

Sunday Night Message

November 5, 2017

Joshua 2 – *Rahab the Harlot*

Series – Joshua

Text – Joshua 2

Introduction

Joshua 2 reveals the recon mission that was ordered by Joshua to check out the City of Jericho that the Israelites were about to attack. Though the Lord had guaranteed success against Israel's enemies, it was probably wise for Joshua to get some eyes in the city in order to see what they were up against.

In this chapter, we are introduced to a great Bible lady who is not only one of only two women mentioned in the Hall of Faith in Hebrews 11, but she was also part of the lineage of both David and Jesus. Rahab became the wife of Salmon and she gave birth to Boaz who was the great-grandfather of David. (Matthew 1:5; Luke 3:32)

"By faith the harlot Rahab perished not with them that believed not, when she had received the spies with peace." (Hebrews 11:31)

Rahab was also mentioned in James:

"Likewise also was not Rahab the harlot justified by works, when she had received the messengers, and had sent them out another way?" (James 2:25)

Rahab is certainly a wonderful picture of the grace of God. She goes from being a pagan prostitute in Joshua to a blood-related mother of David and Jesus; and a blood-washed, justified daughter of God. She was like the believers in Thessalonica:

"For they themselves shew of us what manner of entering in we had unto you, and how ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God;" (1 Thessalonians 1:9)

Oftentimes, we are shocked at the people God chooses to use for His glory. The Apostle Paul was certainly a surprise to many, and no doubt, so was Rahab.

I Joshua Sends the Spies (v. 1)

Though this decision makes good human sense and may reveal Joshua's military wisdom, it should also be pointed out that God did not tell Joshua to do this. Nor do we see Joshua asking the Lord about it. In the future, Joshua will have to learn many lessons about not praying about his decisions. God wants to direct our decisions:

"Pray without ceasing." (1 Thessalonians 5:17)

This is reminiscent of the twelve spies that were sent into the land many years earlier. (Numbers 13:1 – 2) Interestingly, Joshua was one of that original group. He and Caleb were the only two who brought back a positive report. The other ten spies discouraged the congregation of Israel, and as a result they didn't have enough faith to obey God and enter into the Land of Promise. God punished the congregation by not allowing them to enter into the land for forty years. Every adult from that generation had to die before God would allow them to enter into Canaan.

It is interesting that this time Joshua sent out two instead of twelve. The last time, only two came back with a good report. Perhaps, Joshua chose two men who were of the caliber and character of himself and Caleb who would be sure to bring back an encouraging and positive reconnaissance report, one that was filled with faith in their God.

The congregation of Israel was camped at Shittim, which was quite a distance away from Jericho. (Perhaps as much as 15 miles – refer to Map) The name, "Shittim" means Acacia tree, and it is thought that Shittim was a place with an Acacia grove. Much of the wood used in the Tabernacle, including the wood for the Ark of the Covenant, the altar on incense, and the Table of Shewbread, was shittim (or Acacia) wood. (The phrase "shittim wood" is used 26 times in Exodus.)

The spies were sent out secretly. Obviously, their mission would be kept secret from the inhabitants of Jericho, but this could also mean that Joshua kept this mission from the congregation, which would shield them from the discouragement of another negative report.

According to Wiersbe:

Jericho was one of many "city-states" in Canaan, each one ruled by a king (see Joshua 12:9–24). The city covered about eight or nine acres, and there is archeological evidence that double walls about fifteen feet apart protected the city. Rahab's house was on the wall (2:15).

Meanwhile, Jericho was a strategic city in Joshua's plan for conquering Canaan. After taking Jericho, Joshua could then cut straight across and divide the land; and then it would be much easier to defeat the cities in the south and then in the north.¹

Notice that the spies went to the house of a harlot whose name was Rahab. I am curious as to why they would choose her house. Perhaps, they thought that they would not draw too much attention there as it would be common for strange men to come and go from there. We can also conclude that it was the providence of God that brought them together.

¹ Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). Be Strong (p. 35). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

Practical Note – Rahab could have been home one day minding her “business” when God showed up at her door, and everything in her life changed from that point on. What is God going to do in your life tomorrow?

Many believe that harlot’s homes were also often used as inns.

