

Joshua

Lesson #1

“Be strong and courageous . . .”

(1: 1 – 2: 24)

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Preview

At the end of Deuteronomy, Moses commissioned Joshua to lead the conquest of the Promised Land, and Moses himself climbed to the top of Mt. Nebo, gazed at the land and died.

As we enter the book of Joshua, the Israelites are staging for war and preparing to cross the Jordan River to attack Jericho. Joshua has very big shoes to fill, and he faces an extremely difficult job, leading the unruly Israelites as they invade Canaan, a mountainous land with fortified cities, peopled with seasoned warriors.

Jericho sits atop a plateau, overlooking the Jordan Valley. From Jericho to the Jordan River measures roughly 5 miles; the Jordan River to the mountains of Moab another 5 miles. The men of Jericho can watch every move the Israelites make, long before the Israelites get anywhere close to the city. There is no element of surprise.

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Preview, cont.

Every battle commander needs good intelligence about the enemy: How many fighting men are there? What does the city look like inside? What are their defenses? What are their weaknesses? What are their fears? Joshua sends two spies into Jericho to find out.

What they discover ensures that the city will fall!



**James Tissot. *The Harlot of Jericho and the Two Spies* (gouache on board), 1896-1902.
Jewish Museum, New York.**

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"Be strong and courageous . . ."



Joshua takes up where Deuteronomy left off. In Deuteronomy, Moses commissioned Joshua to lead the Israelites across the Jordan River and begin the conquest of Canaan.

At the end of Deuteronomy, Moses dies atop Mt. Nebo, after gazing at the Promised Land from a distance.

Now, as we enter Joshua, we read:

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“After Moses, the servant of the Lord, had died, the Lord said to Moses’ aide Joshua, son of Nun: Moses my servant is dead. So now, you and the whole people with you, prepare to cross the Jordan to the land that I will give the Israelites. Every place where you set foot I have given you, as I promised Moses. All the land of the Hittites, from the wilderness and the Lebanon east to the great river Euphrates and west to the Great Sea, will be your territory. No one can withstand you as long as you live. As I was with Moses, I will be with you: I will not leave you nor forsake you . . .

(1: 1-5)

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Moses had an extremely close relationship with God.

Recall that Abraham had a close relationship with God, as well, encountering him when three men (God and two angels) visited Abraham at the great tree of Mamre in Genesis 18. They had dinner with Abraham, and Abraham even “stepped forward” (18: 23) and argued with God about the fate of Sodom. But that was a theophany, an appearance of God in the form and likeness of a man.



**Arent de Gelder. *God and the Angels Visit Abraham* (oil on canvas), c. 1680.
Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, Rotterdam, Netherlands.**



Moses wanted more.

In Exodus 3 Moses also met God in a theophany, God appearing as fire in a burning bush; then in Exodus 33 Moses pleaded with God, *“Please, let me see your glory”* (33: 18)! And God replied, *“You cannot see my face, for no one can see me and live . . . [but] when my glory passes I will set you in the cleft of the rock and will cover you with my hand until I have passed by. Then I will remove my hand, so that you may see my back; but my face may not be seen”* (33: 20-22).

Like Elijah, tucked in the same cleft of rock on Mt. Sinai, Moses experienced the shimmering, numinous presence of God, but not the essence of who he is, not the “I AM.”



**Sébastien Bourdon. *Burning Bush* (oil on canvas), c. 1642-1645.
Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg, Russia.**

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"Be strong and courageous . . ."



And yet we read at the close of Deuteronomy:

“Since then no prophet has arisen like Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face.”

(34: 10)

The idiomatic expression “face-to-face” should not be taken literally (God doesn’t have a “face,” anymore than he has eyes or fingers); rather, it is an expression of intimacy, of being enveloped in God’s numinous presence.

No one else in the Hebrew Scriptures comes close to the intimacy Moses shared with God.



Nevertheless, at the opening of Joshua, Moses is referred to as *“the servant of the Lord”* (1: 1). The Hebrew word is *“ebed”* [eh’-ved], the normal word for a bond-servant or slave. In a similar fashion, St. Paul refers to himself as a *“servant of Christ Jesus”* (Romans 1: 1), the Greek word in Romans being δοῦλος [doo’-loss], the normal New Testament word for bond-servant or slave.

God assures Joshua that as he was present for Moses, so will he be present for Joshua:

“As I was with Moses, I will be with you. I will not leave you nor forsake you.”

