



Joshua - Chapter Two

I Joshua 1:1-5:15 - Crossing into the Land (continues)

Summary of Chapter Two

In Chapter One, Joshua received his charge. In Chapter Two, he begins to 'take charge.' The adventures of the spies provide the central thread around which the chapter is woven. However, at least as important is the story of Rahab's escape from the coming judgement.

I.b Joshua 2:1-24 - Spies Sent to Jericho

Refer to the chapter summary above.

¹ Then Joshua son of Nun sent two men secretly from Shittim as spies, saying, 'Go, view the land, especially Jericho.' So they went, and entered the house of a prostitute whose name was Rahab, and spent the night there.

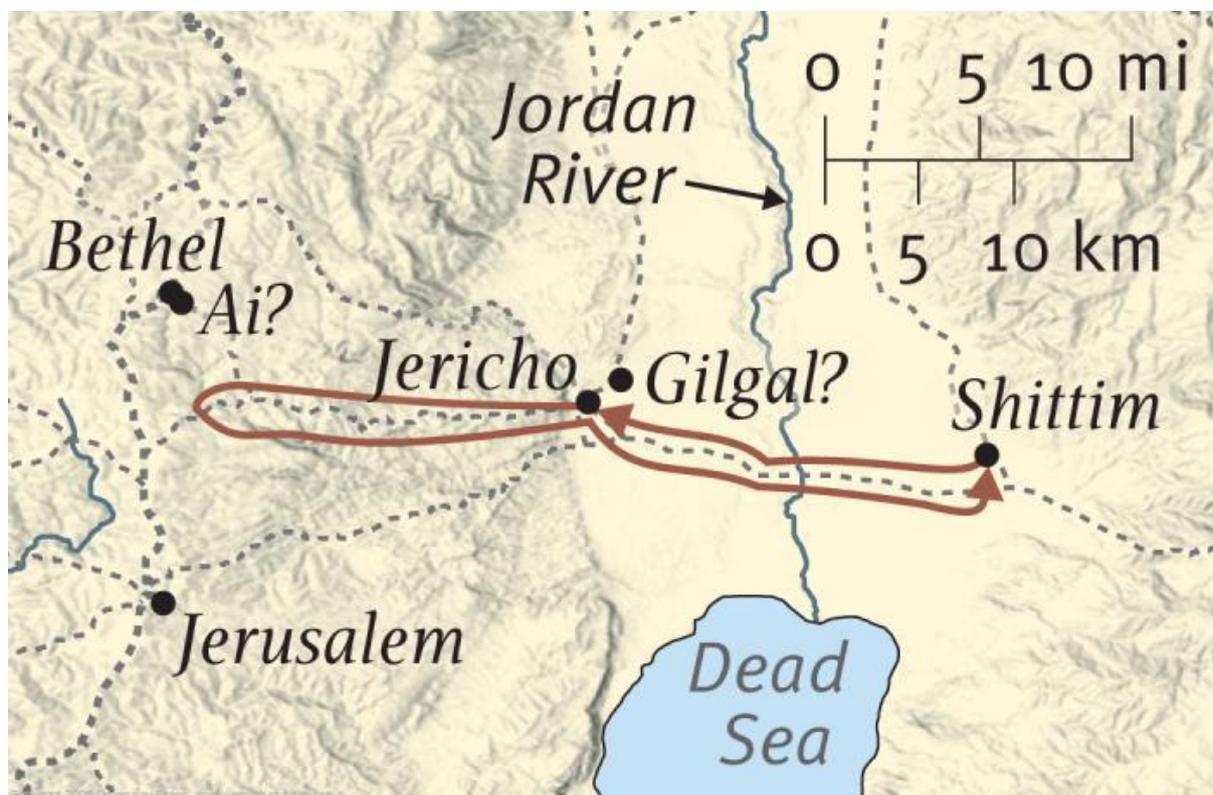
Joshua 2:1

Joshua sent two men as spies. The sending of the two spies, to gather intelligence about the hostile territory, underscores Joshua's skill as a leader and his concern for prudent preparation. In the wider context, the story of the initial conquest and defeat of Jericho stands in stark contrast to the narrative describing Israel's failure to take possession of the land forty years earlier; refer to Numbers Chapters 13-14 and Deuteronomy Chapter 1. It also shows the stark contrast between the bad report of the ten spies in Numbers 13:25-33 as compared to the good report of the two spies: <<*Truly the Lord has given all the land into our hands*>> (v.24).