II Rahab Resorts to Lies, But She Hides the Spies (vs. 2 – 7)

Somehow, the King of Jericho got wind of the spies’ mission. Someone is always watching. The devil has plenty of people out there who are waiting to catch you. They will catch you doing something right and report to those who will try to stop you. They will also catch you doing something wrong and broadcast it to the world. The Devil will actually tempt you to do evil, and then tell on you to God. He is not only the tempter, he is also the accuser of the brethren.

Not only did the king know where the men were from and who they stayed with in Jericho, he also knew their mission.

It seems that the king did not go personally to Rahab’s house, but instead “sent unto” her, meaning that he called her to come to him.

It is important to note that Rahab was not justified because she hid the spies, and she certainly wasn’t justified because she lied. She hid the spies because she had faith in God. (v. 11)

This brings us to the all-important question: was it right for Rahab to lie? Before we answer this question, we should consider a couple of things:

- 1 Rahab was a gentile who knew nothing about the morality of God, save that the law of God was written on her heart. She knew it was wrong to lie, just as the world today knows it, but she would probably ascribe to situational ethics, much like the world does today. She would probably believe that it may be permissible to do something wrong, in order to ultimately accomplish something that is right.
- 2 Many believers today would be all right with lying to an enemy in a time of war, just as they would permit the taking of a human life in the time of war.
- 3 A third consideration here is that she did not obey her civil authority. (Romans 13) Of course, we also know that God is the highest authority, and Peter told us that we ought to obey God rather than men. (Acts 5:29)

My position is that it is never right to lie, just as it is never right to murder. However, the Bible does not consider the taking of a life in wartime to be murder.

God never commends Rahab for lying, but He does commend her for receiving the spies.

There were actually four lies told by Rahab:

- 1 *"I wist not whence they were:"*
- 2 "And it came to pass about the time of shutting of the gate, when it was dark, that the men went out"
- 3 "whither the men went I wot not"
- 4 "pursue after them quickly; for ye shall overtake them." (Joshua 2:4-5)

Usually one lie will lead to many others. Someone once said that liars need to have good memories, so that they can remember what they already lied about and keep their story consistent.

Wiersbe concurs:

Since Rahab was a believer at that time, how do we defend her lies? On the one hand, she demonstrated her faith in the Lord by risking her life to protect the spies; but, on the other hand, she acted like any pagan in the city when she lied about her guests. Perhaps we're expecting too much from a new believer whose knowledge of God was adequate for salvation but certainly limited when it came to the practical things of life. If seasoned believers like Abraham and Isaac resorted to deception (Gen. 12:10–20; 20; 26:6–11), as well as David (1 Sam. 21:2), we had better not be too hard on Rahab. This is not to excuse or encourage lying, but simply to take her circumstances into consideration lest we condemn her too severely.

Lying is wrong (Prov. 12:22), and the fact that God had Rahab's lies recorded in Scripture is no proof that He approved of them. However, let's confess that most of us would hesitate to tell the truth if it really were a matter of life or death. It's one thing for me to tell the truth about myself and suffer for it; but do I have the right to cause the death of others, especially those who have come under my roof for protection? Many people have been honored for deceiving the enemy during wartime and saving innocent lives, and this was war! Suppose we looked upon Rahab as a "freedom fighter"; would that change the picture at all?²

The BKC says this:

Was Rahab wrong to lie since her falsehood protected the spies? Are there some situations in which a lie is acceptable?

After all, some say, this was a cultural matter, for Rahab was born and raised among the depraved Canaanites among whom lying was universally practiced. She probably saw no

² *ibid*

evil in her act. Further, if she had told the truth the spies would have been killed by the king of Jericho.

But such arguments are not convincing. To argue that the spies would certainly have perished if Rahab had been truthful is to ignore the option that God could have protected the spies in some other way. To excuse Rahab for indulging in a common practice is to condone what God condemns. Paul quoted a prophet of Crete who said that Cretians were inveterate liars, and then added, "This testimony is true. Therefore, rebuke them sharply, so that they will be sound in the faith" (Titus 1:13). The lie of Rahab was recorded but not approved. The Bible approved her faith demonstrated by good works (Heb. 11:31), but not her falsehood. (However, some explain Rahab's lying by saying that deception is allowable in war.)³

It appears that Rahab's lie was believed by the king because they followed her advice, and sent men out of the city to pursue after the spies, which, in reality, had never left the city.

