

Joshua: Walking by Faith, Growing in Grace

Rahab, a Signal of Grace

Joshua 2:1-24

June 22, 2025

HDBC

Review: Israelites have been delivered from Egyptian slavery. They rejected God's plan to enter into the land, for fear of the inhabitants. They spent 40 years wandering in the desert. Now they are poised to once again enter the land. Moses has died and Joshua commissioned to take his place. The people have made a verbal commitment to follow Joshua. (1:17-18)

Now Joshua begins to take some proactive steps to get the people over the river and into the land. He begins by sending out a couple of spies. That, in itself is interesting. Forty years earlier Moses had sent in 12 spies. Two came back trusting God. The other 10 did not. Joshua learned a lesson.

The two spies have a successful mission and come back with a great report. In the course of their mission that meet a woman named **Rahab**. This chapter is her story.

In Hebrews 11 she is mentioned for her faith. Though a Gentile, she was a woman who proved to have great faith in the God of the Hebrews. Look at her story in three parts.

1. Rahab's faith is revealed in her actions (1-7)

Verse One: The mission of the spies was a secret one. Joshua was working behind the scenes. They were to examine the whole land, including the city of Jericho. Jericho would be the focus of their mission. They came to the house of a harlot, named Rahab.

Why would these Godly men choose to stay in the house of the harlot? The Bible doesn't offer an answer. Seems safe to assume they had no intention of having a sexual liaison. More likely, her house was also an

inn or a tavern. It was likely a place where people would gather. Good place for a couple of spies to gather information through listening to conversations.

Verses 2-3: Though the spies' mission was one of secrecy, this verse makes it clear that they were not very effective at keeping it that way. The king of Jericho got wind of the mission. He sent word for Rahab to deliver the men to him. He knew who they were, where they were, and what they were doing. And he was concerned.

Verse 4-6: Apparently Rahab knew the spies' mission and was sympathetic with it. She also knew that the king would send soldiers to get them. Prior to the coming of the king's men she hid them in some straw on the roof of the house. She then lied to the king's men in order to protect the spies.

Verse 7: The king's agents set out in hot pursuit of the two spies. As soon as these men left the city the gate was closed. This reinforces the truth that Jericho was a heavily fortified city. They were taking no chances, with the Hebrews camped just over the river.

2. Rahab's faith is revealed in her words (8-14)

As soon as the posse left, Rahab went onto the roof and had a conversation with the two spies. She begins with a description of how she and the people of Jericho really felt about the Hebrew people.

1) Her Testimony of Terror (9-11)

The Hebrews had developed quite a reputation over the preceding 40 years. Rahab knew that God had given the land of Canaan to them (9). She also knew that God had miraculously delivered them on more than one occasion.

Two are mentioned: The Red Sea, and the kings of Sihon and Og.

Not only were the residents of Jericho aware of these facts, but also people throughout the land. This knowledge has caused their hearts to “melt away.”

The greatest statement of faith is found in the last half of verse 11. She (a Gentile) believed the God of the Jews was the true God of Heaven. She was saying she believed their God had dominion of Heaven and Earth. In other words, this God was not like the geographic, territorial, and restricted gods of the Canaanites. She was stating God’s exclusive claim to sovereignty.

Now we know why she did what she did. Her words defend and justify her actions. She was not simply trying to save her skin. She was trusting in the true God. She was rejecting her people’s traditions and embracing true saving faith.

How did Rahab come to this conclusion? How did she know all of this? We do not know. I assume it came from divine revelation.

2) Her Request for Deliverance (12-13)

She then appealed to the spies to respond to her kindness by committing to spare the lives of her family. She knew they would win. She was throwing her lot in with them already.

3) The Response of the Spies (14)

We learn that the spies agreed to her request. They add some conditions that were important to their well-being. And she agrees.

Some argue that this was in disobedience to the instructions of God which did not allow them to make any contracts or agreements with the people of the land. They were to totally destroy them.

Her confession of faith makes all the difference. When she acknowledged the sovereignty of God, she was moving from being outside the family to being in the family. In a way, she moved from

being a foreigner to being one with them. Not in the flesh, but in the spirit.

3. Rahab's faith is revealed in her commitment (15-24)

She followed through, demonstrating that her commitment was firm.

She helped the spies escape. (15-16)

After securing the men's pledge of protection she helped them escape by letting them down the wall with a rope through a window in her house which was built into the wall.

She told them to go to the hill country and wait for three days. This was in the opposite direction from the posse looking for them. Within three days, they would surely give up the search, assuming the spies had escaped.

