

Rahab and the Spies of Joshua – Part 1

Introduction

a. objectives

1. subject – Rahab protects the spies of Joshua in Jericho in exchange for her family's lives
2. aim – to cause us to seek the will of God in every aspect of our lives, no matter how uncomfortable
3. passage – Joshua 2:1-24

b. outline

1. The Spies Come to Jericho (Joshua 2:1-7)
2. The Spies Promise Rahab Protection (Joshua 2:8-21)
3. The Spies Return to Joshua (Joshua 2:22-24)

c. opening

1. the **process** of this pericope
 - a. the entire chapter belongs to a single pericope – it has *great detail*, but it is a *single story*
 - b. so, because of our celebration of the Lord's Supper, we will "break" this story into two sermons
 1. today we will deal only with the **contextual** part of the story (**vv. 1-7**)
 2. and, due to its length, I will not read the entirety of the chapter up front
2. the **place** of this pericope
 - a. this story is an "inserted" event in the flow of the book as a whole
 1. in **chap. 1**, the people prepare to cross, but, the crossing doesn't occur until **chap. 3**
 2. thus, there is some question as to *exactly when* this occurs
 1. the word "sent" in **v. 1** is ambiguous: it could mean "had sent," implying an earlier point in time
 2. **i.e.** the *actual event* of the spies *could have* occurred *prior* to the command of **chap. 1 (clarity)**
 3. **IMO:** that makes more sense – the spies are sent into Canaan; they report to Joshua that everything is ready; *then* Joshua issues his command; and the people cross into Canaan
 - a. **i.e.** the success of the report from Jericho compels Joshua to lead the people forward

I. The Spies Come to Jericho (Joshua 2:1-7)

Content

a. the spies are sent by Joshua (v. 1)

1. the Israelites are camped at "Shittim," in the plains of Moab, just to the E of the Jordan (**Gilead**)
 - a. this is the area that the E tribes of Reuben and Manasseh want to settle (**see chap. 1**)
 - b. their entry into this area is recorded in **Numbers 22-25**, including the events of Balaam
 1. and the Israelites defeat the kings of Sihon and Og in the territory of the Amorites
 2. **note:** this is what causes the fear of the Israelites to fall on the Canaanites, and the *impetus* behind Rahab's willingness to hide these spies in exchange for her life (**see vv. 10f**)
 - c. their journey from Sinai (over 40 years) is summarized in **Numbers 33**, Abel-Shittim being last
 1. they arrive at the time of the harvest, in the spring, in April (**at the Passover**)
 - d. **IOW:** Joshua sends spies across the Jordan *in advance* of the people crossing into Canaan
2. **question:** *why* does Joshua send spies into Canaan, if God has already told him of the outcome?
 - a. maybe, *as a good military leader*, Joshua simply wants to be prepared for what may come
 - b. or, maybe, Joshua wants to *show the people* (again!) that they can (and will!) take this land
 1. *another* set of spies (like he was 40 years ago) that bring back a *similar report* (**see v. 24**)
 - c. or, maybe (unknown to Joshua), the spies are *sovereignly purposed* by God for a *greater good*.
 1. that God has a **remnant** in Jericho that he has elect to himself, and uses the spies to discover them – **a people set aside by his grace to be saved** through the destruction of the city
 2. **i.e.** the spies "finding" Rahab and her family, as purposed by God to be part of his *larger plan*, **the line of the eventual "seed" of Israel that will come through her**
 - a. she is one of five (5) women in the genealogy of **Matthew 1**, the grandmother of Boaz
 - b. she is included in the great "Faith Hall of Fame" in **Hebrews 11**, for her faith in this incident
 - c. she is referenced as an example of "living faith" in **James 2**, *justified* by her efforts here
 3. the spies go to the house of Rahab, a prostitute who lived in the city (**i.e.** in the city wall; **v. 15**)
 - a. entry into the city was not difficult (**i.e.** with the gates open; **v. 5**); to farm, collect water, trade, etc.

