

72—JEHOVAH HAS GIVEN YOU THIS LAND

(Joshua 1–2)

After Moses' passing, Jehovah spoke to Joshua, the man chosen to be Moses' successor. "Rise up, Joshua," he said, "and take this people over Jordan into the land that I will give them. For I will give this people every place upon which the soles of your feet shall tread. Your borders shall be from the wilderness of Lebanon, to the River Euphrates, to the great sea.

Jehovah continued his charge to Joshua: "There will be no man superior to you as long as you live. As I was with Moses, so will I be with you, but you must be strong and courageous and keep the Law that Moses gave you. If you will do this, your way shall be prosperous and you will inherit this land that I swore to give to your fathers."

Joshua sent out word to the children of Israel to prepare to cross the Jordan and inherit the land within three days. "We will do as you command us," they answered. "We will go wherever you send us. For as we hearkened to Moses, so will we hearken to you and put to death any who do not obey your words."

Joshua, who had been a spy himself forty years earlier,²⁰ sent two spies to Jericho in the land of Canaan to see what they could learn about the city and its people. Once in Jericho, they lodged at the house of Rahab the harlot.²¹

When the king of Jericho heard that there were Israelite spies at Rahab's house, he sent men requesting

that Rahab turn the spies over to him. But Rahab, who had hid the spies among some stocks of flax on her roof, told the king's agents, "The men you seek were here, but I did not know who they were. However, when it was dark—about the time of the closing of the city gate—they left. If you go quickly you will surely overtake them."

After the king's men were gone, Rahab went to the roof and talked with the spies. "I know that Jehovah has given you this land," she said, "and all the people are afraid. We have heard how Jehovah dried up the Red Sea when you came out of Egypt and how you destroyed the Amorites on the other side of the Jordan. When we heard these things, we were filled with great fear, for Jehovah is God both in the heavens above and on the earth beneath." Then Rahab pleaded with them to spare her life and the lives of her father's household when Israel came to possess the land.

"We will save you and your father's house," they assured her, "if you do not disclose our business. When Jehovah has given us the land, we will deal kindly and truly with you." It was agreed that Rahab would use a line of scarlet string to mark her window in the city wall. "But, if any of your family leaves your house, their blood will be on their own heads," said the spies. "However, if they remain with you in the house and any hand comes upon them, their blood will be on our heads. Nevertheless, if you tell our secret, we will not be bound by this agreement."

"It shall be according to your words," responded Rahab. And when she let them down from her window by a cord, she warned them to hide in the mountains for three days until their pursuers returned to the city.

Rahab bound the scarlet string in her window, and—after seeing how and where she had bound it—the spies went to the mountains, where they waited. Then, after three days, they descended the mountain and returned to Joshua and the children of Israel with their report. "Truly," they said, "Jehovah has delivered this land into our hands. The inhabitants of the country are all faint because of us."

²⁰ See story "64—Forty Years for Forty Days" where the story is told of Joshua being a faithful spy from the tribe of Ephraim two years after Israel came out of Egypt.

²¹ It is possible that Rahab was not a harlot. The Hebrew word for harlot is "zonah." This word has the same root as "mazon," which means "food." Thus, a possible translation might be "woman of food," or "innkeeper." It is true that ancient inns did keep harlots, but it did not necessarily follow that one who kept an inn was a harlot (see Victor Ludlow, *Unlocking the Old Testament* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1981], 55 [citing Adam Clarke, *Clarke's Bible Commentary* (New York: Abingdon Press, n.d.) 2:11]). What may be more important, however, is the fact that even harlots can show faith in God and repent. There can be no doubt that God blessed Rahab because of her good works. It would be logical to assume that the spies might go to an inn and mingle with the guests as they sought information about the land and the state of the peoples' minds.