



Understanding the Parsha

B'midbar 13:1-14:10

We will Learn how to

- 1) interpret the main theme (subject) of a Parsha (weekly reading from the Torah),
- 2) make thematic connections to that Parsha (study the Scriptures related by a common theme [subject], line upon line and precept upon precept)
- 3) learn how to gain greater understanding of the Parsha we are looking at through its thematic connections to other portions of Scripture.

Spies or Tourists?

Most of us remember what happened in Parashat Shelach — the spies bring an evil report about the Promised Land, and because of their evil report, the generation that was taken out of Egypt cannot enter the Promised Land. We have been learning that when the Scriptures are studied thematically, a deeper understanding of the story is revealed. And, the Scriptures open up with deeper levels of understanding. This is the case in this week's lesson. We will attempt to apply thematic analysis to the first Parsha of this week's sidra (Torah Portion). Normally we try to find the overall theme of the Parsha. This week however, let's analyze the Parsha to understand the purpose of the twelve spies. Why were they sent? Were they on a military mission (the most common understanding) or is there more to the story?

As you study the Hebrew Scriptures it is very important that you get to know the language! Let's see how important it is to 1) know the language and 2) understand thematic analysis in order to properly interpret a passage.

Read Numbers 13:1-14:10. According to understanding of the day, the twelve men were sent as military spies to seek out information about the enemy. How many there were and what the land was like. Let's compare this story with another story thematically related to it.

Can you think of another story very closely resembling this one? Read Joshua 2:1-24.

Joshua sent two spies into J Jericho before attacking it.

That's right. This story is retold for us in Joshua 2:1-24. We know for a fact that the two men sent in Joshua 2 were military spies! Joshua was about to take the city of Jericho and sent two spies to check out the situation for military purposes. As you know, the reason for thematic analysis is to compare and contrast Scriptures that are related by similar themes to uncover more understanding. Let's get going.

Who Was Sent —Did you notice in our Parsha that the story never calls the men spies! It says many times that they spied out the land; but, they are never called spies. In contrast, Joshua 2:1 specifically calls the two men spies. The Artscroll Chumash translates this verse as, "Joshua son of Nun dispatched from Shittim two men spies, secretly saying..." This translation is more correct. If you know just a little Hebrew, you can look at the Hebrew wording in the Chumash and see that the text literally states, "two men spies." The Hebrew word for spies is meraglim, מרגלים.

What does the Torah tell us about the twelve men sent in our sidra versus the two sent in Joshua?

In our Sidra, the Torah gives their n names, what t tribes they are from, and tells us that they represent the n nation. In Joshua 2, we are told nothing concerning the identity of the two men sent. It is covered in S secrecy.

Let me ask you a question. Is it normal for the general public of a country to know the identity and mission of its military spies? Of course not. For example, in the U.S., the spies and their missions are totally covered in secrecy.

Could this be a clue that the twelve were NOT sent as military spies?

Notice how many spies were sent in Numbers 13 and Joshua 2. Which number of spies would be more consistent with a secret military spy mission and why?

Sending a S smaller number would be more true to a military spy mission to prevent detection.

Who knew about the sending of the spies in the two stories?

In the story in Numbers 13-14 M Moses and

a all of the congregation of Israel knew that the spies were being sent. In the account in Joshua 2, only

J Joshua knew the spies had been sent.

No one else was aware—especially not the nation.

Which mission was more like a real military spy operation?

J Joshua's mission was more like a real military operation.



Once again, we see that the mission of the spies send out by Joshua is more like a true military mission, whereas the mission of Moses' spies was not military in nature. These differences have to make us re-think the nature of the mission of the "spies" in the book of Numbers.

Which group of spies seemed to be operating in secret?

Only **J** _____'s spies act secretly once they are in their mission field!
s,unqsor

Nowhere in the story in Numbers 13-14 do we read of the twelve spies trying to hide from the people who live in the land. However, this is opposite to the behavior of the spies in Joshua's mission. Joshua 2:1 tells us that Joshua sent them secretly. Did you notice how much hiding Joshua's spies needed to do in order to avoid detection. Again, we see that the actions of Joshua's spies are more consistent with a military mission, and the actions of Moses' spies are not. In fact, considering that they brought a cluster of grapes so large that it needed to be carried on a pole between two men, I'd say they were probably out in the open.

Who did the spies report their findings to in the two stories?

Moses' spies reported their findings to the entire **n** _____! Joshua's spies secretly reported to **h** _____ alone.
uonju uip

Once again, we see a dramatic difference in behavior of the spies. Joshua's spies report ONLY to him! This is more consistent with a military mission. Moses' spies report their findings to the entire nation!