According to Ryrie, the fords mentioned in v. 7 were on the eastern side of the city, and Rahab's house was likely on the western wall, which means that she sent them in the opposite direction of the spies.⁴

Rahab hid the spies in the "stalks of flax". MacArthur says, "These fibers, used for making linen, were stems about 3 feet long, left to sit in water, then piled in the sun or on a level roof to dry."⁵

III Rahab Pleads for Her Family's Lives (vs. 8 – 14)

Why did Rahab do all of this? She believed God. This is a very important point. In v. 9, she says that she knew that the Lord had given the Israelites the land. She believed the promises of God. She then states, in v. 10, that she heard about the drying up of the Red Sea, which happened forty years earlier. She had heard about God and believed it, and now she was acting upon her faith. Others in the city believed God, but didn't act upon their faith. God had given the people of Canaan 40 years to consider His works, but many chose to reject him. A few, however, believe God, and trusted that He was going to do exactly what He said He would do. Notice her clear statement of faith in God in v. 11:

"... for the LORD your God, he is God in heaven above, and in earth beneath." (Joshua 2:11)

³ Campbell, D. K. (1985). Joshua. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 1, p. 331). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

⁴ Ryrie, C. C. (1994). Ryrie study Bible: King James Version (Expanded ed., p. 338). Chicago: Moody Press.

⁵ MacArthur, J., Jr. (Ed.). (1997). The MacArthur Study Bible (electronic ed., p. 306). Nashville, TN: Word Pub

In vs. 12 – 14, Rahab pleads for her families lives, just as Abraham plead for Lot's family in Genesis 18:22 – 33. There, however, not all of Lot's extended family chose to believe him. Here, it appears that Rahab's family are all saved, at least from the destruction of Jericho.

This brings us to an important principle. The family members of a saved person, though not necessarily saved themselves, are blessed because of the blessings that God places upon the home of the saved person:

"And the woman which hath an husband that believeth not, and if he be pleased to dwell with her, let her not leave him. For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband: else were your children unclean; but now are they holy." (1 Corinthians 7:13-14)

The spies promise to "deal kindly and truly" with Rahab's family as long as she keep's their business secret, which apparently, she does.

It is natural for a saved person to desire to see her family members saved. Peter first heard about Jesus because he had a brother who was concerned about him.

"One of the two which heard John speak, and followed him, was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. He first findeth his own brother Simon, and saith unto him, We have found the Messias, which is, being interpreted, the Christ. And he brought him to Jesus. And when Jesus beheld him, he said, Thou art Simon the son of Jona: thou shalt be called Cephas, which is by interpretation, A stone." (John 1:40-42)

IV The Sign of the Scarlet Line (vs. 15 – 21)

The mountains were on the western side of the city, opposite to where the pursuers had travelled. According to Ryrie, these mountains are full of caves and would be a perfect place to hide.⁶

The spies agreed to use the scarlet line, or cord, as a signal to the Israelite attackers. This was the same cord that she used to lower the spies to safety. The color of the cord is significant as scarlet is the color of blood. The blood had to be applied to the doorposts in order for the death angel to pass over. (Exodus 12)

The scarlet line, or cord, was a token of the covenant that these spies made with Rahab. Wiersbe says:

In the case of Rahab, the spies instructed her to hang a scarlet rope out of the window of her house, which was built into the wall (Josh. 2:18). This scarlet rope would identify the

