

Bringing the Prophets to Life

**Weekly insights into the Haftara
by Rabbi Nachman (Neil) Winkler**

Author of Bringing the Prophets to Life (Gefen Publ.)

The Lesson of Yericho

SH'LACH -

24 p'sukim - Yehoshua 2:1-24

The well-known story related to us in our haftara of Yehoshua's spies and the events that took place in Yericho even before its conquest, parallel the key story found in our parasha. Over the years, we have mentioned the differences between the two stories, primarily, that the sin of Moshe's spies caused the nation to remain in the desert for thirty-nine more years, while Yehoshua's successful "undercover" mission, paved the entry of B'nei Yisra'el into Eretz Yisrael. Yet, it is true that, just as the spies in the desert impacted the very history of Israel, so too, the account related by Yehoshua's spies cannot be regarded as an isolated incident, but as the first link of a chain of events. It is, in reality, a prelude to the conquest of Yericho, the resulting defeat at Ai and a lesson for the nation and their ensuing battles.

In discussing the conquest Yericho, I find myself reluctant to call the event as a "battle" - because it was anything but that! The text makes it

clear that the Israelites did everything BUT fight. Upon Hashem's command, the army surrounded the city and, for seven days (led by the Aron and seven Kohanim blasting their shofarot), proceeded to march around the city. On the seventh day, they followed this same procedure seven times and, after the last circuit, the city's walls collapsed, killing the enemy, thereby allowing the troops to enter the city.

That was it! The army paraded around the city and sounded the shofarot - but they never even raised a sword throughout that time. For that reason, Hashem told the people that they were prohibited from taking any of the booty because the victory - and its spoils - belonged to G-d - and to Him alone. That was precisely the lesson that Hashem wanted the people to learn. But they didn't. The subsequent p'rakim tell us how Achan ben Karmi DID take from the spoils - resulting in the defeat of Yehoshua's army in the next battle, a war against the city of Ai.

Rabbi Menachem Liebttag addresses the question as to why ALL of Israel was punished when only one man sinned and took from the spoils. Why does the text TWICE declare that "the people of Israel trespassed" when only one person did? Rabbi Liebttag's response is both illuminating and satisfying. He explains that, although the sin was committed by

one, the collective attitude, shared by many, was that they, as victors, had earned the right to take from the spoils; in other words, that the victory was not of G-d's doing alone. And to prove that such an attitude was shared by many, Rabbi Liebttag points to what the officers advised Yehoshua before the next battle.

In preparation for the conquest of Ai, Yehoshua's agents reported that the city was small and relatively weak and, therefore, did not require to "exhaust the entire army". Rather, they suggested, send only 2-3000 troops to battle which would suffice to conquer the city... and Yehoshua accepted that suggestion. Now, Israel had yet to win even one battle! She did not even fight against the residents of Yericho, yet they felt that they were powerful enough not to send the whole army? They could do it alone? Like Achan, they had not learned the lesson of Yericho. And, like Achan, they too were punished.

We are blessed to hear the words of the prophets on each Shabbat and Yom Tov. How important it is for us, therefore, to spend time understanding the haftara from its source and, by doing so, learning more of the messages that the prophets leave for us! Their words were not directed to one generation alone, for the words of our nevi'im speak to us today! ✨