d appeared on the tent of meeting, likely with all the noise and lightening which Israel had seen and heard on the mountain. They likely retreated to see what YHVH would say. They probably hoped YHVH would lead them somewhere else easier to conquer.

This is the second time the people are in danger of being exterminated by YHVH for their disobedience and rebellion. They knew they would have to fight to take Canaan and they were chickening out. YHVH told Moses that He would annihilate this whinny bunch of cowards and from Moses (and Aaron and Joshua and Caleb) He would raise up a new nation that would be bigger and more powerful than the group of wimps he was currently leading.

Moses invokes the great mercy of G-d and the people are not to be destroyed. Instead, none of the cowards was going to be permitted to enter Canaan and all the fighting men from 20 years and up were indeed going to die in the wilderness, as they requested. They are to wander one year for every day the spies spent exploring Canaan. In Hebrew, forty years is a symbol for a painfully long period of time. This is how they will carry the weight of their iniquities with two further punishments.

They were to be deprived of YHVH's presence and would be consumed in the wilderness. They still would have followed as much of the festival cycle as they could without being able to go into the land. They also would have kept the sabbath, the dietary laws and performed sacrifices. Any further disobedience on their part would be fatal.

One thing they did not do, was to circumcise any boys born in the wilderness. There was still the group of men under the age of 20 who would have already been circumcised. When the next generation entered Canaan, it was this group who would help Moses circumcise the boys born in the wilderness.

The place where this ritual would be performed was later known as the hill of foreskins. Some of those who were circumcised would have been forty years old, but they had to become the covenant people of YHVH, before they could proceed to watch as YHVH conquered the land with as many terrible signs as were used to demolish Egypt.

When the people heard the wandering ultimatum, they were extremely dismayed and had a change of heart. It was not that they really wanted to go into the land, but it was a better alternative than dying in the wilderness, as they did laps around the mountain. They would still be fed manna and quail and there would always be adequate water for their flocks. There would still be a cloud by day and a fire by night. Their feet would also not swell and their clothes would not wear out.

They arm themselves and appear before Moses, who sees this new readiness to go into the land as another act of rebellion against YHVH. Moses refused to lead them and the ark stayed in the camp. Moses warned them to stand down, but they insisted on attacking Canaan. Without the protection and blessing of YHVH, the Canaanites cut them to pieces and chased them back all the way to Horma. In Hebrew, Horma means devoted to destruction or a broken rock. They were decimated but not destroyed.

Before dealing with several more attempts by the people to avoid going into a forty year wandering, YHVH gives some more instructions about sacrifices which they were to offer, once they entered the land. They should have taken comfort in the promise that their children would enter the land, even though they had forfeited their right to do so.

In the L-RD, there is no room for cowardice and betrayal. Our politically correct, corrupt world may try and get us to abandon some or all of our faith and obedience, but YHVH's agenda in His Word is the only agenda we should follow. Nothing more, nothing less.

Sermon: Things Could Have Been Better, But They Also Could Have Been Worse.

Passage: “*Mordecai answered Esther: do not imagine that you alone will escape from among the Jews, because you are in the house of the King. For if you remain silent, help and deliverance will come from elsewhere for the Jews. And who knows if it is not for such a time as this that you have come into the royalty.*”

I have recently been watching some historical films on Netflix and whenever anything about WW2 is on TV, I like to watch it too. I am very fascinated with both the causes which allowed this massive conflict to happen and with how the war was fought. There were millions of casualties on both sides and the amount of damage to the whole world's infrastructure has seldom been matched. Many billions of dollars were spent on all aspects of the war and it took even the victorious allies many decades to repay their war debts. It was only at the end of 2006, that Britain finished paying off the WW2 debt they owed to the Americans.

Things could have turned out very differently if Germany had been stopped before they could fully re-arm. Things could also have been much worse because Germany had a highly developed weapons program and were months away from coming up with a nuclear bomb. They even had built a missile which could have reached New York and they were planning to arm it with a nuclear warhead.

Towards the end of the war, Japan was prepared to defend their island to the last man and the Americans and other allies would have suffered millions more military casualties and they may have had to nearly annihilate the population of Japan for an invasion to succeed.

One thing I firmly believe, G-d only allows things to go so far, before He intervenes to slow the progress of sin and darkness that is always prowling around our planet. Just because He allows certain things to happen, does not make horrible atrocities a fulfillment of His will. What He permits is not the same as His will for all the nations and generations of mankind.

As a student of history, I often wish things had turned out better, but I realize that the control of G-d is a firm limitation He places on how far He allows things to go. He will not violate our free will, no matter how evil and foolish some people get. Come on, dude, a thousand wives, really? Before the catastrophe of 70 CE the Roman empire was within one or two generations of becoming Jewish and as a vital part of Judaism, the early church (Messianic Judaism) would have rapidly spread through a Jewish Roman Empire. A lot of the folly which the Gentile church came up with, may never have happened if they hadn't lost their Jewish brethren. But you do not have to be happy about how things turn out to have faith in YHVH.

