**PARASHAT HASHAVUA**

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**PARASHAT SHELACH**

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Contribution by Dr. James Cleeman

in honor of Mr. Aryeh Fund,

distinguished alumnus of Yeshivat Har Etzion

and outstanding Ba'al Chesed.

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**The *Parasha* and its *Haftara*:**

**Those Who Scouted the Land vs. the Spies in Yericho (*Yehoshua* 2)**

**Rav Elchanan Samet**

**I. Universally Accepted *Haftara***

 The *haftara* for *Parashat Shelach*, according to all known rites, is from *Yehoshua* 2:1: "And Yehoshua the son of Nun sent out of Shittim two spies secretly."[[1]](#footnote-1)

The beginning of *Parashat Shelach* marks a new *seder* of public Torah reading, even according to the ancient Torah reading cycle of *Eretz Yisrael*,[[2]](#footnote-2) and even according to the rite of *Eretz Yisrael*, the *haftara* of *Seder Shelakh Lekha* is the story of the spies sent by Yehoshua.[[3]](#footnote-3) This is one of the rare cases in which the *haftara* that was read in *Eretz Yisrael* and the *haftara* according to the Torah reading cycle of Babylonia, which we follow today, is one and the same.[[4]](#footnote-4)

This uniform practice concerning the *haftara* reading is certainly the result of the apparent similarity between the story of the spies in our *parasha* and the story of the spies sent by Yehoshua to Yericho.[[5]](#footnote-5) Those who instituted the *haftara* were certainly aware of the many differences between the two stories; indeed, it stands to reason that they instituted this *haftara* also, and perhaps primarily, because of these differences, as we shall see below.

The Ramban in his commentary to our *parasha* (13:2, s.v. *shelach lekha anashim*), in his elaboration on the appropriate military objective of sending out spies in preparation for the conquest of the land, mentions the spies sent by Yehoshua:

This is an appropriate policy for all conquerors, and this is what Moshe himself did, as is stated: "And Moshe sent to spy out Ya'ezer" (*Bamidbar* 21:32**). And similarly Yehoshua the son of Nun: "twelve spies."** For Scripture does not rely on miracles. And [God] said to him: "Send you men, that they may scout out the land of Canaan" (*Bamidbar* 13:2). And they will become familiar with it, and tell them, and based on what they say they will plan the conquest.[[6]](#footnote-6)

In fact, however, comparing the story in our *parasha* with the story of the spies sent by Yehoshua does not strengthen the impression that the scouts in our *parasha* were sent for military purposes. On the contrary, it indicates that the purpose of sending spies in our *parasha* was entirely different.[[7]](#footnote-7)

**II. Two Different Missions for Completely Different Purposes**

The first set of differences stands out already when we compare the beginnings of the two stories, which iterate the people to whom the mission is assigned in each of the stories and the definition of their mission. We will list the differences in the order of their appearances in the two stories:

1. **God's Command vs. Yehoshua's Initiative**

 The first and most prominent difference: In our *parasha*,**God commands Moshe:** "Send you men," whereas in the *haftara* it is stated: "And Yehoshua the son of Nun sent out of Shittim two spies secretly," and it is clear that this action was undertaken at Yehoshua's initiative and without any Divine command.

2. **Twelve Tribal Princes vs. Two Unknown People**

In our *parasha*,God commands Moshe to send twelve people,"of every tribe of their fathers shall you send a man, everyone a prince among them" (13:2), and this is precisely what Moshe does: "And Moshe sent them… according to the commandment of the Lord; all of them men who here heads of the children of Israel" (13:3). In the continuation, Scripture spells out the names and tribal affiliation of each of the twelve (13:4-16).

 It is different in the case of Yehoshua's mission. He sends only two people, and Scripture makes no mention of their names or tribal affiliation; nor is anything said about their rank in Israel. This silence indicates that they were unknown figures, and it stands to reason that they were chosen for the task based on their qualifications for the difficult and dangerous mission assigned to them.