(1: 5)



Those must be reassuring words for Joshua, for I'm sure he is overwhelmed by the task that confronts him. That's why God says in the very next verse, "*Be strong and steadfast*" (1: 6), and he repeats it *three* times in *three* verses!



I'll never leave you or forsake you, either. I'm loyal, for sure!

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“Be strong and steadfast, so that you may give this people possession of the land I swore to their ancestors that I would give them. **Only be strong and steadfast,** being careful to observe the entire law which Moses my servant enjoined on you. Do not swerve from it either to the right or to the left, that you may succeed wherever you go. Do not let this book of the law depart from your lips. Recite it by day and by night, that you may carefully observe all that is written in it; then you will attain your goal; then you will succeed. I command you: **be strong and steadfast!** Do not fear nor be dismayed, for the Lord, your God, is with you wherever you go.”

(1: 6-9)

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Assured by God, Joshua takes his first step as leader of the Lord's people, issuing his first order:

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"Be strong and courageous . . ."

“So Joshua commanded the officers of the people: ‘Go through the camp and command the people, Prepare your provisions, for three days from now you shall cross the Jordan here, to march in and possess the land the Lord, your God, is giving as your possession.’”

(1: 10-11)

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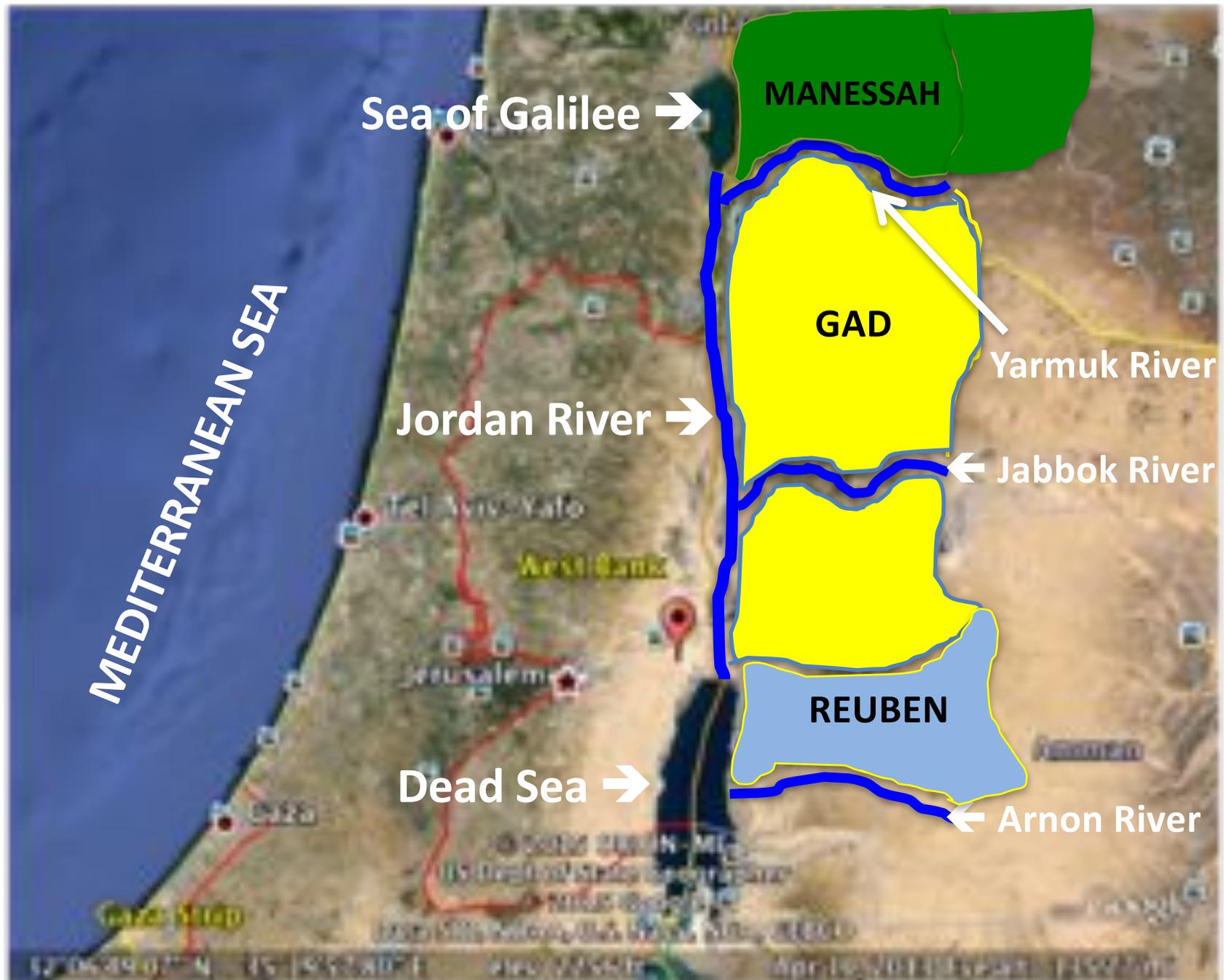
And then Joshua addresses the Transjordan tribes, those who had bargained with Moses for the land on the east side of the Jordan River, the tribes of Reuben, Gad and half of Manasseh.

