

Group Study Outline

LAUNCH QUESTIONS

What kind of people go to church? What kind of people avoid God's judgment?
Today we'll read about the rescue of a very surprising person...

READ Joshua 2:1-24

QUESTIONS

What has happened in the book of Joshua so far?
Where are the people now?
Why is Joshua sending in the spies?

Where do the spies end up?
What's surprising about what Rahab the prostitute does? (4-7)
Why is this so surprising?

What reason does she give for hiding the Israelite spies?
What do the people of the land think about the Israelites?
Why do they think that?
What is Rahab's view of God?
How is it different to the plain fear of her countrymen?
In what way is what she says a sign of real faith in God?
Have we made that same change of mind and confession of faith?

Is Rahab the kind of person we'd expect to be rescued? Why or why not?
Do we believe that God can operate "behind enemy lines" like this and bring all kinds of people to faith?
In what ways do we act like we *don't* believe it?

At this stage in the story (end of 11), how are the spies still in trouble?
And how is Rahab in trouble?
How do they help one another with these problems?
Explain how Rahab and her family can be safe?
In what way will they have to exercise faith in order to survive?

Can you think of any times when God saved people in a similar way?
How is this a picture of how Jesus saves people?
Making that connection to the gospel, how does this story help us appreciate *our own* rescue?
Imagine you are Rahab speaking her brothers and sisters (13). What would you say to them?
How is this similar to what we need to say to those we love?

After the spies return (22-24), what impact do you think their message would have had on Joshua and those who heard it?
How would it have helped them to approach God's promises and plans?

Looking over the whole story, how is it encouraging for believers today?
How should we respond to it?

PRAY

Joshua 2:1-24



'Joshua' at a glance

Ever since Adam and Eve were evicted from Eden, God's people had been homeless. He promised Abraham a land for his descendants where they could live securely, telling him in Genesis 15:13-16 that they would be slaves for 400 years before finally receiving the land. Abraham's family grew and moved to Egypt. After their slavery, God brought the people out through Moses and got them to the border of this Promised Land. Moses then died and it was down to Joshua to take them into the land God was giving them.

The book of Joshua follows the adventures of Israel as they enter the land, judge the people living there, and settle into their allotted inheritances. It's a remarkably upbeat book, with only the occasional hint that all is not well with God's people. The punchline of the story comes in Joshua 21:45, "Not one word of all the good promises that the LORD had made to the house of Israel had failed: all came to pass."

Where this passage fits in...

At this stage in the story, Israel are outside the land, sending in spies to suss out the best way of getting in...

Theme Sentence

God works behind enemy lines to keep His promise of giving His people the land, *and* to save those who turn and trust in Him.

Application

- Like Rahab, we must align ourselves with the one true God, trusting in the only way to be safe from coming destruction (i.e. in Christ)
- Thinking of Rahab, we should believe that God can save the most unlikely people and can be at work in His enemies without our knowing
- Like the Israelites, we should be confident in God keeping His promises

[NB]

Commentary

[these notes follow the 11 January 2015 sermon at Emmanuel]

1a **A spying mission**

God's people are right on the edge of the Promised Land and have been told to cross the River Jordan to go and take the land God is giving them (1:1-2). God has given this task to Joshua but not told him how to go about it. As such, Joshua took this general command and turned it into an action plan in 1:10-11, getting the officers to tell people to be ready to enter the land within three days.

But still, how to take the land? To this end, Joshua follows Moses' example from Numbers 13 and sends in spies to check it out. They are to go behind enemy lines and gather information.

1b-7 **A surprising ally**

The two spies go to Jericho as Joshua had said, but they end up in the home of a prostitute! "Oh no," says the reader! But there's no sense of anything seedy in this account. Some have suggested that a brothel made a sensible place for a spy to hide out. They tended to be well-placed near city entrances so as to attract passing travelers, much like how prostitution today gathers around train stations and airports. Plus they are places where many strange men arrive and leave at all times of day, making the spies less suspicious. (Plus who's going to admit they saw some spies *there*?!)

