

# HAFTARAH EXHORTATIONS: Haftarah Shelach Lecha

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Joshua 2:1-24

## “A Harlot’s Faith”

The thrust of this week’s Torah teaching, *Shelach Lecha* (Leviticus 13:1-15:41), deals primarily with the account of the twelve spies sent into the Promised Land to ascertain its fitness for occupation. When one reads the report of the Land flowing with milk and honey, and the abundance of huge grapes, pomegranates, and figs—not to mention the natural beauty ideal for grazing livestock and growing crops—it is difficult to believe that the majority report was so negative. Apparently, the presence of the different Canaanite city-states, with their natural size and fortifications, dissuaded the ten timid Israelite spies, as the thought of challenging these people was just too much to fathom. These ten spies did not have the faith to understand that the Lord of the Exodus was going to fight for them and with them, just as He had stated it to Moses:

“And the LORD said to Moses, ‘How long will this people spurn Me, and how long will they have no faith in Me despite all the signs that I have performed in their midst?’” (Numbers 14:11, NJPS).

Despite witnessing the defeat and humiliation of the Egyptians, and the provisions already being made for the desert sojourn, only Joshua and Caleb had the faith to take the Promised Land. The Lord tells Moses that Caleb, and then Joshua, had a different spirit that was going to allow them to eventually make it after their peers perished in the wilderness:

“‘But My servant Caleb, because he has had a different spirit and has followed Me fully, I will bring into the land which he entered, and his descendants shall take possession of it. Now the Amalekites and the Canaanites live in the valleys; turn tomorrow and set out to the wilderness by the way of the Red Sea.’ The LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying, ‘How long shall I bear with this evil congregation who are grumbling against Me? I have heard the complaints of the sons of Israel, which they are making against Me. Say to them, “As I live,” says the LORD, “just as you have spoken in My hearing, so I will surely do to you; your corpses will fall in this wilderness, even all your numbered men, according to your complete number from twenty years old and upward, who have grumbled against Me. Surely you shall not come into the land in which I swore to settle you, except Caleb the son of Jephunneh and Joshua the son of Nun. Your children, however, whom you said would become a prey—I will bring them in, and they will know the land which you have rejected. But as for you, your corpses will fall in this wilderness. Your sons shall be shepherds for forty years in the wilderness, and they will suffer *for* your unfaithfulness, until your corpses lie in the wilderness”’” (Numbers 14:24-33).

So with the history of the spies’ rejection of the Promised Land, and following a nearly forty years of wondering, our Haftarah selection turns to the Book of Joshua where the details of the invasion of Canaan are recorded. We are introduced to the harlot Rahab, who just happens to have a similar spirit of faith regarding the Holy One of Israel. Understand that as a resident of Jericho, one of the main points of entry into Canaan from the east, she was very knowledgeable about the reputation of the Israelites, their miraculous deliverance from Egypt, and some of their exploits afflicting other nations during their sojourn. When the two spies were sent into Jericho to determine its strength, they encountered Rahab, who confessed her knowledge and fear of their God:

“Then Joshua the son of Nun sent two men as spies secretly from Shittim, saying, ‘Go, view the land, especially Jericho.’ So they went and came into the house of a harlot whose name was Rahab, and lodged there. It was told the king of Jericho, saying, ‘Behold, men from the sons of Israel have come here tonight to search out the land.’ And the king of Jericho sent *word* to Rahab, saying, ‘Bring out the men who have come to you, who have entered your house, for they have come to search out all the land.’ But the woman had taken the two men and hidden them, and she said, ‘Yes, the men came to me, but I did not know where they were from. It came about when *it*

was time to shut the gate at dark, that the men went out; I do not know where the men went. Pursue them quickly, for you will overtake them.' But she had brought them up to the roof and hidden them in the stalks of flax which she had laid in order on the roof. So the men pursued them on the road to the Jordan to the fords; and as soon as those who were pursuing them had gone out, they shut the gate. Now before they lay down, she came up to them on the roof, and said to the men, 'I know that the LORD has given you the land, and that the terror of you has fallen on us, and that all the inhabitants of the land have melted away before you. For we have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red Sea before you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to the two kings of the Amorites who were beyond the Jordan, to Sihon and Og, whom you utterly destroyed. When we heard *it*, our hearts melted and no courage remained in any man any longer because of you; for the LORD your God, He is God in heaven above and on earth beneath. Now therefore, please swear to me by the LORD, since I have dealt kindly with you, that you also will deal kindly with my father's household, and give me a pledge of truth, and spare my father and my mother and my brothers and my sisters, with all who belong to them, and deliver our lives from death'" (Joshua 2:1-13).

