

## Notes on Joshua 2

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### II. Two Spies Sent into Jericho (Josh. 2)

#### The Spies Hidden by Rahab – 2:1-11

Verses 1-3

1. What task did Joshua assign to two men (see MAP)?
2. Who received the spies and hid them?
3. Where does the New Testament refer to this woman? Summarize what it says about her.
4. What command did the king of Jericho give her?

#### *The spies sent*

Joshua had encamped the people in a place here called Acacia Grove (cf. 3:1; Num. 25:1). Before sending the army into the land, Joshua determined to send spies to view the land. This was reminiscent of his own duty as a spy when the twelve spies were sent by Moses the first time Israel approached to take the land.

The first significant city they were to confront was Jericho, so that is where Jericho sent the spies. (See MAP.)

#### *Rahab the harlot receives the spies*

The spies went into the city and there were received by a woman named Rahab who was a harlot or prostitute. Some claim the Hebrew word does not necessarily mean a prostitute, but the Greek words in the references in Hebrews and James surely confirm that she was a prostitute. She had been a wicked woman, but she here demonstrated faith in God. For her faith she is mentioned elsewhere as an example for us. See Heb. 11:31; James 2:25.

We are not told how the spies found her nor what about her background may have led her to have a heart different from others in Jericho. Waldron suggests that the spies knew they would be recognized as foreigners, so they may have deliberately chosen to visit a harlot, thinking the people would believe they were there for immoral purposes rather than as spies.

In any case, she received the spies into her home. But the king of the city heard that spies had been sent into the city by Israel and apparently he knew that Rahab had received them. He sent messengers to her to tell him where the spies were, since they were spies sent to view the land.

Interestingly, Matthew 1:5 lists a Rahab in the lineage of Jesus. However, Young's concordance lists this as a different woman than this harlot in Jericho. The Rahab in Jesus' lineage was the mother of the Boaz who later married Ruth, great grandmother of King David. That would perhaps have put her later in history than the Rahab here in Joshua 2. However, one wonders why that Rahab is mentioned in Jesus' lineage, when the only other women mentioned were Ruth and Mary.

Verses 4-7

5. What did she say about the spies to the king?
6. Describe how she hid the spies.
7. Did Rahab tell the truth or a lie? Did the New Testament commend her for lying?  
(Think: What can we conclude from this story about lying?)

#### *Rahab hides the spies*

Rahab admitted to the king that they men had come to her, but she said she had no knowledge of where they were from. She said they left in the dark as the gate was being shut. So she

did not know where they had gone, but the king's men might overtake them if they quickly pursued them.

However, this was not just deception but was an outright lie. She did know where they were from and she knew they had not left at all. In fact they were still on her roof where she had hidden them among some stalks of flax on her roof.

Acting on this misinformation, the king's men went by way of the road to the Jordan, hoping to overtake the spies. As soon as the pursuers had gone, the gate was shut, presumably as a safety precaution.

### ***Was Rahab's lie justified?***

While Rahab had come to believe in God, she apparently was still willing to violate a basic command of God's law. She clearly told a lie. Yet God later identifies her by name as a woman who acted by faith and was blessed for her faith – Heb. 11:31; James 2:25. How can her conduct be justified?

There are only two possible explanations I can think of: Either (1) Lying was justified when necessary to save life (as in wartime), or (2) Her lie was not justified but God saved her for her faith despite her lie.

Note that she is not commended in either of the New Testament passages for having told a lie. Hebrews 11:31 commends her for her faith in receiving the spies in peace. James 2:25 commends her for her faith in receiving the spies and sending them (the spies) out another way (so they could avoid their enemies). Neither one says her lie was justified, nor do they say that the lie was an act of faith.

Remember that she had been a wicked woman, who had only recently come to believe in the true God. She might not yet know lying was a violation of the law of her new God, yet she was rewarded for her faith in hiding the spies and sending them away safely. This would require great faith, and for that God commended her and rewarded her, not for her lie. Remember, other great servants of God also committed sins. They are not rewarded for their sins but for their acts of faith. Rahab had been a prostitute too and that is even mentioned in the New Testament references to her faith. Is that here justified? Not at all. To truly please God, she must repent of that and learn to do better. Why not say the same of her lie?

And even if her act may have been justified under the Old Testament, that would not prove it would be justified today. The Old Testament allowed many acts of war not allowed today.

Verses 8-11

8. List the things the people of Jericho had heard about Israel.

9. What effect did this have on the people of Jericho and on Rahab?

### ***Rahab's explanation***

Rahab went up on her roof that night, before the spies went to sleep, and explained to them why she had helped them. She said she knew that God had given the land to the Israelites, and that the people of the land were in mortal terror of the Israelites.

