Portion Shelach Numbers –Bamidbar (13.1-15.41)

After the Tent of Meeting with God is built and made holy, God told Moses that it was time to explore God's promised land of Canaan. So, Moses sends out twelve explorers, one from each tribe, and says, “See if the land is good or bad, if the people are strong or weak, few or many.”

After 40 days they came back with the bountiful fruit and said, “It is true. The land God promised is flowing with milk and honey, but the people are too strong and too many. There are the Amalekites and Hittites, Canaanites and others. And their cities are fortified with weapons. We will be killed if we try to settle there.”

Caleb, the explorer from the tribe of Judah, spoke up. “Don’t listen to them. We can go and settle this land.” Joshua from the tribe of Ephraim agreed but the other explorers insisted, “No we can’t. These people are giants and we are but grasshoppers.”

The entire community began to shout and weep and they railed against Moses and Aaron. “We would rather have died in Egypt than go to a promised land where we will be killed. Let us go back to Egypt.”

Moses and Aaron fell to the ground in shock and dismay and Caleb and Joshua, tore their clothes in grief. They shouted to the community “Don’t listen to them. The land we explored is truly flowing with milk and honey just as God promised. We must not rebel against God. God is with us! They do not have God's protection so we have no need to fear the people of the land.”

Suddenly the Hebrews were set to throw stones at them when the glory of God appeared. God said to Moses, “How long will these people test Me? After all My miracles they still have no faith in Me. I am ready to kill them all!”

Moses pleaded with God, “What will people say? Will they say that the God who made miracles and brought the Hebrews out of slavery was not powerful enough to bring them to the promised land? Let it be true God what you said before, ‘The Lord is slow to anger, abundant in kindness and forgiver of sins yet remembers the sins of the parents upon their children to the third and fourth generation.’ Please forgive the people once more.”

God answered, “I will forgive again but let Me warn you. Anyone who knows of My miracles and still rejects Me will not see this Promised Land. My servants Caleb and Joshua were loyal to me and they and their children can settle on the land. But the explorers who turned

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against Me will die in the wilderness. Only the explorer's children will enter the land and that will be after 40 years of wandering in the wilderness, one year for every day they explored. Then all the Hebrews shall know what it means to reject Me."

And so it was. All the explorers who spread lies about the promised land died suddenly before God. Only the two explorers who had faith in God, Joshua and Caleb, survived.

God said to Moses, "When you enter the land you must give offerings to the Lord and remember that the same rules apply for citizens and strangers. There is only one standard of fairness. If a person sins, then a personal offering must be made. If a community sins, leaders are to make offerings. Accidental sins will be forgiven but anyone, or any community, who rejects God will be cut off from the people with guilt. Remember too, in the promised land, to give a portion of your first kneading dough as a meal offering as gift to God."

After the Hebrews began their 40 years of wandering in the wilderness, they came upon a man gathering wood on the Sabbath day. When he was brought before Moses, Aaron and the community, God ordered the man to be killed. And he was.

God then said to Moses, "Tell the Hebrews to make fringes on the corners of their garments with a cord of sky-blue. Each thread is to remind you of God's commandments. These fringes shall remind you to remain holy to God, Me, your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt to be God to you."

Questions: 1) What reminds you to remain true to God? 2) Have you ever doubted God? How or when? 3) How can a person be cut off from the community with guilt? How does guilt affect you?

Illustration Ideas: The explorers...the promised land...the explorers saying that the people on the land were giants.... the people being mad at Moses and Aaron....Joshua and Caleb speaking up for God and the land ...Moses pleading with God to forgive the people again...fringes on a garment (tzitzis)

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