

God is Still Working

SCOTT HOEZEE

All through history, stories that have a certain fairytale-like dimension to them have been among our favorites. We love stories where the frog is really a prince waiting to be kissed, or the ugly duckling blossoms into a resplendent swan or the blind beggar of a village turns out to be the wisest person of all, who sees far more than even people who are not blind. Well, in the second chapter of the book of Joshua, we encounter just this kind of surprise when the least likely of people turns out to be the most insightful of all. Stay tuned.

DARRELL DELANEY

Welcome to *Groundwork*, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Darrell Delaney.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And I am Scott Hoezee; and Darrell, this is program number two of a six-part series on the Bible's sixth book, Joshua; and at this early stage yet in the narrative of Joshua, the people of Israel haven't yet officially crossed into the Promised Land. They are going to cross the Jordan River ultimately. We will see that in an upcoming program, but before they are even ready to do that, Darrell, the first order of business is research, or in more military terms, reconnaissance.

DARRELL DELANEY

So then, they have to go into the land and spy on it and see what is going on there; and all of this in effort to realize the promise that God has given to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and even Moses that there will be a land; and they are like: Well, right over there is the land. I am going to send twelve spies. They went down there and ten came back with a bad report; two came back with a good report. We see in Numbers 13 and 14 this is what happens.

SCOTT HOEZEE

²⁶They [the spies] came back to Moses and Aaron...and they reported to them and the whole assembly and showed them the fruit of the land. ²⁷They gave Moses this account: "We went into the land to which you sent us, and it does flow with milk and honey! Here is its fruit. ²⁸But the people who live there are powerful, and the cities are fortified and very large. We even saw descendants of Anak there. ³⁰Then Caleb silenced the people before Moses and said, "We should go up and take possession of the land, for we can certainly do it."

DARRELL DELANEY

³¹But the men who had gone up with him said, "We cannot attack those people; they are stronger than we are." ³²And they spread among the Israelites a bad report about the land they had explored. 14:6(paraphrased) Joshua and Caleb tore their clothes ⁷and said to the entire Israelite assembly, "The land we passed through and explored is exceedingly good. ⁸If the Lord is pleased with us, he will lead us into that land, a land flowing with milk and honey, and will give it to us. ⁹Only do not rebel against the Lord. And do not be afraid of the people of the land, because we will devour them. Their protection is gone, but the Lord is with us. Do not be afraid of them."

SCOTT HOEZEE

That was forty years ago, as we are in Joshua 2; the initial foray of spying out Canaan didn't end well, and God said: You know what? You don't believe in me. You are believing the bad report of the ten and not the good report of Joshua and Caleb, you are going to wander around in circles for forty years; and after that time, when this generation that just rebelled against my promises to you, right? When they are all dead, then you can go into the land again.

So, that was a long time ago, but now, it has been forty years. So, Joshua and Caleb had been in the land, they had been spies, but that was four decades ago. Things change. So, they cannot go in without sending *new* spies; this time only two, I think. So, here it is from Joshua 2:

Then Joshua son of Nun secretly sent two spies from Shittim. "Go, look over the land," he said, "especially Jericho." So they went and entered the house of a prostitute named Rahab and stayed there. ²The king of Jericho was told, "Look, some of the Israelites have come here tonight to spy out the land." ³So the king of Jericho sent this message to Rahab: "Bring out the men who came to you and entered your house, because they have come to spy out the whole land." ⁴But the woman had taken the two men and hidden them. She said, "Yes, the men came to me, but I did not know where they had come from." ⁵At dusk, when it was time to close the city gate, they left. I don't know which way they went. Go after them quickly. You may catch up with them." ⁶(But she had taken them up to the roof and hidden them under the stalks of flax she had laid out on the roof.) ⁷So the men set out in pursuit of the spies on the road that leads to the fords of the Jordan, and as soon as the pursuers had gone out, the gate was shut.

