

PARASHA SHELACH

וידבר יהוה אל-משה לאמר: שלח-לך אנשים ויתרו את-ארץ כנען אשר-אני נתן לבני ישראל איש אחד איש אחד למטה אבתיו תשלחו כל נשיא בהם:

Parasha Shelach tells the story of the delegation that Moshe sent to check out the Land of Israel just before they were supposed to begin the conquest. They returned with a dangerously mixed message: true, the land is beautiful, but there is no way that they could conquer it. This report destroyed the morale of the Jewish People, who refused to risk being killed in battle and demanded to go back to Egypt. God responded by decreeing that they must stay in the desert for forty years, with the hope that the next generation would have more courage and more faith. The Haftarah takes place at the end of those forty years. The entire original generation is dead, and Yehoshua (Joshua) is now poised to take the Jewish People into the Land of Israel and begin the conquest. Like Moshe, Yehoshua sends spies to scout out the land. His "secret agents" are identified within hours of arriving in Jericho, and after a single conversation with one person (Rachav the prostitute), spend the rest of their time hiding from the authorities. Nevertheless, the Haftarah relates their mission not as a failure, but as a success. By understanding what went right with Joshua's spies in the Haftarah, we can begin to understand what went wrong with Moshe's spies in the Parasha. They bravely entered the "lion's den" and decided to lodge in the home of Rachav, a dear contact of all of the country's highest-ranking officials. She was fondly known throughout the land and enjoyed a warm personal association with all the authorities. In fact, the results were exactly as could be predicted and the spies were immediately detected upon entry. Yet, when one possesses perfect faith in God the events which follow are far from predictable.

As we go through the Torah, we encounter stories of some unfamiliar people found in the Bible. People that we don't hear about too often. I have found this to be an interesting venture because there have been some very important lessons I have learned from their lives – important lessons that I hope we have all learned! Lot, the man who compromised, taught us the dangers of pitching your tent in the wrong place! We saw in his life the things that he compromised (or placed in danger) because of his obsession with "looking out for number one". We saw the story of two brothers, Nadav and Avihu, and their offering of "strange fire" in the presence of God. In this particular story, holy fire came out from God's presence and consumed the two men. From their lives (and their deaths!) we encountered the importance of having a respectful reverence for God and His holiness – how important it is to never take Him for granted – lest we start bringing our own "strange fire" before Him! Today we're going to look at a woman named Rahav. Perhaps some of you have heard of her, perhaps not. I've called Rahav, the woman who trusted God. Rahav is twice celebrated in the Brit Chadasha as a great believer – in Hebrews 11:31 she is listed in the great "hall of faith" – and is described as one whose faith proved itself by good works. So, Rahav is obviously a woman worth studying.

I read a cute story about a Bible student who wanted to have a scriptural basis for everything he did. He felt he was on solid ground if he could quote Bible book, chapter & verse to okay his actions. He did all right with that until he began to fall in love with a beautiful co-ed. He wanted very much to kiss her, but he just couldn't find a scripture to okay it. So, true to his conscience, he would simply walk her to the dormitory each night, look at her longingly, and then say, "Good night." This went on for several weeks, and all the time he was searching the Bible, trying to find some scripture to okay kissing her good night. But he couldn't find one, until finally he came across that passage in Romans that says, "Greet each other with a holy kiss." He thought, "At last, I have scriptural authority for kissing her good night." But to be sure, he went to his hermeneutics professor to check it out. After talking with the professor, he realized that the passage dealt more with a congregational setting than with a dating situation. So once again he simply didn't have a passage of scripture to okay kissing his girl good night. That evening he walked her to the dormitory and once again started to bid her "good night." But as he did, she grabbed him, pulled him toward her, and planted a 10-second kiss right on his lips. At the end of the kiss, the Bible student gasped for air, and stammered, "Bible verse, Bible verse." The girl grabbed him a second time, and just before kissing him again, said, "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." I think that it would be safe to say that everyone here is looking for love. Oh, you may have found the person who is your true love, but on a day-to-day basis, you are looking for that person to give you, their love. You crave it. You need it just as much as you need food. And sometimes when you don't get it, you substitute chocolate in its place. The children here, though they might not yet be willing to admit their desire for love from a girl or a guy, would willingly admit their need for a hug and a kiss from mom and dad. Part of the reason that you are here today is because you are looking for love from people who have experienced the love of God.

