

JOSHUA

Lesson 5 - Chapters 2 and 3

Let's continue in Joshua chapter 2 and the story of the Rahab, the prostitute/innkeeper of Jericho. Joshua has sent two spies to scout the way and check out the defenses of Israel's crossing point over the Jordan River, and the first city they will encounter in enemy territory, Jericho. The encampment of Israel is waiting at Shittim in Moab for the spies to return.

Let's re-read chapter 2.

RE-READ JOSHUA CHAPTER 2 all

Two Israelite spies have gone to the inn run by Rahab. I'm going to continue calling this place an inn and not a house of prostitution because more and more it seems that it was primarily an ancient motel, although it is equally as likely that prostitution took place there as a matter of course. Usually in the Bible when it associates a house with a person as a designated house of prostitution it says, "the house of so and so"; in our case it would be "the house of Rahab". But we don't get that phrase here. Further there is utterly no implication of sexual activity between these 2 spies and Rahab; and as those of you who have gone through the Torah with me are aware the Bible is not at all shy about dealing rather explicitly with sexual matters.

In verse 3 the King of Jericho accuses Rahab of harboring these 2 Israelite spies. There is no doubt the King had been expecting just such a thing because everyone within a couple of hundred miles knew where the Israelites were camping and their intention to conquer the Land of Canaan. After all you can't move 3 million people around in secret. Not only that but it was by then common knowledge that Canaan was the Hebrews' destination because they had always openly stated it. So the only open question was where Israel would cross the Jordan and attack first, and when. It is apparent that the King's soldiers had been watching carefully the various travelers that entered Jericho.

Now Rahab's response to the soldiers is really quite ironic; she sides with the spies. She hides them at great personal risk so that the King's men won't find them. Then she lies to the soldiers and says that although the men had been at her inn, they were gone now; further she really didn't know who they were or where they were from. She explains that at about the time of the daily shutting of the city gates, the men went out of the city and have not returned. The city gates of the walled cities in that era were usually shut at about nightfall, just as we tend to close our windows and lock our doors as darkness approaches; because in all times and in all lands nighttime is when predators, human and animal, seek their prey.

After convincing the King of Jericho's soldiers that the 2 spies had left the city, she goes up to the roof where the men were hiding. The roofs of houses in that era (and it is still very much so in the Middle East and 3rd world countries) were used for a variety of practical purposes. In the summer heat the roof was typically where some or all of the family slept. It was sometimes the guest area, or offered to strangers passing through as a place to spend the night. Or it was used as a place to hang and cure meat or (like in our story) to spread out organic material to dry; in this case flax. Since flax was cut into long stalks when harvested, and spread thickly on a flat surface to dry, it made an excellent hiding place.

It is interesting that never does the Bible condemn Rahab for her blatant lies to her government authority figures; actually her faith is even held up for admiration. She is favorably compared to some of the great saviors of Israel by the writer of the NT book of Hebrews:

CJB Hebrews 11:30 By trusting, the walls of Yericho fell down- after the people had marched around them for seven days. 31 By trusting, Rachav the prostitute welcomed the spies and therefore did not die along with those who were disobedient. 32 What more should I say? There isn't time to tell about Gid'on, Barak, Shimshon, Yiftach, David, Sh'mu'el and the prophets;

Although the Bible doesn't condemn Rahab for her lies, neither does it excuse them. Often it is said that because she was a pagan Canaanite and a whore that the Lord didn't have any expectation of her to be a truthful person so neither does the Bible; but there is no indication of that view in the Word of God, either.

I think that while we should not admire Rahab's lies neither should they bother us. She was faced with a situation that most of us have been faced with during our lives: to lie or risk hurting someone. Sadly it is but the state of the world in which we live that we must constantly find ourselves having to choose between the lesser of two evils. Or let me put that more succinctly; do we commit a greater sin or a lesser sin because at times (like here for Rahab) they're really is no middle ground. Had she told the truth those men would have been discovered, executed, and Joshua would have had to try something else.

One of the great doctrinal errors of some streams of Christian denominational thought is that a sin is a sin is a sin. One is as bad as another, stealing a loaf of bread is no different than committing adultery; worshipping false gods is no worse than going 40 in a 35 mph zone. This is just patently anti-Scriptural; further, how does one choose between the lesser of two evils if there is no greater or lesser? There are countless sad tales of Christians turning in their Jewish neighbors in wartime Germany and saying that it would have been a sin to lie to the authorities so they had no choice but "to do the Christian thing" and send these innocents to their probable deaths. Rahab is a great illustration to point out such an absurd doctrine, and the writer of Hebrews goes so far as to hold Rahab up as a godly example.