DARRELL DELANEY

This is an interesting turn of events, isn't it, Scott? Unlikely "hero" with Rahab; and it is interesting that they would even note this in the Bible, that they went to see a prostitute, that they were hiding with the prostitute, the prostitute lies and saves their necks. It is really interesting that the Bible doesn't leave out these details.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Now, when I was in Sunday school, I always had the impression the spies ducked into Rahab's only after they had been discovered, but it looks like they went there first, and you can make of that what you want; but certainly, both morally and militarily, this doesn't make a lot of sense. There is some moral complexity here, but also, it doesn't make a lot of military sense to go hide in a prostitute's place. That is not going to help you spy out the land. But when the king of Jericho gets wind of the fact that the spies are there, he knows where to go. He sends a message straight to Rahab. So somebody saw these men go in there, or somebody inside of Rahab's house ratted them out. Either way, the king has them pinpointed. So, these guys are in a bad, bad spot, until Rahab lies. She sends the Jericho soldiers on a wild goose chase: Oh, they went that way! They went thataway! Oh, okay; and they take off, but the men are still there.

DARRELL DELANEY

So then, an all-points bulletin goes out from the king to try to find...I call them the Jericho cops...they were trying to find these guys; and it is interesting that Rahab would cover for them. She is not one of God's people. She is not an Israelite, but she ends up doing things that help the Israelites in this situation. Why does she end up covering with them? It is so complex, all the details of this story. Checkered past, if you will, but God still includes it.

SCOTT HOEZEE

You know, those of us who are familiar with Genesis...and we have done some series on Genesis on *Groundwork* here before...we tidy up the Bible stories to tell them to children...

DARRELL DELANEY

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Or for vacation Bible school or Sunday school, but the Bible doesn't do that. When we have been in Genesis, you know, we noted: Look, Jacob initially, early in his life, was a cheat and a scoundrel and a crook. He lied to his father, he lied to his brother, he was just not a nice guy...

DARRELL DELANEY

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Joseph's brothers...the people for whom the twelve tribes of Israel are going to get named eventually, they were terrible. This isn't tidy; this isn't what we would call a morally clean story. It is complex, and yet, the Bible doesn't pull any punches about it. God is also able to work in all of our muddled, moral messes.

DARRELL DELANEY

You know what is really interesting to me, too, Scott is that because the Bible does not turn a blind eye to the brokenness of the people, and it shows that God can get the glory in dysfunctional situations, it gives me hope because I don't know about you, but I come from a dysfunctional context. There are a lot of people who come from dysfunctional contexts. Their families are not the best. They have situations that are broken; and because God shows that he can work historically in those scriptures like that, we serve the same God who could also help us in our dysfunctional situations and bring us hope, too. So, that really encourages me.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Indeed. I remember when I was a pastor of a church, my sermons would often get printed and then distributed to people, and somebody who didn't go to my church, but who had a family that had a lot of brokenness in it, and he had some children that had gotten into trouble. He wrote me a note saying how encouraged he was on these sermons I was preaching from Genesis about Jacob's family and Joseph's family. He said: You know, all of us who know dysfunction, as you just said, Darrell, this is good news. God hasn't stopped working; and I think that is indeed the message, that God hasn't stopped working. So, through the surprising efforts of a prostitute named Rahab, who tells a bald-faced lie to cover up the presence of the spies, God is getting stuff done; but, as they say on TV, wait there is more! There is something even more dramatic that is going to happen through Rahab, and we will take a look at that in just a moment.

Segment 2

DARRELL DELANEY

I am Darrell Delaney, with Scott Hoezee, and you are listening to *Groundwork*.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And so far, Darrell, we are in Joshua 2 in this second program of a six-part series on the book of Joshua. So far, we have seen that the spies visited a prostitute first thing in the land of Canaan, and specifically in the city of Jericho. Then we are told that Rahab, once the men were found out, she lied to the king's soldiers to send them on a wild goose chase. They were actually still hidden up on her roof, but the soldiers left the city to go chase them; and that is kind of where we pick it up now in verse 8, to see what happens next. If Rahab has been a surprising hero of this story so far, what is going to happen next is even more amazing.