What was the purpose of the mission of the two groups of spies?

Joshua gives a simple military directive — go seek out information about the **e** _____, Jericho.
enemv

Moses asks them to report on the **p** _____ and the land.
ajdoed

While it is true that Moses' directives contain an element of military association (Numbers 13:17-20) concerning the strength of the people and their cities, did you notice how he kept asking particular questions about the land, which have nothing to do with military intelligence. He even asks them to bring some of the fruit back! What's that got to do with a military spy mission?

Putting It All Together

Just by comparing and contrasting two stories that are clearly thematically linked, we have seen that the evidence suggests that Moses did not send the "spies" out for military information. So why did he send them?

Throughout the story of Numbers 13, the Torah uses the Hebrew root נָחַךְ, nut to describe the mission of the "spies". In fact, it's mentioned twelve times. This word means to tour, scout, stroll or survey. According to Rav Elchanan Samet of Har Etzion Yeshiva, this word is not used a lot in the Torah. It is used in three other places besides our story in Numbers—Numbers 15:39, Deuteronomy 1:29-33 and Numbers 10:33.

So they departed from the mountain of the LORD on a journey of three days; and the ark of the covenant of the LORD went before them for the three days' journey, to search out a resting place for them (Numbers 10:33).

And you shall have the tassel, that you may look upon it and remember all the commandments of the LORD and



do them, and that you may not follow [seek] the harlotry to which your own heart and your own eyes are inclined... (Numbers 15:39)

29"Then I said to you, "Do not be terrified, or afraid of them. 30The LORD your God, who goes before you, He will fight for you, according to all He did for you in Egypt before your eyes, 31and in the wilderness where you saw how the LORD your God carried you, as a man carries his son, in all the way that you went until you came to this place.' 32Yet, for all that, you did not believe the LORD your God, 33who went in the way before you to search out a place for you to pitch your tents, to show you the way you should go, in the fire by night and in the cloud by day (Deuteronomy 1:29-32).

As you can see, the root, נָחַר, has nothing to do with spying. It has nothing to do with a secret and hidden operation used to gather military intelligence. Its purpose is one of seeking out, searching, and looking for in order to choose. The real meaning of Am Yisrael's objective was to tour the land, not spy it out. I know you're thinking, "but my Bible and the Chumash uses the word spy." Well, as I've stated before, the Hebrew root word typically associated with spying (as in Joshua 2) never occurs in any of the passages in Numbers. Therefore, the "spies" could not have been engaged in a purely military mission.

So why are they always referred to as spies? There are two reasons. First, as I mentioned earlier, part of their mission did have a military aspect — to see if the inhabitants and the cities were strong or not. People tend to focus on this aspect. But Moses' main questions concerned the Land. Why? Because, this is simply a fact-finding mission, not a spy mission. It was designed to encourage Am Yisrael to **"choose" the Land!** In other words, just as the root, נָחַר, has been consistently used in the sense of searching out in order to choose, so too, the spies were sent to search the Land— bring back evidence of its goodness— so that Am Yisrael would choose it and accept it as the gift it was intended to be. **Instead, they rejected it.**

The second reason has to do with Moses' re-telling of the story beginning in Deuteronomy 1:22.

And they departed and went up into the mountains, and came to the Valley of Eshcol, and *spied it out* (Deuteronomy 1:24; emphasis mine).

In this re-telling of the story, Moses does use the Hebrew verb taken from the same word as meraglim, מְרַגְלִים! So what's the problem? In order to understand this "discrepancy" and resolve it, you will need to cover some more info in the next section, Searching the Parsha (found in the adult study material). For now, let's be happy to understand that the spies were sent to examine the land Adonai was giving to them so that they could encourage the people to take the land. To their own demise, they rejected the land.

Can you find the words from this Parsha?

B	N	U	R	U	T	R	S	G	N	J	S
E	U	M	U	R	I	T	E	R	R	E	D
R	S	E	R	K	U	N	S	A	I	R	H
M	I	L	G	A	R	E	M	P	T	I	C
T	I	P	Y	E	F	E	S	I	E	C	A
T	N	O	V	N	R	I	E	S	R	H	L
A	H	E	T	A	U	H	S	O	J	O	E
C	H	P	B	Y	I	S	O	A	E	L	H
S	A	A	H	K	N	U	M	B	E	R	S



SHELACH
NUMBERS
MOSES
JOSHUA
SPIES
FRUIT
MERAGLIM
RUT
JERICHO
PEOPLE