



Shelach: Joshua 2:1-24

After Moses' death, Joshua is confirmed as his successor¹, and immediately prepares to conquer Canaan. The Haftarah recounts his first act: covertly sending two spies² to scout out the Israelites' initial conquest, the walled city of Jericho.

The spies enter the residence of Rahab, a righteous gentile, who risks her life to save them, with subterfuge, from Jericho's king. She informs them that Canaan's residents know that God dried the Reed Sea during the Exodus forty years earlier and that the Israelites recently defeated neighboring powerful kings, Sichon and Og. Echoing the Song of the Sea (Ex. 15:15-16), she describes the Canaanites' terror at these events and their understanding that God is giving their land to the Israelites. Rahab requests that she and her extended family be spared from the oncoming slaughter. After specifying what her family must do to be saved, the spies agree to the vow. Rahab instructs the spies how to avoid capture by Jericho's king's men.³ The Haftarah concludes with the spies' resulting safe return to Joshua, to whom they privately transmit Rahab's reports. Unlike the twelve spies' public mission described in the Parashah, the two spies' covert mission was a complete success.

Haftarah Breakdown

Verse 1: Preparing to conquer the Land, Joshua covertly dispatches two spies from the Israelites' encampment in Shittim to Jericho. They enter Rahab's residence in Jericho's exterior wall.

Joshua 2:1	יהושע ב:א
Joshua the son of Nun sent two men from Shittim to spy secretly, saying, "Go see the land and Jericho." They went, came to the house of an innkeeper [or: harlot ⁴] whose name was Rahab, and reclined [to sleep] there.	וַיִּשְׁלַח יְהוֹשֻׁעַ בְּנֵי־נֹון מִן־הַשְּׂטִים שְׁנַיִם־אֲנָשִׁים מְרַגְלִים חָרָשׁ לְאֹמֶר לְכוּ רְאוּ אֶת־הָאָרֶץ וְאֶת־יְרִיחוֹ וְיַלְכוּ וְיָבֹאוּ בֵּית־אִשָּׁה זֹנָה וְשָׁמָּה רָחַב וַיִּשְׁכְּבוּ־שָׁמָּה:

Verses 2-7: Jericho's king hears that the spies have come. He orders Rahab to hand over her guests. Feigning ignorance, she hides them on her roof, tells the king they fled the city gates at dusk, and suggests dispatching men to pursue them. Thinking the spies are fleeing towards their camp, the men pursue them eastward.

Joshua 2:4	יהושע ב:ד
The woman took the two men and hid them. She said [to the king], "Indeed, the men came to me, but I do not know where they're from."	וַתִּקַּח הָאִשָּׁה אֶת־שְׁנֵי הָאֲנָשִׁים וַתַּצְפֶּנּוּ וַתֹּאמֶר וַיָּבֹאוּ אֵלַי הָאֲנָשִׁים וְלֹא יָדַעְתִּי מֵאֵין הֵמָּה:

Verses 8-11: Rahab tells the spies that Canaan's residents know of the miracles and victories that the Creator has granted the Israelites. They are terrified of the Israelites and know God is giving them their land.

Joshua 2:11	יהושע ב:יא
[When] we heard [these things], our hearts melted; courage no longer arose in any man on your account- for the Lord your God, He is God in heaven above, and on the earth beneath.	וּבְשָׁמְעוֹ יִימָס לְבַבְנוּ וְלֹא־קָמָה עוֹד רוּחַ בְּאִישׁ מִפְּנֵיכֶם כִּי ה' אֱלֹהֵיכֶם הוּא אֱלֹהִים בַּשָּׁמַיִם מִמַּעַל וְעַל־הָאָרֶץ מִתַּחַת:

¹ Recounted in the Haftarah of Simchat Torah.

² Bamidbar Rabbah 16:1 identifies them as Caleb and Phineas.

³ During Jericho's downfall, the spies indeed spare Rahab and her family, who then live among the Israelites.

⁴ The Hebrew word, זונה, bears both translations.

Verses 12-14: In return for her kindness to the spies, Rahab makes them swear that the Israelites will spare her and her father's family⁵ during the conquest. They agree on the condition that she never reveal their visit.

