

SUMMARY of RASHI (with OTHER COMMENTATORS on SELECTED VERSES : Nu13-01:33

- I. **MAIN SIN OF SPIES:** The main sin of the spies is slander consistent with the slander in stories preceding (*Miriam*) and following this chapter (*Korax*). The spies slandered Israel (*there is a high death rate*) and God (*we cannot go up against the nation because they are stronger than us*).
- II. **MOSES BEHAVIOR:** The midrash brings two opinions, both cited by Rashi, on Moses' behavior: (i) Moses was *allowed* to send them if he wanted to but it was a trap by God to allow the spies to mess up; Moses should not have sent. (ii) Moses was obligated to send them and acted properly. He had no reason to suspect the spies would slander.
- II. **NATIONS BEHAVIOR:** Both the nation and Moses properly asked of the spies to identify *how* best to conquer the land: which routes to take and which cities to conquer first. The pre-spying of a conquered territory is quite normal in the Bible and done by many people

Additionally, there are legal (halachic) novelty inferred from this text.

- V. **SLANDER LAWS:** The *Chafetz Chaim* infers from the narrative that it is biblically prohibited to slander either a person him/herself or their business products. (Inferred from the slander of the spies of Israel, God's product).
- V. **COMMUNAL SLANDER OBLIGATIONS:** Dt24-09 emphasizes *Perpetually remember what God did to Miriam on the road*. Besides remembering that Miriam was punished with slander, we must also remember that the entire nation did not journey for 7 days until she recovered showing honor for the slander laws. Thus, slander has both communal and person obligations.
- VI. **QUORUM (MINYAN):** The requirement that certain communal prayers require the presence of 10 adult Jewish men is inferred from the spy story which showed that the slander of 10 people could cause ruin to the entire nation. Hence the quorum obligation reminds us of the seriousness of slander. Interestingly, women did not accept the spy slander while men did, corresponding to the law that only adult males count for the required quorum as only the men had to be reminded of the danger of slander.

VERSE ID: *This issue covers several dozen Rashis including Rashis on Nu13.*

BIBLICAL TEXT: (Excerpts) *God commanded Moses...Send for your benefit righteous people to spy on Canaan that I am giving to the Jews....Moses did so. He requested the spies to start in the south and report on the inhabitants of the land (strong, weak as evidenced by their occupying fortified cities or not), the land itself (rich or thin), the population density, and any religious protections.The spies returned after 40 days, showed them the fruit of the land and pointed out that it was flowing with white wines and fruit juices. Kalev and Joshua said that the Jews could conquer the land while the other 10 spies said it was not possible because of they were stronger and also suggested that the death rate in Israel was high.*

RASHI RULE: Paragraphs, Meaning, Grammar

We now review the top 3 areas in the summary presented above.

I: MAIN SIN OF SPIES

This table shows that the biblical book of Numbers has *slander* as a theme (JBQ, 39(2),2011)

Episode	Relationship to Slander
Bamidbar*	The chapter emphasizes genealogies and counteracts the tendency, when one loses one's temper, to make derogatory remarks about a person's genealogy.
Naso	Husband accuses his wife of having an affair
Miriam	Miriam slandered Moses and is punished with leprosy.
Spies	The spies slander God and Israel; the Jews have their entry to Israel delayed 40 years
KoRaX	KoRaX slanders Moses and Aaron accusing them of taking leadership roles without authorization
Bilam	Bilam slanders the Jews; he advises Moav to send women to the Jews to entice them to sin which would anger their God.
Daughters of Tzelafchad	The book concludes with an example of non-slander, with good speech. Although Tzelafchad's daughters presented a feminist claim (women should be allowed to inherit) they asked properly
Mattos	War is declared on Moab who accepted slander and sent women to seduce the Jews

NOTES: *A bit more speculative than the rest of the table

I: MAIN SIN OF SPIES: Rashi, Nu13-02a, explains that the spies sin was their slander against both the land of Israel (*there is a high death rate*) and God (*we cannot go up against the nation because they are stronger than us*). This answers the Ramban's objection, "What did the spies do wrong if they were asked to report back?" Yes, they were asked to report back, but they added their value judgement that God couldn't deliver and exaggerated the death rate of the land.

II: MOSES' BEHAVIOR: Rashi brings two opinions: (i) Moses was only allowed to send spies and shouldn't have (**Nu13-02b, Nu13-03a**); (ii) Moses acted properly and had no reason to suspect the spies would misbehave (**Nu13-03a**).

