

Prayer

Jesus Christ, Son of God, we ask for Your forgiveness. In Your life, You showed God's love through the forgiveness You gave to all who came to You in need. Help us to seek and receive Your forgiveness for all that is wrong in our lives, and encourage us to help and pray for others who still do not know what to do with their troubles. Give us courage to minister in Your name as those who know Your love, we pray: AMEN

Other Prayer Suggestions

Weekly Theme: Wildlife

There is a vast range of wildlife on earth from the ocean floor to the highest mountains. Pray that people of all nations will value the world in which we are set and look after it.

On-going prayers

- Pray for all who seek to establish justice for the poor
- Give thanks for the grace of God working in your life today!
- Pray against illegal arms traders and those who sponsor them

Meditation

The Lord will come; He has never been slow.
He delights to fulfil our needs.

We long to be able to see the truth,
so He comes in visions and in prayer ...

We seek to identify what must be done,
so He comes as we read His Word ...

We ask to know how to do His will,
so He comes with wisdom and strength ...

We need to tell the Good News of God,
so He comes in our testimony of grace ...

We try to give love and kindness to others,
so He comes with His power to heal ...

The Lord will come; He has never been slow.
For Him, nothing is not an option.

Bible Study - Joshua 2:1-7

¹ Then Joshua son of Nun sent out two men secretly from Shittim as spies, 'Go, view the land, especially Jericho,' he said. They went and came to the house of a prostitute named Rahab, and lodged there. ² The king of Jericho was told, 'Some Israelites have come here tonight to spy out the land.' ³ Then the king of Jericho sent a message to Rahab, 'Bring out the men who have come to you and entered your house, for they have come only to spy out the whole land.' ⁴ But the woman had taken the two men and hidden them. So she said, 'Yes, the men came to me, but I do not know where they came from.' ⁵ Now when it was time to close the gate at dusk, the men left, but I do not know where they

went. *If you track them quickly, you will be able to catch up with them!*'⁶ However, she had brought them up to the roof and hidden them under the flax stalks she had laid out on the roof.⁷ The pursuers went after them on the way to the Jordan as far as the fords, and as soon as they had gone, the gate was shut.

Review

This passage begins the story of the occupation of the Promised Land by Israel. It starts slowly with a tale of spying and subterfuge, and Israel did what any invading army would do in preparation for advance, and sent men ahead of the main army to assess the opposition. History, as they say, is written by the victors, and so this small but intriguing story survives because Israel soon conquered Jericho and the rest of the Promised Land of Canaan.

There is one other reason why this story is significant, however. Rahab, the prostitute who gave help to the spies, became a 'folk hero' within Israel (see Hebrew 11:31 and James 2:25), but her place in the Bible is ensured by the reference in Matthew 1 (verse 5) to her place in the genealogy of Jesus. In due course, she married Salmon, the father of Boaz, the man who married Ruth, and their son Obed was the grandfather of King David. Rahab therefore joined the amazing group of women recorded in Jesus' genealogy in Matthew, and their inclusion is highly significant because it describes women and the extraordinary things they did to enable God's plan of Salvation to be fulfilled in Jesus (see my notes on Matthew 1).

As we read this story, we must remember that the people of Israel had been wandering in the wilderness between Egypt and the Promised Land for 40 years. It is too often forgotten that the early years of Israel's journey from Egypt were a fruitful experience for Israel (as in Exodus 16 to 20), but the book of Numbers records the drama of the later years which were not so easy. What happened was that Joshua and Caleb spied out Canaan and reported to Moses; their report was favourable, but the people were scared and refused to enter the Promised Land. This rebellion was serious and God despaired of Israel. The nation was left to wander for another 40 years whilst all those who had rebelled eventually passed away, and by the time they came to the Promised Land again, the only survivors of that time were Joshua, and Caleb.

It is not surprising therefore that Joshua sent spies into the land to check it out before committing to invasion. This story is probably the basis of the report they gave to Joshua (see 2:23,24). Clearly, they had an adventure, but their report needed to speak favourably about Rahab from the beginning because they had committed themselves by pledge to save Rahab and her family (2:12-14) when the land was invaded, because of her help.

The report makes several things clear, firstly, the King of Jericho was afraid of Israel and he was expecting trouble. There is no other explanation for his swift reaction once he knew that Israelites had come to the city (2:2f.) He wanted the men taken alive, and demanded their handover from Rahab. It sounds rather simple of the king to expect co-operation, but we do not know enough of the story to comment on the details; we can only presume that he wanted the spies as a means of bargaining if invasion came! We are not told why Rahab chose to help the spies, but this is what she did, and the story reads like a good yarn, containing lies and deception, intrigue and wit. You may have noticed the humour of the final verse as the messengers of the King of Jericho went on a 'wild goose chase' at dusk just as the city gates closed! This gave the spies the protection of Rahab for the whole night, for there was no way that the men could get back into the city!

Some people struggle with finding the spiritual side of a story such as this, but if we are to read the Old Testament properly, we must not look for spiritual insight in small 'verse-sized'

chunks, as we can in the New Testament. The spiritual significance of entering the Promised Land is immense. The Promised Land of the Old Testament is the Kingdom of God in the New, and Jesus had much to say about entry into the Kingdom. Despite the 'folk' nature of this story, it has an important spiritual side to it, which is the faith of the spies and also of the people of Israel in receiving their report. Earlier in their history their faith failed them after Joshua's and Caleb's wonderful report of a land ripe for capture. Now, however, their faith to do what God told them was lifted and enabled by a story of successful covert operations and the humiliation of a foreign king by a prostitute!

Questions *(for use in groups)*

1. Discuss in your group what elements of this story could be regarded as humorous, and what part this played in the acceptance of the report.
2. Rahab is described as a prostitute, this apparently did not matter to the spies, but does it matter to us? Why?
3. Without reading on in Joshua 2, discuss in your group what reasons Rahab could have for supporting a group of spies in this way.

Discipleship

Personal comment:

People who are ready to act are far more likely to feel able to have a laugh and be humorous about what they are doing, than people who are dead set against doing anything. No one laughed when Joshua and Caleb brought back giant fruit 'on poles' from Canaan (Numbers 13:23f.), though this sounds like a jovial description of the fruitfulness of the land. Even when deadly serious matters are in hand, if they are approached with confidence and faith, then the human spirit will often seek the lightness of humour. I sometimes feel that in the affairs of the church (rather than worship, which is different), too much is done with such deadly seriousness that humour is thrust out. This is sad. Perhaps we can learn something spiritual from this story!

Ideas for discipleship programme

- *Reflect on whether you have a sense of humour. Do you find it hard or easy to see the funny side of things at church? At work? At home? What does this tell you? Pray and ask the Lord to help you find the funny side of life, perhaps more often!*
- *Joshua clearly had to plan ahead before the battle of Jericho as well as respond to the Spirit on the day of battle. Are you good at planning ahead? Ask the Lord to help you become more efficient in your work for Him through careful planning, and look for His guidance in this.*

Final Prayer

Dear Lord Jesus; so many things have been written about you. Guide us we pray through the Scriptures so that our eyes might rest on those passages that will bring the Gospel to life for us, and help us understand the precious gift of our faith. Lead us on Lord Jesus, we pray; AMEN