Plagues, earthquakes (volcanic interruptions), famines and war would have less of a negative impact, if our world could relate to them from a position of faith. When the emperor Justinian was in the process of reconquering the territory of the former Western Roman Empire, a plague broke out among his troops and he was unable to finish the task. One of the reasons the Roman Empire fell was a result of poisonous cloud of gas released by a huge volcano in Iceland. The population of the empire was decimated and there were not enough of them left to fight off the barbarians, who were not the terrific fighters they are often portrayed to be.

Even in the case of some of the major personalities of the Bible in both Testaments, they got where they did because of good choices they made. Many others fell by the wayside because of bad choices they made. When Adam's son Seth began to call upon the name of YHVH, he established a line among the righteous core that took ten generations to finally dissolve. It was Abraham's father who received the call to go to Canaan, but he stopped part way and Abraham chose to have faithful obedience and finish the job. The brothers decision not to kill Joseph meant that YHVH was able to position him to save his people during the great famine that struck that part of the Ancient World. It was because of the intercession and intervention of Judah that Jacob agreed to come into Egypt.

While Moses the murderer was hiding out with Jethro, the priest of Midian, YHVH appeared to him and he listened, mostly. He lost the priesthood for his children when he declined YHVH's offer to heal his speech impediment. On several occasions he interceded for the rebellious, stubborn people of Israel and prevented YHVH from having to start over again with Moses (and perhaps Aaron, Joshua and Caleb). YHVH was fully prepared to do so, repeatedly.

G-d has always been faithful to His promises but is never limited in the people He will use to see them fulfilled. He is also not limited by the people who try and get in the way of His purposes. Samuel's mother was obedient to the oath she made to lend her son to the L-RD for his whole life. Samuel obeyed Eli and told him about the punishment which was to come. Saul was G-d's anointed king until he disobeyed beyond the point of no return.

If he had obeyed, then David might have been left peacefully to tend his sheep. Even if David had not responded to the divine call, there was still Jonathon in reserve and when David married Saul's daughter, she may have been one of the ancestors of the Messiah, if she had not despised the King, her husband. I heard about a flight student who was afraid he would flunk the test for his pilot's licence because he talked to himself. When he got his failing grade, the notes read: "student talks to himself. Student does not listen to himself".

Solomon was the wisest man who ever lived, but he did not listen to himself and allowed his wives to practice criminal idolatry and to convince him to participate with them. His adopted the practice of burning his children to Moloch and other unnamed kinds of criminal idolatry. Because of all of this, it means that the Messiah does not descend from Solomon's line, but from the line of Nathan, his younger brother, who apparently made better choices.

Daniel and the three Hebrew children chose to listen to G-d, rather than to obey the King and they were blessed because of the good choices they made. Going back a little, Ruth's good choices allowed her to become a major ancestor of the Messiah. When Esther interceded for her people, she saved the Jewish nation. If she had been unwilling, someone else would have. In the purposes of G-d, only those who walk in faithful obedience are indispensable.

In the New Testament, many of Messiah's early disciples abandoned Him when He said things which they didn't like. Many others did not hang around to listen to His explanations of the parables He used. Others only came to Him to be fed and abandoned Messiah when He said that He was the bread of Heaven. It is a grave misunderstanding for us to think that we are somehow eating the Messiah when we take the L-rd's Table. We are to believe the words of Everlasting Life which He spoke and allow His Spirit to give us life.

When ten lepers were healed, only one returned to give thanks. In the Parable of the ten virgins, only five had enough oil to kindle their lamps when the Bridegroom arrived.

Under pressure, the apostle Peter denied the Messiah three times, but he repented. Judas betrayed the Messiah once and did not repent. He took his own life instead of giving his life to the Messiah and being forgiven. Paul was one of the most violent enemies of the early Messianic community, but came to faith when the Messiah appeared to him and he was used to explain some of the things in the Bible which are not easily understood.

I am not someone who feels that we live in the best of all possible worlds and that things will always turn out for the best. Tribulation and suffering is sometimes the price we pay for walking with the Messiah and while He will not always deliver us when we suffer and are tempted, He will always provide a way of escape so we can bear it. He makes it so that we can defeat sin and not have sin always defeat us. YHVH will always be faithful and will uphold all the promises in His Word. Our job is to have faith in these promises and to walk in obedience as the salty light which refuses to abandon the bumpy straight and narrow path.