Rahab must have been believable (dare I say she was seen as trustworthy) because the soldiers immediately leave the city and go hunting for the 2 spies; they go all the way to the natural and well known fording points of the Jordan (yet another indication that they knew exactly where Israel was and of their intent to cross the Jordan River into Canaan). As the

soldiers left the city the gate was shut behind them so that the spies would be trapped if still inside, and blocked from re-entry if indeed they had gone out.

Now comes this profound and unexpected moment of Rahab's confession of faith in the God of Israel. It is here that we learn the "why?" behind Rahab's risky protection of 2 men who were complete strangers to her. She begins with the words "I know". I know, she says, that the Lord has given Israel this land; of course this is referring to HER land, the very place she lives as a Canaanite. Actually the Hebrew does NOT say that the Lord gave Israel the land, it says **YHWH** gave Israel the land. Rahab knew the formal personal name of the God of Israel. Believe me when I tell you that merely knowing the name of Israel's god was nothing supernatural nor particularly outstanding; people of that era had great interest in the names of the various gods because it was considered important. Yehoveh's name was known far and wide, just as Molech's name was known far and wide.

But those simple words, "I know", also indicate her unequivocal belief (especially on an intellectual level) of what she was about to say. She didn't suspect, or guess, or waffle back and forth: she KNEW. And what she knew began with what was firm fact to her: Yehoveh had already turned Canaan over to the Israelites. Now THAT is a confession of faith that a significant portion of the Church would do well to remember and repent of its more current prevalent view that maybe God DIDN'T give that land to Israel after all, and if He did it isn't entirely theirs any longer.

Rahab goes on that the people of Canaan are in a state of depression and fear because they know that Israel is coming and that the chances of defeating them are slim. Why did the Canaanites think that way? Although it doesn't say so, the sheer numbers of Israel's 600,000-man army were overwhelming. But on another level what Rahab confides to the spies is that everyone has heard of the parting of the Red Sea for Israel to pass through when they came from Egypt. Everyone in Canaan heard what happened to Sihon and Og whom the Israelites destroyed. So the minute the people of Canaan heard about these events they immediately gave credit to the god of Israel, Yehoveh, and knew they were in trouble. They lost all hope. As it says in verses 11 and 12, "Yehoveh your God, HE is God in heaven AND HE is god on earth.

This last statement slips past us but it shouldn't. Saying that Yehoveh is BOTH God of Heaven and God of earth is quite a confession. There were gods whose only realm was heaven and there were gods whose only realm was earth; but there WAS no single Babylon Mystery Religion god that was god of heaven and god of earth. In order for there to exist in the mind of the people of that era the monotheistic notion of only ONE God, it meant that a paradigm that had been understood since time immemorial had to be overturned: that the god of earth was separate god from the god of heaven. Rather there was one god who had authority over both realms.

We'll see the phrase, "god of heaven and earth", continued right on in to the NT era NOT because the Hebrews still thought that two separate gods ruled heaven and earth but because in the Greek thought and language those two realms MUST have two separate gods. We use that same phrase in songs and in worshipful declarations today, but only in a poetic sense;

2000 years ago (and more) the Jews who said, “god of heaven and earth”, MEANT it literally as a way to oppose pagan beliefs to the contrary.

Let me summarize what just happened: Rahab stood up and walked the aisle. Rahab just declared the authority of the God of Israel in her life. She declared that He is god of heaven and earth and since there are no other known realms for a god to govern, then Yehoveh is the only god for her to bow down to. Rahab trusted the Lord and it was credited to her as righteousness. This faith was very simple but also very practical. She didn't know much else about the God of Israel other than He had given her homeland of Canaan to the Hebrews and that He defeated and destroyed all who opposed Him. But from a practical sense she knew that she didn't want to be on the wrong side of this battle; she didn't want to be an enemy of God's people because in her mind the end results were certain and terrible because of their God.