Recall the scene from Numbers:

“Now the Reubenites and Gadites had a very large number of livestock. Noticing that the land of Jazer and of Gilead was a place suited to livestock, the Gadites and Reubenites came to Moses and Eleazar the priest and to the leaders of the community and said, ‘The region of Ataroth, Dibon, Jazer, Nimrah, Heshbon, Elealeh, Sebam, Nebo and Baal-meon—the land which the Lord has laid low before the community of Israel, is a land for livestock, and your servants have livestock.’ They continued, ‘If we find favor with you, let this land be given to your servants as their possession. Do not make us cross the Jordan.’”

(32: 1-5)

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Sea of Galilee →

MANESSAH

GAD

Yarmuk River

Jordan River →

← Jabbok River

MEDITERRANEAN SEA

REUBEN

Dead Sea →

← Arnon River

"Be strong and courageous . . ."

**Of course, Moses'
response was
volcanic!**





“But Moses answered the Gadites and Reubenites: Are your kindred, then, to go to war, while you remain here? Why do you wish to discourage the Israelites from crossing to the land the Lord has given them? That is just what your ancestors did when I sent them from Kadesh-barnea to reconnoiter the land. They went up to the Wadi Eschol and reconnoitered the land, then so discouraged the Israelites that they would not enter the land the Lord had given them . . .

(32: 6-9)

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“But they approached him [Moses, cautiously] and said: We will only build sheepfolds here for our flocks and towns for our families; but we ourselves will march as troops in the vanguard before the Israelites, until we have led them to their destination. Meanwhile our families will remain in the fortified towns because of the land’s inhabitants. We will not return to our homes until all the Israelites have taken possession of their heritage. But we will not claim any heritage with them across the Jordan and beyond, because we have received a heritage for ourselves on the eastern side of the Jordan.”

(32: 16-19)

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**That sounds like a
reasonable
compromise.**

**Don't bet on it. I
think it's going to
bring big trouble!**

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“Moses said to them in reply: If you do this—if you march as troops before the Lord into battle and cross the Jordan **in full force** before the Lord until he has driven his enemies out of his way and the land is subdued before the Lord, then you may return here, free from every obligation to the Lord and to Israel, and this land will be your possession before the Lord. But if you do not do this, you will have sinned against the Lord, and you can be sure that the consequences of your sin will overtake you. Build the towns, then, for your families, and folds for your flocks, but fulfill what you have promised . . .

(32: 20-24)

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“The Gadites and Reubenites answered Moses, ‘Your servants will do as my lord commands. While our wives and children, our livestock and other animals remain there in the towns of Gilead, **all your servants will go across** as armed troops before the Lord to battle, just as my lord says.”

(32: 25-27)

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**So, Moses agreed to
the compromise.**



“So Moses gave this command in their regard to Eleazar the priest, to Joshua, son of Nun, and to the heads of the ancestral houses of the Israelite tribes: He said to them, ‘**If all the Gadites and Reubenites** cross the Jordan with you **in full force** before the Lord into battle, **[then]** the land will be subdued before you, and you will give them Gilead as a possession. But **if** they will not go across in force with you before the Lord, **[then]** you will bring their wives and children and livestock across before you into Canaan, and they will possess a holding among you in the land of Canaan.”

