

Haftarat Shelach שלח

Torah: Numbers 13:1–15:41

Haftarah: Joshua 2:1–24

Rahav's Courage

General Overview

This haftarah is the account of the story of Rahav. She was a Canaanite harlot who had a house that was situated on the wall of ancient Jericho. In preparation for the start of their conquest of the Promised Land, Joshua sent spies across the Jordan River to gather information about their enemies in Jericho, the first city that they would encounter in Canaan.

After the spies found their way to Rahav's house, the king of Jericho learned of their presence there. Courageously, Rahav hid the spies when the king's men came searching for them. Knowing that they were indebted to her, Rahav asked the spies for safety and clemency for herself and her family when the Israelites would come to conquer the city. They agreed and instructed her to place a scarlet cord outside of her window as a sign to the Israelites not to destroy the people in her house when they came in battle.

The haftarah concludes with a scene in the Israelite camp on the other side of the Jordan where the spies were relating the events about Rahav to their commander, Joshua.

Connection to the Parasha

As we mentioned earlier, this haftarah portion is the story about the spies that Joshua sent across the Jordan River in order to spy out the military situation in preparation for the Israelite attack. This is a direct correspondence to the Torah portion, which centers on the sending of the twelve spies by Moshe into the land of Canaan.

But whereas the report of the [spies sent by Moshe] with its fears and exaggeration, followed by the tragic consequences of unbelief, the [sending of spies by Joshua] with their inspiring declaration, "The Lord has delivered into our hands all the land," thrilled the people with the assurance of victory that awaited them.¹

Exposition

It is tempting to study this haftarah by comparing it with the corresponding Torah portion. In both cases we have an incident where spies were sent by the leaders of Israel to check out the Land of Canaan. Although the purposes were similar, the results were quite different.

But, we will resist that temptation and save it for another occasion. Instead, let's focus our attention on the main character of this story, Rahav. Although she

undoubtedly has many qualities that deserve our attention, the one on which we will focus is her courage. Therefore, here is how we will explore this passage:

Rahav — A Woman of Courage

- I. The Need for Courage
- II. The Display of Courage
- III. The Results of Courage

In this excerpt from *Briteinu*, we will focus on the third section of Haftarat *Shelach*, The Results of Courage.

III. The Results of Courage

We have seen how Rahav demonstrated courage in this story. She stood up to protect the lives of the some of the enemies of her people while facing a possible death sentence for doing so. She also gave up her allegiance to her people's government and became loyal to the God and the people of Israel. In the process, she risked being discovered when the king's men came looking for the spies, and she stood against the opposition face-to-face. Those things were not easy to do. Indeed, she was a courageous woman. Let us now look at some of the results of this woman's bravery.

A. The Lives of the Spies Were Spared

The spies made it back to the camp. They were able to report to Joshua all that happened to them, including the story of Rahav. These two spies were unlike the spies that checked out the Land previously under the direction of Moshe. These spies of Joshua were faithful men who, although witnessing some of their potential opposition, did not discourage the people of Israel from entering the land. It was, therefore, important that they survived their mission and return to report to their commander. Through her courage in protecting them, Rahav played an important role in the success of their mission.

B. Rahav's Life Was Spared

Because she was faithful to them, the spies remained faithful to her. Moreover, in addition to Rahav's life, the lives of all of her family members were spared. Thus, when they were attacking the city and destroying all that was in it, Joshua ordered the two spies to,

Go into the harlot's house and bring the woman and all she has out of there, as you have sworn to her. So the young men who were spies went in and brought out Rahav and her father and her mother and her brothers and all she had; they also brought out all her relatives, and placed them outside the camp of Israel (6:22–23).

C. The Children of Israel Were Encouraged

Another result of Rahav's courage was that by siding with the spies, she was able to communicate valuable strategic information to the Israelites. Upon

returning and filing their report to Joshua, the spies were able to tell their commander the news that the fame and fear of Israel had spread far and wide into the land of Canaan. This was important for the Israelites to know. They had the strategic advantage of intimidation on their side. It also had a great effect on the leadership of Israel.

Thus, we find them confidently exclaiming to Joshua,

Surely the Lord has given all the Land into our hands, and all the inhabitants of the Land, moreover, have melted away before us (2:24).

The spies and the people “learned two very important facts: God had been faithful to His promise, and the inhabitants of the land were totally demoralized.”²

D. A Living Example of Faith

Rahav was rewarded for these actions in ways that even she could never envision. She is favourably mentioned in the Brit Hadasha twice for her faith. The first mention of her is in this regard is in the Book of Hebrews. Here we are told,

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

Notice that there is no mention of her “lying.” Perhaps the writer of this book merely was impressed to speak of her strong and obedient action. Her faith in God is set up as an example for all to emulate.

The second time her name is mentioned is in James 2:25. Here we are told that,

In the same way was not Rahav the harlot also justified by works, when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way?

In the Hebrews passage she is listed as an example of a person who trusted God. Here in James she is hailed as an example of someone who had the right kind of faith — the kind of faith that always results in works.

Some people say they have faith. But only those who have true biblical faith are those whose lives demonstrate that faith by what they do. It is not the works that save them. The works are an outward sign that there is a true living and saving faith abiding in the person.

E. The Ancestor of Yeshua

Finally, Rahav was rewarded for her courage in yet another way. God granted that she be counted among the ancestors of Yeshua. In Matthew 1:4–6 we have one of the genealogies of Yeshua. Here we read,

and to Ram was born Amminadab; and to Amminadab. Nahshon; and to Nahshon, Salmon; and to Salmon was born Boaz by Rahav; and to Boaz was born Obed by Ruth; and to Obed. Jesse; and to Jesse was born David the king.

To be sure, we do not know for certain that the Rahav mentioned in this genealogy is the same Rahav mentioned in our haftarah. For example, Jewish tradition says that the Rahav of Joshua chapter 2 married Joshua.³ Yet, most evangelical scholars agree that it is the same Rahav. The time period of the

Rahav in the genealogy is the same one that is required for the Rahav of Joshua chapter two. Moreover, it can be argued that one of the reasons for the whole story to begin with is to introduce this Rahav to us because she played a role in the ancestry of Yeshua.

F. An Example of God's Impartiality

Finally. Rahav's courage in accepting the God of Israel and walking away from the gods of her fathers, and her own personal history, provide us with a wonderful example of God's concern for the nations besides Israel.

Richard Hess provides us with a great insight with this regard. He writes:

If Joshua [who was the focus of chapter one] represents the Israelite male who finds guidance and success through faith in the Lord God, does Rahav represent his counterpart, the Canaanite female who also finds guidance and success through faith in the Lord God? In one of the most nationalistic books in the Hebrew Bible, does it not serve the purposes of the promise to Abraham that "all peoples of the earth will be blessed through you" (Gen. 12:3) to place side by side with the choice of a military leader and his initial preparations for battle, the story of a foreign woman who believed and was saved without arms or bloodshed?⁴

Indeed, in Rahav we see that God has no partiality. He is more than willing to save male and female, Jew or gentile, slave or free — Indeed, anyone who comes to Him will never be cast out. His salvation is for all who will put their trust in His Son.

¹ J. H. Hertz, *Pentateuch and Haftarahs*, p. 635.

² Donald H. Madvig, "Joshua," *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* ("EBC"), vol. 3, 264.

³ A. J. Rosenberg, *The Book of Joshua*, p. 8.

⁴ Richard S. Hess, *Joshua* (TOTC), 96–97.