All of those are good places to find love. But there are a lot of places where people search for love and only find frustration, pain, and regret. We're going to talk about a woman like that this afternoon. See if you can identify with her situation. She was the talk of the town, but nobody talked to her. Every square inch of her seductive body was lovely, but she was unloved. I guess that's the price you pay when you're the town prostitute. Her name was Rahav. She was a streetwalking hooker living in Jericho nearly 4000 years ago. Women despised and cursed her. Men leered at, joked about and visited her. Of all the people you'd least expect God to use in a significant way it was this woman, Rahav. After all she carried with her a rather unseemly past. By all standards of decency, she was a tainted woman. Yet her life proves a truth that needs to be shouted for all to hear, especially in our modern times: Your past does not determine your future, your choices do. Some of you here know what it's like not to be able to get past your past either because of what you've done or because of what's been done to you. You daily live with the constant ache of regret.

Thoughts of your previous mistakes and sins still haunt you and you repeat the mantra, "If only..." "If only I'd done this. If only I hadn't done that. Life would be as I have always dreamed." Because you can't get past your past you suffer from depression and fear. You may have a constant sense of failure. You lack joy or an awareness of purpose. Emotionally you often feel numb. Spiritually, you're cold. Worst of all is this nagging sensation that your life is on hold and you're waiting to really live. Some of those descriptions are true of you. Get ready to see how you can get past your past. Some of those descriptions may be true of people that you know. Pay attention so that you can help them get past their past. Rahav did it. She found that your past does not determine your future, but your choices do. There are others of you out there who are saying, "This message is not for me. I've got no past to get past." Yes, you do. You were born a sinner. We all were. And if you don't get past that past, then there is no hope for your future. But you say, "I'm no hooker, Rabbi. I'm a good person. You won't find any streetwalking clothes on me!" The Bible says that those self-righteous clothes that you are wearing right now are like filthy rags in the sight of God (Isaiah 64:6). The Bible also says that someone who breaks God's law in just one point is guilty of all of His commandments (*James 2:10*) Your unforgiveness makes you just as ugly and repugnant toward God as homosexuality or prostitution. Your pride and gossip put you in the same category as Satan. We've all got a past that we have to get past in order to enjoy the future that God has prepared for us. Godly decision-making is the key. Let's look at the decisions that Rahav made which revolutionized her life.

Before we jump into the story of Rahav, let me set it in context for you. In Parasha Mattot-Massei, we see how the nation of Israel, God's called-out people, are moving out of a forty-year detour in the desert and approaching the territory God had promised them as a home. The problem was that the land was inhabited with lots of people, so the nation of Israel had to first go in and conquer all the cities before they could move in and settle down. The first of these was the massive fortress of a city called Jericho. We know from the bible story that through faith in God and obedience to Him, the walls of Jericho came crashing down. But before the battle of Jericho, Joshua decided to first send in a two-man team of spies to case the city and look for weaknesses. Here's where we pick up the story from the Bible.

Reading *Joshua 2:1-6*, "Then Joshua, son of Nun secretly sent out two spies from Shittim saying: "Go, explore the land, especially Jericho." So, they went and came to the house of a prostitute whose name was Rahab and lodged there. The king of Jericho was told, "Some men from Bnei-Yisrael have just come here tonight to spy out the land." So, the king of Jericho sent word to Rahab saying: "Bring out the men who came to you, who entered your house, for they have come to spy out all the land." But the woman took the two men and hid them, and said: "Yes, the men did come to me, but I didn't know where they were from. So, when it was time to shut the gate at dark, the men went out, and I don't know where they went. Pursue them quickly, for you may overtake them." But she had brought them up to the roof and hidden them in the stalks of flax that she had spread out on the roof.

