

CALVARY PANDAN BIBLE- PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

[Adapted from Bethel Bible-Presbyterian
Church, 10 Downing St. Oakleigh, Vic., 3166]

DHW BIBLE CLASS

LESSON 2

JOSHUA

CHAPTER 2

INTRODUCTION

In chapter one, Joshua was called into ministry by the LORD to take over where Moses left off. We learn that God had chosen him to succeed Moses as His servant to lead His people into the Land of Promise (Palestine).

Chapter two affirms God's promise of His covenant, which He had made with Abraham to give to his descendents the land of Canaan. Now Joshua was the new "leader" of the Israelites. It was not an easy task for him to lead the Israelites to claim the land. The Israelites now numbered about two million. The number could be a little less because the tribes of Reuben, Gad and the half tribe of Manasseh decided to settle on the eastern side of the Jordan River. Joshua would prove himself a great

leader just like Moses. He is therefore a model of leadership as one who did the will of God. However, as a human being, he would make some mistakes along the way. But even from his failures, we can learn not to make the same mistakes.

In this chapter, interestingly, the focus is on Rahab, a Canaanite woman, who lived in Jericho. This incident at this point of the history of Israel was recorded for us to learn about the meaning of living faith. Rahab displayed this living faith. This is a vital lesson to learn for without faith, it is impossible to please God. Professing faith, which does not come truly from the heart, does not save; and salvation is about one's eternal destiny. Therefore, it is of paramount importance to a person while he still lives on earth to ensure that his faith is genuine.

Intertwined with this vital truth is the understanding of the spiritual tension between God's sovereignty and Man's responsibility in life. Another wonderful truth we would learn about God in this chapter is His amazing grace and mercy toward the people He saves.

The chapter can be divided into the following divisions:

- 1) Rahab hid the two spies (2:1-7)

- 2) Rahab believed in the LORD God of Israel (2:8-13)
- 3) Rahab promised to keep what she was told to do (2:14-21)
- 4) God is faithful in keeping His promise (2:22-24)

COMMENTARY

Rahab Hid the 2 Spies – 2:1-7

The Israelites encamped in Shittim, which was situated on the eastern side of Jordan. This place derived its name from the abundance of acacia trees, which grew there. The acacia wood is sometimes called “Shittim wood” (Exodus 25:10). It is a hard and durable wood and was used to make boards, altars, pillars, tables, staves, and bars of the Tabernacle which God commanded Moses to build. From Shittim, Joshua sent two “spies” (intelligence agents) into Canaan to bring back valuable information about the land which they were about to enter. There will be no more of the 12 spies’ incident.

The two spies in their survey of the land came to Jericho, which Joshua had told them to inspect. Joshua’s action in sending the two spies to view the land should not be interpreted as a lack of faith in God. He knew that God had promised to

give the Land to the Israelites, and that God would be with him and would not fail him (1:2, 4). If it is not a lack of faith, how ought we to understand Joshua’s action? God’s promises to him should not negate his part to plan for an effective strategy to enter and claim the land. About forty years before, God told Moses to send men to spy the Promised Land. Joshua was one of the twelve spies (Numbers 13:3ff). Joshua surely remembered this strategic move and he was wise to repeat it. In the first case, the problem was not in sending the 12 spies. It was right to check out the Land before the conquest. But the problem was the faithlessness of the 10 spies who brought back a faithless report. Their faithlessness influenced the entire people of Israel, which resulted in the 40 years of wilderness wandering. This time round he sent in only 2 spies. The sovereignty of God in promising a sure conquest does not negate or diminish human responsibility as seen in this move of Joshua.

Shittim was about eight kilometres (5 miles) to the banks of Jordan River; and Jericho was about the same distance from the river.¹

¹ Jericho was a fenced city in the midst of a valley of palm trees. It was the most important city in the Jordan valley, and the strongest fortress

So the total distance the spies had to trek was about sixteen kilometres. Moreover, they had to swim across the waters of the river to reach the other side. At that time, the waters of Jordan River was overflowing. When they were in Jericho, they came to the house of a Canaanite woman named Rahab, who was a “harlot” (in modern term, a “prostitute”).² The fact that they “lodged there” strongly indicates that Rahab was also operating her house as an inn for travellers. The word phrase “lodged there” is not used for the purpose of having sexual relations. The spies came to Rahab’s inn because it was probably the best place to gather valuable information since it was frequented by travellers and to hide their identity.

