

Dr. David Howard, Joshua-Ruth, Session 6

Joshua 2

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This is Dr. David Howard in his teaching on Joshua through Ruth. This is session 6, Joshua 2, Rahab and the Spies.

We are ready now to talk about Joshua chapter two and this is kind of a narrative aside in some ways.

The storyline of the people of Israel starts in chapter one with God's instruction to Joshua and Joshua and the people. In chapter three is their crossing the Jordan. But here is kind of a parenthetical side where we follow two Israelites into Canaan, into Jericho, and they meet someone named Rahab.

And there's things that unfold there with these spies and Rahab, and that forms the background to giving them some confidence about things. But so let's look at this. Rahab is a Canaanite prostitute, and there are a couple of different words in Hebrew for prostitute.

We'll mention the other one another time. This is the word here is the normal everyday word for prostitute that we think of in every society and pretty much every time frame in human history. A woman who sells herself for money.

Not a good thing on its own, but Rahab emerges from this chapter as a great hero of the faith, I would say. Not only what she does, but also the things that she says. So, we'll try to unpack that as we go through the chapter.

Rahab has become one of my personal heroes for a number of reasons. So, the new story begins, verse one, Joshua, the son of Nun, sends two men secretly from Shittim as spies saying, go look at the land, especially Jericho. So, the commission is to look at all the land, but really specifically it's focused on Jericho.

And that's all we read about in this chapter is the Jericho portion. I doubt if they went the length and breadth of the land as things developed, we will see. I always chuckle about these spies because they don't seem to be very good spies.

Joshua sends him out secretly and immediately verse two, the king of Jericho hears about them. So, they didn't do a very good job of staying undercover. So, they came in, they went and came into the house of a prostitute whose name was Rahab and lodged there.

Now there's discussion about what was their motivation for going to the house of a prostitute. On one level, you could say, well, they just wanted, they were unfaithful servants and they wanted to have some pleasures of their own, the pleasures of the flesh. Others have said, and I would agree with the second view, namely that they were there.

The words actually of going into the house and so on, kind of a technical involved discussion of Hebrew vocabulary. Those are not words used for sexual intercourse or sexual entry. They're more of getting into a place.

And so, I think they just went there to lodge there. It may be because Jericho is on a popular trade route and people came in and out and the house of a prostitute would be where you could be incognito. And people would, you might hear stories and you might get information.

So, it seems to me that's what's going on. But anyway, in verse two, the king of Jericho finds out and he decides that he wants to send people to find who these people are. So, he sends emissaries to Rahab in verse three and tells them to bring the men out.

And of course, Rahab in verse four, had taken the men and hidden them. And she says, yeah, they came, but I don't know where they are. And I didn't know where they were from.

And when the thing was closed at night, verse five, they left. I don't know where they went. Go out and pursue them.

And verse six tells us, but she had brought them up to the roof, hid them there with the socks of flax. The pursuers then pursued down from Jericho to the Jordan River as far as the fords. And the gate was shut and these pursuers were hapless.

Pursuers, they did not find the men, of course, because Rahab had hidden them. So, in this sense, then we find later in the chapter that she sends, they came back safely to Joshua and reported on what they had found. So, in this sense, Rahab has saved the spies and she had helped them by the hospitality that she offered and the hiding of them.

There's a little bit of a bugaboo here in that it seems like she told a flat-out lie in doing this. So, this has been much discussed in Christian ethics circles. And there are three major theories as to how you deal with this kind of situation.

What, you know, in the modern-day classic example, what if, you know, what if you were hiding Jews when the Nazis were coming to your house, how would you deal with it? And some would argue that these are, they're absolutes of scripture. You

should never lie, but you should also protect life. And that when they come into conflict, then you have to choose the lesser of the two evils.

To lie would be evil, to give up a life would be evil. So, choose the lesser one. And in this case, the argument is the lesser evil is to lie and thereby save the life.