And this wasn't a “convert now and repent later” attitude Rahab presented. It wasn't an attempt to deceive the spies, although they rightfully expressed skepticism about her pronouncement. This is proved by her putting her freedom and life on the line by concealing these enemy spies and then lying to her governmental authorities about it all, and then even helping them to escape. I said that this was a practical act of faith and we see that out of all this Rahab wanted something in return; she wanted that she and her family be spared. Folks, what better expression of the Gospel can we find than this? Anyone who comes to Yeshua without understanding what a practical decision and commitment they have made OUGHT to be questioned. We SHOULD be coming to Yeshua understanding what Rahab understood: you either submit to the God of Israel or you are destroyed. The destruction may not be immediate or physical; but it is certain. We SHOULD understand that this is the God of heaven **and** earth; that while an idealistic view of an eternal future with Him is important, that we have an earthly life to live and Yehoveh is God of our earthly life as well as our heavenly spiritual life.

In verse 14 the 2 spies agreed that in return for her helping them, they would save her and her family from the coming onslaught. But there were conditions: she could not wait until they were gone and then tell the authorities to cover her tracks. Even their oath to Rahab is like the Gospel: “our life for yours” they say. They are making an oath to Rahab that not only will they protect her but also that if anything happens to any of her family THEY will forfeit their lives for their failure.

Rahab's house abutted the city wall, such that a window into her house (probably above the roof) was actually a small hole in the city's outer wall. Houses built virtually into the wall were usual and customary; for one reason it meant that at least one wall of their home was already built and a sturdy wall it was. Building a stone dwelling was backbreaking work and it took quite a long time. Stones had to be gathered, trimmed, transported, and placed. That's why the rubble from previous homes and buildings was always the first choice of building material for those who built anew upon the ruins of the old.

Out of that window Rahab dropped a rope with for the men to climb down and escape. But before that she instructed them where to hide for a while; she told them to go to the nearby

mountains. Anyone who has ever been to Jericho understands this suggestion immediately; the mountains near Jericho are due west and Rahab had observed the King's soldiers going due east to check out the fording areas of the Jordan. Further these hills are riddled with caves to hide in and provide shelter. Stay there for 3 days, she instructs, until those soldiers return then it will be safe for the 2 spies to return to Joshua.

But the spies want to make something very clear because they have pledged their lives in the bargain; they have sworn to Rahab invoking the name of Yehoveh so they want to be sure Rahab understands that there are conditions upon her. Otherwise, they claim that the pledge will be vacated.

Rahab must do 3 things: she must hang that same rope with a scarlet thread wound around it, out of this same window to indicate to Israel's soldiers which house they are to spare. Second when Joshua's army surrounds the city Rahab must quickly gather her family to her inn because ONLY those who are with her will be protected. And 3rd they must remain there until these 2 spies come to fetch them; if any of them go out into the city streets prematurely they will be killed right along with the other inhabitants of Jericho. To all of this she agreed.

Christianity has always suspected that the scarlet thread was significant. The color red usually signifies one of two things in the Bible: blood and/or redemption. I think it is not off the mark to say that the red thread coming out of Rahab's window is the equivalent of the red blood painted on the doorposts of the Israelite homes in Egypt at the first Passover; the idea being that death will pass over (bypass) the family that displays it. So I feel very comfortable seeing the scarlet thread as a symbol of redemption for Rahab and her family. Yet there is more. I won't go into depth at the moment (for one reason we've discussed this before and we'll have more opportunities to revisit it in later lessons), but at the heart of everything that is occurring in this story (and that will occur during the conquest of Canaan) is Holy War. And at the heart of Holy War is the law of **herem**, or in English, the ban. The principle is that in true Holy War as initiated and led by Yehoveh, Israel is NOT entitled to the usual spoils of war that accompany victory. Rather ALL of the spoils belong to the Lord; the people are banned from those spoils because they are holy property. In addition to the valuable material things like gold, silver, and flocks and herds are the defeated people who are also spoils of war.

In most wars the people were taken as slaves and servants, or even added to the conqueror's own army. But in Holy War there was really only one way for God to receive the spoils of war; the spoils had to be destroyed and burned up. Now there was some modification of that principle in the sense that God's priests were His earthly representatives so some of the spoils could go to them if the Lord so directed it. But for the most part the priests (and Israel as a whole) were not to accumulate spoils OR people; they were to destroy them.

