

Week 2, Joshua 2

Hook



Main Point: God provides to accomplish His plans, sometimes through unexpected means.

Do you own a cat? What words would you use to describe it? Descriptors like “pet,” “companion,” and even “family member” may come to mind, but during the Battle of Pelusium in 525 B.C., a new title was bestowed on the felines: soldier. The Persians were squaring off against the fierce Egyptians and needed a creative edge; they understood that cats were sacred to Egyptians and decided to use this to their advantage. Persian soldiers marched into battle carrying cats, knowing that their opponents’ beliefs would cause them to be hesitant to strike and potentially harm the feline passengers. The strategy worked; the day was won, and all thanks to an army of cat commandoes.¹

Discussion Questions

Describe a time when you found an unconventional solution to a conventional problem.

Has God ever provided for you in an unconventional way? What did you learn through the process?

¹ <http://www.forbes.com/sites/michaelpeck/2013/01/30/rocket-propelled-cats-and-other-feline-weapons-of-war/#1ed412bf7410>

Week 2, Joshua 2

Book

Main Point: God provides to accomplish His plans, sometimes through unexpected means.

Text Summary: Joshua sends spies into the land of Canaan in preparation for the invasion. The spies are nearly discovered, but they find refuge with Rahab, a prostitute. Because she saves their lives, the spies reciprocate by agreeing to spare her and her family when Israel invades the city. The spies return to Joshua and share that “The LORD has given all the land into our hands!”

Joshua 2:1–11 (Read)

Sub Point: God provides protection, direction and victory for His people.

Joshua 2 opens with a decree from Israel’s newly installed leader, Joshua. In a scene that mirrors an event 40 years in the past, the commander sends two spies into the Promised Land. The original spying party in Numbers 13 consists of 12 men, 10 of whom return to the Jewish camp with a dreadful report —convinced that the Israelites are weak “like grasshoppers” before the inhabitants (Numbers 13:31–33). Joshua does not share the same opinion. The 10 spies make the mistake of comparing the strength and military prowess of the Canaanites and the Israelites. Joshua views the conflict differently: the Canaanites would not be squaring off simply with Israel, they would be facing the one true God. Numbers 14 recalls Joshua and Caleb’s argument:

“The land, which we passed through to spy it out, is an exceedingly good land. If the Lord delights in us, he will bring us into this land and give it to us, a land that flows with milk and honey. Only do not rebel against the LORD. And do not fear the people of the land, for they are bread for us. Their protection is removed from them, and the LORD is with us; do not fear them.”

Even as a younger man, Joshua was convinced that Israel would be victorious because the LORD would be with them. An entire generation later, it is time once again for God’s people to send spies into the Promised Land. This time is different. Joshua sends only two spies, and their adventure is one of the most well-known narratives in Scripture, demonstrating God’s use of unconventional circumstances to bring about His will.

Joshua wants information on Canaan but is particularly interested in Jericho. The city was strategically significant and would need to be taken first.² The place was known for its nearly impenetrable walls, a symbol of security.

² Donald K. Campbell, “Joshua,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 330.

The plight of the spies is an odd one. They survey the land and find themselves seeking refuge in the home of Rahab. The Scriptures are not shy in pointing out that Rahab is a prostitute, not someone who would appear to be a strong candidate to be used by God. The circumstances that led to the spies' lodging at Rahab's house are not clear. However, it seems best to view the encounter as the providence of God connecting representatives of Israel to a sinful woman who would become a proselyte of the true God.³

It does not take long for the king to be alerted to the presence of the spies. In a bold move, Rahab brings the spies to the roof and hides them. It seems odd that the soldiers would not simply burst through the doors and ransack Rahab's home in an aggressive search. The oriental customs of the day valued and respected privacy, providing the prostitute with an opportunity to fabricate a story and redirect the search. It is important to remember that this story is a narrative and is therefore descriptive (describing what happened). Rahab's use of lies to provide a means of protection is not prescriptive (instructing a believer as to how he should live). The Scriptures do not comment on her use of falsehoods but do focus on her welcoming of the spies.

Once the soldiers had gone, Rahab provides a unique perspective to the Jews. *"(She) said to the men, 'I know that the LORD has given you the land, and that the fear of you has fallen upon us, and that all the inhabitants of the land melt away before you'"* (Joshua 2:9).