DARRELL DELANEY

Verse 8 says: Before the spies lay down for the night, she went up on the roof⁹ and said to them, "I know that the Lord has given you this land 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.¹⁰ We have heard how the Lord dried up the water of the Red Sea for you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to Sihon and Og, the two kings of the Amorites east of the Jordan, whom you completely destroyed.¹¹ When we heard of it, our hearts melted in fear and everyone's courage failed because of you, for the Lord your God is God in heaven above and the earth below.¹² 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 sign¹³ 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.”¹⁴“Our lives for your lives!” then men assured her. “If you don’t tell what we are doing, we will treat you kindly and faithfully when the Lord gives us the land”

SCOTT HOEZEE

So again...if earlier here in Joshua 2...if Rahab had seemed an unlikely source of help for the spies in hiding, now we are shocked to see that she becomes an unlikely person to become a prophet and a preacher; but that is what happens. Rahab tells the Israelite men how great their God is. She even uses God’s name, Yahweh, which he first revealed to Moses back in the burning bush in Exodus 3; but Rahab tells the men how great their God Yahweh is. So great that the whole world is in dread of their God; and this comes from her, of all people.

DARRELL DELANEY

She is not an Israelite...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DARRELL DELANEY

She is *not*; and how in the world did she hear about this? Scott, sometimes we think when we go and we do missions and we go and we serve, we are bringing the gospel...we are bringing God...and God’s reputation...his renown...is everywhere! So, there will be people who we least expect or least think that might hear about what God has done and who he is, that they actually end up proclaiming the Word and proclaiming God’s promises and character to us and encouraging us. So, this is exactly what Rahab does. When I was in Bible school, they talked about the concept of a faithful person who is not from Israel, and there are some people sometimes who God can use as an example to Israel to testify to who God is, and he does that with Rahab.

SCOTT HOEZEE

She even has a great line: Your God...she is saying this to these guys...your God is the God in heaven above and on the earth below; and that heaven and earth imagery is a rhetorical device called a *merismus*. We saw it already in Genesis 1: God created the heavens and the earth, and in ancient times, when you used the highest...the heavens...and the lowest...the earth...that stands for everything in between. So, when God creates the heaven and the earth, that was Genesis’ way of saying he made everything. Now, when Rahab says *your* God is the God of heaven above and earth below, she is saying your God is the God of everything, from A to Z; the whole kit and kaboodle, that is who your God is, and that is why we are afraid; I mean, we are melting in fear. So again, an amazing prophecy from a very unlikely person, but as you just said, Darrell, it reminds us, don’t count anybody out. Don’t think that God cannot speak to you through almost anybody, right? God is a God of surprises, so don’t count anybody out. We can get divine insight; we can get guidance; and it can pop up almost anywhere, even from the least likely of people.

DARRELL DELANEY

I love that thing you said about the merismus. I was thinking about that because he did it...God did it in the beginning of the book of Joshua. In the episode that came before this one, we talked about meditate on the law day and night...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, he means every hour in between as well, because if we observe to do what is written in it, we will be prosperous and successful, is what he said to Joshua; and I really enjoyed the fact that you pointed out that

God will use unlikely people, because God's arm is not too short.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DARRELL DELANEY

He can use anybody; he can save anybody; and so, we cannot count anyone out, because we do not know where they are in their regeneration, in their conversion, in their repentance. We cannot count anyone out. The Bible says that even strangers could be angels in disguise...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, we really don't know who he is using, but if we are faithful to testify to who he is, we might be surprised.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Rahab is a surprise. Of course, she is not completely selfless. She does want to cut a deal with the spies. She says, you know, when the time comes, please preserve the lives of me and my family. So, we know that God is going to tell them...we talked about this as kind of the scandal of Joshua, in a way...God is going to tell them to, you know, basically kill everybody; but in this case, not Rahab and her family.