After confessing that she was aware of the Lord's power, Rahab then—"by faith"—extracted a promise out of the two spies in order to save her household and relatives. A deal was struck with the two spies who were allowed to escape harm, and eventually return to make their report to Joshua. But Rahab was required to follow the instructions of the spies:

So the men said to her, 'Our life for yours if you do not tell this business of ours; and it shall come about when the LORD gives us the land that we will deal kindly and faithfully with you.' Then she let them down by a rope through the window, for her house was on the city wall, so that she was living on the wall. She said to them, 'Go to the hill country, so that the pursuers will not happen upon you, and hide yourselves there for three days until the pursuers return. Then afterward you may go on your way.' The men said to her, 'We *shall be* free from this oath to you which you have made us swear, unless, when we come into the land, you tie this cord of scarlet thread in the window through which you let us down, and gather to yourself into the house your father and your mother and your brothers and all your father's household. It shall come about that anyone who goes out of the doors of your house into the street, his blood *shall be* on his own head, and we *shall be* free; but anyone who is with you in the house, his blood *shall be* on our head if a hand is *laid* on him. But if you tell this business of ours, then we shall be free from the oath which you have made us swear.' She said, 'According to your words, so be it.' So she sent them away, and they departed; and she tied the scarlet cord in the window" (Joshua 2:14-21).

It is further recorded that upon the invasion of Jericho by the Israelites, that Rahab complied with the instructions to hang the red cord from her window and her relatives were spared death by the sword of the invading armies (Joshua 6:17, 22-25). What is intriguing is that Rahab is highly recognized for her faithful works. So much is this the case that two times in the Apostolic Writings, she is given a prominent mention for what her faith accomplished.

When James the Just explains how faith without works is dead, he refers to two notable people as his examples. First, he lists Abraham, considered to be the father of faith. But then, his second example is actually Rahab the harlot:

"Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, *being* by itself. But someone may *well* say, 'You have faith and I have works; show me your faith without the works, and I will show you my faith by my works.' You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder. But are you willing to recognize, you foolish fellow, that faith without works is useless? Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up Isaac his son on the altar? You see that faith was working with his works, and as a result of the works, faith was perfected; and the Scripture was fulfilled which says, 'AND ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS RECKONED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS' [Genesis 15:6], and he was called the friend of God. You see that a man is justified by works and not by faith alone. **In the same way, was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out by**

**another way?** For just as the body without *the* spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead” (James 2:17-26).

Additionally, the author of Hebrews notes Rahab the harlot, and her acts with the spies, as a commendable work of faith:

“By faith Rahab the harlot did not perish along with those who were disobedient, after she had welcomed the spies in peace” (Hebrews 11:31).

If you think about these accounts from Numbers and Joshua, and compare the faith of Rahab with the lack of faith of the generation of Israelites that were frightfully intimidated from securing the Promised Land—the contrast is quite extraordinary! This should give each of us today, no matter what our stature or position in life, to realize that God is most concerned about our faith. God cares about what we do with our belief in Him, and that we demonstrate *that such faith is real*—not just something hypothetical as a figment of our imagination. If a harlot’s faith is recognized and indeed memorialized in the ancient texts, we can rest assured that the Almighty God is taking note. As the Apostle Paul wrote those in Corinth, please remember to test and examine yourself:

“**Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith; examine yourselves!** Or do you not recognize this about yourselves, that Yeshua the Messiah is in you—unless indeed you fail the test? But I trust that you will realize that we ourselves do not fail the test” (2 Corinthians 13:5-6).

There is no doubt that Rahab the harlot, by the tangible evidence of her works, was “in the faith.” Can you say the same about your walk? Whatever you do, I urge you to not fail the test!

Until the restoration of all things...

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