The people of Jericho had heard that the Israelites had fled from Egypt by crossing the Red Sea, and dominated the kings east of the Jordan. The people of Jericho were afraid as word spread that these spies had come from Shittim to Jericho because they knew that they were next. Rahab describes the thoughts of the people of Jericho in an interesting way:

"As soon as we heard it, our hearts melted, and there was no spirit left in any man because of you, for the LORD your God, he is God in the heavens above and on the earth beneath" (Joshua 2:11).

The argument of Joshua in Numbers 14 is now echoed in the statements of Rahab. The people of Jericho were not afraid of Israel because of their manpower or their military tactics; they were fearful because they saw God fighting for them. The whole community of Jericho had heard of the miracles that God had done for Israel, and as a result they knew that the God of Israel was the true God. It was the faith of Rahab (as evidenced in her declaration in verses 9–11) that led to action and her salvation.

Read Rahab's confession in Joshua 2:9–11. What does it reveal about the condition of her heart?

³ Donald K. Campbell, "Joshua," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 330.

The Lord had led the spies to safety even though they may not have been aware of the danger they had been in. How has the Lord provided for you in a situation in which you may not have been aware of what was coming?

What are some ways that we can grow in our relationship with God? Would it be helpful to have a strong relationship in place before a time of struggle? How?

Joshua 2:12–24 (Read)

Sub Point: God can redeem and purpose any sinner.

Before God brought down the walls of Jericho, He destroyed the stronghold that held Rahab captive. Rahab's confession to the spies shows her understanding of Yahweh and how He is at work in the heavens and on earth. Rahab, a Canaanite, through her conviction of the one true God, now becomes a part of Israel. She reminds the reader of "outsiders" — separated from God, alienated from Israel, and strangers to the covenant of promise. She was without hope and without God in the world. We can all relate to Rahab's position because we have been where she is.

"Remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world" (Ephesians 2:12).

We are brought near to God because Jesus broke down the wall of separation (Ephesians 2:14). A declaration of faith brings salvation to the outsider! Rahab, too, was brought near by her declaration of faith in the God of Israel. Her faith was evident not just in word, but also in deed.

Through her confession, Rahab vows to serve Yahweh by protecting the two Israelite spies from the men of Canaan and in return, her family will be given the same protection from Israel. Verse 14 shows the oath between Rahab and the spies. This oath is a promise of protection. After bringing them into her home, she lowers them out of her window and provides direction. James talks about this when he records:

"And in the same way was not also Rahab the prostitute justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way? For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead" (James 2:25-26).

Of particular importance is the scarlet cord that the spies instructed Rahab to tie in the window. This cord will be a sign for Israel when they return and lay siege to Jericho to protect Rahab and her family. Much scholarly debate has taken place in regard to the significance of the scarlet cord. Scholars argue that connecting this cord to the redemption and protection provided in Christ is not a clean interpretation. However, while the words used are different, there are some connections to make that are helpful. First, Genesis 38 refers to a scarlet cord as well, one tied around the wrist of one of Tamar's twin boys upon his birth. This son is remembered in the

genealogy of Jesus found in Matthew 1:3. With this connection, both Rahab and Tamar are linked together in being two of the four foreign women within the same genealogy.⁴ Both of these women – outcasts, prostitutes – are in possession of a scarlet cord and included in the lineage of Jesus.⁵

A second connection is the Passover. Like the blood on the door, Rahab's scarlet cord is a sign for the Israelites as they enter Jericho to pass over Rahab's home and family and not destroy them along with the rest of the city.⁶

Ultimately, Israel's victory over Jericho was entirely *spiritual*—God authored every detail of their battle plan. What that meant for Rahab and her family was that their salvation came *straight from the Lord*. He is the one who affirmed her faith by salvaging the wall where her home was, despite total destruction all around. This is God's grace.

God's desire is to rescue every outsider (1 Timothy 2:3–4). This part of the Joshua narrative confirms God's welcome for all people and the opportunity for the chief of sinners.⁷ The oath made between Rahab and the spies reflects the oath that God has made to us through His Son. Just as the spies and Rahab kept their oath to one another for protection and safety, so much more does God keep His promises and covenant to us. Jesus flings the way to the Father wide open and invites *all who will* to enter in, through the wall that once divided. Just as Rahab's faith included her in Israel's lineage, our faith unites us to Christ and changes our identity and our heritage. Sometimes "insiders" are reluctant to invite those messy and unknown into the family, but God is not slow to invite—and He will speak *directly* to them, as He did to Rahab. As He did to us:

"(For) we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures.... But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy...." (Titus 3:3–5).

