

CHAPTER 2

In this chapter we have an account of the scouts that were employed to bring an account to Joshua of the posture of the city of Jericho. Observe here,

- I.** How Joshua sent them (v. 1).
- II.** How Rahab received them, and protected them, and told a lie for them (v. 2-7), so that they escaped out of the hands of the enemy.
- III.** The account she gave them of the present posture of Jericho, and the panic-fear they were struck with upon the approach of Israel (v. 8-11).
- IV.** The bargain she made with them for the security of herself and her relations in the ruin she saw coming upon her city (v. 12-21).
- V.** Their safe return to Joshua, and the account they gave him of their expedition (v. 22-24). And that which makes this story most remarkable is that Rahab, the person principally concerned in it, is twice celebrated in the New Testament as a great believer (^{<S813>}Hebrews 11:31) and as one whose faith proved itself by good works, ^{<S425>}James 2:25.

~~<B11>~~ JOSHUA 2:1-7

THE TWO SPIES AND RAHAB

In these verses we have,

- I.** The prudence of Joshua, in sending spies to observe this important pass, which was likely to be disputed at the entrance of Israel into Canaan (v. 1). *Go view the land, even Jericho.* Moses had sent spies (Numbers 13) Joshua himself was one of them and it proved of ill consequence. Yet Joshua now sent spies, not, as the former were sent, to survey the whole land, but Jericho only; not to bring the account to the whole congregation, but to Joshua only, who, like a watchful general, was continually projecting for the public good, and, was particularly careful to take the first step well

and not to stumble at the threshold. It was not fit that Joshua should venture over Jordan, to make his remarks *incognito* — *in disguise*; but he sends two men (two young men, says the Septuagint), to view the land, that from their report he might take his measures in attacking Jericho. Observe,

1. There is no remedy, but great men must see with other people's eyes, which makes it very necessary that they be cautious in the choice of those they employ, since so much often depends upon their fidelity.

2. Faith in God's promise ought not to supersede but encourage our diligence in the use of proper means. Joshua is sure he has God with him, and yet sends men before him. We do not trust God, but tempt him, if our expectations slacken our endeavours.

3. See how ready these men were to go upon this hazardous enterprise. Though they put their lives in their hands yet they ventured in obedience to Joshua their general, in zeal for the service of the camp, and in dependence upon the power of that God who, being the keeper of Israel in general, is the protector of every particular Israelite in the way of his duty.

II. The providence of God directing the spies to the house of Rahab. How they got over Jordan we are not told; but into Jericho they came, which was about seven or eight miles from the river, and there seeking for a convenient inn were directed to the house of Rahab, here called a *harlot*, a woman that had formerly been of ill fame, the reproach of which stuck to her name, though of late she had repented and reformed. Simon the leper (⁴²¹⁶Matthew 26:6), though cleansed from his leprosy, wore the reproach of it in his name at long as he lived; so Rahab the harlot; and she is so called in the New Testament, where both her faith and her good works are praised, to teach us,

1. That the greatness of sin is no bar to pardoning mercy if it be truly repented of in time. We read of publicans and harlots entering into the kingdom of the Messiah, and being welcomed to all the privileged of that kingdom, ⁴²¹³Matthew 21:31.

2. That there are many who before their conversion were very wicked and vile, and yet afterwards come to great eminence in faith and holiness.

3. Even those that through grace have repented of the sins of their youth must expect to bear the reproach of them, and when they hear of their old

faults must renew their repentance, and, as an evidence of that, hear of them patiently. God's Israel, for aught that appears, had but one friend, but one well-wisher in all Jericho, and that was Rahab a harlot. God has often served his own purposes and his church's interests by men of different morals. Had these scouts gone to any other house than this they would certainly have been betrayed and put to death without mercy. But God knew where they had a friend that would be true to them, though they did not, and directed them thither. Thus that which seems to us most contingent and accidental is often over-ruled by the divine providence to serve its great ends. And those that faithfully acknowledge God in their ways he will *guide with his eye*. See ^{<2869>}Jeremiah 36:19, 26.

III. The piety of Rahab in receiving and protecting these Israelites. Those that keep public-houses entertain all comers, and think themselves obliged to be civil to their guests. But Rahab showed her guests more than common civility, and went upon an uncommon principle in what she did; it was *by faith* that she received those with peace against whom her king and country had denounced war, ^{<813>}Hebrews 11:31.

