

Joshua 2:1, Sending the Spies

September 20, 1997

Overview

Book.—Theme: Victorious living in an unbelieving world.

1-5, Preparations For Battle.—Lesson: Don't go into battle without the proper preparation in advance.

Chapter 1, Commissioning of Joshua.—Lesson: Prepare the leader through divine appointment and popular support.

Chapter 2, The Mission of the Spies.—Lesson: Take the time to learn what you need to do the job that God gives you.

- Review the first spy mission in Num. 13.
- In the light of this background, understand the details of how Joshua sends out the spies the second time.
- Why stay with a harlot?

The First Spy Mission, Num. 13

Who originated it?

- 13:2, the Lord. (Note v.3, emphasizing that their mission is "by the commandment of the Lord")
- Deut 1:22, the people, with Moses' approval ("the saying pleased me well.")

Apparently the people desired it, and the Lord endorsed it. This was not a sinful journey; it was reasonable preparation for the task that lay ahead. The popular interest in the mission is reflected in the appointment of twelve spies, one from each tribe.

Their Task

Num. 13:18-20, they were to look for three things. Note alternation of "land" (the general term) with each of three specifics. The sense is, "examine the land with respect to these three details." They responded on each of these points in 13:27-28.

13:18-20	13:27-28
1. The people	2. Strong
2. The cities	3. Walled and very great
3. The fertility	1. Fruitful

The Outcome

14:1, this report had the effect of discouraging Israel. So much for the democratic approach to military planning!

Manner of Sending

Why just two?

13:2 sent one from each tribe, a representative sample so that the nation as a whole could own the outcome. This time Joshua isn't seeking a national consensus. He is following the example the Lord set them the first time, for his own intelligence.

- Prov. 22:3, "A prudent [man] foreseeth the evil, and hideth himself: but the simple pass on, and are punished."
- Luke 10:2, the Lord sent out 70, two by two, in advance of himself.

The two sent by Joshua perhaps recall the two faithful spies, Joshua and Caleb. Don't send the doubters.

Application: Preparedness is not ungodly. We are not to worry or be careful about the morrow (Matt. 7:34), but calm preparation is commended.

Why sent secretly?

The Hebrew accents have the effect of moving the comma from "secretly" to "spy," so that it is the command, not the spying, that is concealed. Note that in vv.22-24 we are twice told that it is to him, not the nation at large, that they make their report.

Purpose: avoid public pressure.

Application: Part of the responsibility of a leader is to bear certain burdens alone, and not to load the people down with what they cannot handle. Cf. our Lord's conduct toward the twelve, John 16:12, "I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now."

Why "the land and Jericho"?

The precise shape of the saying, distinguishing the land and Jericho, recalls the structure of the original charge, with its three-fold "land +" points.

This recollection emphasizes that this time they are receiving only one-third of the original charge, "Go examine the land, that is specifically the city of Jericho."

Thus they are not to focus on fruits or people, but to pay special attention to the structure and layout of the city, to guide the attack. Where are the gates, how thick is the wall, where is it most easily or least easily defended, etc. Helps us see how responsible Joshua is being. He is focusing on the task at hand.

Why the Harlot?

Divides into two questions.

1. Why would the spies, members of the people of God, go into such a house?
2. Why would the Spirit of God record this detail of their experience?

Why go into this particular house?

1. Talmudic tradition, reflected in the LXX, says that Rahab was an "innkeeper." Linguistically unlikely, and Heb. 11:31 and James 2:25 clearly call her a harlot. But as a matter of fact the two professions have often been linked historically. She probably did take in lodgers, along with whatever other business she may have conducted, and it would have been in connection with this that the men would have sought her out.
2. They would be less likely to attract attention as strangers in such a place. In fact, where else would a stranger stay, than in an inn?
 - Boling and Wright identify the Acacias as Tell el-Hammam. Going straight to the ford (Al-Maghtas') and then straight to Tell es-Sultan is 13 miles, or over 20 km, which the Arad letters show was a day's march.
 - The actual distance and time would have been longer:
 - The road would not be straight.
 - It would take time to ford the river, which was then in flood (3:15)
 - They need to travel in secrecy, to avoid detection, so cannot march straight there.
 - Thus they will need to spend the night somewhere.
3. Might be a good source of information from other travelers who might be there.
4. Later we learn that this particular house abuts the wall. Their mission is to study the structure of the city so as to guide the attack. What good fortune to find a publicly accessible house right against the inside of the wall!
5. The greatest reason is in the sequel. This is a woman whose heart God has peculiarly prepared and inclined toward himself, and they lodge in her house because God has sent them there for her.

Application: God's power to bring his chosen ones to himself. Of all the people in Jericho, here is one who desires to worship him, and he arranges circumstances in a way that men could never have planned to bring her to himself.

Why record that she is a harlot?

Why not just say, "They went into an inn," or "They found a house that abutted the wall"? Why the emphasis on her professional status?

1. The co-occurrence of "harlot" with "Shittim" recalls the same configuration in Num. 25:1. When they first arrived in the plains of Moab and encamped at the grove of Acacias, the nation was tempted with harlotry, and God severely judged them for it. This is the climax of a long series of warnings against harlots throughout the Law of Moses. Cf. Deut. 23:18, which compares a harlot with a sodomite and calls them both "an abomination unto the Lord." That experience would have given them a clear object lesson in the sinfulness of this way of life. This profession is the lowest of the low, a paradigm of wickedness and disregard for the things of God.
2. The same co-occurrence here reminds us of that incident. We are meant to recoil at the reference. "A harlot! What a terrible person—the dregs of this corrupt, unregenerate society."

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3. How surprised we then are to learn of her desire to seek refuge with the God of Israel! The point of the story is not Rahab's impurity, but her incipient faith.

- Cf. our Lord's tendency to eat with publicans and sinners, Matt. 9:11-13 and parallels. Luke 7:37ff is an important example. Our Lord came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.
- This story reminds us that the same principle holds in the OT. God reveals himself not to the proud and self-righteous, but to the humble and penitent, Isa. 57:15.

Application: Both OT and NT magnify our God as a God of mercy and grace toward the undeserving. It is right for us to be morally repulsed by such people, but wrong for us to assume that they have no interest in the things of God. Our call is to be in the world but not of it. Not of it because we must not share in its wickedness; in it that we may bear witness to it.