3. **"Scouts" (*Tarim*) vs. "Spies" (*Meraglim*)**

The most fundamental difference between the two stories lies in the definition of the mission imposed on the people in each of the two cases, which also creates a different terminology in each story.

The purpose of the mission in our *parasha* is:

2: … that they may scout out [*ve-yaturu*]the land of Canaan, which I give to the children of Israel.

17: And Moshe sent them to scout out [*la-tur*]the land of Canaan.

In accordance with this definition of their role, the root *t-u-r*, which appears twelve times over the course of the story, serves as a guide word. The people are called "those that scouted out [*ha-tarim*] the land" (14:6). **The usual roots found in Scriptural stories about spying** – *r-g*-*l*, *ch-f-r*, *ch-k-r* – **do not appear at all in our *parasha*.**

In the book of *Yehoshua,* on the other hand,we read: "And Yehoshua the son of Nun sent out of Shittim two **spies [*meraglim*]secretly"** (2:8),[[8]](#footnote-8) and the people of Yericho and their king describe Yehoshua's agents as having come "to search out [*la-chefor*] the land" (2:2, 3).

This is not just a linguistic difference, but rather an essential one: "To spy" or "to search out" a city or a land means to reveal its secrets. In metaphoric terms: "You are spies; to see the nakedness of the land you are come" (*Bereishit* 42:9). This mission is always a military one, and it precedes a military action or conquest. For this reason, Yehoshua does not have to expand on his instructions when he casts the mission on the two "secret spies." It suffices for him to say: "Go view the land and Yericho" (*Yehoshua* 2:1).[[9]](#footnote-9) The spies, who hide their true identity and thereby act "secretly," infiltrate the city under some pretext, and their goal is well-understood by the people of Yericho who exposed them: "They have come here… **to search out the land"** – to reveal what is hidden below the city, usually secret tunnels that enable access into the city. This revelation of "the nakedness of the city," which is usually hidden, might allow the enemy to enter they city by surprise and easily conquer it without a prolonged siege.[[10]](#footnote-10)

The mission assigned to the twelve tribal princes in our *parasha* is altogether different. They are sent to scout out **the entire** land of Canaan and to answer a series of questions presented to them by Moshe. The purpose of these questions is to receive from the scouts an accurate description of the land in two ways: First, by way of a description of "the people that dwell therein" – the land is settled, and one can learn about the nature of the land and its landscapes from a description of the people and the nature of their settlement in it. Second, by way of a description of the land itself, its feature and its appearance (even in unsettled areas). To this end Moshe commands them to bring back with them of the fruit of the land. None of Moshe's questions have a military-operational objective.[[11]](#footnote-11)

In accordance with the non-military purpose of those who were sent to scout out the land, their activity is not carried out "secretly." They "scout out" the land back and forth and out in the open for forty days, and no one appears to disturb them on their way. Twelve distinguished people cannot serve as spies. This is an overly large and clumsy group that lacks the flexibility and perhaps also the necessary qualifications to serve as "secret spies." But since these people did not come "to search out" the land and they present no military threat, they can fulfill their mission overtly and unhampered, over an extended period of time and across vast areas.

What, then, was the purpose of sending the tribal princes "to scout out the land"? If there was no military objective – preparing for war and conquest of the land – what was the goal of the mission?

The goal is defined in the very word that characterizes our story as a guide word: "That they may scout out [*ve-yaturu*] the land of Canaan, which I give to the children of Israel." *La-tur* means "to select, to locate the desired object," and in our context – to traverse the land in order to choose it.[[12]](#footnote-12)

Here the question may be raised: Surely it was God who chose this land, and it was not now that He chose it, but rather long ago, and He entered into a covenant with the patriarchs to give it to their descendants!

