

Bi235 Old Testament 2

Lesson Bi235-3 Rahab and the Spies

Every so often, God provides help for his people from unexpected sources. We expect help from the talented, the beautiful, the famous, the educated—and in most cultures—the males. In today's lesson we meet a woman who saves the lives of Israelite spies. Her name is Rahab.

Before Joshua and the Israelites crossed the Jordan River, he sent two men across the river to look at Jericho. The great city of Jericho was protected by a wide stone wall. It also controlled access to one of the main valleys which led up onto the Judean plateau in central Palestine. Jericho stood in the way of Israel's advance into the Promised Land.

Joshua told the men, "Go, look over the land, especially Jericho." So the men somehow got into Jericho secretly. They found a house built into the city wall. There they found a welcome. It was the home of a prostitute named Rahab, who lived with her large family.

It was dark, but someone saw the spies entering Rahab's house. They reported it to the king of the city, "Look! Some of the Israelites have come here tonight to spy out the land."

The king sent messengers to Rahab's house. "Bring out the men who came to you and entered your house, because they have come to spy out the whole land." Rahab, however, must have known the men had been seen, because she had quickly told them to hide. They had climbed up onto the flat roof, and she had laid stalks of flax over them to cover them.

So she replied to the king's messengers, "Yes, the men came to me, but I did not know where they had come from. At dusk, when it was time to close the city gate, they left. I don't know which way they went. Go after them quickly. You may catch up with them" (Josh 2:1-5).

The Bible tells us why she misled the messengers of her own city. She had heard what God had been doing with the Israelites. Everyone in Jericho had heard. Before the messengers had demanded information about them, she had told the spies, "I know that Yahweh has given this land to you." She knew the name of Israel's God. She had gone on to say, "All of us who live here are afraid of you. We have heard that Yahweh dried up the waters of the Red Sea before you. We have also heard that you defeated the kings who lived east of the Jordan River. When we heard all this, we became afraid."

Then Rahab declared, "We know that Yahweh, your God, is the God of heaven above and the earth below." By saying this, Rahab was declaring her faith in the God of Israel. She was saying that she believed that Yahweh was the true God. Therefore, she was choosing to help the spies.

She went on to plead with the spies, "Please swear to me that you will be kind to me and my family, since I have been kind to you. Please spare our lives when you conquer the city of Jericho."

The spies agreed, "Our lives for your lives! If you don't tell what we are doing, we will treat you kindly when Yahweh gives us the land."

It seems this conversation took place before the messengers from the king arrived at Rahab's house. She already knew what the spies had agreed to, but she was still taking a big risk to hide them. To save their lives, she risked arrest and punishment from the city officials.

The messengers ran down the street and out the gate to find the spies. Then the city gate was shut for the night. Rahab went onto the roof and fastened a rope from a window to the ground. (Remember that her house was built into the city wall.) She told the spies, "Go into the hills for two or three days, until the messengers stop looking for you. Then go on your way."

The spies replied, "If you tie this scarlet rope in the window through which we are escaping, then we will honor our promise to spare you and your family. But be sure that everyone in your family stays inside your house. Otherwise we can't guarantee your safety. And you must not tell anyone what we're doing." After saying this, the spies crawled down the rope and ran away.

The spies stayed in the hills for three days. Then they came out of the hills, forded the river, and returned to Joshua. They told him the whole story of their adventure. Most importantly, they told Joshua, "Surely Yahweh has given the whole land into our hands. All the people are melting in fear because of us" (Josh 2:6-24).

These spies gave a report based on faith, much like the report that Joshua and Caleb had given 40 years before. Caleb had said, "We should go up and take possession of the land, for we can certainly do it" (Num 13:30).

Joshua had joined Caleb and said, "Don't be afraid of the people of the land, because we will devour them. Their protection is gone, but Yahweh is with us. Do not be afraid of them" (Num 14:9). Now, finally, 40 years later, the leaders and the people were ready to enter the Promised Land.

Furthermore, the Canaanite, Rahab, and her family were spared when Jericho fell to the Israelites. She went on to marry an Israelite man named Salmon, and became an ancestor of the great king David. She is also one of only three women mentioned in the genealogy of the Lord Jesus. The writer to the Hebrews honors Rahab for her faith (11:31).

This story is **important** because it shows us that God honors people who put their trust in him. Rahab and her family were foreigners, but God rescued them. The Israelites welcomed people from other tribes, as long as they declared their love for Yahweh, the God of Israel.

The **main truth** of this lesson is that God was helping Israel to enter the Promised Land. He also blessed Rahab because she was willing to trust God and assist the conquering Israelites.

To **review** this lesson, answer these questions:

1. Why did Joshua send spies into Jericho? [Pause]
A. If you said, "Joshua needed information about the city and its people," you are correct.
2. Why did Rahab and her family help the spies? [Pause]
A. If you answered, "She helped them because she believed in Yahweh and she wanted to escape the coming destruction of Jericho," you answered correctly.

3. What was different about this spy report compared to the spy report 40 years earlier? [Pause]
A. If you said, “The new generation of Israelites responded with faith, while their ancestors had responded with fear,” you are right.

Your **assignment** for this lesson is to listen to the story at least three times. As you hear the story each time, imagine how it happened. See the events in your own mind. Then tell the story in your own words as you remember it. You should spend at least 45 minutes in learning the story. Ask a friend who has never heard this story to listen to it. God used a woman—an unlikely citizen of Jericho—to help the spies. Because of her faith and her actions, she and her family survived. They became part of the Chosen People in the Promised Land. Think about how God may want to use women in your ministry. Encourage female workers in your group to ask God how they can lead others to him.