

JEWISH STUDY NETWORK

Parshat Shlach

Locusts and Ants

The Miraglim, spies, returned from their forty-day mission to gather intelligence regarding the Land of Israel and reported their famous disheartening words. Their goal was to spread slander against G-d and His Land and they caused the Jews to cry bitterly. The day was Tisha B'Av which would become a day of Jewish tragedy. Let us look at a famous question and find a new insight as to what was happening here.

Self-description

“...And we appeared to them as locust and so we were small in their eyes” (Numbers 13:33). The verse states explicitly that the Miraglim viewed themselves as locust insects, but Rashi brings down (based on Talmud Sotah 35a) that when they were seen by the giant inhabitants of the Land, they were called by a different name. They heard the people saying, “there are ants in the fields!” What is going on with the varied animals here, locusts and ants?

G-d's Land

I suggest the following resolution. The first Rashi in the entire Torah tells us that G-d began the Torah enumerating all of the details of His creation of the world in order to make known that everything belongs to Him! If anyone would complain and ask what right do the Jews have to possess Israel, the answer is already stated. Hashem created the entire world and He gives the lands to whom He sees fit!

The nations of the world saw the grandeur and might of Hashem since the time that He took His nation out of Egypt with great miracles. They feared Him and His Nation and they knew that they would soon be removed from the Land that was rightfully the property of the Jews. It was the spies that questioned Hashem's abilities, they did not believe that Hashem was capable of bringing them there! Thus, the nations realized the truth that the Jews would soon be taking their Land by Hashem's desire, but the Meraglim did not see themselves as rightful owners.



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Two Creatures

This is hinted by the two animals mentioned. Each perspective is represented by the insect that was used to describe them. The Talmud in Eruvin (100b) states that had the Torah not been given, one could have logically deduced the prohibition of stealing by observing the ant. Rashi explains that the ant will not touch any food that belongs to its friend! Parenthetically, it is precisely from this insect that King Solomon advised us to learn how to be productive and not lazy! One who does not steal and take shortcuts must work hard to earn an honest living!

The Talmud Shabbos (32b) states that as a punishment for stealing Hashem sends locust to destroy the crops! It is a simple measure-for-measure formula. If you steal from others, then Hashem will send the crop-stealing machines to pay you back! Thus, ants represent rightful and honest ownership and locusts represent theft!

Opposite Perspectives

The nations of the land described the Jews as ants, because they recognized that just as ants do not rob, so too the land is rightfully the Jewish inheritance and they knew that their time was almost up. The Miraglim on the other hand, questioned Hashem's abilities. They viewed their takeover as an illegal theft, accordingly, they termed themselves as the stealing locust. They didn't believe G-d had the power to bring them to the land; they did not believe that they had a right or any ability to take it. The sin of the spies was to look at themselves as thieves and to question Hashem's ability to bring His nation to the Promised Land.

Shabbat Shalom!

