

Joshua

Lesson 2

Before we begin this lesson in chapter 2 of the Book of Joshua, we need to address the authorship of the original manuscript. We saw in chapter 1, and we will see immediately in chapter 2:1 that when Joshua speaks or does something, the text starts the statement with something like, “*Then Joshua ...*” These words indicate that Joshua did not write the original manuscript. The Jewish Talmud attributes the record of this book to either Eleazar or Phinehas, the two priests, descendants of Aaron, who were in charge of the manuscripts of Moses. I agree.

Chapter 2

D. The Great Plan of Joshua

1. The Sending of the Two Spies

Continuing the topic of the beginning of Joshua’s command, we come to the great plan of Joshua. We see that Joshua had learned his lessons from Moses well. Thirty-nine years before, he was involved when Moses sent twelve spies to search out the Promised Land. In this first verse, we see Joshua enter the order for the sending of the two spies to Jericho. Chapter 2, verse 1. “*Then Joshua the son of Nun sent two men as spies secretly from Shittim, saying, “Go, view the land, especially Jericho.”* (2:1a).

“*Shittim*” is also known as *Abel-shittim*, and it is an area on the east side of the Plain of Moab near the mountain range and about five miles from the bank of the Jordan River. It is a village today called Abela, but in Joshua’s day, it was just open territory. The Nation of Israel gave it its name, and it means *the meadow of acacia trees*. Joshua sent the two spies to Jericho, about two miles from the bank of the Jordan River. No doubt, the LORD spoke to Joshua at the beginning of Nisan the 7th, which started at the change of the day at 6:00 PM on Nisan the 6th. The spies must have left that night, crossed the Jordan River, and entered the Jericho gates before closing.

a) The Lodging of the Two Spies

Once inside the gates of Jericho, the problem came for the lodging of the two spies. Verse 1b. “*So they went and came into the house of a harlot whose name was Rahab, and lodged there.*” (2:1b).

In John Phillips Bible Character Series: Exploring People of the Old Testament Volume One, he says the following about Rahab.

Rahab is first introduced as an unchaste member of a degenerate and decadent race. The prevailing Canaanite religion was unspeakably foul. One of the chief deities of Canaan was Ashtoreth, the goddess of sensual love. The most licentious rites were conducted in her honor. The vileness of every kind was elevated to an act of worship. Her temple was served by scores of “sacred” courtesans. Probably Rahab, even as a young girl, was chosen by the priests to serve in one of their temples. In the Bible, she is bluntly labeled a harlot. Whether as a consecrated priestess of the cult or as a common woman of the streets, she lived in sin, lived for sin, and lived by sin. The Canaanite lifestyle in which she was born took immorality in its stride. Rahab's occupation was

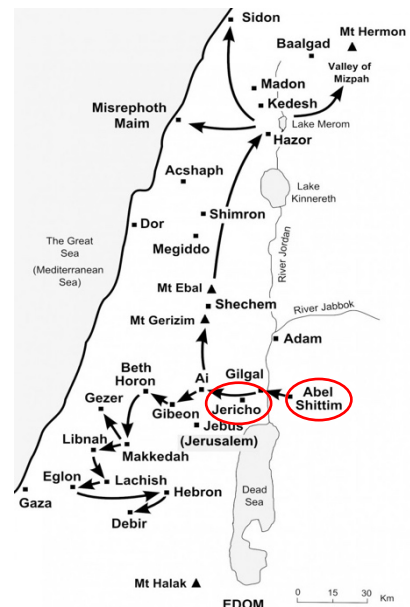


Figure 4: The Campaign of the Promised Land by Joshua

endorsed by society. Her days, however, were numbered. Divine judgment was about to fall on her, on her way of life, and upon her entire nation. God had already appointed the day in which He would judge the world of her day.

The construction of the walls of Jericho was interesting in that day. The town did not have just one wall; it had two walls with a space between about fifteen feet. Both walls had gates. Getting past the first gate would not have been hard after dark; it remained open longer into the night than the inner gate. Getting past the second gate would have been almost impossible after dark. It is for this reason that the two spies landed in the home of this licentious woman. You see, the outer wall of the city was about six feet thick with a gate. The inner wall was about twelve feet thick with a gate. In between the two walls, riff-raff of the degenerate members of Jericho would build a floor up high between the two walls and install a roof to boot. Inside the inner wall lived the people who were not so degenerate but still lost. No doubt, the entry of the two spies through the first gate drew the attention of the sentry, and that set the stage for the next event.

b) The Report of the Two Spies

We come to the report of the two spies to the king of Jericho. Verse 2. *“It was told the king of Jericho, saying, ‘Behold, men from the sons of Israel have come here tonight to search out the land.’”* (2:2).

