

Joshua 2: Biblical Reading and Reflections

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 04 June 2020

Preacher: Alastair Roberts

[0 : 0 0] Joshua chapter 2. And Joshua the son of Nun sent two men secretly from Shittim as spies, saying, Go, view the land, especially Jericho. And they went and came into the house of a prostitute whose name was Rahab, and lodged there. And it was told to the king of Jericho, Behold, men of Israel have come here tonight to search out the land. Then the king of Jericho sent to Rahab, saying, Bring out the men who have come to you who entered your house, for they have come to search out all the land. But the woman had taken the two men and hidden them.

And she said, True, the men came to me, but I did not know where they were from. And when the gate was about to be closed at dark, the men went out. I do not know where the men went. Pursue them quickly, for you will overtake them. But she had brought them up to the roof, and hid them with the stalks of flax that she had laid in order on the roof. So the men pursued after them on the way to the Jordan, as far as the fords. And the gate was shut as soon as the pursuers had gone out.

Before the men lay down, she came up to them on the roof, and said to the men, I know that the Lord has given you the land, and that the fear of you has fallen upon us, and that all the inhabitants of the land melt away before you. 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, who were beyond the Jordan, to Sihon and Og, whom you devoted to destruction.

And as soon as we heard it, our hearts melted, and there was no spirit left in any man because of you. For the Lord your God, he is God in the heavens above, and on the earth beneath. Now then, please swear to me by the Lord, that as I have dealt kindly with you, you also will deal kindly with my father's house, and give me a sure sign that you will save alive my father and mother, my brothers and sisters, and all who belong to them, and deliver our lives from death.

And the men said to her, Our life for yours, even to death. If you do not tell this business of ours, then when the Lord gives us the land, we will deal kindly and faithfully with you.

[2 : 0 0] Then she let them down by a rope through the window, for her house was built into the city wall, so that she lived in the wall. And she said to them, Go into the hills, or the pursuers will encounter you, and hide there three days until the pursuers have returned. Then afterward you may go your way. The men said to her, We will be guiltless with respect to this oath of yours that you have made us swear. Behold, when we come into the land, you shall tie this scarlet cord in the window, through which you let us down, and you shall gather into your house your father and mother, your brothers, and all your father's household. Then if anyone goes out of the doors of your house into the street, his blood shall be on his own head, and we shall be guiltless. But if a hand is laid on anyone who is with you in the house, his blood shall be on our head. But if you tell this business of ours, then we shall be guiltless with respect to your oath that you have made us swear. And she said, According to your words, so be it. Then she sent them away, and they departed, and she tied the scarlet cord in the window. They departed and went into the hills, and remained there three days until the pursuers returned. And the pursuers searched all along the way, and found nothing. Then the two men returned. They came down from the hills, and passed over, and came to Joshua the son of Nun. And they told him all that had happened to them. And they said to Joshua, Truly the Lord has given all the land into our hands, and also all the inhabitants of the land melt away because of us. The story of

Rahab in Joshua chapter 2 is familiar to us. Rahab shelters and delivers the Israelites' spies from the men of Jericho. She makes a covenant with them to protect her and her family when they return to conquer the city. We've all heard this story many times before. We probably grew up with it in Sunday school. However, we've heard it before in other ways. It is a story that should remind us of other stories that have preceded it, and then also some stories that come afterwards. To the attentive reader, much in the Rahab narrative will be reminiscent of earlier scriptural accounts. Many will read the story and instantly recall the story of the destruction of Sodom in Genesis chapter 19. In the destruction of Sodom, two visitors come to a city to scout it out in preparation for judgment.

Having originally planned to stay in the open square, a word that has the same letters as Rahab's name, they were taken in by Lot, while the men of the city sought to attack them. Lot made a night-time meal of unleavened bread, and there was a threat at the doorway, as the men of the city told him to bring out the men who had come to him. Both are threatened by the people of the city and are hidden and protected in a house of refuge. Both Lot and Rahab are told to get all of the people of their households together so that they might all be saved. See that in Genesis chapter 19 verse 12.

In both of these stories, there is an instruction given to flee to the mountain. In both of the stories, one person and all of those who join themselves to them is saved, while the city is utterly destroyed.