(32: 28-30)

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**And the Gadites and
Reubenites
concurred.**



“To this the Gadites and Reubenites replied, ‘We will do what the Lord has ordered your servants. We ourselves will go across **in force** before the Lord into the land of Canaan, but we will retain our hereditary property on this side of the Jordan. So Moses gave them—the Gadites and Reubenites, **as well as half the tribe of Manasseh, son of Joseph**—the kingdom of Sihon, king of the Amorites, and the kingdom of Og, king of Bashan, the land with its towns, and the districts of the surrounding towns.”

(32: 31-33)

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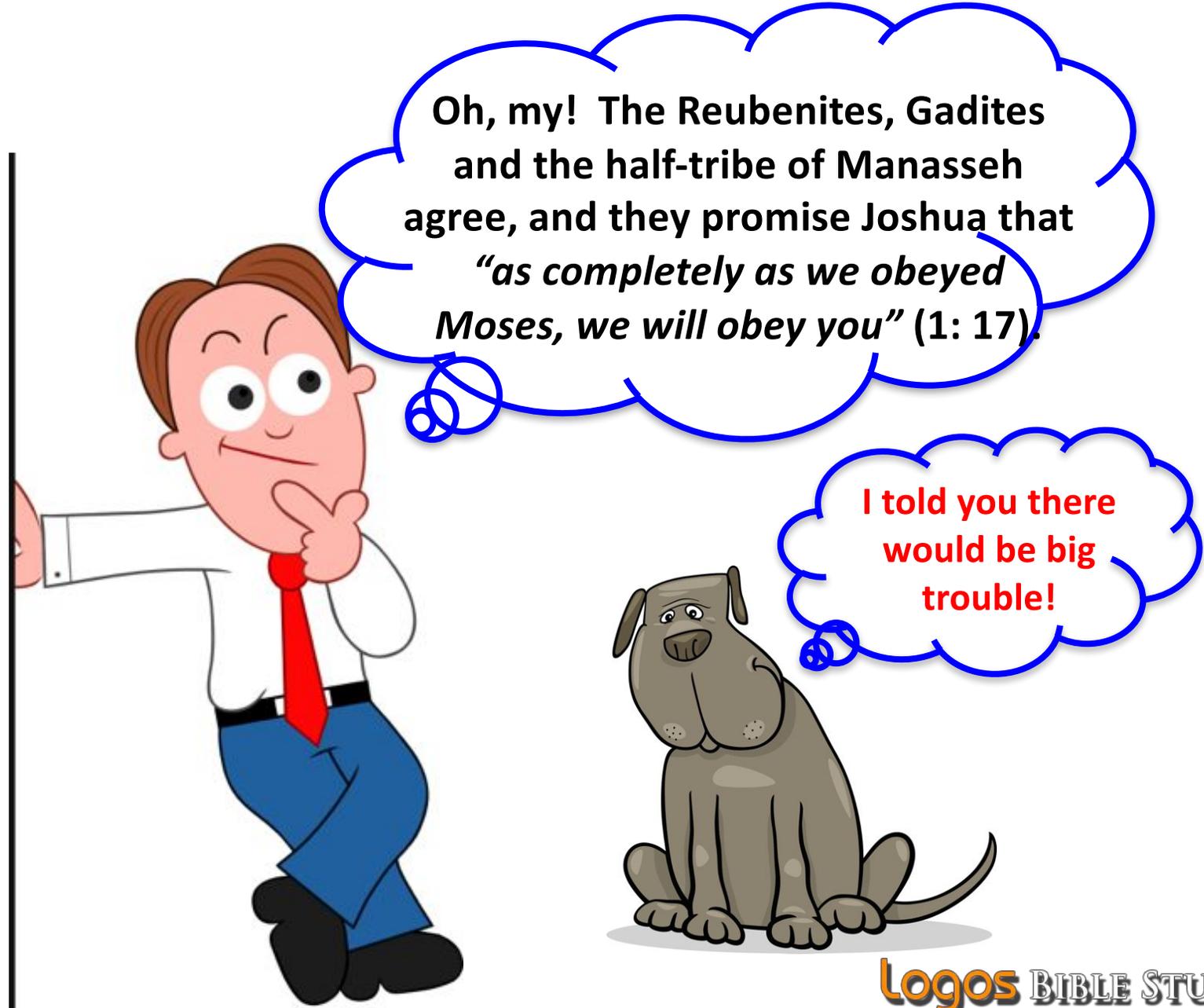


So, with the deal struck in Numbers, it is now time for the tribes of Reuben, Gad and half of Manasseh to make good on their promise. Joshua addresses them:

“Joshua addressed the Reubenites, the Gadites, and the half-tribe of Manasseh: “Remember what Moses, the servant of the Lord, commanded you when he said, ‘The Lord, your God, is about to give you rest; he will give you this land.’ Your wives, your children, and your livestock may remain in the land Moses gave you here beyond the Jordan. But **all the warriors** among you must cross over armed, ahead of your kindred, and you must help them until the Lord has settled your kindred, and they like you possess the land the Lord, your God, is giving them. Afterward you may return and possess your own land, which Moses, the servant of the Lord, has given you east of the Jordan . . .