The people had heard about God's dealings with Israel in leading them across the Red Sea on dry land and leading them to victory over the kingdoms of Sihon and Og on the east side of Jordan. She explained that hearing these things had caused the hearts of the people of Jericho to melt in fear. They had no courage left. As a result she was convinced that the God of heaven and earth was with Israel.

This demonstrates the purpose of miracles, such as the crossing of the Red Sea. They occurred to give people evidence to believe in God's existence and that certain people were from Him. The military victories confirmed His power to defeat Israel's enemies.

This explains why Rahab had acted as she did: she had come to believe in the God of Israel as the true God. Other people, of course, had heard the same stories, but they did not believe as she did. No doubt these people worshipped many gods and had simply been convinced that this

was a very powerful god. Yet that would not lead most of them to be willing to work on behalf of Israel against their own people. Rahab's faith was unusual and God rewarded her for it.

### The Spies Agreement with Rahab – 2:12-24

Verses 12-14

10. What request did Rahab make of the two spies?
11. What agreement did they make with her (v14)?

#### *Rahab's request*

Having explained why she believed in God's intent to bless Israel, Rahab offered an agreement with the spies. Since she had shown them kindness, she asked them to show her kindness and spare her family (father, mother, brothers, and sisters) and all they had from death. She asked them to swear and give a token of this agreement.

The men agreed to spare her life for theirs if she would not tell others about their purpose in being in the city. If so, they promised God would deal kindly with her when He had given them the land.

This raises another issue. God had commanded Israel to slay all the inhabitants of the land (see introductory notes on the people of the land). Yet here the spies were agreeing to do otherwise before the people even attempted to enter. This would appear to be justified in this case, however, on grounds of the reason God gave for the command. He had said to slay the people else they would lead Israel into idolatry. In this case, however, Rahab had become a believer. Later such people would be called proselytes. Proselytes, in effect, became Jews by conversion. Presumably such believers should have been spared, not killed. In that case, the spies agreement was justified.

Verses 15,16

12. How did they escape the city?
13. Where did she tell them to go and what were they to do? Why?

#### *The men escape*

Rahab's house was on the wall of the city with a window looking over or through the wall. So they would not have to go out through the city gate which would be guarded, she let through the window and down the wall by a rope.

She told them to go to the mountains to escape and hide there three days. The pursuers had gone toward the Jordan. By going the other way, the spies could hide in the mountains and then, when the pursuers had given up, they could cross the Jordan to Israel.

Verses 17-21

14. What was the sign of the agreement between Rahab and the spies?
15. Where did Rahab's family have to go in order to be spared?
16. What would happen if Rahab or her family did not keep their part of the agreement?
17. Application: List at least 3 lessons we can learn from Rahab about our own salvation from sin.

#### *Conditions of the agreement*

The spies first gave her a sign and made clear the conditions she must meet to be spared. First, she must tie a scarlet cord in the window through which they had escaped. Then they must be sure everyone who would be saved was in her house. They would not guarantee the safety of anyone outside the house, but they would be responsible if anyone in the house was killed. And third, she must not tell anyone about their business in being there. If she did not keep these conditions, they would be free from their oath to her. Rahab agreed and sent them away.

Note that, in order for people besides Rahab to be saved, they too would almost surely need faith. Why would they agree to be in the house on the wall when Israel attacked, unless they were convinced they could be saved there?

### ***Rahab as an illustration of our salvation***

This story is used to illustrate our salvation in Heb. 11:31 and James 2:25. So consider some lessons we can learn.

(1) We too must have faith to be saved (see the context of both Heb. 11 and James 2). (2) Our faith also must show itself by meeting conditions – we are saved by faith that works, not by faith only – James 2:25 in context. Failure to keep any of these conditions would lead to death. The conditions faith requires of us include baptism. Those who argue that faith need not do anything need to reckon with the illustration of Rahab.

(3) Specifically, faith often requires that people be in a certain place or relationship in order to be saved. Rahab's family had to be in the house to be saved. We must be in the church to be saved (Acts 2:47; 20:28; Eph. 5:23,25). The house did not save Rahab's family, but they had to be there to be among the saved. Likewise, the church does not save us, but we must be there to be among the saved.

Verses 22-24

18. What report did the spies give to Joshua?

### ***The spies' escape***

As Rahab had advised, the spies fled to the mountains and stayed there three days till the pursuers had returned. Then they left the mountains, crossed the Jordan and reported to Joshua all that had happened.

Their conclusion, based on what they had seen and no doubt especially on what Rahab had told them, was that the people of the land were fearful and fainthearted. Surely God would deliver the land to the Israelites. Note how their report differed from that of the ten spies the first time Israel had approached the land.

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