



# Three Responses to Amazing

## Topic

God's sovereign power

## Theme

God's displays of His sovereign power provoke both fear and faith.

## Desired Learner Response

The learner will respond to God's sovereign power with faith and a readiness to serve Him.

## Materials

- Resources 1, 2, and 6
- Access to the Internet
- Notecards and pencils

## Scripture Focus

Joshua 2

## Summary

God's sovereign power is the focus of the account of the spies' visit to Jericho. The people of Jericho responded to God's sovereign power with dread and fear. Rahab responded with faith in God. The spies responded with confidence in God's ability to give them the Promised Land.

## Outline

### I. Jericho Responded to God with Fear (2:1–11)

- A. Jericho's weakness (2:1–7)
- B. Jericho's cowardice (2:8–11)

### II. Rahab Responded to God with Faith (2:12–21)

- A. Rahab's request (2:12–14)
- B. Rahab's test (2:15–21)

### III. The Spies Responded to God with Confidence (2:22–24)

- A. The spies' account (2:22, 23)
- B. The spies' certainty (2:24)

## Memory Verse

*"And as soon as we had heard these things, our hearts did melt, neither did there remain any more courage in any man, because of you: for the LORD your God, he is God in heaven above, and in earth beneath" (Joshua 2:11).*



## GETTING STARTED

### That Was Amazing!

Play a video of amazing feats in sports. There are plenty of videos available on the Internet.

**ASK:** Which feat did you think was most amazing?

**ASK:** What is the most amazing feat you have witnessed in person? (Q1)

God's sovereign power is the focus of this lesson. The Bible account is the spies' visit to Jericho. The people of Jericho responded to God's sovereign power with fear, Rahab responded with faith in God, and the spies responded with confidence in God's ability to give them the Promised Land. God is still sovereign and powerful. We ought to respond to Him as such.

### You Did What?

Give each learner a slip of paper or notecard. Have each learner write on his card something amazing he has accomplished in his life. Collect the cards and read them off one at a time. Allow the learners to guess who accomplished the feats.

**ASK:** Who do you think accomplished the feat?

**ASK:** What is your response to such an accomplishment?

God has done some amazing feats to demonstrate His sovereign power. This lesson will cover how the people of Jericho, a harlot named Rahab, and some Israelite spies responded to God's sovereign power.

## SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

### I. Jericho Responded to God with Fear (2:1–11)

#### A. Jericho's weakness (2:1–7)

**MAP:** Display resource 2 to show the location of Jericho.

Joshua sent spies into the Promised Land to spy out the territory and particularly Jericho, the site of their first encounter with an enemy and a strong, well-fortified city in central Canaan (2:1). Whether God approved of the spies' mission is not mentioned in the text. It does say that Joshua intended for the spies to go in and out of Jericho *secretly*. Perhaps the spies went to Rahab's house in accordance with Joshua's instructions to blend in. Since Rahab was a harlot, her house was most likely frequented by strangers passing through the land. And her residence was probably a good place to gain information about the city and to hear what the people were saying about Israel's presence east of the Jordan River.

While the text doesn't say so, we can be assured that God sovereignly worked



One might say that a faith like Rahab's that is mingled with lies and deception is not much of a faith. But remember that Rahab's faith was rather uninformed. She did not yet have God's law as her guide. Furthermore, she was essentially an enemy of the king of Jericho. Perhaps there is room for deception in wartime. But whether her lie was wrong is not the point of the passage. We should not get hung up on the morality of what she did.

to direct the spies to Rahab's house. At that time she was the only person in the city who sympathized with the Israelites. The spies would have been captured and most likely killed if they had gone to anyone else in the city. And no one else in the city would have told the spies about the extent of Jericho's fear of Israel. So God's work on Israel's behalf happened even though the spies were presumably unaware of it. Later they would reflect on the events as strong evidence that God was sovereignly preparing to give them the Promised Land.