. . . They answered Joshua, 'We will do all you have commanded us, and we will go wherever you send us. As completely as we obeyed Moses, we will obey you. Only, may the Lord, your God, be with you as God was with Moses. Anyone who rebels against your orders and does not obey all your commands shall be put to death. Only be strong and steadfast.'

(1: 12-18)



Oh, my! The Reubenites, Gadites
and the half-tribe of Manasseh
agree, and they promise Joshua that
*“as completely as we obeyed
Moses, we will obey you”* (1: 17).

I told you there
would be big
trouble!

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Joshua faces the daunting task of moving 601,730 fighting men 5-7 miles across open land, crossing the Jordan River at flood stage and positioning his men to attack Jericho, a large fortified city on a plateau, in full view of the enemy.

How in the world will Joshua take Jericho under such conditions?

To develop a plan, Joshua first needs good intel. He needs to know the city's approach routes, its vulnerabilities, its resources, and the determination and fighting ability of its men.

To gather intel, Joshua sends two spies into Jericho.



The story we are about to read is a nicely structured chiasm:

- A** Spies commissioned by Joshua (2: 1)
- B** Spies arrive in Jericho (2: 2-7)
- C** Rahab's confession (2: 8-14)
- B'** Spies escape from Jericho (2: 15-21)
- A'** Spies return to Joshua (2: 22-24)

So, let's take it one step at a time!

Rahab and the Spies of Jericho



A Spies commissioned by Joshua (2: 1)

B Spies arrive in Jericho (2: 2-7)

C Rahab's confession (2: 8-14)

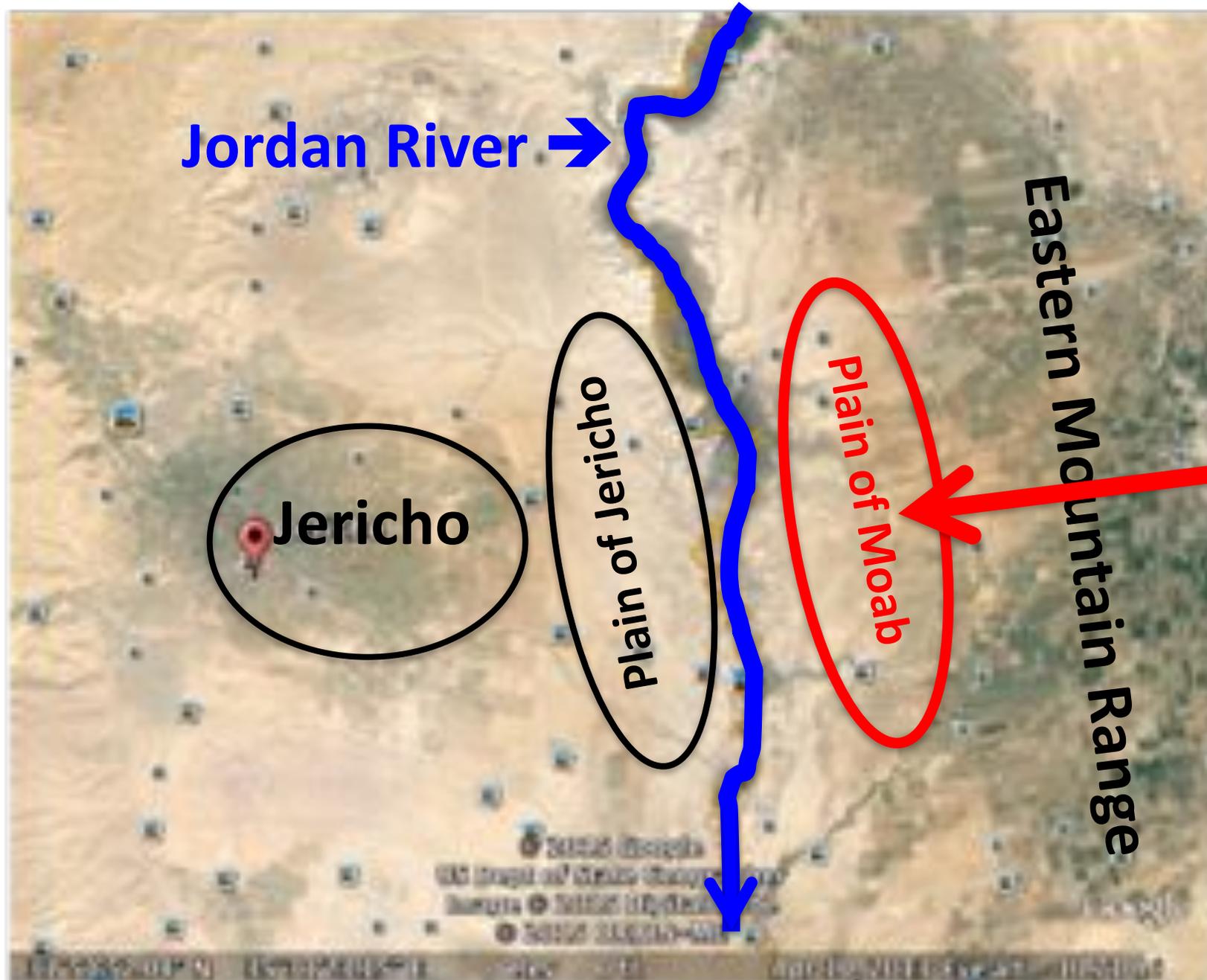
B' Spies escape from Jericho (2: 15-21)

