

# TORAHSCOPE: Shelach Lecha (Send On Your Behalf)

by Mark Huey posted 20 June, 2008 www.outreachisrael.net

Leviticus 13:1-15:41  
Joshua 2:1-24

## “Scriptural Equality”

“As for the assembly, there shall be one statute for you and for the alien who sojourns *with you*, a perpetual statute throughout your generations; as you are, so shall the alien be before the LORD. There is to be one law and one ordinance for you and for the alien who sojourns with you” (Numbers 15:15-16).

*Shelach Lecha* is best known for the account of the twelve spies who went into the Promised Land to scout out the opportunities for the Israelites to enter into the land of their inheritance. This classic example of how two spies, Joshua and Caleb, came back with the good report—versus the ten spies who reported negatively—is a critical part of Israel’s history and must be studied appropriately today. Great lessons on faith contrasted with the lack of faith have been written and discussed on this for many centuries. These recollections are foundational building blocks for books, articles, and sermons that inspired many in the Zionist movement to return to the Land of Israel. **For this, we must be very grateful!**

Now after over a half-century of existence, the modern-day State of Israel is a viable country that uniquely exists as a testimony to the veracity of the promises contained in the Holy Writ. We know that the Scriptures are replete with statements and prophecies that indicate that Israel would eventually be reconstituted as a fulfillment of the promises given to the Patriarchs. If you are interested in just a few, read some of the following verses: Deuteronomy 30:1-5; Isaiah 14:1, 34:16-17, 35:10, 65:9-10; Jeremiah 3:18, 16:14-15, 29:14, 30:2-3, 31:16-18, 50:19; Ezekiel 11:17, 20:41-42, 34:13-15, 36:8-12, 36:24-28, 38:8; Amos 9:14-15; Micah 4:6-8; Zephaniah 2:7; Zechariah 2:11-12, 8:7-8, 10:8-10. There are many others, but this sampling will show you that what the Holy One has promised will and has come to pass. Perhaps some of these very promises were used to inspire the sacrifice needed at times by many of the settlers who were instrumental, individually and collectively, in the return to Zion.

As you read and meditate upon how the Lord dealt differently with the twelve spies, another significantly discussed aspect of this portion comes to light. This is the critical decision that God made as He was considering destroying all of the Israelites and starting over with the offspring of Moses. Here again is another often taught passage that reveals not only the humble character of the teacher of Israel, but also a tremendous testimony to the declared character of the God of Israel and His love for His people, in spite of their faults:

“But now, I pray, let the power of the Lord be great, just as You have declared, ‘The LORD is slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, forgiving iniquity and transgression; but He will by no means clear *the guilty*, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth *generations*. Pardon, I pray, the iniquity of this people according to the greatness of Your lovingkindness, just as You also have forgiven this people, from Egypt even until now.’ So the LORD said, ‘I have pardoned *them* according to your word; but indeed, as I live, all the earth will be filled with the glory of the LORD’” (Numbers 14:17-21).

## Entering the Land

Finally, after judgment comes upon the Israelites for attempting to enter the Promised Land without the blessing and protection of the Lord, a section is devoted to describing what is expected of them when they do finally enter it:

“Now the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ‘Speak to the sons of Israel and say to them, “When you enter the land where you are to live, which I am giving you, then make an offering by fire to the LORD, a burnt offering or a sacrifice to fulfill a special vow, or as a freewill offering or

in your appointed times, to make a soothing aroma to the LORD, from the herd or from the flock” (Numbers 15:1-3).

The text goes on to elaborate the various procedures for offering grain, rams, and bulls for the various sacrifices that are required by the people of Israel. Then you come to some verses that especially stand out:

“All who are native shall do these things in this manner, in presenting an offering by fire, as a soothing aroma to the LORD. If an alien sojourns with you, or one who may be among you throughout your generations, and he *wishes to* make an offering by fire, as a soothing aroma to the LORD, just as you do so he shall do. *As for* the assembly, there shall be one statute for you and for the alien who sojourns *with you*, a perpetual statute throughout your generations; as you are, so shall the alien be before the LORD. There is to be one law and one ordinance for you and for the alien who sojourns with you” (Numbers 15:13-16).