The spies obviously didn't blend into the city, for soon a report of their presence came to the king of Jericho (2:2). We understand that their discovery was simply part of God's plan, but the spies were no doubt nervous about the possibility of being arrested or even killed. The king of Jericho sent men to Rahab with a message to bring out the spies who had been sent to search out all the country (2:3). His message was a warning to Rahab. If she didn't produce the spies, then all of Jericho, including Rahab's family, would be at risk of being destroyed by Israel. He purposefully appealed to her sense of loyalty to her city to motivate her to comply with his command.

Rahab decided to take a risk rather than play it safe. She sided with Israel and hid the spies on the roof in the stalks of flax (2:6). She admitted to the messengers that the men came to her but then she lied about knowing who they were. She furthered her lie by saying the men fled through the gates at dusk. Rahab then suggested the men go after the spies (2:4, 5). They did, pursuing them by the road to the fords of Jordan where the spies would be most likely to cross the river (2:7). Their departure gave Rahab time to talk to the spies about God, her people, and her faith.

**ASK:** How would you describe the king of Jericho's power? (Q3) *As rather weak and certainly not sovereign. Even Rahab, a lowly harlot, was able to fool him and send his men on a pointless search.*

## **B. Jericho's cowardice (2:8–11)**

Rahab returned to the spies with the fate of her people seemingly in her hands. At that moment, there was no person more powerful in all of Jericho than Rahab the harlot. But Rahab was not concerned with her position of power. Instead she confessed how the inhabitants of the land felt about Israel's impending entrance into the land (2:8–11). She began by saying she knew the Lord had given the Israelites the land. The people of Jericho were essentially strangers in Canaan. For that reason Rahab told the men *your terror has fallen upon us* (2:9). The inhabitants of the land were *faint* because of Israel. They were so afraid it was as if their courage had melted away. They didn't have the will to fight. Later on this became obvious when no one raised an arm to attack the Israelites as they marched outside Jericho. Rahab added that the Canaanites' faintheartedness was a direct result of the reports they heard about Israel's Red Sea crossing and victories over Sihon and Og on the east side of the Jordan.

**READ:** Joshua 2:10. **ASK:** What might the inhabitants have learned about the Lord from the Red Sea crossing? (Q4) *That God was more than powerful*

*enough to part the Jordan and let His people into the land, that He fights for His people, and that He is more powerful than any army of men.*

Jericho's fear of both Israel and God made them desperate and anxious (2:11). In fact, Jericho's anxiety was likely the reason why the king of Jericho wanted to keep the spies from returning to their camp. He didn't want Israel to know his people were cowering inside their walls. Jericho never responded to God with repentance. Instead they rejected God's merciful revelation of Himself as *the God in heaven above, and in earth beneath*. Their fear of God left them frozen and faithless inside their walls.

**ASK:** What three words would you use to describe the fear the people of Jericho had? (Q5) *Helpless, hopeless, heightened.*

## **II. Rahab Responded to God with Faith (2:12–21)**

### **A. Rahab's request (2:12–14)**

Rahab's fear of God moved her to faintheartedness too. Notice she used *we* and *our* in verse 11. But instead of remaining frozen by her fear, she had chosen to put her faith in God. She understood the stupidity of standing in the way of the God Who destroyed the Egyptian army in the Red Sea and Who directed Israel in defeating the armies on the east side of the Jordan. She wanted to be on the side of *the God in heaven above, and in earth beneath* (2:11).

**READ:** James 2:21–26. **ASK:** What showed that Rahab had saving faith in God? (Q6) *Her works, like those of Abraham's, were evidence of her faith. She hid the spies because she had placed her faith in God for salvation.*

**READ:** Hebrews 11:31. **ASK:** What does this verse say about the timing of Rahab's faith? (Q7) *She trusted in God for salvation before the spies arrived at her doorstep.*

Rahab's choice to trust in God was life-changing. Her exercise of her faith in hiding the spies would contribute to the destruction of her city, people, and culture. She was willing to protect the spies at the expense of the life she knew. One could argue that the life of a harlot is not much of a life. But the desire to protect the life one knows can be strong. Yet Rahab was certain that faith in Israel's God was the only choice that would protect her and her family from the coming destruction. Obviously she feared God more than the king of Jericho.