Others would argue that, no, these are non-conflicting absolutes and that God would provide a way out. The New Testament says that we are never tempted beyond what we are able. Jesus himself was tempted in all ways as humans, as we were, and yet he never sinned.

So, would he have been confronted with two things that were in absolute contradiction and had to choose the lesser of the evils? No, he never, he never chose an evil. Another would say, well, and this is the position Martin Luther took, would say, just go ahead and do the sin, choose the lesser evil. But sin boldly, as Martin Luther's quote, but then confess boldly and receive grace for your confession.

My view is that these are non-conflicting absolutes at the moment that God would provide the way out. We hear stories in the modern day, for example, of Bible smuggling, for example, across the Iron Curtain years ago. Where people would arrive with suitcases full of, or cars full of Bibles, and the guards would see the suitcases and let them through.

Either they just had a change of mind and let them through or their eyes were blinded. We don't know. There would be ways around this, but it is a real, it is a very real ethical issue in the modern day.

Not just the Nazi Germany, but in modern-day China and other places the church is persecuted. I had the privilege of teaching a large group of Chinese pastors earlier this year, actually, in 2018. And this is a very real thing that the authorities do come knocking at the door.

And so, there are good evangelical Orthodox Christians that take any one of those three views. It's not a measure of your orthodoxy which one of those you choose. But anyway, let's look at a couple of passages in the New Testament.

We know, for example, that Rahab is mentioned there several times. And one of them is in the book of Hebrews, chapter 11. So, we'll just want to take you to that and remind you of this.

If you want to turn with me, Hebrews chapter 11. This is, of course, the chapter, the great chapter of faith, the heroes of the faith, the hall of fame, so to speak, the hall of faith. And so, Hebrews 11, verse 31, mentions Rahab.

It says, by faith, Rahab, the prostitute, did not perish with those who had been disobedient because she had given a friendly welcome to the spies. The wording is careful there, I think, in Hebrews. It doesn't say she was a woman of faith because she lied to not give up the spies.

She just brought them, and gave them a friendly welcome. And then I believe that she could be faulted for her lie. She could have said something else and God would have provided a way of escape.

But anyway, the book of Hebrews does not come in that lie specifically. But then she's mentioned more specifically in the book of James, chapter 2. And we'll see here about justification by works, not by faith. And so James, chapter 2, verse 25, says, in the same way, was not also Rahab the prostitute justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way.

So again, it mentions her works, and her actions. She received the messengers. She sent them out another way.

The book of James is careful not to endorse the lie per se, but it does mention the things that she did. So back to Joshua, chapter 2. In verses, we'll say 4 to 8 or 4 to 7, I would see, I would call this Rahab's faith in actions. What did she do? She welcomed the spies in.

She hid them. She deceived the pursuers. And then eventually she let them go.

That would be her faith in action. And that's clear from the New Testament. But I've often wondered and eventually kind of dug into the text more deeply to wonder, you know, is there a way in which we can see Rahab's faith expressed in the words that she spoke as well, not just what she did? And I think the answer is yes.

And the core of that answer is in verses 9 to 11. So, let's look at that. So, Rahab comes up to the roof, verse 8, and then she says some things to the spies.

And she says I know that the Lord has given you the land and that the fear of you has fallen on us and that the inhabitants of the land melt away before you. So, notice the first thing she says, I know that the Lord or Yahweh, the name of Israel's God, I know that he's the one that has given you this land. Those are words that echo the main statement of the theme that I've mentioned about the gift of the land.

It's God's gift and it's the land. She says those very things. And she says, we are afraid of you and all the inhabitants of the land melt away before you.

Why? Verse 10, because there are two things we've heard. Number one, how the Lord dried up the water of the Red Sea before you when you came out of Egypt. So, this is an event that happened 40 years ago.

And so that the persistence of that memory has continued into Rahab's day. We don't know how old Rahab is here. She may have been a young girl.

She may not have been born, but that memory has persisted here number one. And number two, we heard also what you did to the two kings of the Amorites who were beyond the Jordan, to Sinai and Og, whom you devoted to destruction. So when they were wandering in the wilderness years after the exodus from Egypt, they came across these two kings and they had battles and defeated them.

So, Rahab has heard two things, one years ago, and one more recently. Both of those show how Yahweh, Israel's God, is on their side against these nations especially the Egyptians. They were the great empire at that time.

And the Pharaoh's army is drowned in the sea, you know, Exodus 14 and 15. Continuing, Rahab says, and as soon as we heard it, our hearts melted. Interestingly, in Hebrew, the word to melt in verse 9 is different from the word to melt in verse 11.

One is to melt like ice. One is to melt like wax. And I think the point is, no matter how you look at it, we were just a puddle.

We were, we had no resistance left in us. We had no backbone left. As soon as we heard it, our hearts melted.

There was no spirit left in any man because of you. I want to pause and point out the irony here. Because if you remember the stories earlier, in the book of Numbers, chapters 13 and 14, the Israelites sent spies into the land of Canaan.

And what was the response of the spies? The spies were that this is a land where there are giants in the land. We are like grasshoppers before them. The city is a great, fortified city.

The produce of the land is so great that the grapes, so great that the clusters of grapes, two men had to carry them, and so on. So, the report back in the book of Numbers is that the Israelites are terrified of the Canaanites. And because of that, they were sentenced to wander for 40 years in the wilderness.

And the first generation dies off. There's all this dislocation and so on. Here in Joshua 2, we find the internal perspective.

What were the Canaanites thinking? The Canaanites were terrified of the Israelites. And if the Israelites had known that, or if the Israelites had trusted God, they could have avoided all that problem in the wilderness. They could have avoided having to eat the manna for all those years that they were so sick of.

So, it's a delicious irony to me that we finally see the inside perspective of the Canaanites here in Rahab's eyes. And it disvalidates the Israelite objections back then. But now the core of Rahab's statement of faith is found in the end of verse 11.

She says, for the Lord, for Yahweh, your God, he is God in the heavens above and on the earth beneath. And let me just pause here to say a word about the Canaanite religion. For the Canaanites, the high God was Baal.

And Baal, we read about in the Bible many times. We don't have a whole lot of insight into the nature of Baal's religion from the Bible itself. It's just usually seen from the outside as a perverse thing.

But in 1929, it was discovered in a city on the coast of Syria, the Mediterranean coast, called Ugarit. And there were excavations done. It was discovered a large city there, a cosmopolitan city.

It was on the trade routes and there were tablets. There was a huge royal archive discovered with thousands of tablets giving us information about commerce and about religion and so on. And there was a whole slew of tablets discussing the religion of the Canaanites, in which Baal is the high God.

But we learn all about his father, a God named El, and his wife named Asherah. We know that from the Bible, Asherah, usually in the poles that were erected in her honor. But in the Baal stories, we learn much more about him.

We learn about his adversaries, a God named Mot, the God of death, and a God named Yam, the God of the sea. And his sister, Anat, and Anat and Mot fight. And it's a very interesting story.

And you can find those on the Internet, certainly, if you search. But the point is, there's this whole pantheon of Canaanite gods that the Canaanites worshipped. And there were systems of sanctuaries devoted to them and so on.

But Baal was the high God and he was the God of the storm. He was the rider of the clouds, we hear. And the God of the storm sent not only lightning but rain.

And as the rain watered the earth and made the land fertile and allowed people to grow crops. And as a result, then, the people would survive. In the ancient world,

without storage and so on, famine, and drought was a very real thing and an existential crisis.

And so, Baal was the God to whom people wanted to please, so he would send rain, let the crops grow, and so on. So, he was the God of fertility and the God of the heavens and so on. Just parenthetically, ironically, years later, remember, in the confrontation between Elijah and the prophets of Baal.

When Baal was unable to send fire down on the altar, Elijah the Lord did send fire down in 1 Kings 18. At the end of that story, remember that the prophets of Baal were all killed and then this spelled the end of a drought. There had been a three-year drought and Elijah goes out and sees a little rain cloud that's coming on and the rain comes.