But the spies do get spotted and the authorities head to Rahab's house. Amazingly, she covers for them and sends the king's men in the wrong direction. Why would this disreputable woman hide some of her enemies from being discovered?

(As an aside, don't get caught up in the ethics of Rahab lying to the police. She's a prostitute and has plenty of other things to repent of later! Plus we should be less focused on the lie she told and more on the *truth* she was about to tell...)

8-11 **A shocking confession**

Rahab explains to the spies why she was helping them. She tells them how everyone in the land (not just Jericho!) was terrified of the Israelites. They had heard how God had parted the Red Sea for them to escape the Egyptians, and helped them defeat armies in the desert. It was clear that God was with them and so the people were afraid.

However, Rahab sees not only that something spooky is going on with these Israelites, but that their God is the true God. She says, "the LORD your God, he is God in the heavens above and on the earth beneath." This is a statement of faith in Yahweh, Israel's God. Unlike the local gods of Canaan, this God is Lord of all heaven and earth.

She also believes His promise to Israel, telling them, "I know that the LORD has given you the land..." Quite how she knew this, we can't tell. Perhaps news of the promises God had made to them had travelled into Jericho along with the stories of the Red Sea and the defeat of the kings. Either way, this is a shocking confession of faith from a

Canaanite prostitute! It's exactly the kind of faith we should expect from a Jewish believer! How amazing that long before the spies went behind enemy lines, *God* was at work behind enemy lines bringing this woman to believe in Him.

But now we have an even bigger problem. Firstly, how will the spies get out of Jericho? The king is after them and knows where they've been, plus the city gates are shut (7b). Secondly, how will Rahab escape from the destruction that is coming to Jericho? If she truly is a believer, will she be killed along with all her countrymen?

12-21 **A saving promise**

Both of those problems get resolved through an oath that the spies swear to Rahab (and she swears to them, in a way). Rahab asks the men to help her, just as she has helped them, and the spies agree.

It's at this point that we discover where Rahab lives. Jericho is a walled city, a fortress on the border, built up to defend itself and the rest of the country. The wall is so thick that there are homes built into the wall, with windows looking out of the city, like an ancient block of flats. Rahab is in one of those houses. And so she is able to 'Rapunzel' them out the window, abseiling down on a piece of rope. She gives them directions to avoid the king's men.

But before they go, they give her "a sure sign" (12) that Rahab will be saved alive when the Israelites take Jericho. Just as she helped them with a rope, so they do the same, giving her a red cord to hang in the very window she rescued them through. That red cord would identify that house as hers so that the Israelite soldiers would spare anyone who was inside. The idea of a red marker to signify that a house was safe from coming destruction is not a new one – the Passover followed the same model, with blood on the doorposts to keep the occupants safe from God's wrath. Rahab (and any of her family) would have to trust this sign and stay in that one safe place in order to survive, just as we trust in Christ and find in Him the only place to be saved.

Rahab is a believer, just like us. Hebrews 11:31 and James 2:25 tell us that she acted in faith in what she did. In Joshua 6 we hear that Rahab was saved in the fall of Jericho, and that she settled into God's people, even becoming an ancestor of the Lord Jesus (Matthew 1:5). Last time God's people were in Shittim (say it "shuh-TEEM"! in Numbers 25, God punished them for "whoring" with the local gods and women. This time, the local "whore" turns to align herself with the true God. Great!

22-24 **A strengthening debrief**

The spies make it back to Joshua with great news: everything they've seen (especially from Rahab) leads them to truly believe God's promise to give them the land. These spies are faithful like Joshua and Caleb had been 40 years before, trusting in God, not fearing the enemy. What an encouraging story for God's people to see how the Lord works behind enemy lines, beyond what we could do ourselves, to guarantee the success of His plans and the fulfillment of His promises.