Parashat Shelach Lecha

This Shabbat we read and study the weekly Torah portion, Parashat Shelach Lecha. From our portion, we read about the Israelites and how they spent 40 years wandering in the desert.

If you stop and think about it, they were on the verge of entering into the Promised Land. The Israelites were close enough to send out spies and prepare to conquer the land. They thought that in just a few more days, they were finally going to be able to make it.

However, shortly after that, the sin of the spies occurred. In fact, it was the sin of that entire generation, the desert generation, which suddenly caused them to move away from the Promised Land for 40 years.

They were so close that they could have touched it, and at the same time they were years away. This distance depended on two parameters: the first one is God and His timing. The second parameter was us humans and our level of readiness.
The Sin of the 12 Spies

I would like to relate to the body of Messiah and to our level of readiness as believers to absorb the Jewish people into the local community and to faith in Yeshua as the Messiah. It's a bit of a heavy subject but nonetheless important.

Our parasha begins with sending the 12 spies into the Land of Israel, and later talks about their horrible mistake. The sin of the spies is one of the most severe sins of the people of Israel during their journey in the desert.

In the wake of this terrible sin, God punished the people of Israel, in that all of the men age 20 or older, who came out of Egypt, were to perish in the desert. Only the new generation would be allowed to enter and settle in the land.

What was the sin that was so terrible that it caused the people of Israel not to enter the Promised Land for 40 years? How do we avoid repeating the same mistake today?

The answer is spelled out in the Torah:

“...And they [the spies] spread among the Israelites a bad report about the land they had explored…” – Numbers 13:32a [NIV]

The general impression was that they said the enemies were too strong. They gave a bad report about the land.

Bringing a Bad Report

Before we close the story, I want to remind you that the spies acted exactly according to the orders they received from Moses before they left for the mission:

“...be said, ‘Go up through the Negev and on into the hill country. See what the land is like and whether the people who live there are strong or weak, few or many… What kind of towns do they live in? Are they unwalled or fortified?” – Numbers 13:17b,18,19b [NIV]
A spy’s job is to bring back the most accurate information possible. He is expected to focus on the difficulties, in order to be able to provide a solution for them in advance. The job of a spy is to give accurate information regarding the combat abilities of the enemy.

The sin was that the spies leaked the bad report out to the people, telling them that the land of Canaan is a land that devours its inhabitants. They instilled fear and panic in the people, and caused a rebellion and attempt to overthrow their government.

The people went along with this and actively rebelled. They sought to stone Caleb and Joshua, and rose up against Moses and Aaron.

At that moment, the glory of the Lord was seen in the opening to the Tent of Meeting, in front of all the people of Israel. The situation was saved at the last possible moment.

**How Do We Connect Between Yeshua and Israel?**

Here I believe that especially today, it is necessary to preserve the dignity of the state. It's not our job to bring a bad report about Israel. There are professional organizations, like BDS, that work hard to give Israel a bad reputation.

Our job is to point out the blessings and the good things that Israel has - and there is much to boast about. Our job is to declare that Israel is blessed, “A land flowing with milk and honey.”

If we return to the days of Moses, we will see a group of slaves who fear, or do not understand, their purpose. We see those who fear or do not understand the future and are unwilling to enter the Promised Land.

Therefore, God waited until the old generation was replaced. He waited for a new generation to inherit the Promised Land.

I think that the body of Christ does not understand its purpose. I do not think it is fear, but rather a lack of understanding. Our purpose is to make a connection between Yeshua and the people of Israel.
The question is, how do we do this? We believe that one day the people of Israel will be saved. How do we see this happening? What is our vision?

God Has Kept the Jewish People Alive

For nearly 2000 years, the Gentiles tried, on one hand, to destroy and get rid of us, and on the other hand, to “open” our eyes to the “truth.”

Let us begin with the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 CE. After that, in 1099, we suffered from the Crusades and the massacre of the Jews.

In 1348, Jews suffered persecution against the backdrop of the Great Plague. 1478 was the beginning of the Inquisition.

1492 was the expulsion of the Jews from Spain. In 1648, the massacre of Jews in Ukraine begins, along with the history of the pogroms in Europe, until the Holocaust in 1939.

This a brief summary to show that the Gentiles tried to get rid of and destroy us; however it did not work! Against the impossible, God kept the embers of the Jewish people burning.

Instead, we lit our Shabbat candles hidden in a closet, and we baked the Pesach matzos in the storeroom or in the cellar below the house.

Why Does Israel Reject the Truth?

On the other hand, the Gentiles also tried to show us what is good and beautiful. They tried to show us the beauty and love that Christianity has, the idea of being “born again” Christians.

Why do we, the people of Israel, refuse to see and accept the truth?

This is because, throughout history, every Jew who has come to faith in Yeshua has ceased to be part of the Jewish people. He has left the tradition, the customs, the nation. He has become something else - he lost his identity.

The biggest challenge comes the moment we find the true answer and solution. I emphasize that this is the true solution - not just a band-aid, but rather open heart surgery. When we find the solution to this problem - I believe that the people of Israel will be open to Yeshua.
The challenge is identity and its preservation; when our identity is to be preserved at all costs.

When we suffered during the Inquisition in Europe - those who kept the embers burning were those who risked their lives and their families to keep the tradition and identity at any price.

When the Jews kept their identity, it was with an emphasis on tradition. Like the separation between milk and meat, the lighting of the Shabbat candles - these commandments are not from the Torah, therefore the body of Messiah today does not see the importance of such commandments.

These homes in Europe, which had a sink for milk and a sink for meat, are the ones who kept their Jewish identity, and did not assimilate. They were not destroyed.

**Preserving the Jewish Identity**

When we develop strong Messianic Judaism, that is unaffected by the foreign winds that blow into the country, when it is clear to us that we must preserve our Jewish identity at all costs, then we will see the Promised Land.

Therefore, we must invest in developing the next generation. For the next generation is our future.

Our generation is the desert generation, the generation that came out of Egypt, the next generation must be the one who will enter and inherit the Promised Land.

This is assuming that we will be ready. If not, we will wait for another generation, and another generation, until we are ready to absorb and preserve our identity.

If we slip up, like many before us, God will set up others in our places whose job will be to find the solution to the question of identity and its preservation, until Yeshua returns.

We need to start with the congregation; it cannot look like a Hebrew-speaking foreign church. The way we pray, our worship, the literature, has to be local and authentic.

God entrusted Israel with His book. Therefore, it’s our duty to preserve it
and maintain its relevance from generation to generation. We need to understand that assimilation is not an option, and God will not allow the people of Israel to do so.

Our Jewish Identity in Messiah Yeshua

That’s what we do in our community, we preserve identity. Do we have all the answers? Far from it.

But here, however, the importance of investing in the youth in education, in enrichment, in familiarity with the scriptures, in strengthening their personal ability, and in the acquisition of identity, is revealed. Exactly the same can be said about investing in Messianic university students.

What does this mean for us? We are the first example. We must show, above all, that one can preserve the Jewish identity in an authentic way through Yeshua the Messiah.

I know that we briefly touched upon many important subjects that deserve more attention. Please feel free to write us, call, or even drop by with any questions you might have.

The Teachings of Messiah Yeshua in a Jewish Context

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