

What Difference Can Keeping Promises Make?

International Bible Lessons

Joshua 6:2-3, 4, 12-20

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“The city and all that is in it shall be devoted to the LORD for destruction. Only Rahab the prostitute and all who are with her in her house shall live because she hid the messengers we sent” (Joshua 6:17—NRSV).

“And the city and all that is within it shall be devoted to the LORD for destruction. Only Rahab the prostitute and all who are with her in her house shall live, because she hid the messengers whom we sent” (Joshua 6:17—ESV).

“And the city shall be accursed, even it, and all that are therein, to the LORD: only Rahab the harlot shall live, she and all that are with her in the house, because she hid the messengers that we sent” (Joshua 6:17—KJV).

God keeps His promises, and people expect God’s people to keep their promises. Only God has the power, wisdom, insight, and foresight to keep all of His promises. Though God’s people have good intentions, they do not have all the attributes of God. When the Apostle Paul left Ephesus, he told the church, “I will return to you, if God wills;” God willed, and Paul returned (Acts 18:21; Acts 19:1). The Apostle James wrote, “You do not even know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. Instead you ought to say, ‘If the Lord wishes, we will live and do this or that’” (James 4:14, 15).

Joshua made certain that the Israelite messengers kept their promise to Rahab and all those who took shelter in her home. As one of God’s leaders, Joshua represented God before God’s people and their enemies. If he had not kept his promises to the best of his ability, he would have misrepresented the character of God and God would have punished Joshua in public view for his disobedience (as God had to punish Moses in public when he disobeyed). Even though the Gibeonites tricked the Israelites into making peace with them in the Promised Land, Joshua and the Israelites kept their promises to them (see Joshua 9:15-27 and Joshua 10:6-8). Perhaps some of the Gibeonites and their descendants came to trust in God because Joshua and the Israelites kept their promises. — © Copyright 2011 L.G. Parkhurst, Jr.

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Thinking Further

1. What are some promises that people sometimes make that they cannot keep because they are not God? Why do you suppose they made these promises that they probably knew they could not keep?
2. Why should people always try to keep their promises? Why is it especially important for political and religious leaders to keep their promises? What happens when they do not keep their promises or when they tell lies?
3. How do you feel and what do you think when you come to realize suddenly that a person could have kept their promise to you but chose not to do so?
4. Why was it important for Joshua and the Israelites to keep their promises to Rahab and to the Gibeonites? What if they had thought that neither Rahab nor the Gibeonites were good enough people for them to keep their promises to them? What would have happened to Rahab and the Gibeonites if they had not kept their promises? How might their refusal to keep their promises have had an adverse effect on the future of Israel and these people?
5. What might our world look like today if everyone tried to keep their promises to the best of their ability? Where especially does this need to be done today to make a real difference in society and in the world?

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