However, the king of Jericho came to know of the Israeli spies and their intention, and immediately sent his internal security men to apprehend them. Rahab knew of this, and without hesitation, she hid the two spies among some stalks of flax (a kind of fibre used for making garments) on the roof of her house. The houses there had flat rooftops. When the king’s security men demanded her to bring out the spies, she admitted that

² James 2:25 and Hebrews 11:31 use the Greek word which clearly means “a prostitute”, from which the English word “porno” is derived.

they came to her but lied to them that she did not know where they had gone. She even pointed the security men in the wrong direction to quickly pursue the spies and overtake them.

As soon as the pursuers were out of the city, they shut the gate, thus rendering the spies no way of escape from Rahab’s house. Rahab’s action in hiding the spies and lying to the security men was dangerous. She risked her life for the two spies whom she hardly knew personally. If she were found out, she would definitely be put to death for conspiracy and treason. She was courageous and her seemingly reckless action in hiding the spies demands a reasonable answer.

Rahab Believed the LORD God of Israel – 2:8-13

When the king’s security men had left her house, Rahab went up to the roof of her house to speak to the two Israeli spies. The roof of her house allowed privacy and secrecy in talking to the spies. What she said to them reveals the real reasons why she took such a great risk in hiding the spies and lying to her country’s security men. She began by telling the spies what she knew (v.9). She mentioned three things to them. She knew that the “LORD” (using the covenantal name of God) had given the Land to the Israelites. Then she

said that the inhabitants of Jericho were terrified by the Israelites. And thirdly, the people of Jericho were faint-hearted.

She continued. The people of Jericho had heard the stupendous deed of the LORD in drying up the Red Sea and freeing the Israelites from Egypt. That was forty years ago and she still remembered it. Then she added that the two kings, Sihon and Og, who were on the eastern side of Jordan were utterly defeated by the Israelites. And when the inhabitants of Jericho heard these things, their “hearts did melt”. They were completely demoralized. Then she declared the all-encompassing truth: “for the LORD your God, he is God in heaven above, and in earth beneath” (v.11).

At this juncture, Rahab had shown tremendous faith in the LORD God of the Israelites. Her faith was strong for it was purely based on what she had heard, unlike the 600,000 Israelites that perished in the wilderness because of unbelief even though they had experienced and seen the miracles. She had probably received accounts of the amazing deeds of the LORD God of the Israelites, possibly from travellers who visited her. So, she feared for her life and the fact that the spies had entered into the land of Canaan and Jericho

simply meant to her that she and her people would be next on the list for destruction. And based upon what she had heard, she acknowledged the sovereignty and power of God over all.

The next thing she said was a plea to the spies to swear “by the LORD” that her life and those of her father’s family—her father, mother, brothers and sisters—be spared, when the Israelites should invade Jericho (v.12). This plea for her life firmly confirmed her belief in the LORD God of Israel. In other words, if she had previously believed in Canaanite gods, she now renounced and denounced these gods, and accepted and embraced the LORD God of the Israelites. Rahab asked for “a true token” (a sure sign or a guarantee) that her request would be granted because she had been kind to them. The spies replied that they would grant her request and that she must keep their intention secret.

After this assurance, she let the spies down from a window looking out of the city wall. The gate of the city had been shut and this was the only way the spies could escape. She told them to hide in the mountains lest they be apprehended by the king’s security men, and remained there for three days. After that, they could safely go on their way (v.16). Before the spies left, they imposed upon her one thing

that she must do. The scarlet rope, with which she let the men down from the window, must be tied to the window. Then she must ensure that her father, mother, brothers and sisters remain within her house. They must not leave the house. If anyone of them happened to be outside the house, he shall die. His death should not be blamed on them. Once again, the spies imposed upon Rahab complete secrecy over this arrangement. If ever she should break this secrecy, they would be free from the oath (v.20). With these last words, the spies went on their way.

Rahab Promises to Obey – 2:14-21

Rahab obeyed and tied the scarlet rope to the window straightaway. She had not only shown her faith in the LORD God and her concern for her salvation, she also displayed her deep love and concern for her family and loved ones. Her faith and action would actually make her a part of Israel hence a part of the chosen people of God. It was a difficult decision, but she had acted on faith based upon the truth of what she had heard concerning the LORD. She was brave and this was shown in the risk she undertook in hiding and protecting the Israeli spies. Noting that it would take at least three days for the spies to return to their camp base, and for Joshua to prepare the people to

cross the Jordan River, Rahab must persevere and meet all conditions of her faith.

