

Inspirations from the Haftarah - Parshas Shlach by Rabbi Eliyahu Kirsh

The connection between this week's Torah reading and its haftarah is on the surface quite obvious. The majority of Parshas Shlach deals with the incident of the *meraglim*, the spies. Am Yisrael was at the threshold of entering Eretz Yisrael and planned to send spies to survey the land. (Their impulse to reconnoiter the land was in itself inappropriate because Hashem had already promised that Eretz Yisrael was 'flowing with milk and honey,' i.e. there should have been no doubts. Nevertheless, Hashem agreed to let Moshe send a group of twelve scouts.)

The result of the mission was a historic disaster for the Jewish people. Spying huge fortified cities inhabited by terrible giants, the scouts determined that the land was unconquerable; with the exception of Yehoshua and Calev, all the spies delivered pessimistic news. While the classic Torah commentaries offer various interpretations of the negative reports and the sin that was committed in delivering them, the narrative makes it quite clear that the spies' primary transgressions were their lack of belief that Hashem could and would enable the nation to conquer the land as He promised, and that they discouraged the nation – who had just emerged from over 200 years of slavery - from wanting to enter Eretz Yisrael. As a result of this episode, Hashem decreed that Bnai Yisrael must spend the next forty years wandering the desert, leaving the generation of non-believers to die in the desert and their children to enter the land with Moshe's successor, Yehoshua (Joshua).

The Haftarah for this parsha also concerns itself with spies, but those who snuck into Eretz Yisrael on the orders of Yehoshua did so under different circumstances. The new generation about to enter the land shared an undiluted belief that Yehoshua was about to lead them there; the spying mission was carried out for the logistical purpose of gauging the inhabitants' perceptions of Bnai Yisrael in order to determine the right time to launch an attack. The fact that the spies lodged in the Yericho home of Rachav – in a brothel disguised as an inn - indicates their intention to tune into the Canaanite "word on the street" about the Jews and their strength; and indeed, the conversations they record are full of terror about Bnai Yisrael. Once he hears that the populace is agog over the Jews, Yehoshua sets out to prepare the people, both physically and emotionally, to enter and conquer Eretz Yisrael.

Perhaps the Haftarah can be seen as a *tikkun* or correction for the wrong that Bnai Yisrael had committed forty years earlier. Had that generation acted with proud belief in Hashem's promise to lead them into Eretz Yisrael, the inhabitants of the land would have reacted with the same fear and dread of Am Yisrael. Forty years later, the next generation righted the wrong by displaying full confidence in Hashem's word. The previous generation's error was rectified as Yehoshua and Bnai Yisrael proudly entered the land, at long last fulfilling the promise made by Hashem to Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov.