

Rahab and the Spies

Back in the days of Abraham, God had made a promise to him:

Genesis 12:1-7

1 The Lord had said to Abram, “Leave your native country, your relatives, and your father’s family, and go to the land that I will show you. 2 I will make you into a great nation. I will bless you and make you famous, and you will be a blessing to others. 3 I will bless those who bless you and curse those who treat you with contempt. All the families on earth will be blessed through you.”
4 So Abram departed as the Lord had instructed, ... and headed for the land of Canaan. When they arrived in Canaan, 6 Abram traveled through the land as far as Shechem. There he set up camp beside the oak of Moreh. At that time, the area was inhabited by Canaanites.
7 Then the Lord appeared to Abram and said, “I will give this land to your descendants.” And Abram built an altar there and dedicated it to the Lord, who had appeared to him.

God had promised that the land of Canaan would belong to the descendants of Abraham. Abraham never saw this happen in his lifetime. Neither did his son Isaac. Years went by and the descendants of Abraham, the Israelites were still not in possession of the land God had promised (the Promised Land). It was beginning to look like they were never going to have the land that God had promised.

And then it got worse. It was during the time of Abraham’s grandson Jacob. Now, you’ll remember that Jacob had 12 sons, one of them being Joseph. Can you remember where Joseph ended up? – That’s right, Egypt.

And if you remember, there was a famine which drove Joseph’s whole family to go to Egypt. Well they settled there and then the Israelites started to expand. But when a new king came to power, he didn’t like the fact that the Israelites were expanding, he thought they were getting too strong and saw them as a threat. So he made the Israelites slaves.

They were slaves for years and the promise God had given to Abraham seemed so long ago that the Israelites must have all but given up hope.

But then came Moses. Can you remember what happened? – That’s right. God brought 10 plagues on Egypt and eventually Pharaoh let them go. And then he changed his mind and chased after them with his army. And I’m sure you know the story of how the Israelites escaped through the Red Sea as God parted the water for them to cross on dry ground.

It’s quite an adventure isn’t it? After all that things slow down a little bit and the Israelites spend some time in the desert. In fact, they spend years in the desert. And

many of the generation that left Egypt, including Moses, never made it to the Promised Land.

Joshua was now leader of the Israelites. God had promised them the land of Canaan, remember. But how would they get that land? It was already occupied.

One big problem was the city of Jericho. This was the first city they would encounter after crossing the Jordan River. If the Israelites were going to take the land of Canaan, then they needed to take Jericho. This was a bit of a problem because Jericho had a huge wall around it and huge gates to get in and out and it was heavily guarded. Chances are, they had a strong army.

While Moses was leader he sent out spies to assess the land and this is what happened:

Numbers 13:25-33

25 After exploring the land for forty days, the men returned 26 to Moses, Aaron, and the whole community of Israel at Kadesh in the wilderness of Paran. They reported to the whole community what they had seen and showed them the fruit they had taken from the land. 27 This was their report to Moses: “We entered the land you sent us to explore, and it is indeed a bountiful country—a land flowing with milk and honey. Here is the kind of fruit it produces. 28 But the people living there are powerful, and their towns are large and fortified. We even saw giants there, the descendants of Anak! 29 The Amalekites live in the Negev, and the Hittites, Jebusites, and Amorites live in the hill country. The Canaanites live along the coast of the Mediterranean Sea and along the Jordan Valley.” 30 But Caleb tried to quiet the people as they stood before Moses. “Let’s go at once to take the land,” he said. “We can certainly conquer it!” 31 But the other men who had explored the land with him disagreed. “We can’t go up against them! They are stronger than we are!” 32 So they spread this bad report about the land among the Israelites: “The land we traveled through and explored will devour anyone who goes to live there. All the people we saw were huge. 33 We even saw giants* there, the descendants of Anak. Next to them we felt like grasshoppers, and that’s what they thought, too!”