Rahav recognized that something significant was happening in her life. She knew that God was up to something. She knew that God was trying to get her attention and she made a choice accordingly. Realizing her God moment... She decided to ...

Go with the "God moment." - From time to time we all have these God moments. They're interruptions of our daily routine. They're people or events that shake us out of life as usual. Rahav's life was dramatically interrupted by a God moment. Two foreigners appeared at her door asking for lodging. Their clothes were different. Their language was different. She recognized them as Israelites. The circumstances and the voice of God in her spirit told Rahav that this was a God moment. God brings crises moments into all of our lives, so we'll bring a halt to business as usual and look to him. From one man he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live. God did this so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us. All of the people that we read about in Scripture experienced God moments. For Joseph, it was the dreams that he had foretelling that he would one day be a great ruler. For Moshe, it was a burning bush out in the desert. For Avraham, it was the voice of God telling him to leave behind everything that he knew. Whenever you experience one of those God moments, you have to make a choice in how you are going to respond. Pharaoh had a pretty big God moment. God really wanted his attention. He sent 10 plagues. But rather than listen with his heart, he hardened his heart. The result was the destruction of his nation and the death of his son. You may never experience a burning bush or the parting of the Red Sea, but there are other more subtle but no less profound ways that God calls out to us. It may be the birth of a child. As you hold that child in your arms and wonder at the miracle of new life, God, the ultimate Father calls out, "I want you to be my child. I want to hold you in my arms and protect you from the dangers of this world just like you want to protect your child." Your God moment may have been your marriage. As you looked into the eyes of your husband or wife and wondered at the love that shown from those eyes, Yeshua was whispering in your ear, "I want to love you more than He ever could." And as your heart was breaking the day you buried that special someone, God was longing for you to reach out to Him so that He could wrap you in His arms of love.

Many of you know of one of my God-moments. It's the reason there is a Beit HaShaar Fellowship today. I was working for the DoD and life was pretty good... God impressed upon me that I was to become a Rabbi and begin a fellowship. I laughed at God's notion. I challenged Adonai with a sort of Gideons fleece. I told God that if He wanted me to be a Rabbi He would have to make it, so I was not financially burdened, as Rabbi's are not well paid. Well, three months later, I took a fall that broke my skull, and was retired from the DoD. How was I supposed to be a Rabbi, when I could read, walk or speak effectively. My brain injury was my God-moment. Because I accepted my calling in faith and began the fellowship, I have gotten to experience many more God-moments since then.

God has planned these God moments so that we'll turn and respond in faith. That's what Rahav did. She took a risk on God. When the king orders you to bring out spies it's not a request. He wasn't offering a reward for their capture. He wanted them dead. Anyone who aided them was guilty of treason as well. Rahav hid those men at the risk of her own pretty little neck. She decided to go with the "God moment" and it helped her to get past her past. I don't know what your "God moments" are right now, but you do. Maybe your God moment is happening right now. God has every one of you here for a reason. If you sense God calling you from the routine, from your comfort zone, from your safe life to a place that's unfamiliar and dangerous... go with it. Take the risk. It's a wake-up call from God. Recognize it as such and respond to his invitation. God-moments are pivotal times. Your response to them determines the direction of your life. This moment in Rahav's life was her only chance. If she had chosen to harden her heart, there would have been no more God-moments in her life. She would have died with the rest of the inhabitants of Jericho. One chance. Maybe today is that one chance for you. "God moments" always push you into the future and never leave you trapped in the past. There's another thing that must happen to get you past your past. And that is...