Bottom line: the people of Jericho were not going to become Israelite slaves; they were going to be annihilated. This was Holy War. So for Rahab and her family to be spared was unusual; on the surface this was a violation of the law of **herem**. It is interesting that these 2 spies felt that they had the authority to spare this family. But in the end it was because of the reality that to declare one's faith in the God of Israel IS to be saved. The spies inherently understood that Rahab and her family merited this because now they were in some sense more Israelite than

Canaanite (we'll see this same theme appear with Ruth and Naomi). The spies weren't entirely comfortable in all this and thus the long and detailed rhetoric about what they promised, under what circumstances, and if Rahab didn't follow the procedure all bets were off. Yet the 2 spies knew that for their own sake, and because of Rahab's confession of faith, something was fundamentally different now. Rahab and her family were gentiles, but they worshipped the Israelite God. Hello? Can you see this illustration of exactly what would be professed in the New Testament? Can you also see that the Gospel is an Old Testament promise not a New Testament invention?

Can you also see that as gentile Believers we are in the same strange position as Rahab; we're either fish or fowl, or, we're NEITHER fish nor fowl but something else entirely. We're gentiles, but yet we're in one spirit with the God of Israel. So are we Israelites with a gentile body, or are we gentiles with an Israelite spirit? The arguments can go on forever; what we know is that by profession of faith in the God of Israel and putting our full trust in His Messiah, exactly how to describe us doesn't matter except that we ARE saved.

Verses 22 –24 finish the story of Rahab with the words that the spies went to the hills and hid for 3 days; the soldiers looked and looked and couldn't ever find the spies so they returned to Jericho; and then the spies crossed back over the Jordan and went directly to Joshua to tell them all that happened. Note that in addition to their report they added what was really matters the most, and what they probably couldn't wait to tell their own wives and families: truly the Lord has delivered Canaan into our hands. The Promised Land is ours for the taking. Those who will oppose them are shaking in their boots and know they are already defeated.

Let's move on to chapter 3 as we witness a truly momentous event: the grand entrance of the nation of Israel into the Promised Land. For the Believer I'm not sure any event ought to stir our hearts more than this one except for Yeshua's grand entrance into Jerusalem on the colt of a donkey, that would shortly lead to His death and our redemption.

It is far more than coincidence that a focal point of Israel's entry into their exodus from Egypt was the crossing over of the Red Sea; and the ending of their exodus was the crossing over of the Jordan River. They crossed over INTO the Wilderness, and they crossed over OUT OF the Wilderness. In addition we'll soon see in a later chapter in the Book of Joshua that the Passover was associated with Israel's official end to their Exodus and beginning of their inheritance, just as Passover was also the official mark to the end of their servitude to Pharaoh and the beginning of their redemption.

Buried just under the surface of these passages of chapter 3 are some principles that can be easily recognizable to a Believer if you know what to look for; I'll do my best to point them out as we come to them.

Before we do this, however, the first few words of this chapter ("Joshua got up early in the morning..."), as simple and innocuous as they might seem to a modern Westerner, are leading me to discuss yet again the matter of HOW to think about the material of Bible as we read it. In other words we cannot approach the Bible as though we are reading a Tom Clancy novel; nor can we read it as though we're perusing a newspaper at our kitchen table. We cannot see the

Bible through the eyes of Western culture; we must adopt a view as though we are part of the cultural milieu in which it was written. We also must understand that the Greek language (the earliest known translations of the original Hebrew), then the Latin that the Greek was later translated into, and then the English after that, are all languages that are linear and rational in nature while Hebrew is circular and organic. To approach the Bible otherwise leads us down dubious rabbit trails and we arrive at places that produce error filled and rigid doctrines born of allegory and speculation.

There is another element however that also bears critical importance for a Torah student to grasp; the Hebrew Bible (the Old Testament) especially was NOT meant to be read it was meant to be spoken out loud and passed along orally. Thus the stories and narratives were created and handed down in a way that was made more for storytellers to speak than for students to silently read and study.

That concept might hurt your head a little because ours is a text-based society that utilizes the written word to pass along thoughts and information. It is nigh on to impossible for we of the Western world to conceive of an oral culture where the written word was only there for a sacred archive so that the stories that would transmitted from generation to generation by means of story telling had an anchor. The first real use for text to be passed along and used in a textual form was not to teach history or to instruct detailed aspects of a particular religious cult to the next generation; rather text was used for accounting records and contracts in more advanced societies and highly structured economies such as the Egyptians, the Hittites, and later the Assyrians.

All ancient people, even those with high literacy rates, preferred the spoken word to the written. The Hebrews of Jesus' day had one of the highest literacy rates in the entire world, surpassing even that of the Roman Empire. All Jewish children were required to attend at least 6 years of formal schooling. Yet, we hear Yeshua say, "Let those who have ears, listen"; he never says, "Let those who have eyes, read". Most Hebrews could read in His era, and many could read Greek as well as Aramaic and Hebrew (even if it was only at an elementary level). But they preferred to be taught by means of the spoken word, because that was at the heart of their culture (and this was the norm for the world).