The text does not state who the two spies are, but Jewish tradition, speculation, really, says they were faithful Caleb and the High Priest Eliezer.

That the spies were sent secretly shows wisdom on Joshua's part. The expedition of the last spies that went out publicly turned out badly for Israel, when a majority of the spies came back with a discouraging report; refer to Numbers Chapter 13.

Shittim, which means 'the Acacia trees,' was east of the Jordan River, although its exact location is unknown. Two potential sites have been proposed: Tell el-Kefrein, 6 miles or 9.7 km northeast of the Dead Sea, and the much larger Tell el-Hamman, 2 miles or 3.2 km farther east of the Jordan. Shittim was the site of an earlier instance of Israelite prostitution, both physical and spiritual: <<*While Israel was staying at Shittim, the people began to have sexual relations with the women of Moab. These invited the people to the sacrifices of their gods, and the people ate and bowed down to their gods. Thus Israel yoked itself to the Baal of Peor, and the Lord's anger was kindled against Israel*>> (Numbers 25:1-3). Shittim is referred to as the valley of the Acacias in Joel 2:18.



The Journey of the Two Spies

Joshua prepared to enter Canaan by sending two spies from Shittim to scout out the land and the city of Jericho. The spies spent the first night in Jericho at the house of Rahab the prostitute, who hid the men and sent away the soldiers sent by the king of Jericho to capture them. After travelling deeper into the hills and hiding for three days, the spies headed back across the Jordan River to report to Joshua at Shittim.

Go, view the land, especially Jericho. God has greater things in mind for this spy mission; it will fail as a mission of military reconnaissance, but it will succeed in God's purpose.

Entered the house of a prostitute. The narrative carefully avoids any suggestion of a sexual relationship between the two spies and Rahab. Some commentators believe that the house was most likely a kind of inn or way station, which would be a logical place to stay and to gather information. Although she was a prostitute, Rahab was spared judgement by the mercy of God, and she is remembered as one of the ancestors of Christ: <<*and Salmon the father of Boaz by Rahab, and Boaz the father of Obed by Ruth, and Obed the father of Jesse*>> (Matthew 1:5), for her faith: <<*By faith Rahab the prostitute did not perish with those who were disobedient, because she had received the spies in peace*>> (Hebrews 11:31), and for her good works: <<*Likewise, was not Rahab the prostitute also justified by works when she welcomed the messengers and sent them out by another road?*>> (James 2:25).

² The king of Jericho was told, 'Some Israelites have come here tonight to search out the land.'

Joshua 2:2

The king of Jericho was told. The spies' intent to remain undercover was singularly unsuccessful! Canaan at that time consisted of various city-states, each with a central, often walled, city surrounded by villages and farmland and each with its own king.

³ Then the king of Jericho sent orders to Rahab, 'Bring out the men who have come to you, who entered your house, for they have come only to search out the whole land.'⁴ But the woman took the two men and hid them. Then she said, 'True, the men came to me, but I did not know where they came from.'

Joshua 2:3-4

But the woman took the two men and hid them. In the culture of that day, there was a strong tradition of hospitality. If someone was a guest in someone's house, the owner had a strong duty to protect them and care for them. Even considering this, Rahab went much further than the respect of cultural traditions regarding hospitality. She put her own life on the line for these men.

I did not know where they came from. Rahab's deceptive response has been alternatively condemned as a lie or defended as justified in the context of impending warfare. The narrative, in fact, does not address this ethical issue, and

the NT, while commending Rahab for protecting the spies, offers no explicit comment regarding her methods; refer again to Hebrews 11:31 and James 2:25.