So, in verse 17, after Rahab says, you know, tell me that you will save me:

Now the men had said to her, "This oath you made us swear will not be binding on us ¹⁸unless, when we enter the land, you have tied a scarlet cord in the window through which you let us down, and unless you have brought you father and mother, your brothers and all your family into your house. ¹⁹If any of them go outside your house into the street, their blood will be on their own heads; we will not be responsible. As for those who are in the house with you, their blood will be on our head if a hand is laid on them. ²⁰But if you tell what we are doing, we will be released from the oath you made us swear." ²¹"Agreed," she replied. "Let it be as you say." So she sent them away, and they departed. And she tied the scarlet cord in the window.

So, she lets them over the wall, when they finally escape...she already sent the king's men on a wild goose chase...down by the scarlet cord, which has become a well-known biblical image, and the men say: Keep it there...keep it hanging there, so when we get here, we will remember where you live; and your whole family can come down that way and you won't die when the rest of Jericho does.

DARRELL DELANEY

That scarlet thread...that scarlet cord...is a really powerful image, and it is well-known for a lot of folks; and especially when they go in to take this city, the actual houses may look all the same, so they really need an indicator to say: Oh, no, no; leave that house alone. That is Rahab; that is her family. She did a kindness to us. We are going to do a kindness to her. Ultimately, she becomes a part of the family of God eventually, and we will get to that soon, but it is really powerful to see that God can also use these weird situations and circumstances, and still get his purpose done.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; as my friend Neal Plantinga says, God is really good at hitting straight shots with crooked sticks. As you just said, Darrell, you never know through whom God is going to work in your life; and the only mistake we can make is assuming we know where we will find divine insight; where we will get a word from the Lord. No, not so fast. God is awfully good at surprises, and Rahab is certainly a great surprise. In fact, Rahab is such a great surprise that she has resonance in different parts of the Bible, and as we wrap up this program, we are going to take a look at that in just a moment. So, stay tuned.

Segment 3

DARRELL DELANEY

You are listening to *Groundwork*, where we are digging into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Darrell Delaney.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And I am Scott Hoezee; and the prostitute Rahab is a prominent part of the story that we have been looking at here in Joshua 2, but Darrell, she will be mentioned again; a couple of times in Joshua 6, and that is when they actually do get rescued. So, we just said, you know, they told her to keep the scarlet cord...the scarlet rope that she let the spies down on...keep it in your window, they said, so we remember you, and you and your family will take that to safety; but you might think Rahab is kind of a minor character. She is mentioned, you know, in Joshua 2 and Joshua 6. That is it. There are a lot of characters who come and go in the Bible and you never hear from them again. You might think that was true of Rahab, but no; she struck...literally, she struck a chord...no pun intended; and we see that even into the New Testament.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, it seems the New Testament writers were really intrigued by the story of Rahab, and they echo her quite a bit. Like this one here in James Chapter 2, picking up at verse 21. It says: Was not our father Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? ²²You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did. ²³And the scripture was fulfilled that says, "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness," and he was called God's friend. ²⁴You see that a person is considered righteous by what they do and not by faith alone. ²⁵In the same way, was not even Rahab the prostitute considered righteous for what she did when she gave lodging to the spies and sent them off in a different direction? ²⁶As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead.

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, James is making his big point there that we need both faith and deeds, and Rahab becomes an example of this. Amazing that James would tumble to talk about Rahab all those centuries later; but she makes it into the great hall of fame of faith in Hebrews 11, too: ²⁹By faith the people passed through the Red Sea as on dry land; but when the Egyptians tried to do so, they were drowned. ³⁰By faith the walls of Jericho fell, after the army had marched around them for seven days. ³¹By faith the prostitute Rahab, because she welcomed the spies, was not killed with those who were disobedient.

So again, in James 2 and now in Hebrews 11, Rahab becomes sort of a striking figure in scripture.