This is all true, and God is about to keep His promise and give the land to the people of Israel. **They,** however, are not familiar with the land, and God wants the choosing of the land to come from Israel as well. Therefore, when they reach the borders of Israel, **God commands** Moshe with great solemnity to send twelve distinguished representatives of all the tribes of Israel, instructing that they should traverse the land and see that it is very good and return to the whole people and describe to them what they saw. Thus, Israel will "choose" the land by way of their representatives and join with the Divine selection with joy and desire.

This is the way the Ramban explains the matter (at the end of his main explanation of our *parasha*, according to which the mission had a military objective):

God commanded "that they may scout out the land of Canaan." This bears the sense of selection, like those who come to buy something, as in: "beside that which the traffickers [*ha-tarim*] and merchants brought" (II *Divrei Ha-yamim* 9:14). And similarly: "Into a land that I had sought out [*tarti*] for them" (*Yechezkel* 20:6). And similarly: "to seek out [*la-tur*] a resting place for them" (*Bamidbar* 10:33).[[13]](#footnote-13) And therefore Moshe commanded them to specify "whether it is good or bad… whether it is fat or lean." It was all to gladden them, because it is "the beauty of all lands" (*Yechezkel* 20:6), **so that they should enter it with great desire.**

All of the aforementioned differences between the story in our *parasha* and the story in the book of *Yehoshua* are well-explained by the very different goals of the two missions. It turns out that the *haftara* serves as a contrasting background to the story in our *parasha*, and thus helps us reach a proper understanding of the story of the scouts. It is doubtful, however, that this was the purpose of choosing this *haftara*.

**III. The Different Fulfillment of Each of the Two Missions**

The fundamental difference between the two missions in the *parasha* and in the *haftara* is further reflected in other points of comparison between the two stories. In this section, we will compare the way the agents fulfill their mission in each of the stories.

4. **Overt and Prolonged Mission vs. Focused Secret Mission**

We have already noted that Yehoshua's spies acted "secretly" and that their goal was limited in scope, aimed primarily at locating the weak points in the city of Yericho in order to enable its speedy conquest.[[14]](#footnote-14) By its very nature, such a mission must be very short, as it involves great danger; the spies are liable to be exposed and caught.

The mission of those who were sent to scout out the land, in contrast, was open, extensive in scope (the entire land), and continued for forty days. It would appear that this mission did not put the tribal princes in danger, and they therefore could proceed in a relaxed manner.

5. **Success vs. Failure**

As a result of the differences mentioned thus far, each of the two missions ended in a different way in accordance with its circumstances. The mission of those who were sent to scout out the land was crowned as a total success:

13:21: So they went up, and scouted out the land from the wilderness of Tzin to Rechov, at the entrance to Chamat.

22: And they went up into the South, and came to Chevron…

23: And they came to the valley of Eshkol, and cut down from there a branch with one cluster of grapes, and they bore it upon a pole between two; they took also of the pomegranates, and of the figs…

And they returned from scouting out the land at the end of forty days.

They followed Moshe's instructions and return now to the camp with the impressions that they had gathered of the land and its inhabitants during those forty days, as well as with the fruit of the land which they had been commanded to take with them. One might expect such success given that the mission posed no real risk in the first place.

The mission of the spies sent by Yehoshua, in contrast, failed from the very beginning:

2:1: … And they went, and came to the house of a harlot whose name was Rachav, and lay there.

2: And it was told the king of Yericho, saying: Behold, there came men here tonight of the children of Israel to search out the land.

3: And the king of Yericho sent to Rachav, saying: Bring forth the men that are come to you, that are entered into your house; for they are come to search out all the land.

Scripture does not reveal to us how the spies were exposed. Who are the people who told the king of Yericho of their arrival, and how did they identify them as members of the people of Israel? The truth is that this is unnecessary. By its very nature, a dangerous mission of this kind is likely to become quickly exposed, and the failure of being caught lurks at every moment. What was likely to happen happened – something that every leader who sends out spies and every spy who is willing to go on such a mission takes into consideration.

