

Rahab Welcomes Spies

Devotional Reading: Matthew 25:31–46

Background Scripture: Joshua 2; 6:16–25; Matthew 1:5;
James 2:25; Hebrews 11:31

Today's Scripture: Joshua 2:8–13; 6:16–17

I. The Lord's Reputation

Joshua 2:8–13

8 And before they were laid down, she came up unto them upon the roof;

9 And she said unto the men, I know that the LORD hath given you the land, and that your terror is fallen upon us, and that all the inhabitants of the land faint because of you.

10 For we have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red sea for you, when ye came out of Egypt; and what ye did unto the two kings of the Amorites, that were on the other side Jordan, Sihon and Og, whom ye utterly destroyed.

11 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.

12 Now therefore, I pray you, swear unto me by the LORD, since I have shewed you kindness, that ye will also shew kindness unto my father's house, and give me a true token:

13 And that ye will save alive my father, and my mother, and my brethren, and my sisters, and all that they have, and deliver our lives from death.

typically flat, in contrast to the multi-pitched roofs of many modern structures. Ancient rooftops often served many functions, including spaces for household members to live, work, or store items. The rooftop was the most private and secluded part of an ancient house, making it suitable for hiding the two Israelite spies.

9. *The men* Rahab speaks to are the two spies sent out by Joshua. Rahab could easily expose the spies' presence to the authorities of Jericho. Instead, she hides them on her rooftop and directs the authorities elsewhere. What Rahab says now in the verse before us reveals the motive for her act of treason against the king.

First, she realizes that *the Lord*, the God of Israel, has *given* the *land* of Canaan—the land on which Jericho sits—to the Israelites. The title *LORD* (with a large capital letter and three small capital letters) reflects God's identity, often transliterated as “Yahweh,” meaning “I am that I am” or “I will be what I will be” (see Exodus 3:13–14). It conveys God's reliability to be Himself, not fickle or changing like people or pagan gods. Rahab could instead use the word *Elohim*, a designation used for both pagan gods and the true God, but the text doesn't indicate that she does.

Events that result in *terror* and hand-wringing among *all the inhabitants of the*

8. The rooftops of ancient houses were

land have had a further effect on Rahab personally: the events draw forth her recognition of who is behind it all.

10. Rahab reveals the basis of the people's anxiety. The first of two victories she mentions, the parting of *the water of the Red sea*, was a key feature of the escape from enslavement in *Egypt*. In the Israelites' moment of need, the Lord *dried up* the water, allowing the Israelites to cross on dry land.

The second victory occurred in the region east of the *Jordan River*, where Kings *Sihon* and *Og* led the *Amorites* in an attack against the Israelites. However, through the power of the Lord, the Amorite forces were *utterly destroyed*.

Not to be overlooked is that these two events occur about forty years apart! Rahab's knowledge of the defeat of the kings is easy to understand, having recently happened.

11a. At this point, the Israelites have not yet crossed the Jordan River to enter the land of Canaan. To outside observers, it appears they have been stalled for some forty years on the other side of that river. But news of the recent defeat of Kings Sihon and Og has alarmed the Canaanites, shaking them from their complacency; this is a fulfillment of the prophecy in Deuteronomy 2:24–25.

As a result of having *heard these things* their *hearts did melt*, *neither did there remain any more courage in any man*. This melting of hearts and disappearance of courage will only intensify as events progress. The Canaanites' lack of *courage* is not to be mirrored by the Israelites—quite the opposite. The courage leaders exhibit is contagious, and Joshua is personally challenged several times to act courageously in his role as a leader. As the military campaign progresses, he will model courage for the people to emulate.

11b. Rahab again refers to *the Lord* by

His unique designation. Scripture does not explicitly state that she completely abandons her loyalty to the pagan gods of the Canaanites. However, she does acknowledge to the spies that their *God* rules both *heaven above* and the *earth beneath*. This confession reveals her awareness of His supremacy and power over all creation. Any lesser “god” must be subservient to Him.

Any appeal for deliverance she might make to a pagan deity would be a failure to take into account the absolute authority of the Lord God. Rahab's confession of the Lord's authority is undoubtedly unexpected, as it opposes the norms of the inhabitants of Jericho and Canaan.

12. Having acknowledged the supremacy of *the Lord*, Rahab negotiates with the spies in terms of a *quid pro quo* (“something for something else”). The statements about a mutual showing of *kindness* elegantly understate a brutal reality: lives are at stake! The two spies recognize this instantly in their reply, “Our life for yours” (Joshua 2:14).