So, the irony is that Baal, the god of the storm, the god of the clouds, the god of the rain, in Elijah's day had not been able to bring rain on the land. So, there was that existential crisis between the religious systems of worship of the Lord, of Yahweh, and Baal. So, Rahab, when she was a kid, I imagine her parents taking her to Sunday school at the First Church of Baal in Jericho.

And she learns in Sunday school about all these gods and goddesses and about who Baal was and Asherah and all these others. And for her to say this, for Yahweh your God, the Lord your God, Jehovah your God, he is the God of the heavens above and the earth beneath. Implicit there, Rahab is saying, Baal is not.

I'll come back to that in a minute. But now I want to point to a specific wording here in verse 11. It says he's the God of the heavens above and the earth beneath.

And those words, that wording, the exact words, heavens above, earth beneath, occur only three times previously in scripture. They occur twice in the Ten Commandments, Exodus 20, and Deuteronomy 5. And there it's always in the context of you shall make no graven images of the Lord your God. And if anything in the heavens above, the earth beneath, or the water under the earth.

And so the point in both those cases, Exodus 20, and Deuteronomy 5, is the incomparability of Israel's God. That these other gods don't exist and you should not make any images of them and so on. But then there's the third reference to this is found in Deuteronomy chapter 4. And this is an even clearer passage.

So, I want to turn to that. If you have your Bible, you can turn to that. In Deuteronomy 4, verse 39, we're going to jump in the middle of a paragraph and take it out of context.

But we're just going to be looking at this wording here. Deuteronomy 4, verse 39 says, Know therefore today and lay it on your heart that Yahweh is God in the heavens above and the earth beneath. The same exact wording was in Rahab's mouth.

And then it goes on to say, there is no other. So that's very clearly talking about the incomparability of Israel's God. All three references in the Pentateuch to heavens above, earth beneath, are talking about the incomparability of Israel's God.

So, when Rahab says those things, it seems to be pretty clear that what she is doing is stepping out in a way from everything she had learned in the first church of Baal Sunday school class. She was implicitly rejecting the gods of her ancestors or family and affirming that this new God, the God of Israel that she's heard about, is the true God. He is the one in the heavens, not Baal.

So that is a huge step of faith in the words that she says. And she is really exposing herself by stepping out in a way from the whole religious system in the city where she lives, in the land in which she lives. So that, to me, these words here in verses 9 to 11, especially verse 11, are her words, her statement of faith in words, and it makes her a great hero of the faith.

So, her statement, her faith in action, verses 4 to 7, statement of faith in words, verses 9 to 11. Now, one question we might ask is, well, my goodness, how in the world did Rahab know the words to say that exactly echo the words that are in the Ten Commandments or Deuteronomy? How can that be? And there are a couple of different answers to that, I think. One is just, it's clear, as she has said, the word of Israel's God had preceded it.

The reputation of Israel's God had preceded it. She had heard about what God did to the Egyptians. She heard what God did to the Sihon and Og, and she lived in the area of common trade that came past through.

And so, it's obvious that she knew about the Israelite's God already, maybe unbeknownst to us. She took steps to learn more, and she had heard other things about this God, and she affirmed those words. That's one possibility.

I think it's a very, very reasonable possibility. Another possibility is that she said something like this, but the author of the book of Joshua, in order to make clearer what she was saying, sort of paraphrased what she said and made it come into line with the earlier parts of the Pentateuch to say, what she said was really a step of faith, and it's rooted in the truths of the Pentateuch. And I think that's also a reasonable understanding of this.

So, it's not as if this is a fictional story that somebody invented and sort of made the things fit exactly. I think she really said either these words or something pretty close to them, and this represents her faith. The rest of the chapter is about her negotiating with the spies, and her own deliverance.

She says, please swear to me, verse 12, by the Lord that as I have dealt kindly with you, you will be kind with me in my father's house. Give me a sure sign that you'll save me alive. And so, the conversation in the rest of the chapter is between her and the spies, and they promise that they will do this.