Both the story of Lot and the story of Rahab are Exodus-style narratives, but they have key variations. Much the same pattern is playing out in the story of the spies and Rahab and the story of the angels and Lot. Now it's not angels, this time it's Israelites who act as the agents of divine judgment. The Rahab story also recalls and displays the fundamental conflict between the serpent and the woman. In Genesis chapter 3, in the story of the fall, the serpent deceived the woman, and thereafter, in various stories of scripture, the woman repeatedly deceives the serpent figure, often to save the seed from being destroyed. Sarah deceives Pharaoh and Abimelech, Rebecca deceives Abimelech, Rachel deceives Laban, the Hebrew midwives deceive Pharaoh, Rahab deceives the men of Jericho, Jael deceives Sisera, Michael deceives Saul, Esther deceives Haman, etc. In each case, we see a sort of poetic justice, as the shrewd woman outwits the serpent at its own game. And on a number of these occasions, the woman is deceiving the tyrant in order to protect the seed or the anointed one. Hiding the spies among the flaxstorks might perhaps remind us of Jochebed's placing Moses among the rushes.

[6 : 09] Some of these stories resonate with the story of Rahab in a particular way. For instance, the story of Michael delivering David from Saul is a story that plays with a lot of these previous accounts of women deceiving men. Michael disguises a household idol as David using goat's hair and then lets David down through the window in 1 Samuel chapter 19 verses 11 to 17. In this respect, she's like Rachel who deceived her father Laban concerning the household idol in Genesis chapter 31. She's like Rebecca who deceived her husband using goat's hair in order to ensure that the right child received the inheritance in Genesis chapter 27. And she's like Rahab who let the Hebrew spies escape from the doomed men of the land. Like the Hebrew midwives then, Rahab lies to the king and the men of Jericho. She's a new Eve deceiving the serpent. Like Pharaoh's daughter, she is a faithful Gentile who protects the people of the against the commandments of her rulers. The spies finally flee, as Moses did from Egypt, ending up at the mountain. They later return and then at their second visitation bring destruction to the city.

I've noted the parallels between the story of Rahab and the story of Lot. But the story of Lot and Sodom is paralleled with another story. It's paralleled with the story of the Passover. Destruction is coming to a city after two visitors have come from the Lord to judge it. There is a threat at the doorway.

There's an evening meal of unleavened bread. And then there's a fleeing the city to the mountain. All of these are Exodus themes. And many of these themes and more are found in the story of Rahab.

She gathers her household together within a safe house. And there's the stress upon the themes of the door and blood. Rahab is instructed to place a scarlet cord in the window of her house. A cord that relates to the rope by which the spies escaped in their exodus from the city to the mountain. Note that the pursuers pursued them until the fords of the river. The scarlet cord relates to the blood on the doorposts of the house at Passover. It's connected with blood and blood guiltiness in verses 18 to 19.

Either she displays this scarlet cord, this symbol of blood, on her window, or she will be destroyed with the city and the spies will bear no blood guiltiness. When the Israelites, the Lord's angels of death in this instance, saw this, they would pass over Rahab's house and all within it. All of this, we should note, is leading up to the crossing of the Jordan. Just as the first Passover was followed by a crossing of the Red Sea, so now there is a new Passover being anticipated. A Passover that will occur after they cross the Jordan. The whole narrative of the Exodus then is bookended by these common themes at both ends. In the story of Rahab, we see a Gentile declaring her fear of and her faith in the Lord.

[9 : 01] An oath is sworn to her, and she is yet another Gentile who is blessed as she blesses the seed of Abraham. She identifies with the people of the Lord and so is delivered from the judgment to come, and all of this serves to make clear that it was possible for Canaanites to convert and to join Israel and thus be saved from the condemnation that they were under. In this Exodus-like experience, Rahab is also conformed to the people that she was to become one of. The story of Rahab and the spies looks back to another story that has preceded it. The story of the spies going into the land in the book of Numbers and bringing back a bad report. Now there's a new story of spying out the land, this time successful. Rahab's description of the people's heart melting is later reported by the spies to Joshua. Here the good report comes directly from the lips of a Canaanite. A question to consider. Rahab is mentioned three times in the New Testament, in Matthew chapter 1 verse 5, in Hebrews chapter 11 verse 31, and in James chapter 2 verse 25.

What can these three passages teach us about Rahab and her faith?