But here is where we reach the crux of the story – how Rachav's amazing resourcefulness and readiness to save the spies led to their rescue from the closed city and their escape from their pursuers. In the end, these men stood before Yehoshua healthy and intact, but their mission failed. They returned with no military information that would be of use to them in the conquest of Yericho, and it was to this end that they had been sent.

But we need not be disturbed by these results, for this is what happens to secret spies.

6. **To Whom do they Report?**

Yehoshua's spies were sent on a military-technical mission at the initiative of Yehoshua, leader of Israel. At the end of their (failed) mission, they present themselves in proper fashion before Yehoshua who had sent them:

23: Then the two men returned, and descended from the mountain, and passed over, and came to Yehoshua the son of Nun; and they told him all that had befallen them.

The people are not a party to this mission, and there is no reason for the spies to report to the people about what had happened to them.[[15]](#footnote-15)

However, regarding those who had been in our *parasha* to scout out the land, it is stated:

13:25: And they returned from scouting out the land at the end of forty days.

26: And they went and came to Moshe, and to Aharon, **and to all the congregation of the children of Israel…** and brought back word to them, **and to all the congregation, and showed them** the fruit of the land.

27: And they told him, and said: We came to the land where you sent us…

The reason for their appearance before the people is understandable. After all, the princes acted as the agents of the people, as the representatives of each of the tribes, and their mission was not military-technical, but rather communal-religious. They were to describe the land and its goodness to the people, "so that they should enter it with great desire." They were sent to "scout out" the land – to choose it in the name of the entire people. Thus, their primary report should be delivered to the people. The Divine command regarding their mission is what obligated the gathering of the people prior to their arrival, and this is how Moshe and Aharon acted when they assembled the people, all eagerly waiting to hear their story. But then happened what happened, and the opportunity was missed.

Comparing the stories told in our *parasha* and in the *haftara* reveals so many deep differences, to the point that we can say that there is no connection and no similarity between them. They deal with entirely different missions; there is no connection between their goals, there is no similarity between the manner in which they were carried out, and the results are also completely different. On the linguistic level as well there is no connection between the stories. The gap between them is so great that we can question why the early Sages established the story of the spies in the book of *Yehoshua* as the *haftara* of the story of those who were sent to scout out the land in *Parashat Shelach*.[[16]](#footnote-16)

**IV. The *Haftara* as a Repair of the *Parasha***

The comparison that we conducted between the two stories is not yet complete. It lacks one detail that is of the greatest importance: What did those who were sent conclude about their mission in each of the stories?

The last comparison that we made in the previous section was between the description of the return of the scouts to Moshe, Aharon, and the entire congregation and the account of the return of the spies sent by Yehoshua to Yehoshua alone. Those who were sent to scout out the land say to Moshe: "We came to the land where you sent us," whereas regarding Yehoshua's spies it is stated: "And they told him all that befallen them." But neither party sufficed with this; rather, they added their own assessment regarding the possibility of entering the land in the future, an assessment that was based on the experience of their mission. Of course, this assessment was of the utmost importance, given that it was expressed by people who saw and heard things that the people and its leaders had never encountered. It is therefore possible to see their words of assessment as the high point of the story of their mission.

In the story of those who were sent to scout out the land, their assessment leads to far-reaching consequences that change the entire historical course of that generation. Thus, even after they conclude their words, the story continues. In the story of Yehoshua's spies, on the other hand, the spies' assessment has no consequence; it constitutes the story's conclusion.

What are the agents' conclusions in each of the stories? Let us compare them:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **The assessment of those who were sent to scout out the land** | **The assessment of the spies** |
| 28: However, the people that dwell in the land are fierce, and the cities are fortified and very great…31: We are not able to go up against the people, for they are stronger than we. | 24: … Truly the Lord has delivered into our hands all the land;and moreover all the inhabitants of the land do melt away before us. |

We see that regarding this point as well the two stories are the opposites of each other.[[17]](#footnote-17) But note that it is precisely in this place that the opposition between the two stories raises an interesting similarity between them.