We indeed find the spies entered the gate at night, for the verse tells us it was so.

c) The Summon of the Two Spies

The king did not wait for the morning; that night, we hear of the summon of the two spies. Verse 3. *“And the king of Jericho sent word to Rahab, saying, ‘Bring out the men who have come to you, who have entered your house, for they have come to search out all the land.’”* (2:3).

Jericho guarded one of the main roads that ran from the Jordan Valley and up through the hill country. It was just seven miles from the camp of Israel in the Plain of Moab. This king knew what the nation had done with the two Amorite kings on the east side. His fear told him these spies were from Israel, and he knew what they were doing. He was right.

d) The Hiding of the Two Spies

For whatever reason, Rahab did not comply with the king’s order. We find her hiding the two spies. Verse 4. *“But the woman had taken the two men and bidden them, and she said, ‘Yes, the men came to me, but I did not know where they were from.’ It came about when it was time to shut the gate at dark, that the men went out; I do not know where the men went. Pursue them quickly, for you will overtake them.”*⁶ *But she had brought them up to the roof and hidden them in the stalks of flax which she had laid in order on the roof.”* (2:4-6).

Rahab lied to the king. The consequences could have been deadly if the king discovered the truth. She tells the king’s men the spies had left the city before the outer gate was shut for the night. But she had hidden them on the roof under *“stalks of flax.”* The flax was more than likely the roofing material.

e) The Pursing of the Two Spies

The men took Rahab at her word. We hear of the pursing of the two spies. Verse 7. *“So the men pursued them on the road to the Jordan to the fords; and as soon as those who were pursuing them had gone out, they shut the gate.”* (2:7).

The gate was not shut because it was time to be shut. The gate was shut to keep the spies from coming back in. Yet, they were still in, at least between the two walls. A *“ford”* is a shallow place in the river where the crossing was easy. In the area between Jericho and Shittim, there are four fords. Therefore, the king’s men must have checked all the fords at the Jordan River and found nothing. There was nothing to see.

f) The Hider of the Two Spies

(1) What She Knew

Rahab, the hider of the two spies, went to the men and told them what she knew. Verse 8. *“Now before they lay down, she came up to them on the roof,⁹ and said to the men, “I know that the LORD has given you the land, and that the terror of you has fallen on us, and that all the inhabitants of the land have melted away before you.” (2:8-9).*

The two spies were probably ready to fall fast asleep. No sooner had they made the seven-mile journey that night and entered the outer gate, had no choice but to seek shelter in the house of a prostitute, which broke the Levitical law, only to find themselves in trouble with the king. No doubt they were tired. But that did not matter to Rahab. The men had to go for their safety. The men had to go if the LORD was going to use them to take the Promised Land. Rahab had figured the whole thing out. She already knew about the fear in Jericho of the Nation of Israel.

(2) What She Heard

Rahab confessed to the spies what she heard about the power of the LORD of Israel. Verse 10. *“For we have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red Sea before you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to the two kings of the Amorites who were beyond the Jordan, to Sibon and Og, whom you utterly destroyed.¹¹ When we heard it, our hearts melted and no courage remained in any man any longer because of you; for the LORD your God, He is God in heaven above and on earth beneath.” (2:10-11).*

Listen again to the confession of Rahab’s knowledge concerning the LORD God. *“... for the LORD your God, He is God in heaven above and on earth beneath.”* She had heard the rumors of the Red Sea crossing, which happened forty years before, and the defeat of the Amorite kings which had happened a few months before and determined that the God of Moses *“is the God in heaven above and on earth beneath.”* All sinners can know about God. Paul, in his letter to the Romans said, *“for the invisible things of God from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead.”* (Romans 1:20). Rahab, speaking for the people of the entire town of Jericho, expressed the depth of their despair.

(3) What She Asks

Consider now what she asks of the spies. Verse 12. *“Now therefore, please swear to me by the LORD, since I have dealt kindly with you, that you also will deal kindly with my father’s household, and give me a pledge of truth,¹³ and spare my father and my mother and my brothers and my sisters, with all who belong to them, and deliver our lives from death.” (2:12-13).*

Rahab wanted to live through the onslaught by the coming nation, and she wanted her family to live too. She knew by instinct that Jericho, double-walled as it was, could not stand against the God of Israel.

(4) What She Received

Look now at what she received from the spies. A promise. Verse 14. *“So the men said to her, “Our life for yours if you do not tell this business of ours; and it shall come about when the LORD gives us the land that we will deal kindly and faithfully with you.” (2:14).*

A pledge was made to her. It is the same as an oath. The spies did not ask permission from Joshua. How could they promise something that broke the command of the LORD? How did it break the command of the LORD? Here is the LORD’s command in case you have forgotten.

“When the LORD your God brings you into the land where you are entering to possess it, and clears away many nations before you, the Hittites and the Girgashites and the Amorites and the Canaanites and the Perizzites and the Hivites and the Jebusites, seven nations greater and stronger than you,^{2a} and when the LORD your God delivers them before you and you defeat them, then you shall utterly destroy them.” (Deuteronomy 7:1-2a).