1. She bade them welcome to her house; they lodged there, though it appears by what she said to them (v. 9) she knew both whence they came and what their business was.

2. Perceiving that they were observed coming into the city, and that umbrage was taken at it, she hid them upon the roof of the house, which was flat, and covered them with stalks of flax (v. 6), so that, if the officers should come thither to search for them, there they might lie undiscovered. By these stalks of flax, which she herself had lain in order upon the roof to dry in the sun, in order to the beating of it and making it ready for the wheel, it appears she had one of the good characters of the virtuous woman, however in others of them she might be deficient, that she *sought wool and flax, and wrought willingly with her hands*, ^{<813>}Proverbs 31:13. From this instance of her honest industry one would hope that, whatever she had been formerly, she was not now a harlot.

3. When she was examined concerning them, she denied they were in her house, turned off the officers that had a warrant to search for them with a sham, and so secured them. No marvel that the king of Jericho sent to enquire after them (v. 2, 3); he had cause to fear when the enemy was at his door, and his fear made him suspicious and jealous of all strangers. He

had reason to demand from Rahab that she should *bring forth the men* to be dealt with as spies; but Rahab not only disowned that she knew them, or knew where they were, but, that no further search might be made for them in the city, told the pursuers they had gone away again and in all probability might be overtaken, v. 4, 5. Now,

(1.) We are sure this was a good work: it is canonized by the apostle (³⁰²⁵James 2:25), where she is said to be *justified by works*, and this is specified, that *she received the messengers, and sent them out another way*, and she did it by faith, such a faith as set her above the fear of man, even of the wrath of the king. She believed, upon the report she had heard of the wonders wrought for Israel, that their God was the only true God, and that therefore their declared design upon Canaan would undoubtedly take effect and in this faith she sided with them, protected them, and courted their favour. Had she said, “I believe God is yours and Canaan yours, but I dare not show you any kindness,” her faith had been dead and inactive, and would not have justified her. But by this it appeared to be both alive and lively, that she exposed herself to the utmost peril, even of life, in obedience to her faith. Note, Those only are true believers that can find in their hearts to venture for God; and those that by faith take the Lord for their God take his people for their people, and cast in their lot among them. Those that have God for their refuge and hiding-place must testify their gratitude by their readiness to shelter his people when there is occasion. *Let my outcasts dwell with thee,* ²³⁶³Isaiah 16:3, 4. And we must be glad of an opportunity of testifying the sincerity and zeal of our love to God by hazardous services to his church and kingdom among men. But,

(2.) There is that in it which it is not easy to justify, and yet it must be justified, or else it could not be so good a work as to justify her.

[1.] It is plain that she betrayed her country by harbouring the enemies of it, and aiding those that were designing its destruction, which could not consist with her allegiance to her prince and her affection and duty to the community she was a member of. But that which justifies her in this is that *she knew the Lord had given Israel this land* (v. 9), knew it by the incontestable miracles God had wrought for them, which confirmed that grant; and her obligations to God were higher than her obligations to any other. If she knew *God had given them this land*, it would have been a sin to join with those that hindered them from possessing it. But, since no such

grant of any land to any people can now be proved, this will by no means justify any such treacherous practices against the public welfare.

[2.] It is plain that she deceived the officers that examined her with an untruth — That she knew not whence the men were, that they had gone out, that she knew not whither they had gone. What shall we say to this? If she had either told the truth or been silent, she would have betrayed the spies, and this would certainly have been a great sin; and it does not appear that she had any other way of concealing them that by this ironical direction to the officers to pursue them another way, which if they would suffer themselves to be deceived by, let them be deceived. None are bound to accuse themselves, or their friends, of that which, though enquired after as a crime, they know to be a virtue. This case was altogether extraordinary, and therefore cannot be drawn into a precedent; and that my be justified here which would be by no means lawful in a common case. Rahab knew, by what was already done on the other side Jordan, that no mercy was to be shown to the Canaanites, and thence inferred that, if mercy was not owing them, truth was not; those that might be destroyed might be deceived. Yet divines generally conceive that it was a sin, which however admitted of this extenuation, that being a Canaanite she was not better taught the evil of lying; but God accepted her faith and pardoned her infirmity. However it was in this case, we are sure it is our duty to speak every man the truth to his neighbour, to dread and detest lying, and never to *do evil, that evil, that good may come of it*, ~~HEB~~ Romans 3:8. But God accepts what is sincerely and honestly intended, though there be a mixture of frailty and folly in it, and is not extreme to mark what we do amiss. Some suggest that what she said might possibly be true of some other men.