This notion of various societies having different preferences to communicate information and thoughts shouldn't be foreign to us; many of my friends (and I) lament this new visual/video world we have evolved towards whereby it is all any parent can do to get his child to sit down and read a book. They prefer to watch and listen rather than to read and comprehend. I'm not going to debate the merits of any of these methods; the point is that the Bible (especially the Old Testament) was created in an oral culture.

So, other than for transaction records, all ancient documents were there to be read out loud not read silently. This is because the vast majority of ancient documents ever found were to be transmitted to groups of people; from a small flock of 3 or 4 students to crowds of thousands. So when a so-called letter was written down, it would NOT be handed to its intended recipient; rather a message bearer would read it to him aloud. Not because the recipient was illiterate but because the letter had been created in a manner that lent itself for oral rather than textual

communication. Thus when seen in its original, and not almost completely masked by languages that were created for their ability to be communicated by text perhaps better than by the spoken word, we find the Hebrew Bible is loaded with rhyme, alliteration, poetry, songs, and various rhetorical devices that achieves that purpose.

Once we translate those Hebrew phrases into another language, the embedded grammar and structure that allows one to tell a story, and have mental pictures drawn, and its essence remembered by entering in through the ears, is lost.

Even in our text based culture writers have to write in a way that pays attention to how the words of the text will be transmitted. A simplistic example would be a modern science textbook; it read such a book out loud to a class is frustrating not only to the reader but the listener. A science textbook was written to be silently read and studied and it loses its potency when read aloud to a group. The detail is too fine, the amount of information too tightly packed together. I would say that when read out loud a science textbook is almost incomprehensible.

Compare this to children's books such as the Dr. Sues series; they are BETTER read out loud than they are silently read. The writer uses word tricks and rhyming and other methods that please the ears more than the eyes. In fact it's the SOUND of the story more than the content that pleases and is easily remembered. Dr. Sues books were written to be spoken and are much more effective when used this way.

One more example: I have watched our own music and worship director sing a song under his breath in order to call the song's words to recollection; he can't just recite them verbatim and without the attendant rhythm; without the music they were written to complement the words lose much of their ability to be remembered. I dare say many of us here have at times sung the ABC song under our breath to help us remember what letter comes after another.

Further, the modern practice of punctuation is recent. Punctuation helps us to sound out written words so that they can become spoken words. In St. Augustine's classic 4th century work "Confessions" he mentions that a dear associate of his, Ambrose, was one of the most remarkable men he had ever met because he could read text without HAVING to move his lips. This is because not only did most written languages not have punctuation marks; they didn't have paragraphs. They didn't even have beginnings and ends to sentences, and most didn't put spaces between words. This is because they were written **in order** to be spoken; and by speaking out loud the separations between words, sentences, and paragraphs became quite natural and free flowing.

Many of you are aware of a certain Hebrew Bible from the Middle Ages that is called the Masoretic Text. What makes this Bible so valuable is that a group of Hebrew scholars (called the Masorets) saw the need to preserve the SOUND of Hebrew because the world was steadily becoming a place of the written document as opposed to the oral transmission of stories and histories. The Masorets developed a system of punctuation so that a way for Jews of the Diaspora and future generations who had never heard Hebrew spoken would be able to correctly pronounce the words.

One final thing and we'll conclude for today: the ancient world believed that words had great power; not WRITTEN words but SPOKEN words. Thus we read that God SPOKE the world into existence, He didn't send a memo. We read that Yeshua is the Word. The spoken words of a God were considered powerful and living in and of themselves.

I don't wish in any way, of course, to diminish the wonder and usefulness of text. In fact, I don't even really want to say that the spoken is better or worse than text. I'm attempting to point out that the form of the Bible was accomplished NOT in a way meant to be read, but to be spoken out loud. Thus what to us (especially in the Levitical Law) seems like boring repetitions and needless detail and saying the same exact thing 3 or 4 different ways is actually a style needed to make a story interesting, memorable, and highlighting the important principles.

Joshua is told that way. Our Bibles that have been somewhat rewritten for the modern student to read silently, cover that over; thus sometimes the point or purpose of a historical account, the choosing of which events to recount and transmit to the future generations in order that an important principle be brought to light, is lost.

I'll do my best to try and draw those hidden principles and purposes out for us as we move through Joshua and then Judges.