“Only in the cities of these peoples that the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance, you shall not leave alive anything that breathes.¹⁷ But you shall utterly destroy them, the Hittite and the Amorite, the Canaanite and the Perizzite, the Hivite and the Jebusite, as the LORD your God has commanded you,¹⁸ so that they may not teach you to do according to all their detestable things which they have done for their gods, so that you would sin against the LORD your God.” (Deuteronomy 20:16-18).

2. The Plan of Rahab

a) The Path of the Two Spies

(1) First through the Window

Rahab received the promise from the spies, and that leads us to the plan of Rahab. She knows best and directs the path of the two spies. First, through the window, they must go for the outer gate of the city has already been closed. Verse 15. *“Then she let them down by a rope through the window, for her house was on the city wall, so that she was living on the wall.” (2:15).*

(2) Second to the Hills

Second, verse 16 says, *“She said to them, “Go to the hill country, so that the pursuers will not happen upon you, and hide yourselves there for three days until the pursuers return. Then afterward you may go on your way.” (2:16).*

Just moments before, she had sent the king’s men to find the spies headed back across the Jordan River. Now Rahab sends the spies off into the hills to wait until the king’s men returned, and it is safe for the spies to cross the Jordan River. Here is what we must remember as we read this text. The spies were probably in Rahab’s house on the wall less than four hours – if that much. They had not spied out anything about the city save for constructing the double walls and house of Rahab built between the walls. She told them to hide for three days. The counting of Jewish time changes days at 6:00 PM each night. This means the men left on the seventh of Nisan, arrived at Jericho on the seventh of Nisan, and left out the window on the seventh of Nisan. On our Western Calendar, they left Shittim on the sixth of Nisan, arrived at Jericho on the sixth of Nisan, and probably left through the window after midnight on the seventh of Nisan. Waiting three days would mean that it would probably be safe to return to the camp of Israel on the ninth of Nisan, just in time to spend the night and cross back over the Jordan headed to Jericho the next morning with the camp on the tenth of Nisan.

b) The Instruction of the Two Spies

(1) The Sign of the Agreement

The spies gave their oath, but they included a way to be free from the oath. Here we see the instruction of the two spies, which includes the sign of the agreement. Verse 17. *“The men said to her, “We shall be free from this oath to you which you have made us swear,¹⁸ unless, when we come into the land, you tie this cord of scarlet thread in the window through which you let us down, and gather to yourself into the house your father and your mother and your brothers and all your father’s household.” (2:17-18).*

The scarlet thread was the sign of the agreement, but the spies agreed to save only those inside her house, just inside that window – nowhere else. No thread, no agreement.

(2) The Terms of the Agreement

From the sign of the agreement, we consider the terms of the agreement. Verse 19. *“It shall come about that anyone who goes out of the doors of your house into the street, his blood shall be on his own head, and we shall be free; but anyone who is with you in the house, his blood shall be on our head if a hand is laid on him.” (2:19).*

Simply, the spies agreed to protect Rahab’s family, who were just inside the window, but nowhere else.

(3) The Secret of the Agreement

From the sign and terms of the agreement, we see the secret of the agreement. Verse 20. *“But if you tell this business of ours, then we shall be free from the oath which you have made us swear.”²¹ She said, “According to your words, so be it.” So she sent them away, and they departed; and she tied the scarlet cord in the window.”* (2:20-21).

Rahab and the spies agreed to keep the plan secret between the two. She helped them out of the window in the dark of the night. Then Rahab immediately tied the scarlet thread in the window that night. She did not wait a single day. Rahab was serious about the plan to save her life and that of her family.

c) The Journey of the Two Spies

(1) What the Spies Did

From the path of the two spies to the instruction of the two spies, we come to the journey of the two spies. First, we see what the spies did. Verse 22. *“They departed and came to the hill country, and remained there for three days until the pursuers returned.”* (2:22a).

The spies took the advice of Rahab and waited three days in the hills before returning to their Israelite camp. The plan was working.

(2) What the Pursuers Found

Second, we see what the pursuers found in verse 22b. *“Now the pursuers had sought them all along the road, but had not found them.”* (2:22b).

The men had found nothing. Not a trace. Surely the king was disappointed.

(3) What the Spies Said

Third, we come to what the spies said in verse 23. *“Then the two men returned and came down from the hill country and crossed over and came to Joshua the son of Nun, and they related to him all that had happened to them.”²⁴ They said to Joshua, “Surely the LORD has given all the land into our hands; moreover, all the inhabitants of the land have melted away before us.”* (2:23-24).

Joshua was not bothered by the oath of the spies. He was comforted by their report. He did not take credit. He gave the credit to the LORD.