Rahab begged the spies to swear to her by a *true token*, a pledge of truth, that they would show her kindness (2:12). She reminded them of the kindness she showed them by hiding them. It appeared as if the spies were at Rahab's mercy as long as they were in her house. Rahab could have delivered them over to her king at any moment. But Rahab realized she was the one at their mercy. She asked the spies to *save alive* her family when the Israelite army came to destroy her city, mentioning specifically her mother, father, brothers, and sisters (2:13). By the phrase *save alive* Rahab may have simply been requesting that the spies take her



family into custody without having them executed. The spies promised they would treat Rahab and her family with kindness as long as her family kept their visit a secret. The spies even pledged their lives as a promise that Rahab and her family would not be killed (2:14).

### **B. Rahab's test (2:15–21)**

Rahab let the spies down the outside of the wall through a window in her house, but not before telling the spies to escape to the mountains to wait for the soldiers from Jericho to abandon their search (2:15, 16). In response the men gave Rahab another opportunity to demonstrate her faith. She and her family would be spared if they tied the line of scarlet cord in the window and if they all stayed in Rahab's house at the time of the attack (2:18). Any family member who went into the street during the attack would be killed without any guilt falling on the spies. Conversely, the spies would be guilty of violating their promise if anyone who stayed in the house was killed by an Israelite (2:19). Furthermore, if any of Rahab's family members reported the spies' business to the Jericho authorities, then the spies would be free from their oath (2:20). Rahab agreed to the stipulations, sent the spies away, and tied the scarlet cord in her window (2:21).

**READ:** Joshua 2:21. **ASK:** What did tying the cord in the window reveal about Rahab's faith? (Q8) *It was focused on God, and it was real.*

Tying a cord in a window in and of itself would do nothing to protect a person from attack then or ever. There was obviously nothing magical or superstitious about the act. The cord in the window did send a message though. It became an ongoing testimony to Rahab's faith in God, for the cord presumably made Rahab vulnerable. If it hung down the side of the outside wall, it would have been a way for the Israelites to return to the city covertly to launch a surprise attack on the Canaanites, starting with Rahab's family. Rahab had the spies' word that no one would attack her, but she didn't have a promise from Israel's general. Perhaps he would violate their promise. And what about all of Israel's soldiers? Could Rahab trust all of them not to climb up into her house with swords drawn once the attack started? She believed she could because of her faith in God's sovereign power. She understood the spies' promise of safety as a promise from God. She trusted God to keep His promise to her.

We do know that the rope would have been a ready means of escape regardless if the cord actually hung down the outside of the wall. Letting down the rope and using it as a means to leave the city and slip away to the mountains would have been tempting for Rahab and her family.

**READ:** Joshua 6:1. **ASK:** What made the temptation to escape by means of the rope particularly strong? (Q9) *The city of Jericho was eventually put on lockdown. No one was allowed to leave through the city gate. Leaving would have to be done secretly.*

Rahab had already used the rope to help the spies escape. If she and her family could do the same, then they could be out of harm's way when the Israelites destroyed the city.

**ASK:** What would you say was the logical thing for Rahab to do once the city was on lockdown? (Q10) *The logical thing to do was to use the rope to get away from her countrymen, whom she could no longer trust, and from the invading Israelites, who wanted to annihilate her people.*

Rahab set logic aside and put her faith in God's sovereign power instead. She stayed put even though she faced serious uncertainties. She believed God both could and would protect her.