Similar instances of 'deception' are found in Exodus 1:15-21, 1 Samuel 16:2 and 1 Kings 22:19-23. Given that this is a descriptive narrative, rather than prescriptive instruction, no general ethical principles can be drawn from Rahab's actions. It is also possible, however, to say that Rahab's profession of faith in vv.9-14 implies her new allegiance to the Lord and to his people. Thus she helps them in their warfare, and she expresses her new allegiance by protecting the spies with a ruse. This is a similar principle where Joshua uses a ruse to win a battle (Joshua 8:5-8).

Rahab is one of four women mentioned in the genealogy of Jesus in the first chapter of Matthew; the other three are Tamar (v.3), Ruth the Moabitess (v.5), and the 'wife of Uriah' (v.6), a reference to Bathsheba.

⁵ And when it was time to close the gate at dark, the men went out. Where the men went I do not know. Pursue them quickly, for you can overtake them.' ⁶ She had, however, brought them up to the roof and hidden them with the stalks of flax that she had laid out on the roof.

Joshua 2:5-6

Flax is the plant from which linen is made by a process of alternately drying and soaking the flax fibres. The flat rooftops of houses were convenient places for drying the stalks, as well as other purposes: <<*It happened, late one afternoon, when David rose from his couch and was walking about on the roof of the king's house, that he saw from the roof a woman bathing; the woman was very beautiful*>> (2 Samuel 11:2), <<*So the people went out and brought them, and made booths for themselves, each on the roofs of their houses, and in their courts and in the courts of the house of God, and in the square at the Water Gate and in the square at the Gate of Ephraim*>> (Nehemiah 8:16), <<*At the end of twelve months he was walking on the roof of the royal palace of Babylon, and the king said, 'Is this not magnificent Babylon, which I have built as a royal capital by my mighty power and for my glorious majesty?'*>> (Daniel 4:29-30), and: <<*About noon the next day, as they were on their journey and approaching the city, Peter went up on the roof to pray*>> (Acts 10:9).

⁷ So the men pursued them on the way to the Jordan as far as the fords. As soon as the pursuers had gone out, the gate was shut.

Joshua 2:7

The Jordan River forms a large natural boundary between Transjordan on the east and Cisjordan on the west. As it lacked any bridges in antiquity, the Jordan was

generally impassable except by swimming, or it could be waded at shallow areas or **fords** under appropriate water conditions. Between the Sea of Galilee in the north and the Dead Sea in the south, there were few places where the Jordan could be crossed. One such place, however, was near Jericho, and the king's men probably hoped to cut off the fleeing spies at that crossing point, as also seen in the account of Ehud leading Israel into battle: <<*He said to them, 'Follow after me; for the Lord has given your enemies the Moabites into your hand.'* So they went down after him, and seized the fords of the Jordan against the Moabites, and allowed no one to cross over>> (Judges 3:28).

⁸ Before they went to sleep, 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 dread of you has fallen on us, and that all the inhabitants of the land melt in fear before you.'

Joshua 2:8-9

I know that the Lord has given you the land. Rahab shows a remarkable awareness of Israel's history and of the Lord's intention to give Israel the land of Canaan. Her confession is filled with the language and theology of the Pentateuch, especially Deuteronomy, and echoes Joshua 1:2. The narration itself does not clarify whether her confession implies spiritual conversion or simply recognition of the supreme power of Israel's God, but her later integration into Israel favours a genuine conversion; refer to Joshua 6:17 and 6:25.

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 that were beyond the Jordan, to Sihon and Og, whom you utterly destroyed.

Joshua 2:10

In Genesis Chapter 15 the Lord promised Abraham that his descendants would one day inherit the land of Canaan, but not until the iniquity of the Amorites was complete. Outside the Bible the Amorites are referred to as Martu, Sumerian for westerner, and Amurru in Akkadian. They are attested as early as the beginning of the 3rd Millennium BC. Migrating westward and southward into Canaan, they were at their strongest in the middle of the 2nd Millennium BC and faded quickly thereafter. In biblical parlance, the term Amorite is variously used to connote the inhabitants of Canaan generally, and the inhabitants of the hill country specifically.