To understand the source of the two opinions we must review some grammatical and dictionary meanings. First: There are 4 words for *people* in biblical Hebrew, *adam, ish, gever, enosh*. Using the **synonym** category in the **Meaning Pillar** of exegesis Rashi notes here and elsewhere that *ish* has a nuance of a *distinguished and righteous person*. Second, using the rule about **Reflexive pronouns** in the **Grammar Pillar**, we see that in 1-2 dozen places Rashi notes that the bible uses the reflexive pronoun *for you, yourself*, to indicate a personal benefit. The Appendix to II below presents many examples.

Generally, a command from God, even with the word *for your sake*, is not optional but obligatory as seen in God's command for Abraham to leave his homeland *for his benefit*; the command by God to Moses to make two tablets for the second receipt of the decalogue which was for *his benefit* (since he kept the shearings from which he became rich); or the command to

Aaron at his inauguration as High Priest to take a calf *for himself* (to atone for his participation in the Golden calf sin).

So, God’s command to Moses to send spies *for himself* seems to indicate an obligatory command from which Moses would benefit (he would find out the best route to conquer Israel and the easiest cities to conquer). This is an opinion brought by Rashi.

But Moses did not benefit at all from sending the spies. The spy incident was a tragedy. So, a second opinion also brought by Rashi is that the command *send spies for yourself* should be translated as *send spies if you wish*. According to this second opinion, the command to send spies was optional and as the Midrash says, “It was a trap set by God to allow the spies to fail.”

The first opinion that Moses was obligated and the spies were for his benefit is defended by Rashi. First, as Rashi says (**Nu13-03a**) the spies were distinguished people *at the time of sending*. Second a *Torah Shlaymah* brings a commentary on the calendar of events leading to the sending of the spies. This table uses the following notation:

2:2:20 means in the 2nd year after leaving Egypt, in the 2nd month, on the 20th day.

Date	Event	Biblical Source
Year 1	Golden calf; plague and forgiveness to people	Ex32; Dt11
2:1:1	Temple is inaugurated	Ex40-01; Lv07-01; Nu07-01;
2:1:1-12	Princes bring gifts, one a day	Nu07-10:11
2:1:14-21	Passover	
2:2:19	People rejoice a month after Temple was inaugurated	Nu10:11,12
2:2:20	Journey from building the temple	Nu10-11:12
2:2:23	Journeyed for 3 days before stopping	Nu10-33
2:3:21	A month punishment for the lusters of meat	Nu11-20
2:3:28	Miriam punished with leprosy for slandering Moses; Nation does not move till she recovers	Nu12-15:16
2:3:29	Spies are sent	Nu13-01

This table defends and supports the position that *Moses had every reason to believe, at the time he sent the spies, that the mission would be successful*. First, as already indicated, the spies were distinguished people and leaders. Second, as the table shows, the three tragic national sins of (i) the golden calf, (ii) the lusters of meat, and (iii) Miriam’s slander of Moses resulted in national punishment but also in full atonement and national repentance. Moreover, the entire nation stood in honor while Miriam recovered from the leprosy punishment for her slander, showing they

affirmed the values of the prohibition of slander. What an honor to the slander laws to have an entire nation stop all activity for a week!!

So, Moses had every reason to believe that *all was OK*, and the mission would be successful.

Echoes of these two opinions (Moses shouldn't have sent the spies vs. Moses had no choice but to send them, acted properly, and had every reason to believe all was OK) are seen throughout the Rashi comment. For example, **Nu13-16a** *Moses renamed Hosea, Joshua* is interpreted by Rashi grammatically, with the added *J* corresponding to the Hebrew *yud* indicating future tense: "May God save you from the advice of the spies."

This Rashi is according to the opinion that Moses should not have sent the spies because things turned out badly. However, although Rashi doesn't say so explicitly, we can *adjust* this Rashi in a straightforward manner to be consistent with the first opinion: That Moses acted properly and had no reason to suspect that things would go bad. We can interpret the added *J* corresponding to an added *Yud* indicating the future, as *May God continue to save you as you go on this perilous journey of spying in a foreign country.*

APPENDIX TO II:

SYNONYM RULE: Of the 4 words meaning people, *ish* and *anashim* refer to righteous people(Nu31-03b, Dt01-13b), distinguished (Nu13-03a), and God fearing (Ex17-09d).