Joshua 2:14	יהושע ב:י"ד
[The men] said to her, "Our life for yours [and your families', even unto] death- if you [all] do not tell [anyone] our promise. It shall [then] be, when the Lord gives us the Land, that we will act with you in kindness and truth."	וַיֹּאמְרוּ לָהּ הָאֲנָשִׁים נַפְשֵׁנוּ תַחְתִּיכֶם לְמוֹת אָם לֹא תִגִּידוּ אֶת־דְּבָרֵנוּ זֶה וְהָיָה בְּתַת־ה' לָנוּ אֶת־הָאָרֶץ וְעָשִׂינוּ עִמָּךְ תְּסֻד וְאִמְתּ:

Verses 15-21: Rahab lowers the spies outside the city wall and tells them to hide in mountains to Jericho's west for three days. They clarify their oath, stating that she must mark her window with a scarlet thread, and that the Israelites will save only her family members in her house. She readily agrees and immediately hangs the thread.

Joshua 2:18	יהושע ב:י"ח
[You will not be saved unless,] when we come into the land, you shall bind this cord of scarlet thread in the window you lowered us from. You must gather your father, mother, brothers, and all your father's household, unto you into [your] house.	הִנֵּה אֲנַחְנוּ בָּאִים בְּאָרֶץ אֶת־תַּקְוֹת חוּטֵי הַשָּׁנִי הִנֵּה תִקְשְׂרִי בַחֲלוֹן אֲשֶׁר הוֹרַדְתֵּנוּ בּוֹ וְאֶת־אָבִיךָ וְאֶת־אִמְךָ וְאֶת־אֲחִיךָ וְאֶת־כָּל־בֵּית אָבִיךָ תֹאסְפֵי אֵלַיךָ הַבְּיָתָה:

Verses 22-24: After following Rahab's advice, the spies return. They tell Joshua what happened to them, that Canaan's inhabitants are terrified of the Israelites, and that God will surely grant the Israelites the Land.

Joshua 2:24	יהושע ב:כ"ד
They said to Joshua: "For the Lord has delivered the entire land into our hands. Moreover, the land's inhabitants have melted away before us."	וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֶל־יְהוֹשֻׁעַ כִּי־נָתַן ה' בְּיָדֵנוּ אֶת־כָּל־הָאָרֶץ וְגַם־נִמְגְּלוּ כָל־יֹשְׁבֵי הָאָרֶץ מִפְּנֵינוּ:

Connection

According to the Talmud, Rahab was one of history's most beautiful women, a harlot from her youth who inspired irresistible lust in men. After encountering the spies at the age of 50, she converted powerfully to God and **married Joshua**. Despite her age, the Talmud asserts that an **illustrious group of descendants came from their marriage**.

Megillah 14b	מגילה י"ד עמוד ב
Eight prophets who were also priests descended from Rahab the harlot. They are: 1) Neriah; 2) [his son,] Baruch; 3) Seraiah; 4) Mahseiah; 5) Jeremiah; 6) [his father,] Hilkiyah; 7) [Jeremiah's cousin,] Hanamel; 8) [and Hanamel's father,] Shallum. Rabbi Yehuda says: "Huldah the prophetess was also a descendant of Rahab the harlot." [Regarding Huldah's husband, 2 Kings 22:14] states, "...the son of Tikvah", and [regarding Rahab's escape from Jericho, Joshua 2:18] states, "This cord of [tikvat] scarlet thread."	שְׁמוֹנֵה נְבִיאִים וְהֵם כֹּהֲנִים יֵצְאוּ מִרַחֵב הַזִּזְוֹנָה וְאֵלוּ הֵן נְרִיָּה בְרוּךְ וְיִשְׂרָיָה מַחְסִיָּה יְרֵמְיָה חֶלְקִיָּה חַנְמָאֵל וְשְׁלוּם רַבִּי יְהוּדָה אוֹמֵר אַף חוּלְדָּה הַנְּבִיאָה מִבְּנֵי בְנֵיהָ שֶׁל רַחֵב הַזִּזְוֹנָה הִיְתָה כְּתִיב הִכָּא כֹּן תִּקְוָה וְכְתִיב הֵתָם אֶת תַּקְוֹת חוּטֵי הַשָּׁנִי

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⁵ Rahab mentions no husband or children of her own.