A' Spies return to Joshua (2: 22-24)

“Then Joshua, son of Nun secretly sent out two spies from Shittim, saying, ‘Go, reconnoiter the land and [especially] Jericho.’”

(2: 1a)

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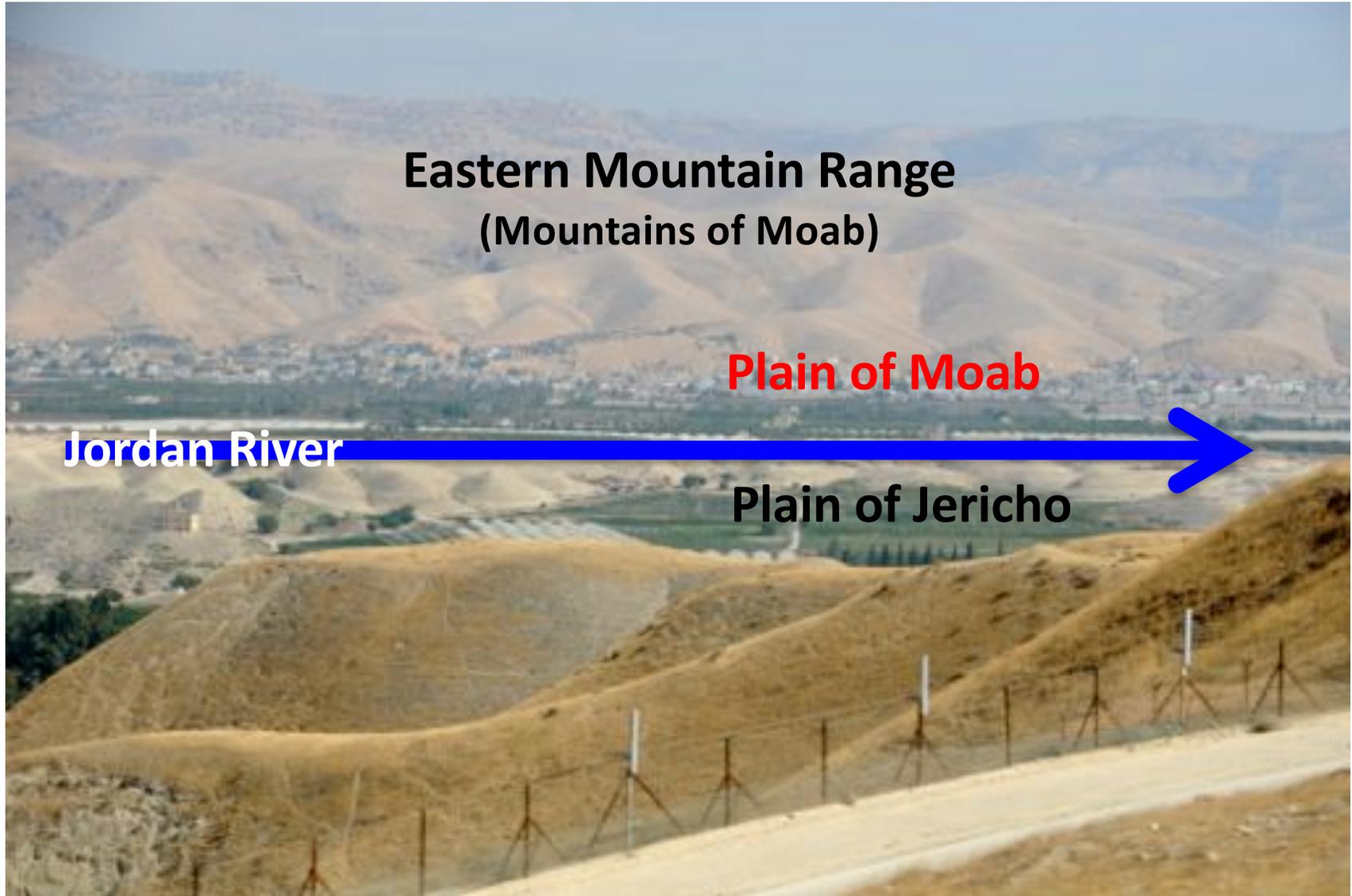
Jordan River →