Numerous commentators have discussed the question of what the sin of the scouts sent by Moshe was. According to the understanding that the objective of their mission was to scout-choose the land in the name of the people and on their behalf, and to join thereby with the Divine selection, the answer to this question is absolutely clear: They betrayed their mission and turned its objective upside down. Instead of "choosing the land," they worked toward diverting the Divine process from its planned track, causing the people to refuse to enter the land and to return to from where they came.

However, they did this in a sophisticated manner, in a way that their betrayal of their mission would not be strongly felt: They delivered an assessment as if they were spies on a military mission. They answered some of Moshe's questions as if they were questions that were meant to clarify the possibility of the military conquest of the land (and, as stated in section II and in note 11, this was not their intent). By way of the small changes in their answers from what they were asked about, they described a reality that would lead on its own to the unfortunate military conclusion that it would be impossible to defeat the people living in the land. In this way they turned a mission whose objective was fundamentally religious – to join human choice to God's selection of the land – into a mission of a military-practical nature. This falsification of the definition of their mission is what enabled them to work toward inciting the people against entering the land.[[18]](#footnote-18)

The mission of Yehoshua's spies was indeed military-practical, but it did not succeed. They reported to Yehoshua about the failure of their mission, telling him "all that had befallen them." But at the end of their report, they suddenly veer from their role as professional military personnel and deliver their conclusion regarding their mission, formulated as a surprising declaration of faith: "Truly the Lord has delivered into our hands all the land; and moreover all the inhabitants of the land do melt away before us." They too go beyond their duties and fulfill a mission that had not been assigned to them: strengthening the faith in the fact that God would deliver the entire land into Israel's hands and that they would thus defeat all of the inhabitants of the land, who were melting away before them.[[19]](#footnote-19)

Here we have uncovered the schematic similarity between the two stories: In both of them, the agents go beyond their mission and add their personal assessment, which constitutes their conclusion from the events of the mission that they filled. In doing so, they abandon their duties and fill a fundamentally different role that had not been assigned to them. But since the role that had been assigned to those who were sent to scout out the land was essentially different from that which had been assigned to Yehoshua's spies, it turns out that when each delegation veered from their mission when they reported their conclusions, their roles were reversed: The **scouts** turned themselves into **spies,** and instead of working toward strengthening the people's faith in the conquest of the land, they delivered a negative military assessment in that regard. In contrast, the professional **spies** turned into **men of faith,** who fulfilled the role of those who were sent "to scout the land" and strengthened the faith in its imminent conquest.

Of course, these two deviations cannot be evaluated on the same scale. The deviation of the scouts to serve as spies was criminal; it was done with deceit, malice, and despicable motives. It brought disaster upon them and upon all the members of their generation. In contrast, the deviation of Yehoshua's spies from their role as spies may be counted to their credit. With innocence and out of fiery faith in the word of God, they reported their religious conclusion from that amazing encounter with the representative of the Canaanite people – Rachav – who rose as a result of the events of that generation to recognize God and His people, Israel.

In the course of their mission, Moshe's scouts met "the children of Anak" among the inhabitants of the land, and the physical strength that they encountered caused them to become spiritually dwarfed – "and we were in our own sight as grasshoppers." In the course of their mission, Yehoshua's spies met a woman of spiritual greatness, and they rose up with her to greatness of faith, which led to their declaration before Yehoshua. Hence their statement to Yehoshua: "Truly the Lord has delivered all the land into our hands."