THAT WAS THE IMPOSSIBLE SITUATION – how were the Israelites going to defeat a city that was so heavily guarded and had huge strong walls?

Joshua believed that God had given them the land but he also knew that he was going to have to fight for it. And he wanted to know what he was up against. But how was he going to get information without the whole camp being scared off again like they were before? He needed to get some confidence into the people, not have them shaking with fear.

This called for a **SECRET MISSION**. Joshua sent spies secretly (secret agents) to check out the land. The spies ended up at the house of Rahab – a prostitute. **HANG ON A MINUTE!! – A PROSTITUTE???!!!** What were they doing at a prostitute’s house?

Well it's obvious what they're doing at a prostitute's house but... well... they shouldn't be. They're supposed to be part of the Israelites, the people of God. God's going to be pretty annoyed with them for going to a prostitute when they were supposed to be checking out the land for Joshua.

But hang on a minute. Let's look at this from another angle. The spies might be a bit cleverer than it may first appear. Think about it. They need a place to stay where they can check things out. A place inside the city walls but somewhere where they can hide away without the authorities knowing they are there. A prostitute is not likely to be best friends with the local authorities, so it's a pretty safe bet that they could hide away here without being detected. What's even better is that Rahab's house formed part of the city wall. That meant that if anything did go wrong, the spies could make a quick getaway. So we can see why the spies might have decided to go to a prostitute's house.

But I'm going to suggest another reason that may surprise you. I think that God led them to Rahab's house. I know it sounds a strange thing to say, that God would lead people to the house of a prostitute, but perhaps that is because we limit God, but God can use anyone, can't he?

You see, someone did tell the authorities about the spies. Maybe it was a guard that saw them come through the gates of the city. Maybe it was one of Rahab's neighbours. We don't know. What we do know is that the secret agents were not so secret anymore. But this next bit is what makes me think that God was in this whole thing. You see, I imagine that most people in the city would have happily handed the spies over to the authorities. I mean the king would be grateful that you had saved the city from being attacked. You'd probably get a large reward, and you'd be a local hero. But for some reason Rahab didn't do that. She took the spies up onto the roof of her house and hid them under flax (Flax was a plant that grew like a tall grass and was used to make linen). When the authorities came looking for the spies, Rahab told them that the men were at her house but she did not realise who they were and they had now left. She said "if you are quick you might catch up with them before they leave the city". With that the authorities left to chase after the spies (who of course were hiding on Rahab's roof).

When the authorities had gone, Rahab told the spies why she had hidden them.

8 Before the spies went to sleep that night, Rahab went up on the roof to talk with them. 9 "I know the Lord has given you this land," she told them. "We are all afraid of you. Everyone in the land is living in terror. 10 For we have heard how the Lord made a dry path for you through the Red Sea when you left Egypt. And we know what you did to Sihon and Og, the two Amorite kings east of the Jordan River, whose people you completely destroyed. 11 No wonder our hearts have melted in fear! No one has the courage to fight after hearing such things. For the Lord your God is the supreme God of the heavens above and the earth below.

See, I told you God was in this. Rahab told them that she believed that God was with them and that they would conquer Jericho. She told them that the people of Jericho were

actually quite scared because they had heard about the way that God had parted the Red Sea for them so as they could pass through it on dry ground. They had heard how the Israelites had taken other places and they knew they were next.

Rahab knew that God is powerful and she was more worried about that than she was about the authorities. So she asks the spies to spare her and her family when they attack Jericho.

The spies agree that so long as Rahab doesn't betray them. They will make sure that her house is not touched when they attack Jericho. But how will the Israelites know which house is Rahab's? In the morning Rahab helped the spies escape by lowering them out of her window on a rope. The spies said to Rahab, we will only be bound by our agreement if you leave this scarlet rope in the window. That way they would know which house was Rahab's and which house they needed to leave alone when they attacked the city.

