

The Book of Joshua

Chapter 2-6

Reconnaissance in the Land

The Faith of Rahab

Israel Crosses the Jordan River on Dry Land

Israel Prepares for Battle?

The Fall of Jericho

Theological Impact

Reconnaissance in the Land (2:1-3)

Just as they did at Kadesh-Barnea, they sent spies in to survey the land. Joshua tells them to pay particular attention to Jericho.

Jericho is the lowest city in the world, nearly 800 feet below sea level. It is about 6 miles north of the Dead Sea and about 6½ miles (a 2-hour walk) from the Jordan River. The city is famous for (other than the biblical account) for being the oldest city in the world.

This sending out of 2 spies was not about deciding whether or not to attack but was meant to add information on how to attack. Joshua's instruction was to view both Jericho and the land; this only meant the area between Shittim and Jericho. The idea was for them to scout a good route and to determine the strength and readiness of Jericho's defenses. At this time, there is no indication that the Lord told Joshua of His plan to only cross the river and prepare for war.

The Faith of Rahab (2:4-24)

In Jericho, they lodge in the house of Rahab the harlot. Some try to claim that the word for *harlot* means innkeeper. "And Joshua the son of Nun sent two men out of Shittim to spy secretly, saying, Go see the land and Jericho. And they went and came to the house of an innkeeper named Rahab, and they lay there" – Complete Jewish Bible. They follow the Targum's word, which is an Aramaic paraphrase of the Scriptures.

But even in their own translations, they cannot get around the fact that the word for *harlot* is used in Joshua 6:17, 22, 25. Coupled with the fact that the Greek Scriptures give her the moniker Rahab the "*pornē*" and the LXX translates Joshua 2:1 with "*pornē*," the indication is that she was a prostitute and probably ran a house of ill repute.

This leads to a question. Why did the two spies go to that house? That answer is not found in Scripture. I can think of several possibilities as to why they ended up there.

1. Staying at a brothel is good cover for spying out the city.
2. Perhaps it is the only place that would house them if they were known to be Israelites

The opinion that they were partaking of the wares is unsubstantiated and, based upon the command and warnings of God, would have caused severe problems for Israel.

Rahab's story is a familiar one. The two Israeli men (unidentified) lodged at Rahab's house and when the King of Jericho came to kill or capture the men, she told them to hide and sent the pursuers away, telling them they went a different way. Before she hid them, she gave the testimony found in Joshua 2:8-14 and made a deal—their lives for hers and her family.

The deal is confirmed, and Rahab is to put out a signal for the house that is under safety, the scarlet thread or rope.

The two spies told Joshua what Rahab had said, how she saved their lives and the deal they made with her, thus, reassuring the confidence of the Israelites and ensuring Rahab's family's safety (Joshua 6:22-25).

This is the only mention of Rahab in the Hebrew Scriptures, but in the Greek Scriptures, she is mentioned three times (Hebrews 11:31; James 2:25). Also, in Matthew 1:3-6, it is believed that this is the same Rahab who is the great-great grandmother of David in the line of Jesus the Messiah. The timing fits and there is no other Rahab in the Bible to explain who this person is.

Israel Crosses the Jordan River on Dry Land (3:1-4:24)

1. Preparation (3:1-6)
2. Purpose (3:7-11)
3. Method (3:12-13)
4. Execution (3:14-17)
5. Memorial Stones (4:1-11)
6. Number of Troops from the 2½ Tribes (4:12-13)
7. Recap of the Crossing (4:15-24)

Israel Prepares for Battle?

The first verse in chapter 5 probably belongs with chapter 4, concluding the crossing of the Jordan River with the entrance into the land. And there was no courage left in the land of Canaan, which emboldened the Israelites and points to the formula God used to demonstrate His power to Israel and all the world. Intimidation was the impact, but the desire was for awe, respect, and belief in YHWH, just like Rahab had.

Circumcision – In chapter 5, we find out something unexpected. All of those who were born in the wilderness were not circumcised. The reason they were not circumcised is not given, only the fact that they were not (5:5-7). One thought is that God waited for this generation to be circumcised in Israel instead of in the wilderness as a testimony against the previous generation who failed in their belief (5:8-9).

Celebration of the Passover – They follow the Law in observing the Passover. Only Joshua and Caleb were there for the actual Passover. After the Passover, they ate of the produce of the land and the manna ceased. Manna had been provided for Israel from 1446-1406 (40 years).

Divine Intervention – Joshua has an interaction with a mysterious man and the famous statement, "What has my lord to say to his servant." Several questions flow from this section. The primary question is who this man is.

The figure whom Joshua encounters is described initially as simply a man with a drawn sword. His appearance is so much like an ordinary soldier that Joshua asks him the natural question about which side he is on. He answers with the startling "Neither!" (lit., "No!" or "Not so!") and announces that he is the commander, or "prince" of Jehovah's army; he is not part of the Israelite army but leads the mightier forces of God.

Joshua's response to the disclosure of the man's identity is as if he was in the presence of God Himself (v. 14). This is consistent with occasions when people are met by "the Angel of Jehovah," but that moniker is not used here. Yet Joshua is told to remove his shoes since he is on holy ground, exactly as God instructed Moses when he met Him in the burning bush before sending him to lead Israel out of Egypt (Exodus 3:5).

Joshua asks for a word of command or guidance in verse 14 but is answered only by the word about holy ground. The conversation is veiled to the reader, but the instructions are clear from the next chapter.

If I had to guess what this is about: Joshua is considering how to defeat Jericho; there is no indication that Joshua is worried or questioned God, but in response to Joshua's plan, God discloses his own (6:1-5). Perhaps the conversation is recorded in 6:1-5.

Recap Preparation for Battle:

1. Circumcision
2. Passover
3. Divine Instruction

The Fall of Jericho (6:6-27)

In the text, the fall of Jericho is rather anti-climactic. Instructions are received, the instructions are relayed to the warriors, and in 15 verses, the fall of Jericho is recorded with most of the verses dedicated to walking in circles, trumpeting horns, and honoring the deal with Rahab.

Involved was six days of marching around the city once; and during the first six days, they are not to yell or let their voice be heard. On the seventh day, they march around the city seven times, blast the horns, and shout.

The encampment of Israel around Jericho was probably completely surrounding Jericho. They would come out from the camp and encircle the city and then march as one unit.

Theological Impact

Does God condone lying?

In a review of biblical ethics, we must understand that whatever conclusion we come to in this question, we recognize that God is very serious about the truth and about our verbal activity.

What is lying or deception in Scripture?

Rahab's faith makes her righteous in the sight of God. Her actions made her righteous in the sight of Israel and her life was preserved.