

PARASHAT SHELACH-LECHA

Numbers 13:1–15:41

Parashat Shelach-Lecha describes how the twelve spies, each representing a tribe of Israel, scout the Land of Israel. After forty days they return. Ten of them report that the land is fruitful, but its cities and countryside are filled with powerful warriors—giants. Two of the spies, Caleb and Joshua, disagree. They urge the people to conquer the land. Hearing the divided report, the people protest against Moses and Aaron, telling them, “Let us go back to Egypt.” God threatens to abandon the people for their disloyalty and to create a new people for Moses to lead. Moses pleads with God to pardon the people, pointing out that God’s reputation is at stake. He argues that, if the people are destroyed, it will appear that God freed them from Egypt to crush them in the desert. The people are told that, because of their lack of faith, they will die before entering the Land of Israel, and only after forty years of wandering in the desert will their children conquer the land. Offerings to be presented at the sanctuary are described, as is the treatment of the *ger*, or “stranger,” who resides among the Israelites. The Israelites are warned that the penalty for gathering wood on the Sabbath is death by stoning. They are commanded to attach a blue cord or thread to the fringes at the corners of their garments as a reminder of their responsibility to fulfill all the commandments of Torah.