Jericho

Plain of Jericho

Plain of Moab

Eastern Mountain Range



**Eastern Mountain Range
(Mountains of Moab)**

Plain of Moab

Jordan River

Plain of Jericho

Photography by Ana Maria Vargas

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Notice that the spies set out from Shittim. The Hebrew word means “the acacias,” hardy trees that are plentiful on the plains of Moab and Jericho, as well as in the Negev and the Sinai.



Dr. C. standing under an acacia tree in the Sinai.

Photography by Ana Maria Vargas

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"Be strong and courageous . . ."



Acacia trees are hardwood with VERY sharp thorns!

Photography by Ana Maria Vargas

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"Be strong and courageous . . ."



The spies are to reconnoiter the terrain between the plains of Moab and Jericho, but they are to pay careful attention to Jericho itself, covertly entering the city.

Now, where would the spies go to learn about what's going on inside the city, what people are saying, and what preparations are being made for defending the city and other tidbits of information?

Rahab and the Spies of Jericho



A Spies commissioned by Joshua (2: 1)

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C Rahab's confession (2: 8-14)

B' Spies escape from Jericho (2: 15-21)

A' Spies return to Joshua (2: 22-24)

“When the two reached Jericho, they went into the house of a prostitute named Rahab, where they lodged. But a report was brought to the king of Jericho: ‘Some men came here last night, Israelites, to spy out the land.’ So the king of Jericho sent Rahab the order, ‘Bring out the men who have come to you and entered your house, for they have come to spy out the entire land.’ The woman had taken the two men and hidden them, so she said, ‘True, the men you speak of came to me, but I did not know where they came from. At dark, when it was time to close the gate, they left, and I do not know where they went. You will have to pursue them quickly to overtake them.’ Now, she had led them to the roof, and hidden them among her stalks of flax spread out there. But the pursuers set out along the way to the fords of the Jordan. As soon as they had left to pursue them, the gate was shut.”

(2: 1b-7)

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The Israelite spies covertly enter Jericho during daylight, as crowds of people are coming and going, and they go directly to the local prostitute's house.

The Hebrew word is *ishshah* [ish-shah'], the ordinary word for "woman" ("man" is *ish*), but in this context she is traditionally a prostitute, a prime source for local gossip. Josephus refers to Rahab as an "innkeeper," but Hebrews 11: 31 and James 2: 25 refer to her rightly as a "prostitute" [Greek, πόρνη].

The big question in this B unit is: "Why would Rahab take in the spies and hide them from Jericho's authorities?" After all, like everyone else in town, she can see the Israelites staging for war only 5-7 miles away on the plain of Moab, and she knows that Jericho is the target.

