

Prayer

We praise You, Lord God, for when we are stressed by problems, we can always turn to You for guidance. Lead us through the maze of feelings and emotions that accompany our troubles, for you have always been a help to Your people through the years. Keep us sure-footed on the pathway of faith and compassion shown to us by Jesus, and may we always keep close to You, whatever happens to us in this life. AMEN

Other Prayer Suggestions

Weekly Theme: Prayer Ministry

Ask the Lord to stir up your own heart to pray for people and generate within you a greater heart for intercession for others. Ask the Lord to help you open your heart to others.

On-going prayers

- *Pray about the difficult relationship between money and sport*
- *Pray that politicians will consult to help people, not just compete*
- *Give thanks for the technology you use in your home*

Meditation

All around us, there are people rushing about,
Doing the things that people do to keep things going;
Working, playing with children, shopping and visiting friends:
Travelling, texting, phoning, listening to music, eating snacks.
All around us, somewhere just beyond our horizons
Are people rushing about, trying to keep everything going
Despite the break-up of marriage or the death of a loved one,
Barely aware of what they are doing; lost, and looking for help.
All around us, Jesus is alive and God is with us by His Spirit,
Just waiting to be found, offering all the strength and help
We need to overcome our trials, troubles, distress and strife.
But who will point these dear people towards His help?

Bible Study - Joshua 2:15-24

¹⁵ Then she let the spies down by a rope through the window, for the house in which she lived was part of the city wall; ¹⁶ she had said to them, 'Go towards the hill country where your pursuers cannot find you. Hide there for three days until they have returned, and afterwards, go on your way.' ¹⁷ The men said to her, 'We will be released from this, your oath, which you made us swear ¹⁸ if when we invade the land, you have not tied this scarlet cord in the window through which you let us down, and you have not gathered your father and mother, your brothers and your entire family into your house. ¹⁹ The blood of all who go outside your house into the street will be on their own heads; we will not be responsible; but we will be responsible if a hand is laid on any who are in the house with you: ²⁰ and if you reveal what we are doing, then we will be

released from the oath you made us swear.' ²¹ 'Let it be as you say.' She replied. So she sent them away and they left, and then she tied the scarlet cord to the window. ²² When they left, they went into the hill country and stayed there three days until the pursuers, who had searched all along the road and failed to find them, returned. ²³ Then the two men came back from the hill country; they crossed the river, came to Joshua (son of Nun), and told him all that had happened to them. ²⁴ They said to Joshua, 'The LORD has surely given the whole land into our hands; all those who live there are in fear of us.'

Review

There is nothing like a good story, and there was a time when children were told the story of the spies in Canaan, Joshua's subsequent invasion and the battle of Jericho as an integral part of their Christian education. People are more cautious about this story today, even though the story of Rahab is a deeply human one about her salvation and the strange way in which she obtained it. Preachers may make occasional reference to this story today, but it is not well known, so we are left wondering why it is that scripture gives so much space to this story.

In previous studies of Joshua 2, we noted the significance of Rahab for scripture and the genealogy of Christ, and then her recall of the Exodus and recognition of the presence of the Lord God with His people (2:8-14). The part of the story we have just read describes the oaths made which secured the salvation of Rahab and her family, and the subsequent escape of the spies from Jericho back to Joshua and the camp of Israel, but is there anything we can take from this passage more than just the story line?

The past and the present The story line is important, of course, because it was vital that this expedition went well in view of the previous failure of Israel to enter the Promised Land (Numbers 14:1f.). What, however, can we make of the whole issue of Israel invading a land under the direction of God, in order to find a place to live? Firstly, we must accept that what Israel did was quite normal for the peoples of that day. History records constant tribal movements in that part of the world and frequent 'invasions' as different groups of people sought to establish themselves. Our modern picture of fixed geography and national land rights simply did not exist then, and it is hard for us to imagine what it must have been like with the guarantee of these things. For ancient people, it was all a matter of life and death.

Instead of approaching these stories with judgemental attitudes, it is better to accept them for what they are, records of 'great events' in Israel's history through which the country gained its national identity under God. This national sense of identity rose during the time of the kingdoms of Israel and Judah, but collapsed after the Assyrian and Babylonian invasions of Israel and Judah (respectively). God's people however retained their sense of identity and placed their hopes in a coming Messiah who would draw all God's people together. Now that Jesus has come and our battles, as Christians, are against evil rather than against nations, our perspective has changed; but the stories of the past still inspire.

Just one story, or one of many? In this passage, rather like many 'war' stories that inspire film makers and story tellers, we read something of the human side of a wider human conflict. Moreover, scripture often give us one story to illustrate more; so the stories of healing by Elijah, Elisha and Jesus, for example, give us just a sample of what they did. So here, it is worth considering whether the story we have read was repeated across Canaan as those who were friendly to Israel were saved. The evidence of this lies in the stories of Judges and David and Saul, where many individuals or groups of people (e.g. Abimelech, Judges 9; and Uriah, 2 Samuel 11 etc.) lived peacefully in the Promised Land alongside Israel, despite Joshua's obliteration of the nations of Canaan (Joshua 23:1f.). How many more scarlet scarves hung from city windows or walls as the invading Israelite

army swept through Canaan? Why else does the Law given by Moses allow for 'aliens' living in the land (Ex 12:19f, Leviticus 17:8f. etc.)?

A sign of God's favour The bond of an oath was sacred to ancient people, and here, the narrator records the contract carefully. In exchange for Rahab's silence, and her deeds in hiding the spies, her enabling of them to escape and giving them instructions to evade capture (2:21f.), not only was Rahab saved, but her entire household (2:18). In addition, the spies believed that God's hand was on their mission (2:24) and after escaping successfully they were bound by their oath to Rahab. For them the whole incident was a 'sign' of God's favour, and when they had feared for their lives, such a sign was no small matter.

All of us experience battles and trials, and we all value immensely the smallest of signs that God is 'with us'. We may find it hard to explain to others, and the moral basis of either our actions or what happens to us might be disputable by others, but such signs are invaluable. Certainly, if this story were to be taught appropriately to young people learning about the things of God today, I see no reason why it could not challenge them to think about the human impact of large scale events such as war, and the Godliness and humanity that survives it and triumphs over it.

Questions *(for use in groups)*

1. Discuss in your group the differing things that this story says to people about God's faithfulness.
2. Do you accept the argument that this one story might be an example of others?
3. What signs has God given you to confirm His faithfulness and His favour, and what part has this played in your life?

Discipleship

Personal comment:

It is always important to ask the question 'why is this story recorded in scripture?' Stories in scripture as long as this usually have great significance, so we must ask what this is. We do not always know the answers, but many things must have happened when Joshua led the people of Israel towards the Promised Land, and yet only a few are written down. They are in our records for a reason and although we might be right or wrong in trying to work it out, we will only find the deeper truths by asking these (and other) questions.

Ideas for discipleship programme

- *Sometimes the least expected of people are used by God for great things, as in this story. Keep your eyes open and see if you can spot God using people unexpectedly in the things you see happening around you today.*
- *Pray about those who are seeking salvation and do not really know how to find it. Pray for God's people to be aware of those around them who are seeking salvation, and open their eyes to how they can be helped.*

Final Prayer

If we give Your Spirit free reign in our lives, then Your Love, O Lord Jesus, saves us from more than we can imagine. Your Love will save us from bitterness, from fear, from hopelessness, from aggression, and from all the works of the enemy to draw us back into sin. Praise You Lord Jesus for Your love, shown in death, which conquers all. AMEN