~~HEB~~ JOSHUA 2:8-21

THE TWO SPIES AND RAHAB

The matter is here settled between Rahab and the spies respecting the service she was now to do for them, and the favour they were afterwards to show to her. She secures them on condition that they should secure her.

I. She gives them, and by them sends to Joshua and Israel, all the encouragement that could be desired to make their intended descent upon Canaan. this was what they came for, and it was worth coming for. Having

got clear of the officers, she comes up to them to the *roof of the house* where they lay hid, finds them perhaps somewhat dismayed at the peril they apprehended themselves in from the officers, and scarcely recovered from the fright, but has that to say to them which will give them abundant satisfaction.

1. She lets them know that the report of the great things God had done for them had come to Jericho (v. 10), not only that they had an account of their late victories obtained over the Amorites in the neighbouring country, on the other side of the river, but that their miraculous deliverance out of Egypt, and passage through the Red Sea, a great way off, and forty years ago, were remembered and talked of afresh in Jericho, to the amazement of every body. Thus *this* Joshua and his fellows were *men wondered at*, ^{<388>}Zechariah 3:8. See how God *makes his wonderful works to be remembered* (^{<380>}Psalm 111:4), so that *men shall speak of the might of his terrible acts*, ^{<385>}Psalm 145:6.

2. She tells them what impressions the tidings of these things had made upon the Canaanites: *Your terror has fallen upon us* (v. 9); *our hearts did melt*, v. 11. If she kept a public house, this would give her an opportunity of understanding the sense of various companies and of travellers from other parts of the country, so that they could not know this any way better than by her information; and it would be of great use to Joshua and Israel to know it; it would put courage into the most cowardly Israelite to hear how their enemies were dispirited, and it was easy to conclude that those who now fainted before them would infallibly fall before them, especially because it was the accomplishment of a promise God had made them, that he would *lay the fear and dread of them upon all this land* (^{<612>}Deuteronomy 11:25), and so it would be an earnest of the accomplishment of all the other promises God had made to them. Let not the stout man glory in his courage, any more than the strong man in his strength; for God can weaken both mind and body. Let not God's Israel be afraid of their most powerful enemies; for their God can, when he pleases, make their most powerful enemies afraid of them. Let none think to harden their hearts against God and prosper; for he that made man's soul can at any time make the sword of his terrors approach to it.

3. She hereupon makes profession of her faith in God and his promise; and perhaps *there was not found so great faith* (all things considered), *no, not in Israel*, as in this woman of Canaan.

(1.) who believes God's power and dominion over all the world (v. 11): "Jehovah your God, whom you worship and call upon, is so far above all gods that he is the only true God; for *he is God in heaven above and in earth beneath*, and is served by all the hosts of both." A vast distance there is between heaven and earth, yet both are equally under the inspection and government of the great Jehovah. Heaven is not above his power, nor is earth below his cognizance.

(2.) She believes his promise to his people Israel (v. 9): *I know that the Lord hath given you the land*. The king of Jericho had heard as much as she had of the great things God had done for Israel, yet he cannot infer thence that the Lord had given them this land, but resolves to hold it out against them to the last extremity; for the most powerful means of conviction will not of themselves attain the end without divine grace, and by that grace Rahab the harlot, who had only heard of the wonders God had wrought, speaks with more assurance of the truth of the promise made to the fathers than all the elders of Israel had done who were eye-witnesses of those wonders, many of whom perished through unbelief of this promise. *Blessed are those that have not seen, and yet have believed; so Rahab did. O woman, great is thy faith!*

II. She engaged them to take her and her relations under their protection, that they might not perish in the destruction of Jericho, v. 12, 13. Now,

1. It was an evidence of the sincerity and strength of her faith concerning the approaching revolution in her country that she was so solicitous to make an interest for herself with the Israelites, and courted their kindness. She foresaw the conquest of her country, and in the belief of that bespoke in time the favour of the conquerors. Thus Noah, being *moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house, and the condemning of the world*, ^{SAID} Hebrews 11:7. Those who truly believe the divine revelation concerning the ruin of sinners, and the grant of the heavenly land to God's Israel, will give diligence to flee from the wrath to come, and to lay hold of eternal life, by joining themselves to God and to his people.

