

## Spying Out the Land

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Joshua 2: 1-24 & Hebrews 11: 30-31

From time to time we all hear stories about spies. Sometimes they belong to our country. Sometimes they belong to our adversaries. Either way spying has always been a part and indeed an important part, of almost every nation on the face of the earth. In fact, several years ago my son took me to the International Spy Museum in Washington, D. C. It was a fascinating visit. I saw all kinds of spy hardware, even one of the Aston Martin sports cars from the James Bond movies. I also learned that going all the way back to the Revolutionary War, George Washington had a network of spies that kept him well informed about what the British were up to. It's therefore, not surprising to discover that Joshua sent two spies to take a look around Jericho before the Israelites crossed over the Jordan into the Promised Land. Jericho was a big city with high walls. If it was not taken, the people of Israel would never be able to take possession of the land that the Lord had given to them.

So let's take a look at what happened as recorded in the second chapter of the book of Joshua. It reads like a good spy novel. Joshua selects two spies and sends them into the city, possibly dressed like weary, traveling merchants. Looking for a place to stay, they select the house of Rahab, located in the "red light district," an obvious choice for two reasons. First of all, it's a place where they can secure lodging without a lot of questions. Second, it is a great place to get an inside scoop on what's going on. Do the people of Jericho know about the Israelites? Are they scared or preparing for battle? Are there any weaknesses that can easily be exploited?

They are just getting settled in when the mistress of the establishment, Rahab, confronts them. She's no fool. These two men don't look like her usual clientele. They speak with a foreign accent and in spite of their disguises, it's obvious that they are something more than what they appear to be. Almost immediately she realizes that they are Israelites and that she and her entire household are in danger. If discovered in her home, both they and all of her family will be imprisoned and probably executed. Even as she is considering what to do, she hears the sound of approaching footsteps. Soldiers are coming down the street towards her door, sent by the king who suspects that she is harboring fugitives. Summoning one of her servants, she sends the spies upstairs. She tells her servant, "Hide them under the bundles of flax that are drying on the flat rooftop."

Then, thinking quickly, she comes up with a story that she hopes the soldiers will believe. Arriving at her front door, they demand, "Where are they, those two men who came to your house? The king has sent us to arrest them. They are spies." Rahab replies, "I don't know

where they are. They were here earlier, but they left just before you closed the gates at dusk. Hurry and go after them. Perhaps you can catch them before they cross over the river.” Searching her home and not finding the spies, the soldiers finally believe her story and head off in pursuit of the two intruders.

Later that night, Rehab meets with the two spies on her rooftop. She tells them, “I know that the LORD has given this land to you and that a great fear of you has fallen on us, so that all who live in this country are melting in fear because of you” (Joshua 2:9). She goes on to recite all of the victories that the Israelites have already won on the eastern side of the Jordan, all of the victories that everybody in the city already knows about. Having expressed her faith in the God of the Israelites, she then asks, “Now then, please swear to me by the LORD that you will show kindness to my family, because I have shown kindness to you. Give me a sure sign that you will spare the lives of my father and mother, my brothers and sisters, and all who belong to them, and that you will save us from death” (Joshua 2:12-13). “Our lives for yours,” the spies respond. “But be sure to remember this. When our army attacks, keep everyone inside this house. That’s the only way we can promise they’ll be safe.”

Later that night, she throws a rope out the window of her home because it backs up directly to the outer wall of the city. Before sliding down the rope, the spies tell her, “Tie a scarlet cord to this window. It will be the sign for your deliverance from harm when the battle begins. However, if you tell anyone about us our promise to you is null and void.” She agrees and after three days of hiding in the Judean hills, the spies recross the Jordan and report to Joshua. They tell him, “The LORD has surely given the whole land into our hands; all the people are melting in fear because of us” (Joshua 2:24).

Now what does all of this have to do with our church? You may be surprised, but in many respects, selecting a Pastor Nominating Committee is like sending out a group of spies. Instead of surveying the strengths and weaknesses of a city, this committee has been given the responsibility of searching for and scouting out the individual who will become the next pastor of our church. Having served as an advisor to two pastor search committees in the past, there are some important similarities between what our Pastor Nominating Committee will be doing and the two spies that were sent out on a reconnaissance mission to Jericho.

First, spying out the land requires courage and devotion. The spies who were sent to Jericho were risking their lives. They had to be completely dedicated to the task before them. Unlike those spies, our Pastor Nominating Committee need not fear for their lives, but it will require a courageous determination and a wholehearted devotion to that which they have been called to do. They will be going forth into what for some of them may, be a new set of circumstances and situations. Imagine for just a moment that just like a spy, you were sent to a land with different customs and even a different language. Wouldn’t you feel a little uncertain, a little anxious about your mission? Well, finding a minister for a church takes a Pastor Nominating Committee into a new realm, one which at times can be somewhat intimidating and quite

different from what most of us experience on a day to day basis. Like those spies, serving on a Pastor Nominating Committee requires a courageous devotion to what you have been called to do.

Spying out the land also requires diligent research and insight. The spies who were sent to Jericho needed to discover the strengths and weaknesses of this citadel in the Jordan valley. Were the people ready to fight the Israelites or were they frightened of this new adversary? Our Pastor Nominating Committee will likewise be doing a lot of research as they gather resumes, check credentials and perform background checks of the various prospects. In many ways, they will be like those officials in the CIA who spend hours and hours poring over hundreds of documents, searching for those vital pieces of information that will make their endeavors successful. More than one church has been embarrassed and even harmed because their search committee did not thoroughly investigate the person whom they had selected to present to the church as the congregation's next pastor.

Finally, spying out the land requires secrecy and stealth. The spies that Joshua sent out could not walk into Jericho and announce, "We're here to check out your defenses before our soldiers cross the Jordan and attack your city." They had to sneak in and then sneak out. Years ago, before all of today's electronic wizardry, that was easier said than done. A Pastor Nominating Committee would try to sneak into a church to hear a prospective pastor's sermon without being noticed. Sometimes they would come as a group. That was a dead giveaway. Sometimes they would try to come in one at a time. That didn't work either. It was like they had a sign hanging around their necks saying, "We are a search committee who have come to hear your pastor." Today, most pastors' sermons are on line so those kind of visits are no longer necessary. Nevertheless, you would be surprised how many times a church begins to sense that their pastor is thinking about leaving. So our committee will have to be careful and not just in alerting another church about their pastor's intentions. They will have to also be careful about sharing information prematurely with our own congregation. Do not expect to hear a great deal from our Pastor Nominating Committee until they are ready to present the one whom they feel has been called to be our next pastor.

So, in summary, I want to remind you of what the Lord said to Joshua a long, long time ago. Those words are just as true today as they were then, especially with regards to our Pastor Nominating Committee. "Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go" (Joshua 1:9)