The two kings Sihon and Og are not mentioned outside the Bible; refer to Numbers Chapter 21 and Deuteronomy Chapter 3 for accounts of their battles with Israel.

¹¹ As soon as we heard it, our hearts failed, and there was no courage left in any of us because of you. The Lord your God is indeed God in heaven above and on earth below.

Joshua 2:11

As soon as we heard it, our hearts failed. They had heard of the power of the Lord from the accounts that were circulating ever since the Israelites were led out of Egypt: <<*The peoples heard, they trembled; pangs seized the inhabitants of Philistia. Then the chiefs of Edom were dismayed; trembling seized the leaders of Moab; all the inhabitants of Canaan melted away*>> (Exodus 15:14-15). The people knew that they could not stand against God even though they dwelt within a fortified city.

The Lord your God is indeed God in heaven above and on earth below. This is a statement of faith. It is not strong faith and it is not perfect faith, but Rahab's faith is commendable nonetheless. Some Christians have been appalled at the fact that Rahab was a prostitute and a liar. However, the fact is that she was not saved by her works, but by her faith. She knew who God was, she knew who she was, and she trusted in God for her very life.

¹² Now then, since I have dealt kindly with you, swear to me by the Lord that you in turn will deal kindly with my family. Give me a sign of good faith ¹³ that you will spare my father and mother, my brothers and sisters, and all who belong to them, and deliver our lives from death.' ¹⁴ The men said to her, 'Our life for yours! If you do not tell this business of ours, then we will deal kindly and faithfully with you when the Lord gives us the land.'

Joshua 2:12-14

Swear to me by the Lord that you in turn will deal kindly with my family. Rahab's desire to see her family saved, and the length she goes to in order to save their lives shows that her love should be noticed, as well as her faith. This shows that Rahab longed for assurance by asking for an oath. She wanted to leave her sinful life and culture and live with God's people.

We will deal kindly and faithfully with you. The response of the spies comes as a surprise, given that Israel was to dispossess and destroy the inhabitants of the land God had promised to Israel: <<*In the plains of Moab by the Jordan at Jericho, the Lord spoke to Moses, saying: Speak to the Israelites, and say to them: When you cross over the Jordan into the land of Canaan, you shall drive out all the inhabitants of the land from before you, destroy all their figured stones, destroy all their cast images, and demolish all their high places*>>

(Numbers 33:50-52). This underscores the gracious character of the God of Israel and the fact that the boundary between Israel and Canaan was not drawn along ethnic lines but in terms of allegiance to the Lord. It also shows that there was room for exceptions in the general instruction to destroy the Canaanites, for people who came to genuine faith in the God of Israel.

¹⁵ Then she let them down by a rope through the window, for her house was on the outer side of the city wall and she resided within the wall itself. ¹⁶ She said to them, ‘Go towards the hill country, so that the pursuers may not come upon you. Hide yourselves there for three days, until the pursuers have returned; then afterwards you may go on your way.’

Joshua 2:15-16

For her house was on the outer side of the city wall. This interesting architectural note explains how Rahab lowered the spies through a window to the outside of the city. Archaeological exploration at the site of Jericho suggests that the city probably enjoyed a double wall structure, with houses particularly of poorer individuals built between the inner and outer wall. Those houses abutting the outer wall may well have had a window in the wall.

Their escape is reminiscent of Paul’s escape from the Jews in Damascus: <<*After some time had passed, the Jews plotted to kill him, but their plot became known to Saul. They were watching the gates day and night so that they might kill him; but his disciples took him by night and let him down through an opening in the wall, lowering him in a basket*>> (Acts 9:23-25).

¹⁷ The men said to her, ‘We will be released from this oath that you have made us swear to you ¹⁸ if we invade the land and you do not tie this crimson cord in the window through which you let us down, and you do not gather into your house your father and mother, your brothers, and all your family.