- b. Jericho is a **Middle Bronze Age** (2200-1550BC) city-state: built upon a hill, walled for protection, close to a water source, surrounded by arable land, and situated on a major road
 - 1. approx. 10 acres with 1000-1500 inhabitants; a *double wall* (**inhabitable**) and a moat
 - 2. at the “back door” to the Hill Country, situated ~5 mi. to the W of the Jordan (at the edge of its lush valley) NW of the Dead Sea ~7-10 mi. (**IOW:** at the lower end of the Jordan)
 - 3. the *exact location* is unknown, although Bryant Wood claimed it was “City IV”
 - a. the city was *destroyed*, cursed to never be rebuilt; **Joshua 6:26 cf. Hiel: 1 Kings 16:34**
 - c. so, why go to *her house* (no reason is given)?
 - 1. **logical:** visitors (strangers) at the house of a prostitute would not be unusual or raise suspicion
 - a. however, given their interaction, it is *highly unlikely* the men used her “services”
 - b. more than likely, given that Rahab *knows* about the history of the Israelites, *and desires to come under their protection*, it seems that she *invites them in* purposely as her hope
 - 2. **IOW:** the spies go to her house *because they are directed there*, both by God and by her
- b. the king of Jericho learns of the spies (vv. 2-3)**
- 1. **question:** how does the king find out that there are spies in the city, *and what their purpose is?*
 - a. after all, Joshua sends two men “*secretly*” (**v. 1**) and there is no one else who knows their intent
 - 1. **IMO:** it’s possible that not even the *leaders of Israel* know about these spies being sent
 - b. maybe someone *overhears* them discussing their plans with Rahab, and reports it (**family?**)
 - 1. after all, the flow of the narrative *seems to imply* such a discussion before **v. 2**
 - 2. and, the city is *not that big*, so it would be easy for rumors to spread about some strangers
 - 3. and, based on **v. 10**, the presence of the Israelites *is well known in the city* (**paranoia?**)
 - c. or, maybe God *himself* makes the presence of the spies known *in order to force out Rahab’s faith*
 - 1. note **v. 12** (following Rahab’s great confession of **vv. 9-11**): is it possible that God caused the spies to be found out so that Rahab would be *forced* to protect them, and that doing so would solidify her confession of faith, her *choice to trust* the God of the Israelites?
 - 2. which leads into the most “controversial” part of the story (**in a moment, but first**) ...
 - 2. **Rahab protects the spies from the king (vv. 6-7; chronologically before vv. 4-5)**
 - 1. her habitation in the city was *between* the inner and outer wall, built *specifically* for habitation
 - a. the “*roof*” would have been a wooden structure between the walls covered with organic material
 - b. **ITC:** “*stalks of flax*” that were probably gleaned from the field after the harvest (*i.e.* a *thatch*)
 - 2. Rahab hid the spies “*in*” the thatch on the roof – if the men came to search her abode
 - 3. **Rahab denies the presence of the spies (vv. 4-5)**
 - 1. she *confesses as true* that the men did come to her house ...
 - 2. but, she *lies* about a) their origination (which she knew), b) their departure (they had not left), and c) where they went (which was *actually* on her roof)
 - a. **controversy:** Rahab’s protection of the spies is based on her *lying*, the assumption being is that lying is always wrong, right? after all, doesn’t the Ninth Commandment prohibit lying?
 - b. **question #1:** who is Rahab lying *to* – someone who deserves the truth (as righteous), or someone who will *use* the truth in unrighteousness?
 - 1. **answer:** the *already condemned* king of the city – Rahab lies to a man who is *fundamentally unrighteous*, the very *emblem* of why the city is about to be destroyed
 - c. **question #2:** *why* is Rahab lying – to further her own selfish interests, or to protect an agent of God as a function of trusting in God himself?
 - 1. **answer:** to do what is good and right *in the eyes of God*, to protect *his* agents against unrighteousness and to solidify her faith in the God of the spies
 - d. **fact:** Rahab is never condemned by another biblical writer for her lie – she is *elevated*
 - 1. the question here is not “did Rahab lie?”, but (rather) was her action, *in a fallen world*, consistent with a desire to trust in the Living God over against keeping a “legalistic” standard?
 - 4. **the value of Rahab’s protection of the spies**
 - 1. **God sets aside a prostitute, a liar, and a foreigner to Israel to be saved from destruction**
 - a. there is nothing *inherently* good in her, and nothing that would cause *us* to embrace her
 - b. but, she becomes the *perfect example* of the **undeserving nature of God’s grace** = one whom *we would utterly dismiss as unworthy* becomes the recipient of the unfettered mercy of God
 - c. *i.e.* his choice to reveal himself to her and to save her from the destruction she is destined for
 - 2. **and, in the Supper, we too admit our utter unworthiness, and are reminded in the elements of the unfettered mercy of God over us, the grace of God that rescued us from the destruction we were destined for and which Christ took upon himself in our place**