REFLEXIVE PRONOUNS: The reflexive pronoun indicated in English by *for*, always indicates that a command or request is for personal benefit. (cf. **Nu10-02b** (the trumpets God commanded Moses to make were *for him*, for this personal benefit to treat him like a king); **Ex25-02b** (voluntary donations to the Temple were *for* the sake of God); **Ex18-27a** (Jethro's return to his homeland was *for* himself to create a personal society to God; **Gn06-14a** (Noah's construction of the ark was *for* himself so that his generation is aware of the flood and might repent); **Gn13-01a** (Abraham's command by God to leave his homeland was *for* himself, for his good, and enjoyment, so that he could found a family and have a good name); **Ex04-16a** (Aaron's required transmission of commands God gave Moses is *for* Moses sake or on Moses behalf); **Ex30-37a** (The *Ketoreth* was holy *for* the sake of God (it had to be intended for God)); **Ex34-01a, Ex34-01b** (The second tablets which Moses was ordered to make to received anew the 10 commandments was *for* his sake, since he had broken the first set, he could now fix it and create a second set; moreover, the shearings from the carving of the tablets would be *for* Moses and from them he became rich); **Lv09-02b** (The calf Aaron was ordered to offer at his inauguration for High Priest was *for* his benefit (to atone for the sin of the Golden calf); **Lv25-05g** (7th year produce although primarily for the poor is also *for* you, that is non-poor can benefit); Nu22-20a (God told Bilam, if these people's invitation is *for* your personal benefit, you may go with them); **Nu27-20b** (God told Moses to take *for* himself Joshua (since Moses already knew Joshua and choosing him as successor for Moses would be a personal benefit)); Dt04-08a (Gods command to the Jews to remember the decalogue was *for* their benefit since they would be known throughout the world as wise people); **Dt21-11a** (The statement that one could take an attractive woman in war for a wife was *for* personal lust of the soldiers (and would eventually lead to hatred of them); **Dt28-14a Dt28-15a** (Don't take *for* yourself false weights; do take *for* yourself good weights (these commands are for your benefits – if you act properly you will be rich and if you act improperly you will be poor);

III: THE NATIONS BEHAVIOR: The biblical narrative shows that originally, the nation never doubted that God could bring them into Israel and conquer it. Dt01-22 states that the nation initiated the request for the spies for purposes of finding how *best* to conquer the land: What

routes to take and which cities to conquer first. Moses liked the idea and after consulting with God sent the spies. The reflexive pronoun, *send for your benefit spies* could simply be interpreted *send spies according to your likes and dislikes prior to a military operation*.

Moses' commands were likewise proper. He requested the spies to report on Israel from the perspective of 4 dimensions: (i) the inhabitants, strong or weak as evidenced by whether they relied on city fortifications or not, (ii) the land, rich or thin (in terms of natural resources), (iii) population density, and (iv) religious structure if any (**Nu13-18a Nu13-18b Nu13-19a Nu13-19b, Nu13-20a**). He also ordered them to start their spying at the poorest point in Israel, the south (**Nu13-17a**).

Prior to completing this point, we briefly comment on why Rashi interpreted *does the land have a tree* to mean *is there a religious leader who provides shade and protection to the land*. Normally, of course, *tree* means *tree*. But almost all lands have trees (so why ask?). Also, the inquiry is in the singular: *is there a tree*.

Partially because of these difficulties, Rashi does not translate *tree* as *tree* but as a religious leader with protective spiritual capability. Rashi here uses the **Synecdoche method** of the **Meaning Pillar**, since a tree providing shade to the surrounding meadow is a good example (**synecdoche**) of a religious leader protecting the nation. The good spies also spoke about the nation's spiritual protection by either God or righteous people as *their shade*.

I think the best way to justify Rashi's use of the Synecdoche method is to recall that God explicitly told Abraham that the conquest of the land depends on the inhabitants completing their share of sin (Gn15-16). This would indeed justify Moses spying on the spiritual nature of the land.

Summary: Both the nation initially and Moses asked properly; they did not doubt God could conquer the land but wanted to answer the question of *how*, or the best way to conquer in terms of the 4 dimensions mentioned.

This point, of proper questioning, is also mentioned by the Ramban who points out that the sin of the spies could not have been the *act* of spying. In fact, pre-spying prior to conquering a land is very common in the Bible (Nu21-32 (Moses), Jo02-01 (Joshua), Jo07-02 (Joshua). Ju18 (conquest by Tribe of Dan). We have however answered the Ramban's objection, *is so what was their sin* above: The spies were asked to report back on the inhabitants, the land, the population density, and the religious structure. They were not asked to comment on God's ability to deliver and conquer the land for the Jewish people; it was this slander of God along with the slander of the land of Israel (as having a high death rate) that constituted their sin.