Though this follows the statement that she let them down through a window. The tense of the verb indicates that the conversation actually took place prior to the escape.

She understood the conditions of her deliverance.

The spies revealed three things that she needed to do, in order for them to honor their promise to spare her.

The scarlet thread. – Hang a red rope out her window. Signal.

Stay inside your house. If you come out, you will be killed.

Complete secrecy. She was not to reveal it to anyone.

She quickly agrees to the terms and immediately tied the scarlet cord outside her window. We'll come back to these conditions.

She allowed the spies to escape. (22-24)

When they left her house they hid for three days. Then made their way back to the camp of the Hebrews. They gave a report filled with faith. There was no doubt in their minds that God had given them the land

Observations:

1. This story raises some questions.

Before I address the specific questions, let me point out a couple of important principles when you come to passages or historical events that raise difficult questions.

First, look for specific Scriptural statements to guide you.

Second, look for Scriptural principles to guide you.

Third, take only what the Bible says, and nothing more. Don't add to it.

Fourth, admit that some questions may remain unanswered.

1) Why did the men go to the house of a prostitute?

The Bible does not say.

Maybe they did not know she was a prostitute.

Maybe because it would have aroused little suspicion.

Clearly, the providence of God was at work. Leave it at that.

2) Why would God use a prostitute to protect the men?

God can and does use good, bad and even evil for His purposes.

God was already at work in her. This is evident in her initial words.

God loves to show his glory by demonstrating His grace.

3) Was it ok for Rahab to lie to the officials?

This is the question most of us wrestle with. Clearly, lying is sinful.

Clearly, Rahab lied. So, what she sinful when she did?

I'm a bit hesitant to say this, but I'm not sure what she did was sinful. Now, please know that I'm not suggesting that it is ok to be dishonest. It is not. However, consider a few things.

a) She was forced to choose between two difficult options.

If she told the truth, the spies would likely be arrested and killed.

If she deceived the leaders, she would be lying.

Some suggest that no matter what she did, she would be sinning. I would not go that far. Some suggest she chose the lesser of two evils. Maybe. Let me read some quotes from some commentaries that I've consulted.

She is put in a tricky position: she has to choose between the king's envoys and the Israelite men, and she chooses the men.

Let's confess that most of us would hesitate to tell the truth if really were a matter of life or death. It's one thing for me to tell the truth about myself and suffer for it, but do I have the right to cause the death of others, especially those who have come under my protection? Many people have been honored for deceiving the enemy during wartime and saving innocent lives, and this was war! Suppose we looked upon Rahab as a freedom fighter; would that change the picture?

Courageous people who hid Jews during the holocaust.

Captured soldiers who give false information to protect others.

Those involved in national security, false identities.

Missionaries who use false names and mask their real agenda.

Midwives who hid the male children in Egypt.

We would consider them to be heroes.

I believe there are limited situations where the kind of deception illustrated by Rahab is morally acceptable.

b) The New Testament commends her.

She is mentioned three times in the NT. All are positive.

Matt 1:5-6 Lineage of Jesus: *and to Salmon was born Boaz by Rahab; and to Boaz was born Obed by Ruth; and to Obed, Jesse; and to Jesse was born David the king. And to David was born Solomon by her {who had been the wife} of Uriah;*

Heb 11:31 (one of only 2 women named in this chapter)
By faith Rahab the harlot did not perish along with those who were disobedient, after she had welcomed the spies in peace.

James 2:25: And in the same way was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works, when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way?

2. This story points to the only means of salvation.

Note the conditions for her salvation.

The scarlet thread. Staying in the house. Secrecy.

The first two point to the Exodus from Egypt. The people of Israel would have easily identified with it. Rahab had heard stories. She probably also knew of the exodus and of the protection by the blood.

The scarlet thread also points to the shed blood of Jesus. The scarlet thread protected Rahab from the invasion of the Israelites. The blood of Christ protects us from the judgment of God.

3. This story points to the grace of God in saving sinners.

Think about this. She is the first person encountered by the people of God. As far as we know she is the first person that the spies actually had a conversation with. And rather than resisting them and their message, she responded in faith and was saved by the grace of God.

Before the waters of the Jordan River were opened up, God had already saved a Canaanite. Before the priests and the musicians marched around Jericho, before the trumpets blasted, and before the people shouted, the Lord had entered the heart of this sinner and called her to repentance and faith, leading to salvation. I love this.

Before God sent the armies in to fight the inhabitants, He proved His love for them and His desire for any to come to faith and salvation.