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The comparison that we conducted between the two stories in this study illuminates the thinking of those who determined the *haftarot* with regard to our *parasha.* By juxtaposing the story of the spies in the book of *Yehoshua* to the story of the scouts in *Parashat Shelach*, despite the many profound differences between the two stories, they may have wished to allude that the later story is a repair of the sin in the earlier story. The positive deviation on the part of Yehoshua's spies from their professional military role to their positive religious conclusion regarding the conquest of the land constitutes a repair of the opposite deviation on the part of those who were sent to scout out the land.[[20]](#footnote-20)

(Translated by David Strauss)

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1. According to all contemporary rites, the *haftara* ends with v. 24: "And moreover all the inhabitants of the land do melt away before us." This is the conclusion of the story as well as the end of the chapter. According to the Romanian rite followed in the Balkans until about two hundred years ago, the *haftara* ended at v. 21. See the list of *haftarot* in *Encylopedia Talmudit*, vol. 10, pp. 709-710. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. As marked in Jewish editions of the *Tanakh*, this *seder* ends at *Bamidbar* 14:10 – the end of the first half of the story of the scouts. See what I wrote in my study of this *parasha*, first series, sec. 1. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. See the list of *haftarot* according to the early rite of *Eretz Yisrael* assembled by Prof. Y. Ofer in the appendix to his article, “*Sidrei Nevi'im U-Ketuvim*,” *Tarbitz* 58 (Tevet-Adar II, 5749), p. 182. The *haftarot* read in *Eretz Yisrael* are shorter than those found in the Babylonian rite and usually do not exceed 11 verses. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. We sometimes find such identity in cases in which the customary practice of *Eretz Yisrael* was adopted and that of Babylonia was rejected – for example, in the case of the *haftara* for *Parashat Ve-Zot Ha-berakha* according to all rites, and similarly in the case of the *haftara* for *Parashat Shemot* according to the Ashkenazi rite. However, such identity from the outset is exceedingly rare, because the principles of similarity between the Torah reading and the *haftara* are different in the two rites: The similarity according to the one-year cycle can be between the *haftara* and any part of the *parasha* and its nature varies from *parasha* to *parasha.* In contrast, the similarity according to the rite of *Eretz Yisrael* follows a single principle. See the article of Y. Ofer mentioned in the previous note, p 170; see also the following note. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. According to the rite of *Eretz Yisrael*, the decisive factor in the selection of the *haftara* is the linguistic similarity between the beginning of the *seder* and the beginning of the *haftara*. In our case, the similarity is between the words "send you men" and the words "and he sent… two men." It stands to reason, however, that the selection of this *haftara* stems from the broader similarity between the two passages, and the linguistic similarity between the two openings merely alludes to that. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. The Ramban’s explanation raises the obvious difficulty: "What was their transgression and sin, when they said to him: 'However, the people that dwell in the land are fierce, and the cities are fortified, and very great' (13:28)? Was it to give false testimony that he sent them?!" This is the question that the Ramban tries to answer in his commentary. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. In the comparison that we will draw in this study between the two stories, we refer exclusively to the story of the scouts as it appears in *Parashat Shelach*, and not to the references to it elsewhere in Scripture. The repetition of our story in Moshe's oration in the book of *Devarim* paints a different picture of the events, and this requires a separate examination. Our study of *Parashat Devarim* (first series) is devoted to an examination of the relationship between the account in *Parashat Shelach* and the story of the events in Moshe's oration at the beginning of the book of *Devarim*. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. The designation of the two men sent by Yehoshua as "spies" (*meraglim*) appears two more times in the verses that constitute the conclusion of the story told in chapter 2 – in chapter 6, verses 22-23. These verses were pushed off to chapter 6, which describes the conquest of Yericho, because only there can an account be given of the rescue of Rachav and her family. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. The reference is to **the land of Yericho** and the city of Yericho itself. Yericho, like the rest of the important cities of the land of Canaan, was a royal city, and its king ruled over a confined area around his city. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. It seems that this is the way that Yoav succeeded in conquering Yevus; see II *Shemuel* 5:6-8 and its parallel in I *Divrei Ha-yamim* 11:4-6. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. This is true even of the question about the people, "whether they are strong or weak, whether they are few or many" – the objective of which is to clarify the physical traits of the people, which serve as an indication about the land in which they live – and even the question, "what cities they are that they dwell in, whether in camps, or in strongholds" – which teaches about the look of the land and the nature of the settlement therein, permanent settlement or of nomadic tribes. We clarified these matters in our study of the *parasha*, first series, section 5. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. These matters and their continuation until the end of this section were clarified more fully in our study of *Parashat Shelach*, first series, section 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. In all these verses cited by the Ramban, the root *t-u-r* denotes selection and choice. Most important is the verse in *Yechezkel*, in which God's choosing of *Eretz Yisrael* is expressed through the root *t-u-r.* In the wake of this verse, we may suggest that God's intention at the beginning of our *parasha*, "Send you men, that they may scout out the land of Canaan, **which I give to the children of Israel,"** is: Send you men of the children of Israel, that they too may scout out [= choose] the land of Canaan, which I already scouted out [= chose] for them. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. In the end, Yericho was conquered by way of a miracle, and retroactively it became clear that there was no need to send the spies. Nevertheless, Yehoshua's sending them on their reconnaissance mission appears to have been justified. First of all, the miraculous conquest seems to be a consequence of the failure of the spies' mission; the miracle was intended to prevent the need for a prolonged siege of the first city that Israel came to conquer in the country. Second, even if Yericho's miraculous conquest was part of the original plan, this was not known to Yehoshua, and he was required to adopt the normal course of actions that is followed before embarking on a war of conquest.