You need to confess the reality of your situation. - If you notice in most Bibles, you will notice that whenever the word "prostitute" comes up, there's a little number or letter beside it. That symbol tells you to look in the margin or footnotes of your Bible for some type of explanation. There you'll see that the word used here for "prostitute" could also be translated "innkeeper". That changes everything. An innkeeper is a respectable profession – a necessary service. Maybe Rahav wasn't so bad after all. Except for one thing. The verse in Hebrews 11:31, calls her a prostitute. And in that verse, there is no ambiguity – no doubt about the meaning of the word. Sure, Rahav may have been an innkeeper. But that just meant that when she needed a room for an hour or an evening, she didn't have to go to the front desk. She just took her guests directly to the manager's suite. Nobody likes to confess that they have done something wrong. And we've come up with all kinds of elaborate ways to avoid confession. We call our lies "mistruths", our adultery "affairs", and our abortions "medical procedures". I heard recently that in New Jersey, the education board has decided that in the public schools there, history books will no longer refer to war as "war". They will now call it conflict. So now it's World Conflict I and II and the Persian Gulf Conflict. Just by changing the name of something doesn't change the fact that is an offense to a holy God and that you will have to suffer the consequences for it one day. Rahav was a sinner. That's why she lied when she was confronted with a sticky situation. The Bible records her lie, but it does not condone or excuse it. The Bible never condones lying because lying is sin. She was a good liar. Lies had gotten her out of many sticky situations in the past. When different women had come to her door wanting to know if their husband was there, she could bold-faced lie about it even as he climbed out her window that led over the wall. Rahav would have made an excellent Poker player.

Rahav lied to herself too – telling herself that her profession made her valuable to men and to her god. She was such a good liar that on a really good day, she could even make herself believe that she actually enjoyed her lifestyle. But her lying was getting ready to change. She had been confronted with the true God and she knew that she couldn't lie to the true God. It's easy to lie to yourself. You tell yourself that you are a good person. But you know the things that you've done. You know the evil desires that are within your heart. You lie to yourself and say that the past doesn't matter. If you can just keep it hidden, keep it under the rug, then you can pretend it never happened. But you know that's a lie. You will never find healing until you admit it to yourself, to God, and maybe even to some people. Let's see how Rahav came to an understanding of the truth about herself. Here, we'll also see how she understood what God was doing.

I'm reading *Joshua 2:8-11* - *Now before they lay down, she came up to them on the roof, and she said to the men: "I know that Adonai has given you the land—dread of you has fallen on us and all the inhabitants of the land are melting in fear before you. For we have heard how Adonai dried up the water of the Sea of Reeds before you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to the two kings of the Amorites that were beyond the Jordan, to Sihon and Og, whom you utterly destroyed. When we heard about it, our hearts melted, and no spirit remained any more in anyone because of you. For Adonai your God, He is God, in heaven above and on earth beneath.*

There's a lot going on in Rahav's confession. First, she's renouncing her false religion. This woman, like the people of her culture, was a Ba'al worshipper. He was the storm god. Worshipers of Ba'al performed elaborate, but perverted sex rituals to entice Ba'al to shower them with prosperity. When Rahav confessed the Israelites God as the true God, she rejected her former religion. Confession is where we start today too. It is a confession not only of who we are – sinners- but also a confession that we understand that God is the only one who can forgive and heal us. We cannot heal ourselves. God made us. He alone can fix us. *Romans 10:9* tells us, *"For if you confess with your mouth that Yeshua is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved."* Follow that by living a repentant Torah observant life. It's as simple as that. There's no ritual, no pilgrimages, just a simple confession that you want Yeshua as your forgiver and leader and then obey His commandments because you love Him. There's another aspect to confession that needs to be pointed out. Confession for our past mistakes and sins is the path to healing. Yet is a sort of a regret cycle: An initial sin or mistake leads to regret... which is followed by some destructive coping mechanism... which brings more sin and mistakes... which prompts more regret. On and on the downward spiral goes. Some of the coping mechanisms we turn to include drugs, alcohol, overeating, gambling, pornography, escapism, or inappropriate relationships. When we rely on these things to cope with guilt and hopelessness, we find that regret begets regret - and the cycle continues. The only way to break the cycle is confession.