As I read these verses regarding how the alien or stranger (Heb. *ger*, rGE) was to be treated among the Israelites, the two statements, “**just as you do so he shall do,**” and “**as you are, so shall the alien be before the LORD,**” really caught my attention. After all, in this day and age, as the return of Israel to the Promised Land has become more than mere statements or prophecies in the Holy Scriptures, there is much jockeying for position among those who claim to be the inheritors of the blessings of God.

## Modern-Day Believers and Their Relationship to Israel

This is a very complex and emotional issue among many people not only in the Land of Israel today, but also those on the outside looking in. To further complicate things, within the past thirty to forty years, the number of Jewish people who have come to believe that Yeshua is the Messiah has exploded. Today, as many of you are no doubt aware, there is a Messianic Jewish population that has a considerable following in the Diaspora, with many Messianic Jewish congregations in the United States and other English-speaking countries, and some in Latin America. Since I am most familiar with the American-based organizations, I will keep my thoughts focused on them.

Without trying to pick any theological bones, I was reminded of a controversy that surrounds the notion that many of these Messianic Jewish organizations are heavy laden with non-Jewish Believers who are seeking spiritual enrichment from their Hebraic Roots. From my own experience, having attended a Messianic Jewish congregation as we came into the Messianic movement, I recollected my thoughts about how differently we were treated as a family, because we were non-Jewish. I remembered that even though we felt some discrimination, meaning that we were not fully welcomed or ministered to because we were not Jewish, we still felt led to stay in the congregation because of all the spiritual growth we were experiencing. Even though we knew that there was something wrong with the attitude about different levels of membership, we still persevered in our fellowship. **After all, we did know how the Apostle Paul addressed this problem of equality among the saved in the assemblies of Galatia:**

“For all of you who were baptized into Messiah have clothed yourselves with Messiah. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Messiah Yeshua. And if you belong to Messiah, then you are Abraham's descendants, heirs according to promise” (Galatians 3:27-29).

Paul was very specific about the equality of all in the Messiah Yeshua. He extended it beyond the parameters of simply the alien or sojourner among the Israelites, but actually made slaves equal to free men. Most interestingly, Paul elevated women to the status of men as they all become one in the Messiah. On top of that, he declared that if we belong to the Messiah Yeshua, that we are then considered Abraham's offspring and heirs to the promises made unto him. **In modern parlance, quite an upgrade!**

## To Be or Not to Be?

Now many years later, when I focus on a Torah reading which indicates that, according to Moses, we are all supposed to do the same things regarding the instructions given by God, I am puzzled. Am I not reading the passage correctly? Is there some hidden meaning that I am not able to discern? As I continued my reading in Numbers 15, I see a complimentary statement being made about the unintentional sin and how to handle it:

“You shall have one law for him who does *anything* unintentionally, for him who is native among the sons of Israel and for the alien who sojourns among them” (Numbers 15:29).

Here, once again, the instructions are very straightforward. The native son of Israel and the alien or sojourner among them have **one Law** that holds them accountable. **So why do I ask, to those who read, study, and practice the Torah—and claim to have a relationship with the Messiah Yeshua—that they have such a difficult time with the sojourner in their midst?**

It appears from my reading that it is abundantly clear what the instructions have been from both Moses and the amplification from Paul. And yet I know the glares and comments of some discriminating Messianic Jews who believe or have been taught that non-Jewish Messianics are not required to follow the same statutes and regulations that they believe they are supposed to follow. Some have been taught that at the most, non-Jewish Believers in Yeshua can become “righteous Gentiles” by following the seven so-called Noahide Laws:

1. not to commit idolatry
2. not to commit blasphemy
3. not to commit murder
4. not to have forbidden sexual relations
5. not to commit theft
6. not to eat flesh cut from a living animal
7. to establish courts of justice to punish violators of the other six laws.

Rabbinical authorities claim that these seven laws are “suggested” in Genesis 9 after the Flood recedes. In fact, if you do your research, you will discover that post-Second Temple Judaism, who prior to the destruction of the Temple was very active in making proselytes, since then has not really sought to bring any Gentiles into their religion. There is no organized proselytizing today, and those who do convert are carefully observed until they have “proven” themselves as Jews. Is it possible that the Messianic Jewish movement has been influenced by these attitudes?

From my perspective, it certainly appears to be the case. But we should rejoice, because this problem is not one that is hidden, but rather very much out in the open for many to see, to discuss, and for the faithful, to pray about.