But if the end the spies' mission turned out to be unnecessary, why does Scripture bother to tell us about it? The answer to this question requires a discussion of the objective of this story about the spies. We cannot expand upon the matter in this context; we will merely remark that in our opinion the objective and essence of the story is connected to the character of Rachav, and that it was for her sake and in her honor that the story was recorded in Scripture. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. This is true in chapter 2. In chapter 6, on the other hand, it would appear that the people knew about the spies' mission and about their rescue by the hands of Rachav (see there, vv. 17 and 25). It stands to reason that their story became known after their return, as there was no reason to hide it. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. It may be suggested in answer to this question that the *haftara* was chosen not for the story of *Parashat Shelach* in itself, but for the story in the perspective of the book of *Devarim*. There the mission of the twelve men has a military objective: "Let us send men before us, that **they may search** the land for us, and bring us back word of the way by which we must go up, and the cities to which we shall come" (*Devarim* 1:22); "And they came to the valley of Eshkol, and spied it out" (v. 25). We will suggest a different answer, one that relates to the story in the book of *Bamidbar*, independent of the very different story that is told in the book of *Devarim* (see above, note 7). [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. The assessment of Yehoshua's spies is very similar to that of Yehoshua and Calev, who later in the story address the rebellious people:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **The words of Yehoshua and Calev to the people** | **The words of the spies to Yehoshua** |
| 8: If **the Lord** delights in us, then He will bring us into this **land**, **and give it to us**…9: Fear not the people of the land; for they are bread for us; their defence is removed from over them… | And they said to Yehoshua: Truly **the Lord** **has delivered into our hands** all **the lan**d; and moreover all the inhabitants of the land do melt away before us. |

However, the words of Yehoshua and Calev did not influence the people, whereas the words of the ten who stood against them had a great impact, such that they determine the contrast between the two stories. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. See our study of the *parasha*, first series, section 5. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Some commentators would disagree with this presentation, as they understand these words of the spies as the delivery of invaluable information regarding the morale of the enemy. Even though their military-technical mission – to serach out Yericho – failed (and in the end turned out to be unnecessary), they brought Yehoshua much more important information. Their words in verse 24 are the essence of their achievement as spies. On the contrary, they rose up from spies on a tactical mission to spies on a strategic mission. Understanding the societal processes taking place among the enemy is often far more important than technical military information. National morale is an exceedingly important factor in a people's ability to stand firm during a war. Therefore, their words, "all of the inhabitants of the land do melt away before us," are of great military value, and they would strengthen the spirit of Yehoshua, the people's leader. This is the way the Ralbag explains not only what the spies said to Yehoshua at the end, but also the purpose of their mission from the outset. According to this interpretation, the story of the spies is not an introduction to the story of the conquest of Yericho, but of the wars of conquest of the entire land, and therefore its place is at the beginning of the book of *Yehoshua.*

