

Exegetical Notes, Joshua 2:1-24

“Spies”

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Joshua 2:1-24

Verse 1

Then Joshua son of Nun secretly sent two spies from Shittim. “Go, look over the land,” he said, “especially Jericho.” So they went and entered the house of a prostitute named Rahab and stayed there.

- Joshua, Moses’ replacement, prepared to enter the promised land. (See Joshua 1:10)
- He was concerned about Jericho, a strong fortified city just across the river Jordan from Shittim, the place where Israel was encamped and from which the invasion would begin. He sent two spies into the land to see what obstacles Israel would meet.
- The spies went into Jericho to the house of Rahab, a prostitute in Jericho.

Verses 2-3

The king of Jericho was told, “Look, some of the Israelites have come here tonight to spy out the land.”³ So the king of Jericho sent this message to Rahab: “Bring out the men who came to you and entered your house, because they have come to spy out the whole land.”

- The cities of Canaan, the promised land, were each considered kingdoms unto themselves. It was a land of small city/states with no strong central government. So Jericho had its own king.
- Israelites would have been recognized at the city gate because of their dress and speech. The presence of a large army opposite Jericho at Shittim would have put the city on guard. So when the guards at the city gates noticed Israelites entering the city, the matter was reported to the king.
- The Israelite spies were followed to Rahab’s house and the king sent orders to her to “bring them out” because they were an intimate and immediate threat to the safety of Jericho and the surrounding areas.

Verses 4-7

But the woman had taken the two men and hidden them. She said, “Yes, the men came to me, but I did not know where they had come from. ⁵ At dusk, when it was time to close the city gate, they left. I don’t know which way they went. Go after them quickly. You may catch up with them.” ⁶ (But she had taken them up to the roof and hidden them under the stalks of flax she had laid out on the roof.) ⁷ So the men set out in pursuit of the spies on the road that leads to the fords of the Jordan, and as soon as the pursuers had gone out, the gate was shut.

- Rahab had hidden the Israelites. She told the king a half-truth. She admitted that they had come to her house. But she told the King’s men that the Israelites had left her establishment at dusk. She suggested that the King’s men pursue the Israelites, but told them that she did not know which way the Israelites had gone. The King’s men set out to capture the spies, but as soon as they left the city the gates were closed thus preventing their return into the city before morning.
- In truth, Rahab had hidden the spies on her roof deck under some flax stems that she was drying there.

Verses 8-11

Before the spies lay down for the night, she went up on the roof ⁹ and said to them, “I know that the LORD has given you this land and that a great fear of you has fallen on us, so that all who live in this country are melting in fear because of you. ¹⁰ We have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red Sea for you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to Sihon and Og, the two kings of the Amorites east of the Jordan, whom you completely destroyed. ¹¹ When we heard of it, our hearts melted in fear and everyone’s courage failed because of you, for the LORD your God is God in heaven above and on the earth below.

- After the King’s men had gone, Rahab met with the spies. She confessed that the people of Jericho were frightened by the Israelites. They had heard stories about how Israel’s God had delivered his people. Their assumption was that they could not stand in a fight with Israel. This was what the spies needed to know and to report to Joshua.

Verses 12-13

“Now then, please swear to me by the LORD that you will show kindness to my family, because I have shown kindness to you. Give me a sure sign ¹³ that you

will spare the lives of my father and mother, my brothers and sisters, and all who belong to them—and that you will save us from death.”

- Rahab pleaded for help. She asked the spies to assure that she and her family would be showed mercy because she had helped and protected the spies.

Verse 14

“Our lives for your lives!” the men assured her. “If you don’t tell what we are doing, we will treat you kindly and faithfully when the LORD gives us the land.”

- The spies agreed to show Rahab and her family mercy.

Verses 15-16

So she let them down by a rope through the window, for the house she lived in was part of the city wall. ¹⁶ She said to them, “Go to the hills so the pursuers will not find you. Hide yourselves there three days until they return, and then go on your way.”

- She then helped the spies escape. Her house was built into the city wall. So, she lowered them out of the city by a rope through the window of her house which was in the city wall.

Verses 17-21

¹⁷ Now the men had said to her, “This oath you made us swear will not be binding on us ¹⁸ unless, when we enter the land, you have tied this scarlet cord in the window through which you let us down, and unless you have brought your father and mother, your brothers and all your family into your house. ¹⁹ If any of them go outside your house into the street, their blood will be on their own heads; we will not be responsible. As for those who are in the house with you, their blood will be on our head if a hand is laid on them. ²⁰ But if you tell what we are doing, we will be released from the oath you made us swear.”

²¹ “Agreed,” she replied. “Let it be as you say.”

So she sent them away, and they departed. And she tied the scarlet cord in the window.

- Before leaving her house, the spies explained the conditions of the agreement: (1) They gave her a scarlet cord which she was to display in the window of her house; (2) only those family members who were in her house when the invasion began would be protected; (3) If she told anyone about any of this, the agreement was entirely revoked.

- Rahab accepted these conditions.
- As soon as the spies had left she tied the scarlet cord in her window.

Verses 22-24

²² When they left, they went into the hills and stayed there three days, until the pursuers had searched all along the road and returned without finding them.

²³ Then the two men started back. They went down out of the hills, forded the river and came to Joshua son of Nun and told him everything that had happened to them. ²⁴ They said to Joshua, “The LORD has surely given the whole land into our hands; all the people are melting in fear because of us.”

- The spies hid in the desert around Jericho for three days. Their pursuers returned to the city and reported that they had not found the spies.
- The spies returned to Joshua with the news that all the people of Jericho were “melting in fear”! They concluded that God would give Israel Jericho.

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