## All for One and One for All

From the reading of *Behar*, it does not appear that there was any dispute from the Ancient Israelites when the edict came down to treat aliens or strangers who joined to them with equality. In all respects, the grafted-in sojourners were considered equal, and had the identical requirements for following the Torah. In order to fully instill the equality issue in the minds of the Israelites, a dramatic event takes place as this portion begins to come to a close. Moses has just given a very emphatic command about how Israel is to contend with those who are guilty of intentional sin. Just prior to the intentional sin of picking up firewood on *Shabbat*, Moses has made it very clear that whether a sin was unintentional or intentional, the penalty was identical for the native and the proselyte:

“You shall have one law for him who does *anything* unintentionally, for him who is native among the sons of Israel and for the alien who sojourns among them. But the person who does *anything* defiantly, whether he is native or an alien, that one is blaspheming the LORD; and that person shall be cut off from among his people” (Numbers 15:29-30).

After the commands are given, a memorable example of executing judgment for disobedience is related. The unidentified man who is a part of Israel, whether a native or proselyte

(the text does not indicate), is found collecting firewood on *Shabbat*. This was a clear violation of the Fourth Commandment and the people of Israel sought a verdict from God—and they received one:

“Then the LORD said to Moses, ‘The man shall surely be put to death; all the congregation shall stone him with stones outside the camp.’ So all the congregation brought him outside the camp and stoned him to death with stones, just as the LORD had commanded Moses” (Numbers 15:35-36).

Here, the interesting thing to note is that the “entire assembly,” or *kol ha'edah* (hd<sup>na</sup>[eh'-IK]), was required to execute the judgment. This solidified the reality that all of those gathered were a part of this unique people called Israel.

**Now how does this apply today?**

First, I believe Messianic Jews should recognize that non-Jewish Believers in their midst have to live by the same requirements that God expects of them. Second, I believe that non-Jewish Believers, who have become apart of the Commonwealth of Israel (Ephesians 2:12), should recognize that the same set of laws apply to them. **This means that keeping the Torah is equally pertinent to all members of the Body of Messiah.**

We, modern-day recipients of the New Covenant, know that the requirements of the Torah are not a burden, but instead a delight. To know that you are following the commandments of God and pleasing your Heavenly Father is very encouraging. May the day soon come when we see modern-day Messianics from Jewish and non-Jewish backgrounds have a similar ability, as our desert wandering predecessors, to accept one another as equals in the entire assembly. **Perhaps then *kol Yisrael* will work together as *one* in the family of faith.**

## A Final Thought

Is it possible that the Holy One can use this very Torah portion to help inspire the long awaited reconciliation of all Israel, and equality among those who claim to worship the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob? We can pray to that end. After all, we know that much past attention has been devoted to the study of the twelve spies. The inspirational lives of Joshua and Caleb are examples of great faith. However, upon examination one discovers some very interesting truths regarding the two “faithful spies.” First, even a cursory study finds that Joshua was from the tribe of Ephraim. This is certainly not emphasized, but something that most never consider. Secondly, when researching the genealogy of Caleb, you uncover the fact that he was originally a Kenizzite who attached himself to the tribe of Judah:

“[E]xcept Caleb the son of Jephunneh the Kenizzite and Joshua the son of Nun, for they have followed the LORD fully” (Numbers 32:12).

One finds this very interesting, especially when, in this Torah portion, the Lord specifically clarifies for Moses the unique spirit that was upon Caleb and his promised inheritance of descendants for his faithfulness:

“But My servant Caleb, because he has had a different spirit and has followed Me fully, I will bring into the land which he entered, and his descendants shall take possession of it” (Numbers 14:24).

Caleb, the son of Jephunneh the Kenizzite, who was distinguished among the tribe of Judah as a leader and candidate to spy out the Promised Land, himself was not a native born son of Judah. And yet, he had the faith that represented the tribe of Judah for their future inheritance.

When you think about it, the fact that Joshua was from Ephraim and Caleb was not a blood-related son of Judah is very interesting considering where we are in the process of Israel's end-time restoration. No one should exhibit any pride about his heritage or lineage. Instead, as described in this portion, we should seek to have the humility of Moses as he was contemplating the destruction of an entire generation of Israelites. **In so doing, perhaps the recognition of equality will someday soon lead to unity among all of us today—as God gathers His people from all over the globe!**

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