God used Rahab to confirm Israel's victory; God used Israel to bring about Rahab's salvation. To this day, God works astonishing miracles through people. Let's open our eyes to see, open our ears to hear, and open our hearts to the mercy of our always-rescuing Savior.

Rahab was able to use the scarlet cord as a reminder that the Lord was going to provide protection for her. What are some ways that we can remember the Lord is with us in struggles of our own?

⁴ Howard, David [1998] *New American Commentary: Joshua*. Nashville: B&H Publishers, p. 116.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid., 117.

⁷ Hess, Richard [1996] *Tyndale Old Testament Commentary: Joshua*. Downers Grove: IVP Academic, p. 89.

How can we avoid becoming anxious not knowing the future of our situation and waiting for the Lord to provide?

In what ways has the Lord provided and protected you?

Week 2, Joshua 2

Took



Main Point: God provides to accomplish His plans, sometimes through unexpected means.

George Mueller was a man who knew about God’s provision. He was born in Germany in 1805 and lived most of his life in England. Mueller was a pastor who had a burden for children and a faith that could move mountains. He built five orphanages and helped more than 10,000 parentless children.⁸ Although the number of rescued little ones is impressive, it was Mueller’s strategy for provision that has become legendary. The man knew that God would provide and so he faced each need with a confidence that a solution would be presented. For example, one of Mueller’s orphanages had run out of food. The worried housemother brought her concern to Mueller: the children were prepared for the day but needed a meal. Instead of reacting in panic, the pastor simply instructed her to have the children enter the dining room and wait. Three hundred orphans occupied the space, sat and looked to Mueller as he prayed a word of thanksgiving for the food that God would provide. Then they waited. Within moments a knock on the door echoed through the orphanage. The visitor introduced himself to Mueller and explained that he was a baker; “last night I could not sleep. Somehow I knew that you would need bread this morning. I got up and baked three batches for you. I will bring it in.” Soon after, the orphanage door received another knock. This time it was a milkman whose cart had broken down in front of the orphanage. The man offered ten large cans of milk to Mueller, knowing that the dairy would spoil waiting for a repairman to fix the milk cart.⁹ Three hundred children entered the dining room hungry, three hundred left satisfied.

Discussion Questions:

How does someone develop faith like Mueller’s?

In what areas of your life do you need to release to God’s provision?

⁸ <http://www.desiringgod.org/messages/george-muellers-strategy-for-showing-god>

⁹ <http://www.christianity.com/church/church-history/church-history-for-kids/george-mueller-orphanages-built-by-prayer-11634869.html>

Lesson Conclusion: God keeps His promises, sometimes through unexpected means and unlikely sources. That provision is best experienced through a spirit-led, confident and bold obedience to the Lord.

Challenge:

Rest because God is with you. The same God who encouraged Joshua, emboldened the spies, enlightened Rahab and provided victory for Israel is the same God who has promised always to be with His children. As Jesus tasked the disciples to enter a lost world and redeem it, He reminded them that in the face of this great challenge He would never leave them. He walked with them through wonderful moments: the birth of the Church, the healing of the broken, and the conversion of the masses. He also saw them through their darkest hours: times of betrayal, dashed hopes and even the threshold of death. So too, He has promised to walk with you. In victory and agony, you are secure. He has not forgotten you and He has a plan for you. Jesus never leaves.

Give God your plans. Plans are important and valuable. However, God will arrange the steps of those who delight in Him (Psalm 37:23–24). When the plan changes, you can rest, knowing that, as you walk in obedience, the Lord will direct you.

Focus on the moment. God will work out His plan in your life. Instead of worrying about tomorrow, devote your energy and attention to what God has called you to today (Matthew 6:34). Believers are not promised problem- or danger-free lives (John 16:33 speaks to the struggles that Christians are promised). However, God also promises His provision (Matthew 6:25–33).

Never underestimate God's ability to redeem. Jesus gave His life for the lost. The dredges of society are not too far gone for the redeeming touch of the Savior. When encountering those who are discarded by even the world, look for opportunities to share the mercy that you have received. God desires to bring outsiders to Himself and provide them with a new life.