

Joshua 2

Rahab: the Lord is Already Present in Canaan

1. The two spies (2:1-3)

In ch.2, Joshua makes preparations for the entry into and the conquering of the Promised Land by sending out two spies. Why did he do that? Wasn't it true that the LORD was going to *give* the land to them? The answer to this question we find in this chapter. God is preparing his people to enter Canaan. Not only does the LORD want to show them what the dangerous and weak points of the enemy are, but, in particular, he wants them to hear from the mouth of Rahab that all the nations of Canaan shudder before the God of Israel. He was already present in Canaan before the Israelites arrive. Pay careful attention to the report that the two spies present.

Unintentionally, our thoughts probably take us to the twelve spies whom Moses had sent out (Num 13). At that time, Israel's unbelief was followed by forty long years in the wilderness.

Question 1: What was the cause of Israel's unbelief? (You read about that in Numbers 13:20-23, 32-34.)

This time, however, there are only two spies. The work of the twelve spies did not have to be duplicated. Their work, as well as their report, had been properly carried out. However, their conclusion had been incorrect.

The journey of the two spies has a limited, but also a much different, purpose. They have to decide *how* they can enter the land. In this chapter the focus is on the conclusion they draw. That is what especially deserves our attention (see v.24 and section 4).

Joshua assigns to them the following task: Go into the land and carefully observe it, in particular the city of Jericho. To the Israelites, Jericho was an important city. Jericho was like the entrance gate to the land of Canaan. Once that gate was open, the land would lie open and exposed.

The only Canaanite city whose invasion by Israel is recorded in detail is Jericho. This city was invaded in a miraculous manner. When we discuss chs. 5 and 6, which deal with the fall of Jericho, we will come back to the importance of Jericho to the Israelites. For now, the conclusion of the two spies will suffice.

2. Rahab, an unexpected gift of God in Jericho (2:4-13)

In Jericho lives a prostitute named Rahab. At that time, most prostitutes owned an inn of one kind or another in which guests could lodge. That is why the two spies find accommodation in Rahab's house.

Rahab uses deception to send the spies' pursuers in the wrong direction. In connection with this text one might be inclined to speak elaborately about necessary lies. It is better not to do this. It could take too much attention away from the main point. This main point you will read about in section 3 below.

If it is deemed necessary to discuss the point of necessary lies, then at least the following should be said about it: To love God and your neighbour is the summary of the ten

commandments, including the ninth commandment. Being trustworthy in one's speaking, then, is more than repeating the facts or whatever someone regards as facts.

Rahab's scheme is successful. The pursuers make haste and leave while the spies lay on the roof, hidden by the stalks of flax she laid out to dry.

Rahab's action may not strike us as very sympathetic. She has betrayed her own city and nation. In the end, only she and her family were spared the inevitable destruction. Yet, it would have been wrong to use as heading for this section, "Rahab, the traitor of Jericho".

Question 3: *Why would that not have been a good title? (See vv.8-11.) In these verses we read the reason for Rahab's action: Rahab bows before the LORD and acknowledges his rightful ownership of Canaan.*

The two spies must have experienced some very tense moments while they were being pursued; they must have been greatly relieved as well when they manage to escape. But even more so, the spies are filled with amazement: Why did Rahab hide them? Rahab comes and explains her motivation to them before they sleep.

To their amazement, the spies hear from Rahab that the fear of the LORD had fallen upon the inhabitants of Canaan. That is exactly what the LORD previously had promised. He would put his terror and dread upon the nations that lived in Canaan (see Ex 15:15; Deut 2:25; 11:25). In this manner, Israel receives a confirmation of God's faithfulness shortly before the entry into the Promised Land. He does what he has spoken. They can count on him. Verses 8-11 constitute the essence of this chapter. This chapter is not about Rahab, but about what Israel may hear from the mouth of Rahab about the LORD.

Rahab makes clear that, according to her, the LORD of Israel is the mightiest God. However, this is true not only according to her: all the inhabitants tremble before the LORD, even though they do not bow down before him like Rahab does.

Question 4: *Rahab also makes it clear how much respect she has for the Name of the LORD. Use v.12a to point this out. In addition, demonstrate how Rahab shows honour to God (last words of v.13).*

3. Rahab's safety (2:14-21)

The spies use their own lives as a security deposit for Rahab's safety (read Gen 43:9 and also 44:32, which speaks about Judah, the surety of Israel).

By giving themselves as a surety, the two men consent to Rahab's request. The two spies promise Rahab that they will deal kindly and faithfully with her when the LORD gives them the land (v.14b). Both they and Rahab firmly believe that the LORD will give them this land.

Question 5: *What did they mean when they said that they would treat her kindly and faithfully (see v.12)?*

There were at least three possible situations in which the spies would be released from their oath to Rahab.

Question 6: *Name these three situations. You can find them in vv.18-20.*

Because of Rahab's act of faith, her whole family is saved. From the Bible we know of other similar instances where this happened: Genesis 18:16 ff. and Genesis 19, which deal with

Abraham, Sodom and Gomorrah, Lot, his family, and his sons-in-law. At this point, one might ask if God establishes relationships with isolated individuals who have nothing to do with each other. The answer is negative. He establishes his covenant with members of a lawful communion. Rahab is saved together with her family. In the New Testament this happens in like manner (Acts 16:33).

The promises of the LORD are for Israel, but that does not mean that all those from among the heathen are excluded. How are they able to share in these promises? Recall the stories of Rahab and Ruth.

Question 7: *Use the Ten Commandments, which God gave to Israel, to point out that heathens are not excluded from God's promises. Which incident from the New Testament reminds us of this fact? (See Mt.15:21-28.)*

From the beginning, the LORD God has worked out his plan of salvation with a view to extending it to all nations throughout this world (Gen 1-11). Before the entry into Canaan takes place, the LORD uses Rahab to remind Israel that he is not merely concerned with the tribes of Joseph (see Is 49:6). This becomes clear during the feast of Pentecost in the New Testament: salvation is proclaimed to the ends of the earth; believers are gathered from among all the nations. The testimony of Rahab already makes it clear that Pentecost is drawing closer.

Question 8: *In Mt.1:5 Rahab's name is mentioned. What family ties existed between the Lord Jesus and Rahab? In Hebrews 11:31 and James 2:25 we read about Rahab as well. What is said about the inhabitants of Jericho? Rahab was a prostitute, yet she was saved. By what means? Are we allowed to make a distinction between Rahab's work and her faith? (See Jas 2:26; we confess this in HC, LD 24 and 32.)*

4. The return of the spies (2:22-24)

Rahab has given good advice to the spies of Israel. Their pursuers are forced to return empty-handed.

Question 9: *On which side of the Jordan did the spies lay hidden? In which direction did they have to go?*

Finally, in v.24 we read about the release of the report. It is quite a striking account. For instance, we do not read anything about the strength of the hostile armies and their bulwarks. That is what we would expect. Did they not meet other people besides Rahab? Instead, they say, "The LORD is already on the other side of the Jordan. He has given the whole land into our hands. Moreover, the inhabitants of the land are trembling with fear because of us." This is the conclusion they state at the end of their report.

Question 10: *How did the spies come to this conclusion? (See vv.8-11.)*

The Israelites awaited the conquest of Canaan with trepidation, but they could be comforted in the knowledge that the LORD had gone ahead of them. We may take courage from the fact that the LORD goes ahead of us and prepares our path. We must thank him only for the (eternal) life that he has granted us.