The LORD God Is Faithful – 2:22-24

The spies returned to their camp base safely, having escaped pursuit of the king's security men. They reported everything to Joshua, their commander-in-chief. Joshua was wiser now. He made sure that the report was privately given unlike the previous one, which was publicly declared.

They highlighted the faithfulness of the LORD God. God indeed had been faithful in His promise to them. God had delivered the land, which they were about to enter and claim because all the inhabitants of the country were utterly faint-hearted before them.

PRACTICAL VALUE

One small issue in this account of Rahab that has aroused much debate is Rahab's lie to the king's security men. God teaches clearly in Scripture that lying is a sin (Proverbs 12:22): *Lying lips are abomination to the LORD: but they that deal truly are his delight.* This includes all kinds of lying; and it includes Rahab's lie. It is argued that Rahab lied in order to protect the Israeli spies. Humanly

speaking that was not a bad thing to do. Does the end justify the means? According to Scriptures, this cannot be justified.

Then what would happen if Rahab had told the truth to the security guards? This is not only a redundant question but a silly one as well. Who says that Rahab had only two options – tell lies or tell the guards to hide out of the 2 spies? Rahab could have easily side stepped the issue or simply keep silent.

From the human point of view, it appears that one is playing God believing that lying seems to be the only way out for the 2 spies. But it can be argued that God was able to intervene and prevent them from being put to death, if that was His will without Rahab lying. It seems that it is very difficult for a person to tell the truth when his testimony could mean the death of the other person. In this case, Rahab's lying was understandable but not acceptable. There is no Scripture reference specifically condemning her for lying. Instead there are two references, Hebrew 11:31 and James 2:25; both verses commend the genuineness of her exemplary faith. Rahab's faith is the main theme of the chapter.

A believer's true faith shows in his or her 'whole personality'. This

true faith is exemplified by Rahab. Faith begins by hearing and knowing what is true. Rahab heard what the LORD God of the Israelites did for His people (Romans 10:17). On hearing that, she believed and acted on it. Rahab acted by confessing her new found knowledge to the spies, hiding them and pleading for her life and those of her father's household. She further affirmed the sincerity and perseverance of her faith by keeping to the conditions imposed on her by the spies.

D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones correctly describes genuine faith as such: 'the mind is instructed, the emotions stirred, and the will then acts in obedience to God.' Other examples of genuine faith are Noah (Genesis 6), Abraham (Genesis 15), and the woman who touched the clothes of Jesus Christ (Matthew 9:20-22). James illustrates true believing faith by the example of Rahab. If we want to have the assurance of our salvation, we must base *not only* on what we say from the Word of God; or on how we feel in our hearts, but it *must also* be based on how we live in our profession of that faith in Jesus Christ according to Scriptures. If there has not been any change in our heart, conduct and behaviour, then it is doubtful that we have been truly born again or saved.

We learn a couple of truths about God. Firstly, God is faithful to His Word and promises. He had already made a covenant promise with the forefathers of the Israelites, namely, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, that He would give the Land of Promise to them. In the words of the two Israeli intelligence agents, the LORD God delivered the land into their hands (Joshua 2:24). Secondly, we are very encouraged to know that no one is too sinful to be saved. Rahab was a Canaanite, and probably worshipped idols, and was a prostitute. Yet having heard about God, she believed and acted upon her new found knowledge. God saved her. She became a part of God's people, she married and was the mother of Boaz, who married Ruth, and through whom eventually the babe Jesus was born through the line of Joseph (Matthew 1:5, 16). How gracious and merciful is the LORD our God! Finally, God has a way of working and using ordinary people, even unlikely people. This is very encouraging and comforting indeed. AMEN

DAILY READINGS & DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

MONDAY: Joshua 2:1-7; Hebrews 11:3; Matthew 1:5.

TUESDAY: Joshua 2:8-13; 1 Corinthians 1:27-29.

WEDNESDAY: Joshua 2:14-17; James 2:19-26.

THURSDAY: Joshua 2:18-21; Exodus 12:21-28.

FRIDAY: Joshua 2:22-24; 2 Peter 1:3-7.

Discussion Questions

1. Can there be a legitimate justification for telling lies? Explain.

2. How did Rahab's demonstrate the reality of her faith?

3. What would you say to those who argue that it is ok to tell lies because Rahab was rewarded by God for it?

4. Was Rahab's request for the salvation of her family justified since she was the only one who believed?

5. Is there any spiritual significance in the binding of the scarlet thread in the window?

6. What one truth in this chapter have you learned that will help you live a victorious Christian life of faith?