You can see that they are very good secret agents because this is like a secret code. No one in the city would have known why the scarlet rope was hanging in the window. But the Israelites would have known. And for the Israelites, it was quite an easy code to remember because it was very similar to the secret code that they had to use in Egypt when God brought the plagues. You may remember how the last plague was that God sent an angel of death. When the angel passed over a house in Egypt, the first born male would die. But for the Israelites, God said that if they painted lamb's blood on their doorframes, the angel would not touch their house.

Rahab accepted the terms and left the scarlet rope hanging in the window.

22 The spies went up into the hill country and stayed there three days. The men who were chasing them searched everywhere along the road, but they finally returned without success.

23 Then the two spies came down from the hill country, crossed the Jordan River, and reported to Joshua all that had happened to them. 24 "The Lord has given us the whole land," they said, "for all the people in the land are terrified of us."

So often we think that people need to be super spiritual to be used by God. We think that if someone is going to play an important role for God they need to be well respected, they need to be good, honest people, and they need to be living a Godly life. Rahab had none of these qualities and yet God still had an important part for her to play.

That's the amazing thing about God, he doesn't discriminate like we do. He can work with us whether we've got it all sorted out or not, whether we think we deserve to be on his team or not. Whoever we are, whatever we've done in the past, however you feel your relationship with God is right now, God can use you. Do you believe that?

You might think that it's impossible for God to use you, but God is a God of the impossible. He is a God that makes the impossible possible.

I want to finish with a story and then I'm going to give you a chance to make a response to God this morning. This is a story you may have heard before, I heard Brian tell it once and I think it's a great story for all those of us who sometimes compare ourselves with other people and we feel a bit useless compared to someone else. Do you ever feel like that? Well, if you do, this may help.

[Story of the two water pots]

A man had two water pots that he used to carry water from the river each day, back to his home for his family to use. Each day he would take the empty pots and walk a mile to the river and fill the pots to the brim. Then he would walk the mile back to his home. One day as the man was about to set out, one of the pots said to him "I don't think I'm very useful as a water pot". "Why do you say that" said the man. The pot replied "I have a crack in me and I've noticed that while you're carrying me back from the river, my water is leaking out and by the time we get home, half of it has gone." "Oh I see" said the man, "Wait until the morning, I have something to show you."

The next day the man took the two pots out as usual, filled them with water from the river and walked them home again. As usual, one pot was full to the brim but the cracked pot was half empty. "You see" said the pot, "I told you I was useless, look, half of my water has gone." The man replied "Did you notice anything on the way back today". "Nothing special" said the pot "just some flowers along the path". "Ahh" said the man "and did you notice that the flowers were only on your side of the path? You see, I knew you were cracked and that you leaked, but because of that, you water the flowers and those flowers cheer me up when I have to walk two miles every day. I'm glad you've got a crack and that you leak, without it I wouldn't be able to enjoy the flowers."

You see, God has a wonderful way that even the things that we consider a weakness, God has a use for. So whether you think of yourself as the complete pot, or as a crackpot, you can be used by God.

RESPONSE

Piece of paper – represents things that hold you back (things you've done in the past, things people have done to you, hurts, feelings of inadequacy, bitterness, even apathy) – take that paper, write on it if you want to or just leave it blank and imagine what that piece of paper represents, your secret code between you and God. Then I want you to come up to the front and tear it up and throw it in the bin.

Scarlet chord – then down here there are bowls with pieces of scarlet chord. Take one with you and tie it somewhere where you will see it regularly. This is a secret code to remind you that God can use you like he used Rahab. So for example, tie it to your keys

– no one else will know why it's there, but it's your secret code so as whenever you open the door, it's a reminder to you that God has a purpose for you.

Youngster's you might want to tie it to the zip of your pencil case so as every time you open your pencil case you are reminded that God has a job for you to do.

A song will play and I invite you to make that response to God – throw away anything that is holding you back and take a reminder that God can use anyone, even you.