But innocent people will continue to suffer and thieves and murderers will continue to get away their crimes. In the past there have been great genocides and we may see even more in our lifetime. Even though I see modern Israel do great things and successfully defend itself, antisemitism is still on the rise globally, even though we have never done anything to deserve this intense hatred. Incredible lies are still being told about Jews and there are even many Gentile Christians who believe them. The world is full of spiritual confusion.

It is always our job to do good and to stand up to immorality and idolatry. We are required to speak up for the widows and the orphan and wholly give ourselves over to the practice of *Tikkun Olam* (the healing of the world).

Patti got me a 2022 world almanac and now I am full of useful statistics. When it comes to describing the religion each country of the world practices, there is now two new categories: agnostic and atheist. It saddens me that so many people in what used to be considered Christian Europe, now identify as agnostics. In some cases there are almost more agnostics in a country than there are believers.

I realize that some of my alarmist, conspiracy theorists feel that Islam is slowly taking over the world. But most Muslims who now live in our midst are immigrants and not converts. Some well meaning people are firmly convinced that all major news outlets are full of fake news and do not tell the truth. They believe what they want to in order to confirm their conspiracy suspicions. After some very intense scrutiny, we can now be sure that the last American election was not rigged and Mr. Biden did not steal the presidency from Donald Trump.

It is true that our media driven world is full of misinformation and horrible propaganda, but just because some of what we see and hear (and read) is not true, that doesn't mean that everything we see and hear (and read) is false. I am startled and angry that evolutionism has virtually taken over the world and that taking the life of a preborn baby means that deaths from abortion are nearly equivalent to the world's natural death rate (the death from all other causes rate). Immorality is escalating and horrible things are happening around the planet.

I am horrified by the death toll in the Ukraine, but there is also another statistic which also horrifies me. I went on line to find out how many school shootings have occurred in the US since 2000. One article went back further and said that 2,032 school shootings have occurred in the US since 1970. Gun violence in the US is the leading cause of death among children and teens. 321 people are shot in the US every day, and every day, 111 of them die.

One of the sad facts about this slaughter of innocent children through gun violence is that the US produces more guns than any other country. This is one of the reasons I am happy to live in Canada, but we are not completely immune to gun violence. One reason may be that while California has more people than Canada, our country is bigger than the continental US.

It is enough to make me want to hide in the mountains and become a hermit, but even if I did, a bear would probably get me. While we cannot escape the horrors of our modern world, we need to be comforted by at least three things and then I will bring the service to an end.

As bad as it gets, it could be worse. As he watched his people being slaughtered and carried away into captivity, the prophet Jeremiah said that it is because of the L-RD's mercy that all of us are not slaughtered. At various points in the sad history of our world, the L-RD has prevented total annihilation. And even though horrible things will continue to happen, YHVH will always set limits on how bad things can get until it is time for the end of the world, after all of His purposes have been fulfilled. We should be grateful things have not been worse. We should still do our best to prevent evil and work for peace, as we help victims of violence (and famine and disease). As long as we have breath, we should breathe and not give up.

Next, even though the number of wicked people in the world is on the rise, there are still a lot of good people doing their best to serve and protect, as they dedicate their lives to improving the quality of life in almost every area of human activity. Sometimes good things do happen to good people and there is still so much beauty in our darkening world. Nice people may soon become an endangered species, but we are not there yet. There is still a lot of good, both among believers and unbelievers and those who practice other religions.

Lastly, we know that the end is coming and that every human being who has ever lived will stand before our resurrected Messiah and be judged. We know that a new earth and a new Heavens will one day burst forth upon our sorry universe. We are just on a generational pilgrimage through this life and this old world ain't our home no more. We will either still be alive to see the end come, or we will rest in peace among the blessed dead without a care in the world. Truly, when we walk with the Messiah, we really do not have a care in the world.

Did you know that many human rights activists have been people of faith? Now, even such groups as Amnesty International that used to do such good work, attack both our faith and Israel. Promoting homosexuality is an attack on our faith. We need to seek the truth and speak the truth and to not participate in the sins of others. We need to shine and be salty as we build our house of faith, firmly on the rock and decorate our lives with the fruit of the Spirit.

The tragedy tearing apart the Ukraine will eventually be over and I pray that no one and none of the nations of the world get tired of helping the Ukraine. People now talk about the rise of Ukraine fatigue. We still need to reach out and be part of the healing solution, both in our own neighbourhoods and around the globe. If we can only do a little, YHVH will bless our little. If we can only tithe a little, 10% of a little is the same as 10% of a lot. The point is that we need to always be doing our part and not give into the darkness of sin or become paralyzed by the horrendous things that are happening in our world. We are called to walk without terror.

One day soon, we may be jailed for practising our faith and not for breaking Covid restrictions. Until then, I want to share my faith and let my light shine. Some want to live within the sound of church and chapel bell. I want to run a rescue shop within a yard of hell. Shabbat Shalom.