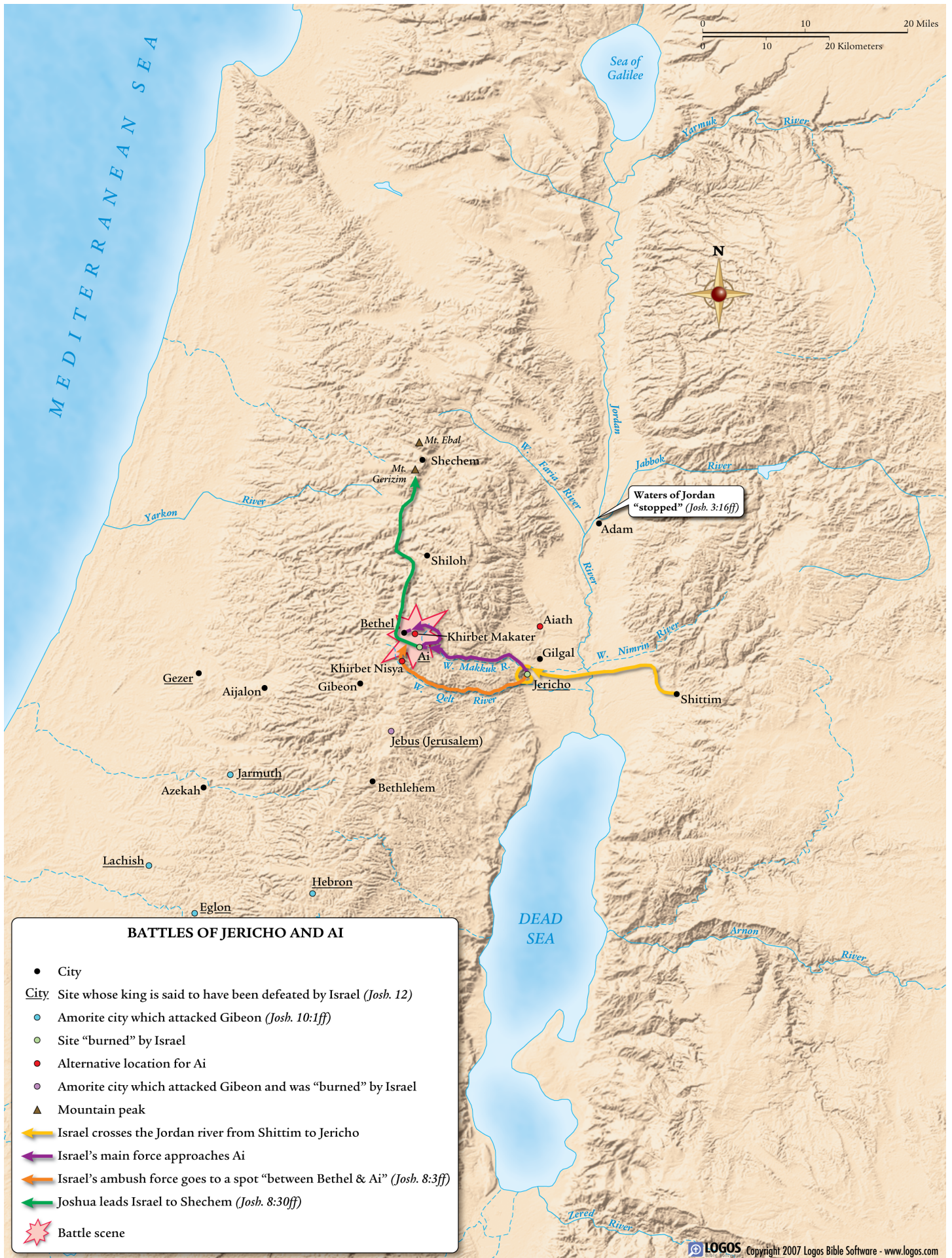
⁶ Ryrie, C. C. (1994). Ryrie study Bible: King James Version (Expanded ed., p. 339). Chicago: Moody Press.

“house of safety” to the army of Israel when they came to take the city. The color of the rope is significant for it reminds us of blood. Just as the blood on the doorposts in Egypt marked a house that the angel of death was to pass over (Ex. 12:1–13), so the scarlet rope marked a house on the Jericho wall whose occupants the Jewish soldiers were to protect. Rahab let the men down from the window with that rope and kept it in the window from that hour. This was the “sure sign” of the covenant that she had asked for (Josh. 2:12–23).⁷

V The Spies Report of the Prize (vs. 22 – 24)

These spies bring back a totally different report than the spies did 40 years earlier. They are positive, encouraging, and full of faith. They were now even more sure of the fact that God had delivered the Canaanites into the hands of the People of God. This time, it was not the Israelites who were afraid, it was the City of Jericho.

⁷ Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). Be Strong (p. 42). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.



0 10 20 Miles
0 10 20 Kilometers



Waters of Jordan
"stopped" (Josh. 3:16ff)

BATTLES OF JERICHO AND AI

- City
- City. Site whose king is said to have been defeated by Israel (*Josh. 12*)
- Amorite city which attacked Gibeon (*Josh. 10:1ff*)
- Site "burned" by Israel
- Alternative location for Ai
- Amorite city which attacked Gibeon and was "burned" by Israel
- ▲ Mountain peak
- Israel crosses the Jordan river from Shittim to Jericho
- Israel's main force approaches Ai
- Israel's ambush force goes to a spot "between Bethel & Ai" (*Josh. 8:3ff*)
- Joshua leads Israel to Shechem (*Josh. 8:30ff*)
- ★ Battle scene