Rahab and the Spies of Jericho



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“Before the spies lay down, Rahab went up to them on the roof and said: ‘I know that the Lord has given you the land, that a dread of you has come upon us, and that all the inhabitants of the land tremble with fear because of you. For we have heard how the Lord dried up the waters of the Red Sea before you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to Sihon and Og, the two kings of the Amorites beyond the Jordan, whom you destroyed under the ban. We heard, and our hearts melted within us; everyone is utterly dispirited because of you, since the Lord, your God, is God in heaven above and on earth below. Now then, swear to me by the Lord that, since I am showing kindness to you, you in turn will show kindness to my family . . .

“. . . Give me a reliable sign that you will allow my father and mother, brothers and sisters, and my whole family to live, and that you will deliver us from death.’ ‘We pledge our lives for yours,’ they answered her. ‘If you do not betray our mission, we will be faithful in showing kindness to you when the Lord gives us the land.’”

(2: 8-14)



What do the spies learn from Rahab?

- a** “I know that the Lord has given you the land” (8a)
- b** “That a dread of you has come upon us and that all the inhabitants of the land tremble with fear because of you” (9)
- c** “For we have heard how the Lord dried up the waters of the Red Sea before you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to Sihom and Og, the two kings of the Amorites beyond the Jordan, whom you destroyed under the ban” (10)
- b’** We heard, and our hearts melted within us; everyone is utterly dispirited because of you” (11a)
- a’** “The Lord, your God, is God in heaven above and on earth below” (11b).



This is precisely what Joshua needs to know to defeat Jericho: the people of Jericho recognize that Israel's God is, indeed, a powerful God, and they recognize this because of what happened only a generation ago in Egypt, and recently what happened to Sihon and Og on the east side of the Jordan River.

The people of Jericho believe that God defeated the Egyptian gods, as well as the gods of the Ammonites and Moabites—and that he will defeat the gods of Canaan, too.

The result is that the people of Jericho are trembling with fear and dread of the Israelites; the entire population is dispirited.

PERFECT!

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"Be strong and courageous . . ."

Rahab and the Spies of Jericho



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“Then she let them down through the window with a rope; for she lived in a house built into the city wall. ‘Go up into the hill country,’ she said, ‘that your pursuers may not come upon you. Hide there for three days, until they return; then you may go on your way.’ They answered her, ‘We are free of this oath that you made us take, unless, when we come into the land, you tie this scarlet cord in the window through which you are letting us down. Gather your father and mother, your brothers, and all your family into your house. Should any of them pass outside the doors of your house, their blood will be on their own heads, and we will be guiltless . . .

“. . . But if anyone in your house is harmed, their blood will be on our heads. If, however, you betray our mission, we will be free of the oath you have made us take.’ ‘Let it be as you say,’ she replied, and sent them away. When they were gone, she tied the scarlet cord in the window.”

(2: 15-21)



The city walls of Jericho are long gone, but the city walls of Dan have been reconstructed. They are about 30 feet high.

Photography by Ana Maria Vargas

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"Be strong and courageous . . ."



The entrance gate to Dan. The arrow points to the top of the city wall, seen in the previous photo. It is 20-25 feet in width. Rahab's house would have been built atop such a wall.

Photography by Ana Maria Vargas

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**“Rahab Helping the Spies Escape,” in Josephus’ *Jewish Antiquities*
(illuminated manuscript), 15th century.
Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris.**

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Now we know why Rahab helped the spies: she knew that Jericho would fall to the Israelites, and she knew that the city would be put under the ban. So, she betrayed her own people to save herself and her family.



I'm not sure how I feel about that. To the Israelites Rahab is a hero; to the people of Jericho she is a traitor.

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“They went up into the hill country, where they stayed three days until their pursuers, who had sought them all along the road without finding them, returned. Then the two came back down from the hills, crossed the Jordan to Joshua, son of Nun, and told him all that had happened to them. They assured Joshua, ‘The Lord has given all this land into our power; indeed, all the inhabitants of the land tremble with fear because of us.’”

(2: 22-24)



Joshua has all the intel he needs to defeat Jericho. Now it's time for mission planning.

How will Joshua get 601,730 men across the Jordan River at flood season, a river raging with Class 4 rapids?

Questions for discussion and thought

1. Why does God tell Joshua to be “strong and courageous” multiple times?
2. Is there anything in the story of the Transjordan Tribes that suggests problems to come?
3. Why do the spies go to Rahab, the prostitute?
4. What do the spies learn there that will help Joshua defeat Jericho?
5. If we read the story of Rehab typologically, what does the scarlet cord represent?

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