Joshua 2:17-18

We will be released from this oath that you have made us swear to you. Had Rahab failed to put the Crimson cord in place then her fate was her own responsibility and not the spies. Abraham’s servant would also be released from his oath to bring back a wife for Isaac if the woman he found refused to come: <<***But if the woman is not willing to follow you, then you will be free from this oath of mine; only you must not take my son back there***>> (Genesis 24:8).

Crimson cord. This was the signal to the army of Israel that the people in this home were to be spared. Despite Rahab's desire, despite her faith, despite the promises of these spies, she would have perished unless she put her trust in a blood red cord cast down from her window. Without the crimson cord, she could not have been saved. As early as the 1st Century AD, commentators such as Clement of Rome, Justin Martyr, Ireneaus, Origen and more saw this crimson cord as a symbol of the blood of Jesus. The instructions that Rahab should gather and retain her entire family in her house recall the procedure prescribed at the time of the first Passover; refer to Exodus 12:22 and its context. The cord's colour would enable it to be clearly visible against the wall.

¹⁹ If any of you go out of the doors of your house into the street, they shall be responsible for their own death, and we shall be innocent; but if a hand is laid upon any who are with you in the house, we shall bear the responsibility for their death. ²⁰ But if you tell this business of ours, then we shall be released from this oath that you made us swear to you.' ²¹ She said, 'According to your words, so be it.' She sent them away and they departed. Then she tied the crimson cord in the window.

Joshua 2:19-21

If any of you go out of the doors of your house into the street, they shall be responsible for their own death. Rahab immediately put her faith into both the identification and safety of the crimson cord. She also trusted in the ones who made the promise, i.e. **according to your words, so be it.** Joshua would be a saviour for Rahab, but a judge of the rest of Jericho. In the same way Jesus is a saviour for those who trust in him, but a judge for those who reject him: <<*The Father judges no one but has given all judgement to the Son*>> (John 5:22).

But if you tell this business of ours, then we shall be released from this oath that you made us swear to you. A covenantal oath is binding only if both parties keep to their part: <<*He said, 'If you will listen carefully to the voice of the Lord your God, and do what is right in his sight, and give heed to his commandments and keep all his statutes, I will not bring upon you any of the diseases that I brought upon the Egyptians; for I am the Lord who heals you'*>> (Exodus 15:26), <<*If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love*>> (John 15:10), and: <<*Now by this we may be sure that we know him, if we obey his commandments*>> (1 John 2:3).

²² They departed and went into the hill country and stayed there for three days, until the pursuers returned. The pursuers had searched all

along the way and found nothing. ²³ Then the two men came down again from the hill country. They crossed over, came to Joshua son of Nun, and told him all that had happened to them. ²⁴ They said to Joshua, 'Truly the Lord has given all the land into our hands; moreover, all the inhabitants of the land melt in fear before us.'

Joshua 2:22-24

They departed and went into the hill country and stayed there for three days.

The men went in the opposite direction from that which their pursuers had expected and thus avoided capture. The period of three days also ties in with the period Joshua had said the people had to prepare before crossing over the Jordan in Joshua 1:11.

On their return the men told Joshua all that had happened to them. Considering how God will have them conquer the city of Jericho, how did the information from these spies help in the battle for Jericho? Jericho was one of the strongest and most heavily fortified cities of Canaan; if Israel could conquer it, the whole land would be before them, but how did this reconnaissance help them with the eventual battle? It did not help them at all!

The reconnaissance mission did not help with military strategy, but it did help in encouraging the faith of these spies and the whole nation. This was far more important than a good battle plan. There was another purpose at work in sending the spies - to save Rahab. In this, the extent God goes to in bringing one woman and her father's house to salvation is seen, someone seemingly 'impossible' to save. There are many people that seem 'impossible' to save, but God's hand is not short to save people like Rahab, and he can work in amazing ways to bring salvation: <<Jesus looked at them and said, 'For mortals it is impossible, but not for God; for God all things are possible'>> (Mark 10:27).

All the inhabitants of the land melt in fear before us. The spies' report echoes what Rahab herself said (v.9).