She lets them down by a rope. And then later in chapter six, when the Israelites come to Jericho to capture the city, she's going to put this scarlet rope in the window so they can know what not to destroy. There's been some attempt to tie the color of the cord with the scarlet of the blood of Christ or the kind of typological symbols like this.

The short answer is I think it's not, the color words are different, and it's a nice attempt, but it's not really rooted in facts. So, the chapter ends with her letting them out, and in verse 21, she ties the scarlet cord in the window. They departed to into the hills, remained for three days, and then they came back from the hills to find Joshua.

They told him what happened, and the conclusion, verse 24, truly the Lord has given all the land in our hands, and also the habits of the land melt away because of us. So, the long and the short of it, from the Israelites' perspective, is they're going to have success in the land. And this chapter sort of gives us an insight into that.

Along the way, it gives us a beautiful kind of parenthetical aside into a story of a Canaanite who embraces the God of Israel. So, we will talk in another segment about the whole issue of the destruction of the Canaanites and the command of God, God's command for the Israelites to annihilate the Canaanites, and it sounds very harsh. But as a preview of that, I would say those commands were, there an implicit condition behind that, the destruction is to happen if the Canaanites do not repent.

But I would argue that if the rest of the inhabitants of Canaan, who clearly had also heard about the Israelites, just as Rahab had if the rest of the inhabitants of Canaan had reacted and responded the same way as Rahab did, there would have been no destruction. Rahab becomes part of the narrative of the storyline of salvation in the Bible. We think ahead to the book of Jonah, and Jonah goes with a similar message about Nineveh being destroyed, Nineveh repents, and God pulls back and does not destroy them.

So, I think the example of Nineveh in Jonah would apply to the book of Joshua, and if the Canaanites had responded that way, repenting, they would have escaped the

destruction that was theirs. A final little footnote to Rahab is that many of you know, I'm sure, that she is also part of the genealogy of Jesus. So, let's, just show you that, that's in the book of Matthew, chapter 1, and if you want to turn to that, we will see that the first 17 verses of Matthew 1 are the genealogy of Jesus, starting with Abraham down to Jesus himself.

There are five women in this genealogy, and four of the five are foreigners. In verse 3, we have Tamar, who is the daughter-in-law of Judah, but she's apparently a Canaanite, and she dresses up as a prostitute to entice her father-in-law to lie with her. We have Rahab, a prostitute, in verse 5, we have Ruth, who is a Moabite, in verse 5, we have the wife of Uriah, Bathsheba, verse 6, she's undoubtedly a Hittite, married to a Hittite, and then we have Mary, mother of Jesus, in verse 16.

So, four of the five are foreigners, it would make the point that I think that God, the God of the Old Testament, is an inclusive God, not an exclusive God, sometimes one of these false dichotomies is that God is the God of Israel in the Old Testament, God of the Gentiles in the New, and many, many examples in the Old Testament that, no, God is also the God of the Gentiles. Here is a great example of a Gentile woman, Rahab, along with these other three, who are included in the genealogy of the Savior of the world. Also interesting, all five of these women had some, what society might say, are some moral problems.

Tamar, verse 3, dresses up as a prostitute to entrap her father-in-law. Rahab is a prostitute. Ruth goes in the middle of the night and lies at the feet of Boaz and uncovers his feet, whatever that means.

I may have been purely innocent, but I don't think I would have liked my teenage daughters doing that with anybody in their years. The wife of Uriah, Bathsheba, has an affair with David. Now, of course, David is the power one in that situation, but she is part of that.

And then Mary has a child out of wedlock. So, from a couple of different angles, I think it shows God's vision for the world is that it includes all peoples, Gentiles, and even people that society might condemn as untouchables or as immoral in one way or another. So, again, just concluding Joshua 2, it's a beautiful example of a foreigner rooted in the Canaanite culture, a foreigner who is herself a prostitute embracing the God of Israel and then being delivered because of that faith that she exhibits in word and in action.

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