

CHAPTER 6, VERSE 17-18 - ADDITIONAL THOUGHTS

by Rabbi Dovid Siegel

(6:17) - Additional Thoughts on this Verse

"And the city and all therein shall be totally destroyed for Hashem's sake, save Rachav the innkeeper and all with her in the house because she hid the angels which we sent."

Rashi (see verse 23) explains that the spies are referred to here as angels in recognition of their superhuman display of self-control. Rachav enjoyed a very close relationship with all who visited her inn. Although the spies experienced a night of seclusion with her, they acted like angels without entertaining any thought of sin. It is interesting to note the placement of this lesson here during the conquest rather than during its actual occurrence. What lesson can be gleaned from this regarding Rachav and the conquest of Yericho?

It seems that the spies' self control played a significant role in Rachav's embracing Judaism in a full sense. Fully aware of her irresistible attractiveness, Rachav saw in their self-control a spiritual strength akin to that of the angels. This superhuman ability reflected a holiness and purity that transcended all physical drives. Genuinely petrified of Hashem's power and intrigued by this elevation, Rachav pledged to follow this example and whole-heartedly committed herself to a pure Jewish lifestyle.

This insight helps us appreciate the exception made here for Rachav and her family. Hashem called for the annihilation of Yericho because of its inseparable association with idolatry. Yet, because of Rachav's heroic act on behalf of the spies, she and her family were spared. One could question the rationale behind this. After all, Rachav and her family were idolaters whose moral and ethical conduct had not complemented the Jewish way of thinking. How could she be trusted never to revert to her enticing immoral practices?

The answer to this is found in this subtle description of the spies as angels. Rachav was privileged to observe human beings rise to the level of angels. Although they appeared to be ordinary mortals their spiritual conduct revealed an unparalleled inner strength. Rachav saw in this the power of the Jewish faith and responded by proclaiming Hashem as Master of the entire universe, all inclusive. With this, Yehoshua assured the people of Rachav's sincerity and guaranteed that her embracing Judaism would yield only positive and productive results. And so it was, Rachav and her entire family married prominent Jewish leaders and brought much credit to Hashem and His people.

(6:18) - Additional Thoughts on Collective Responsibility

"But you should guard the ban lest you destroy yourselves by violating it through which you will condemn the Jewish camp and ruin it."

Radak comments on the repetitive nature of this verse and explains that it includes a stern warning regarding collective responsibility. Every Jewish person was obligated to secure that no one violate the ban. They were forewarned that even the slightest violation by one person would yield devastating results. Why was this collective responsibility treated so severely? Should masses of righteous people suffer because of the frivolity of a few misdirected sinners?

It seems that the Jewish people were taught here an important lesson about Eretz Yisroel. Moshe Rabbeinu warned the people time and time again against the influence of idolatry. The Torah states: *"If you do not drive out the inhabitants of the land all who will remain will be pegs in your eyes and thorns in your sides"* (Bamidbar 33:55).

The task of ridding Eretz Yisroel of idolatry was all-encompassing. Idolatry's influence was so poisonous and contagious that any trace of it threatened the spiritual fiber of the entire Jewish nation.

This lesson was clearly expressed through the spoils of Yericho. We have learned earlier that the total destruction of Yericho served as a tribute to Hashem. Yericho was treated as an idolatrous city and, bar a few items preserved for the Sanctuary, the city and all therein was totally devastated. A strict ban was placed upon the remaining spoils because of their association with idolatrous people. Any involvement in or benefit from the city would, in some way, validate its existence and bring back memories of its inhabitants.

The Jewish people were therefore sternly warned against any violation of this ban. Even if one person partook of the spoils, this would associate him and ultimately his surroundings with idolatry. So severe was this threat to the nation's spiritual existence that Hashem held everyone responsible for this with their lives. And indeed when one person did violate the ban the entire Jewish camp was endangered and suffered serious losses. This severe response undoubtedly drove this message home and reminded the people of the dangers of even slight influences of idolatry.

From this point onward the Jewish people would be motivated to do their utmost to preserve their spirituality thereby securing their physical existence in the land of Hashem.

With so many winds blowing across the land it is so important to maintain this perspective. Eretz Yisroel is a land of spirituality and does not tolerate foreign influences. We must do our utmost to rid the land of such influence and realize that potential threat to our spirituality is, by definition, a serious threat to our physical existence in the land, as well.

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