**ASK:** Out of all the people in Jericho, why do you think God chose to save a lowly harlot? (Q11) *Her life showed that anyone can come to God by faith and receive forgiveness of sins. Rahab didn't do anything to merit salvation.*

Rahab's fear was filled with hope that God would provide a way to be rescued from certain destruction. The people's fear was filled with helplessness. They desperately tried to control their situation, but in their hearts they had already concluded that they were doomed. God responded to Rahab's highly unlikely faith and rescued her, the town harlot, from certain destruction. In doing so God showed He is a gracious, forgiving God Whose justice could be overruled by His mercy and grace if the condemned would but respond to Him in faith.

Rahab's story is a beautiful illustration of God's redeeming love. It also shows His strongest desire for the inhabitants of Canaan was His love for them and His desire to spare them. But His justice would not allow the Canaanites to escape judgment any longer. Their end was near. They realized that and were deathly afraid of the Israelites.

### III. The Spies Responded to God with Confidence (2:22–24)

#### A. The spies' account (2:22, 23)

The spies returned to their camp after the men from Jericho abandoned their search for them. They told Joshua all that had happened to them (2:22, 23).

**READ:** Joshua 2:23. **ASK:** How do you think the spies related their story to Joshua? Do you think they were matter of fact or excited and animated? (Q12)

The way God worked in the spies' lives to direct them in Jericho so specifically and precisely most assuredly impacted them deeply. They recognized that God worked in Rahab's heart ahead of time and then made sure they arrived at her residence so they could hear her report about Jericho and get away safely. God's sovereign power had to be the explanation for such an unexpected sequence of events. In addition, the fear Jericho felt in response to God's display of His sovereign power at the Red Sea and in the battles on the east side of the Jordan served to bolster the spies' faith even more.

#### B. The spies' certainty (2:24)

**READ:** Joshua 2:24. **ASK:** According to their report, what did the spies imply was true of God? (Q13) *That He is sovereign and powerful and therefore no one*

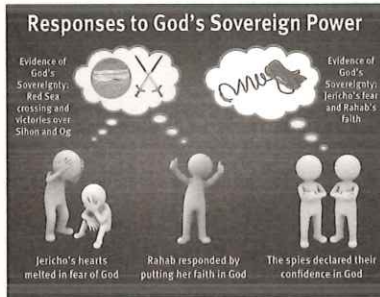


would be able to stand against Him or foil His plan to give Israel the Promised Land.

The spies had no doubt that all of the Promised Land was already theirs.

**ASK:** Why was it so important for Israel to be assured of God's sovereign power at this point in their history? (Q14) *Because they would need to rely on His sovereign power in order to fully realize the conquest of the Promised Land. The conquest was all about trusting God.*

**RESOURCE:** Display resource 6 as a review of the three responses to God's sovereign power in Joshua 2.



## MAKING IT PERSONAL

The account of Rahab and the spies shows that faith is the proper response to God's sovereign power. And while God has not called us to conquer a Promised Land, we must learn to rely on God and trust His sovereign power as we live for Him and as He seeks to work His will through our lives.

### Response to God's Sovereign Power

**ASK:** How were you impacted as a result of this lesson on God's sovereign power? (Q15)

**ASK:** How has God shone Himself to be sovereign and powerful in your life? (Q16)

**ASK:** How have you responded to displays of God's sovereign power? Have you put your faith firmly in Him? (Q17)

### Serving the Sovereign God

**ASK:** What excuses for not serving God might the account in Joshua 2 dispel? (Q18) *God can't use me because I have ruined my life; God doesn't care about what I can do because I'm not important; God only uses people who deserve to be used.*

**ASK:** How does understanding God's sovereign power help you take your focus off yourself and your limitations as opportunities to serve Him arise? (Q19)

### Summary and Memory Verse

**RESOURCE:** Display resource 1. Add the following statement about God's faithfulness: God's sovereign power encourages faith in Him.

Encourage learners to memorize Joshua 2:11. Give them an opportunity to say the verse in class next week.