2. The provision she made for the safety of her relations, as well as for her own, is a laudable instance of natural affection, and an intimation to us in like manner to do all we can for the salvation of the souls of those that are dear to us, and, with ourselves, to bring them, if possible, into the bond of the covenant. No mention is made of her husband and children, but only

her parents, and brothers, and sisters, for whom, though she was herself a housekeeper, she retained a due concern.

3. Her request that they would swear unto her by Jehovah is an instance of her acquaintance with the only true God, and her faith in him and devotion towards him, one act of which is religiously to *swear by his name*.

4. Her petition is very just and reasonable, that, since she had protected them, they should protect her, and since her kindness to them extended to their people, for whom they were now negotiating, their kindness to her should take in all hers. It was the least they could do for one that had saved their lives with the hazard of her own. Note, Those that show mercy may expect to find mercy. Observe, She does not demand any preferment by way of reward for her kindness to them, though they lay so much at her mercy that she might have made her own terms, but only indents for her Life, which in a general destruction would be a singular favour. Thus God promised Ebed-Melech, in recompence for his kindness to Jeremiah, that in the worst of times he should have *his life for a prey*, ~~2EB18~~ Jeremiah 39:18. Yet this Rahab was afterwards advanced to be a princess in Israel, the wife of Salmon, and one of the ancestors of Christ, ~~4005~~ Matthew 1:5. Those that faithfully serve Christ and suffer for him he will not only protect, but prefer, and will do for them *more than they are able to ask or think*.

III. They solemnly engaged for her preservation in the common destruction (v. 14): “*Our life for yours*. We will take as much care of your lives as of our own, and would as soon hurt ourselves as any of you.” Nay, they imprecate God’s judgments on themselves if they should violate their promise to her. She had pawned her life for theirs, and now they in requital pawn their lives for hers, and (as public persons) with them they pawn the public faith and the credit of their nation, for they plainly interest all Israel in the engagement in those words, *When the Lord has given us the land*, meaning not themselves only, but the people whose agents they were. No doubt they knew themselves sufficiently authorized to treat with Rahab concerning this matter, and were confident that Joshua would ratify what they did, else they had not dealt honestly; the general law that they should make no covenant with the Canaanites (~~4002~~ Deuteronomy 7:2) did not forbid them to take under their protection a particular person, that had heartily come into their interests and had done them real kindnesses. The law of gratitude is one of the laws of nature. Now observe here,

1. The promises they made her. In general, “*We will deal kindly and truly with thee*, v. 14. We will not only be kind in promising now, but true in performing what we promise; and not only true in performing just what we promise, but kind in out-doing thy demands and expectations.” The goodness of God is often expressed by his kindness and truth (~~HEB~~ Psalm 117:2), and in both these we must be followers of him. In particular, “*If a hand be upon any in the house with thee, his blood shall be on our head*,” 5:19. If hurt come through our carelessness to those whom we are obliged to protect, we thereby contract guilt, and blood will be found a heavy load.

2. The provisos and limitations of their promises. Though they were in haste, and it may be in some confusion, yet we find them very cautious in settling this agreement and the terms of it, not to bind themselves to more than was fit for them to perform. Note, Covenants must be made with care, and we must swear in judgment, lest we find ourselves perplexed and entangled when it is too late *after vows to make enquiry*. Those that will be conscientious in keeping their promises will be cautious in making them, and perhaps may insert conditions which others may think frivolous. Their promise is here accompanied with three provisos, and they were necessary ones. They will protect Rahab, and all her relations always, provided,

(1.) That she tie the scarlet cord with which she was now about to let them down in the window of her house, v. 18. This was to be a mark upon the house, which the spies would take care to give notice of to the camp of Israel, that no soldier, how hot and eager soever he was in military executions, might offer any violence to the house that was thus distinguished. This was like the blood sprinkled upon the door-post, which secured the first-born from the destroying angel, and, being of the same colour, some allude to this also to represent the safety of believers under the protection of the blood of Christ sprinkled on the conscience. The same cord that she made use of for the preservation of these Israelites was to be made use of for her preservation. What we serve and honour God with we may expect he will bless and make comfortable to us.

