

Judges 1:24

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And the spies saw a man come forth out of the city, and they said unto him, Shew us, we pray thee, the entrance into the city, and we will shew thee mercy.

Analysis

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The spies' request, 'Shew us... the entrance' (har'enu na et-mevo ha'ir, הַרְאֵנוּ נָא אֶת־מְבוֹא הָעִיר), parallels Rahab's assistance at Jericho (Joshua 2), but crucial differences emerge. Rahab acted from faith confession: 'the LORD your God, he is God in heaven above, and in earth beneath' (Joshua 2:11). This informant apparently acts from self-preservation without professed faith. Their offer 'we will shew thee mercy' (ve'asinu immecha chesed, וְנַשְׁכֵּנוּ עִמָּךְ חֶסֶד) uses covenant language—chesed (חֶסֶד) meaning loyal, steadfast love, covenant faithfulness—yet applies it to someone outside covenant, creating theological tension.

The 'entrance into the city' likely refers to a secret passage, hidden gate, or structural weakness unknown to external observers. Ancient cities' fortifications included multiple defensive layers, with outer gates, inner gates, and sometimes hidden passages for escape or covert entry/exit. Warren's Shaft in Jerusalem, for example, provided access to water sources outside walls. Knowledge of such features gave attacking forces decisive advantage, explaining why the informant's betrayal ensured Beth-el's fall.

This account raises ethical questions about using enemy informants. Scripture

records the event descriptively without explicit moral evaluation, though the outcome (v. 26) suggests problems. Unlike Rahab, who joined Israel and appears in Jesus' genealogy (Matthew 1:5), this man departs to rebuild Canaanite culture elsewhere. The contrast shows that God honors faith-motivated assistance (Rahab) differently than self-interested betrayal. Reformed ethics distinguish between legitimate intelligence gathering in just war versus treachery, deception, and betrayal motivated by cowardice or greed.

Historical Context

Ancient siege warfare required either prolonged blockade (starving defenders) or breaching fortifications. Prolonged sieges demanded substantial resources and patience—Jerusalem withstood Babylonian siege for 18 months (2 Kings 25:1-3). Breaching walls required siege engines (battering rams, siege towers), mining (tunneling under walls), or betrayal by insiders. The Assyrians perfected siege warfare, as depicted in reliefs showing assault on Lachish (701 BCE) using multiple siege engines simultaneously.

Cities' hidden entrances served multiple purposes: escape routes for royalty/elites, covert supply lines, access to external water sources, and sally ports for surprise attacks on besiegers. These passages represented security vulnerabilities if discovered by enemies. Gibeonites' deception (Joshua 9) and this informant's betrayal show how knowledge of cities' secrets determined military outcomes. Later, Joab's conquest of Jerusalem possibly exploited water system vulnerabilities (2 Samuel 5:8).

The practice of offering 'mercy' or safe passage to informants appears throughout ancient warfare. The Assyrian annals describe granting clemency to those who submitted voluntarily versus brutal treatment of rebels. Roman conquest similarly distinguished between cooperative and resistant peoples. However, biblical ethics demanded more than pragmatic cooperation—true integration into Israel required covenant commitment and religious conversion (as with Rahab), not merely political accommodation.