DARRELL DELANEY

And it just doesn't address her current lifestyle situation, but it addresses her behavior that she did as faithful behavior to help those who were also going to follow God's promises and the provisions thereof; but then also, too, you see in Matthew Chapter 1, where Matthew intentionally puts her name into the genealogy of the birth of Jesus. You see it here starting in verse 2. It says: Abraham was the father of Isaac, Isaac the father of Jacob, Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers, ³Judah the father of Perez and Zerah, whose mother was Tamar, Perez the father of Hezron, Hezron the father of Ram, ⁴Ram the father of Amminadab, Amminadab the father of Nahshon, Nahshon the father of Salmon, ⁵Salmon the father of Boaz, whose mother was Rahab (there it is), Boaz the father of Obed, whose mother was Ruth, Obed the father of Jesse, ⁶and Jesse the father of King David.

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, this is the real capper of who Rahab the former prostitute went on to be. She joined Israel and she became the great, great, great grandmother of no less than King David; and through that, she becomes the great, great, great...I don't know how many greats we need...but grandmother of no less than Jesus himself; and that is quite stunning. You know, when we have looked at the genealogy before, we have done an Advent series here on *Groundwork*, Darrell, on the four women...

DARRELL DELANEY

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Five if you count Mary. Women weren't usually included in Jewish family trees. If they were, they were the righteous women like Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel and Leah; but Matthew includes Tamar and Rahab and Ruth and Bathsheba, all foreigners; several of them with some iffy stories associated with them as a reminder: Jesus the Messiah came for all people, and Rahab, who becomes a great, great, great...great grandmother of Jesus is a reminder of that...of that great grace.

DARRELL DELANEY

The circumstances in which the birth of Jesus came were not perfect circumstances either. So, even though again we come from situations and families that are not always the best and ideal situations, it doesn't tie our God's hands. He can still work, he can still get the glory; and if you look at Rahab's situation, you see that she is a person who has a reputation of being a prostitute, and God still incorporates her in the plan. So, it is redeeming for me to know that no matter what my past is, no matter what my circumstance is, I don't need to stay that way. God can bring me into the family, use me, and redeem me; and so now I am part of the family of God, and God gets the glory for that transformation of life.

SCOTT HOEZEE

It is the fulfillment of Genesis 12 again: Abram, you will be a blessing to all nations; and Rahab becomes a symbol of all nations. Don't ever count anybody out. Darrell, I think that is a good reminder for us today because we all know that in our society today in the 21st Century, we, through social media...Facebook, Twitter, Instagram...we have all tended to go into these silos where we just go into these echo chambers of the likeminded, you know. We don't want to hear contrary opinions, we only want people who vote the way we vote, think the way we think, and we are not going to associate with people who have different ideas. Rahab stands as a reminder here that God works through all people. Don't count anybody out. Don't isolate yourself and assume only my group has the corner on truth. God is bigger than that, right? God is always at work.

DARRELL DELANEY

Even though sometimes we go into these echo chambers in places where we just want people to nod around the room in here and agree with what we say, we really do need to understand that there could be people who are not like us; that don't think like us; that don't dress like us; that don't vote like us; that God can still use and incorporate and bring into his family; and we need to be understanding and have a little bit more of an open mind; and think about how sovereign God can be and how powerful he can be, because his role is to bring everybody to a place where they get an opportunity for the saving knowledge of Jesus Christ; and this is the awesome, powerful thing that God gets to do through the people he has chosen.

SCOTT HOEZEE

God is always bigger than just our local group; he is always up to far more than we could dream at any given moment. So again, the Bible is good at showing that God is a God of surprises, and this will go right into the New Testament, right? I mean, the apostles are...in the book of Acts they are constantly getting surprised where God is working: In Cornelius and his family; in an Ethiopian eunuch. The Holy Spirit pops up all over the place in Acts.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

We sing a song in our churches, a lot of us: *Awesome God*. Through some surprising twists and turns, the story of Rahab is a great reminder of that truth: Our God is an awesome God indeed.

Well, thanks for listening and digging deeply into scripture with *Groundwork*. We are your hosts, Scott Hoezee and Darrell Delaney; and we hope you will join us again next time as we study Joshua 3 and 4 to see what happens as Israel arrives at the Jordan on their journey to the land God had promised them. Connect with us at groundworkonline.com to share what *Groundwork* means to you, or share ideas for future *Groundwork* programs.

DARRELL DELANEY

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