Rahab has already demonstrated the type of kindness she has in mind by misdirecting the search party, having done so at significant personal risk. In modern terms, we might say that the Israelites “owe her” a guarantee of personal safety in return. But she is asking for more than that. She wants the guarantee to extend also to her *father's house*.

The *true token* she seeks is a physical item representing her request. We might think of it in terms of collateral of some sort. The text does not reveal the nature of that token. Later verses state that a cord of scarlet thread hung from her window as a signal to the Israelites regarding the location of her household (Joshua 2:18). The word translated *token* is occasionally connected with covenants in the Old Testament (examples: Genesis 9:12, 17; 17:11).

If the idea is more along the lines of “covenant,” the reference may be to the oath that the spies take in Joshua 2:17.

13. Rahab’s request for safety extends well beyond that of her own life. We do not know whether her family members have affirmed the supremacy of the Lord God as she has. Eventually, she will have to reveal to her family the agreement she made to protect the Israelite spies. On the one hand, Rahab is guilty of the high crime of treason.

II. The Lord’s Victory

Joshua 6:16–17

16 And it came to pass at the seventh time, when the priests blew with the trumpets, Joshua said unto the people, Shout; for the LORD hath given you the city.

17 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.

16. After the rooftop conversation, Rahab helps the spies escape through a window in her house that is connected to the city wall. After three days in hiding, the spies return to the Israelite camp and share with Joshua the findings of their reconnaissance mission.

As the Israelites near Jericho, the Lord instructs the Israelite fighting men to march around the city once a day for six days and seven times on the seventh day (Joshua 5:13–6:7). This verse resumes on the seventh of those seven circuits.

The Israelites’ actions reflect the directives of Joshua 6:6–9. Per those instructions, seven *priests* carrying *trumpets* went ahead of the ark of the covenant. The ancient Israelites have two kinds of trumpets. The most common ones are made

from rams’ horns. The horn conveys military signals during battle.

On this, the *seventh* circuit on the seventh day, Joshua issues a command different from those of the other days. At first, the Israelites were to keep silent while the horns blew. But at Joshua’s command, the army was to *shout*, the wall would collapse, and the army would rush in. Joshua speaks confidently, knowing that *the Lord* will provide victory by giving *the city* to the Israelites.

17a. The Hebrew term translated *accursed* appears dozens of times in the Old Testament. The word refers to the complete destruction of material wealth, cities, and even people within the context of conquest. The verb form of the word appears in Joshua 2:10, where it is translated as “utterly destroyed.” By setting certain things aside for destruction, those things are dedicated *to the Lord*.

This word expresses a sacred process intended to establish the holiness God desired for both the land and the people. The ancient inhabitants of the land had defiled it through idolatry, violence, and immorality. As the Israelites entered the land, God wanted them—and the land—to be undefiled by sin. Therefore, God gave the command for destruction to a particular people in a specific time and context. The purpose of this destruction was to remove any and all influence that could lead the Israelites into sin and idolatry.

17b. Joshua intends to honor the agreement his spies made with Rahab—and he does. While Jericho is destroyed (Joshua 6:21, 24), *Rahab* and *all that are with her in the house* are spared. Through the blessing and hospitality shown to this Canaanite woman and her family, we see an early example of the fulfillment that God promised the nations through the seed of Abraham (see Genesis 12:2–3).

Involvement Learning

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Into the Lesson

Complete the following sentence:

Important lessons to share about God . . .

We have all learned about God through various sources. Today, we will study a woman who learned about God's power and strength. Let's explore how she responded to her knowledge of God in a way that was different from her neighbors.

Key Text

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

Into the Word

Read Joshua 2:8–13 and 6:16–17 and answer the following questions.

Where did Rahab meet with the spies to ask for a significant favor?

What words describe the emotions or feelings of the Canaanites when they heard of the Israelites' advances?

What acts of God had the inhabitants of the land heard about prior to the spies' arrival?

How were God's power and presence evident to the inhabitants of Jericho?

What favor did Rahab request of the spies?

What actions did the priests take prior to Joshua's speech to the people?

What instructions did Joshua give the Israelites regarding the seventh circuit around the city on the seventh day?

Into Life

Jot down details about a time when God used an unexpected person to accomplish His will in your life. What did you learn from the experience?

Thought to Remember

Work with God
in His unexpected ways.