(2.) That she should have all those whose safety she had desired in the house with her and keep them there, and that, at the time of taking the town, none of them should dare to stir out of doors, v. 18, 19. This was a *necessary* proviso, for Rahab's kindred could not be distinguished any other way than by being in her distinguished house; should they mingle with their neighbours, there was no remedy, but the sword would devour

one as well as another. It was a *reasonable* proviso that, since they were saved purely for Rahab's sake, her house should have the honour of being their castle, and that, if they would not *perish with those that believed not*, they should thus far believe the certainty and severity of the ruin coming upon their city as to retire into a place made safe by promise, as Noah into the ark and Lot into Zoar, and should *save themselves from this untoward generation*, by separating from them. It was likewise a *significant* proviso, intimating to us that those who are added to the church that they may be saved must keep close to the society of the faithful, and, having *escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust*, must take heed of being again entangled therein.

(3.) That she should keep counsel (v. 14, 20): *If thou utter this our business*, that is, “If thou betray us when we are gone, or if thou make this agreement public, so as that others tie scarlet lines in their windows and so confound us, then we will be clear of thy oath.” Those are unworthy of *the secret of the Lord* that know now how to keep it to themselves when there is occasion.

IV. She then took effectual care to secure her new friends, and *sent them out another way*, ^{<5025>}James 2:25. Having fully understood the bargain they made with her, and consented to it (v. 21), she then *let them down by a cord* over the city wall (v. 15), the situation of her house befriending them herein: thus Paul made his escape out of Damascus, ^{<4713>}2 Corinthians 11:33. She also directed them which way to go for their own safety, being better acquainted with the country than they were, v. 16. she directs them to leave the high road, and abscond in the mountains till the pursuers returned, for till then they could not safely venture over Jordan. those that are in the way of God and their duty may expect that Providence will protect them, but this will not excuse them from taking all prudent methods for their own safety. God will keep us, but then we must not wilfully expose ourselves. Providence must be trusted, but not tempted. Calvin thinks that their charge to Rahab to keep this matter secret, and not to utter it, was intended for her safety, lest she, boasting of her security from the sword of Israel, should, before they came to protect her, fall into the hands of the king of Jericho and be put to death for treason: thus do they prudently advise her for her safety, as she advised them for theirs. And it is good advice, which we should at any time be thankful for, to *take heed to ourselves*.

~~HE22~~ JOSHUA 2:22-24

THE TWO SPIES AND RAHAB

We have here the safe return of the spies Joshua had sent, and the great encouragement they brought with them to Israel to proceed in their descent upon Canaan. Had they been disposed to discourage the people, as the evil spies did that Moses sent, they might have told them what they had observed of the height and strength of the walls of Jericho, and the extraordinary vigilance of the king of Jericho, and how narrowly they escaped out of his hands; but they were of another spirit, and, depending themselves upon the divine promise, they animated Joshua likewise.

1. Their return in safety was itself an encouragement to Joshua, and a token for good. that God provided for them so good a friend as Rahab was in an enemy's country, and that notwithstanding the rage of the king of Jericho and the eagerness of the pursuers they had come back in peace, was such an instance of God's great care concerning them for Israel's sake as might assure the people of the divine guidance and care they were under, which should undoubtedly make the progress of their arms glorious. He that so wonderfully protected their scouts would preserve their men of war, and cover their heads in the day of battle.

2. The report they brought was much more encouraging (v. 24): "*All the inhabitants of the country, though resolved to stand it out, yet do faint because of us, they have neither wisdom to yield nor courage to fight,*" whence they conclude, "*Truly the Lord has delivered into our hands all the land, it is all our own; we have nothing to do, in effect, but to take possession.*" Sinners' frights are sometimes sure presages of their fall. If we resist our spiritual enemies they will flee before us, which will encourage us to hope that in due time we shall be more than conquerors.