Admitting that your past choices were wrong, and you brought the consequences on yourself. Confession leads us to turn to God and away from the sin and mistakes of the past. It brings forgiveness and a relationship with God. *1 John 1:9 says, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."* Confession breaks the regret cycle and brings freedom.

I want to share an illustration taken from Max Lucado's book, "No Wonder They Call Him the Savior." Christina lives in a small dusty village in Brazil. Her heart was empty, and she felt like society had cheated her of its joys. She longed for the excitement of the big city of Rio. One morning her mother Maria awoke to find Christina's bed empty. "Maria knew immediately where her daughter had gone. She also knew immediately what she must do to find her. She quickly threw some clothes in a bag, gathered up all her money and ran out of the house. On the way to the bus stop she entered a drugstore to get one last thing. Pictures. She sat in the photograph booth, closed the curtain, and spent all she could on pictures of herself. With her purse full of small black and white photos, she boarded the bus to Rio de Janeiro. Maria knew that Christina had no way of earning money. She also knew that her daughter was too stubborn to give up. When pride meets hunger, a human will do things that before were unthinkable. Knowing this, Maria began her search. Bars, hotels, nightclubs, any place with a reputation for street walkers or prostitutes. She went to them all. And at each place she left her picture – taped on a bathroom mirror, tacked to a hotel bulletin board, fastened to a corner phone booth. And on the back of each she wrote a note. It wasn't too long before both the money and the pictures ran out, and Maria had to go home. The weary mother wept as the bus began its long journey back to her small village. It was a few weeks later that the young Christina descended the hotel stairs. Her young face was tired. Her brown eyes no longer danced with youth but spoke of pain and fear. Her laughter was broken. Her dream had become a nightmare. A thousand times over she had longed to trade these countless beds for her secure pallet. Yet the little village was, in too many ways, too far away. As she reached the bottom of the stairs her eyes noticed a familiar face. She looked and there on the lobby mirror was a small picture of her mother. Christina's eyes burned and her throat tightened as she walked across the room and removed the small photo. Written on the back was this compelling invitation. 'Whatever you have done, whatever you have become, it doesn't matter. Please come home!' And she did" Going home is answering a call to become a believer.

I once talked to a man about becoming a Believer who tried to convince me that he "wasn't really a bad person." He didn't think he had really sinned all that much. Sensing that he was trying to avoid accepting his sinfulness I gave him this illustration: I told him to imagine I had invited him over to my house and offered him a cold Coke. I asked him "would you drink it?" "Of course," he replied.

Then I asked to imagine I had poured that sparkling Coca-Cola into a filthy glass. Would he drink it then? Even if it had only a ring of old milk at the bottom of it? Of course not. Then I explained that when we sin - even just a little - and presume that God will accept us without our accepting His cleansing of "glass" (or soul) we were, in essence, asking God to accept any good deeds we might do in a glass. You see, Rahav knew she was a sinner. And when she had heard about the power of God, she believed in the power of God. And so, she acted... so she could have that power in her life. In order for you to become a Believer and in covenant with the God of Israel – you need to act upon what you've heard.

You need to; Recognize that you are a sinner and need to repent, it is a God moment. Next you must confess Yeshua as your Messiah and Savior, then surrender your life to Him. Lastly you must be buried in the waters of baptism in Yeshua's name to receive the Gift of His Holy Spirit. Rahav was saved because she trusted in a promise. Her faith hung upon (if you will) a scarlet thread. But without relying on a promise, she would not have been saved. Similarly, our salvation hangs upon a scarlet thread as well – the blood of Yeshua. You will be saved only by relying on that promise - that His blood has the power to set you free and change your life. If you are looking for love... I pray you seek Him with all your heart.

b'Shem Yeshua, haMelech v'haMashiach Shelanu! Amein.
("in the name of Yeshua, our King and the Messiah! Amein.")