We do not agree with this view. First, we ask: From where do the spies know that "truly the Lord has delivered into our hands all the land; and moreover all the inhabitants of the land do melt away before us"? The answer is, of course, that they know this from the words of Rachav, which were stated when she hid them on the roof:

9: I know that **the Lord has given you the land,** and that your terror is fallen upon us, and that **all the inhabitants of the land melt away before you.**

The spies' words to Yehoshua are nothing but a repetition of the words of Rachav (with a conversion of the pronouns). It stands to reason that the spies also made it clear to Yehoshua that they were citing the words of Rachav, and this follows from what they told him previously "all that had befallen them."

Thus, we cannot discuss the words of the spies in and of themselves without seeing their source in its context, in the words of Rachav in verses 9-11. Was it Rachav's intention to provide the spies with military information regarding her people's morale? Certainly not. This is the framework for Rachav's words on the roof:

9: I know that the Lord has given you the land…

11: For the Lord your God, He is God in heaven above, and on earth beneath.

Rachav's oration constitute a declaration of faith in the God of Israel as the God of the universe. Only in the framework of this declaration can we understand the description that she offers in the middle, between the beginning of her declaration and its conclusion:

… and that your terror is fallen upon us, and that all the inhabitants of the land melt away before you.

For we have heard how **the Lord dried up** the water of the Red Sea before you… and what you did to the two kings of the Amorites…

And as soon as we had heard it, our hearts did melt, neither did there remain any more spirit in any man, **because of you;** for the Lord **your God,** He is God…

Rachav's remarks about the fear that gripped the people of Canaan are validated in the Song of the Sea:

*Shemot* 15:14: The peoples have heard, they trembled…

15-16: All the inhabitants of Canaan **are melted away. Terror** and dread **falls upon them.**

This fear, however, did not bring the people of Canaan to the conclusion reached by Rachav, because they did not interpret the facts as she did – as acts of the one and only God in heaven above and on earth beneath. They thought that they could deal with Israel by way of war.

Therefore, the words of Rachav and their repetition by the spies had no real military value; the peoples' fear of Israel was long known. The effect of this fear on their actions is a question that depends on the theological interpretation of the events. Rachav, and later the Givonites, were brought by this fear to recognize the God of Israel and come to terms with the people of Israel. This very fear pushed other nations into fighting Israel with all their might.

Thus, we return to our original argument: The spies' words to Yehoshua, like the words of Rachav herself that preceded them, were not a strategic military assessment of the enemy's morale in the mouths of the spies who had just returned from a professional mission across the enemy's borders. Rather, their words constitute a declaration of faith. Rachav with her amazing words strengthened the faith of the spies in God's action among Israel in preparation for the conquest of the land, and they adopted her words and repeated them to Yehoshua, as a religious conclusion that **they** reached through their mission. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Such a tendency among those who determined the *haftarot* according to the one-year Torah reading cycle is evident in other places as well. At times they chose a prophetic chapter that would "balance" the reading of the *parasha.* For example, for *Parashat Vayigash*, which describes the unification of the house of Yaakov under the patronage of Yosef, they chose Yechezkel's prophecy (37:15 and on), which describes the reunification of the tribes of Israel with the tribe of Yehuda: "And My servant **David**shall be king over them." For *Parashat Tzav*, which deals for the most part with the sacrificial service, they chose Yirmeyahu's prophecy (7:21 and on): "Add your burnt-offerings to your sacrifices, and eat you flesh. For I spoke not to your fathers, nor commanded them in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt, concerning burnt-offerings or sacrifices." There are other examples of this phenomenon. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)