

The Covenant With Rahab

Joshua 2:1-24

Introduction

The book of Joshua began with a commission by God to Joshua and continues with a covenant with a most unlikely subject; a woman named Rehab.

Are you a fan of spy thrillers? This story is full of conspiracy, intrigue, mystery, and drama. Like any good spy thriller novel the stakes must also be very high. In this story the consequences of the drama will reach into Israel's future. All the way to the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ! This is the story of two spies and a brave woman who risks all to save them. The woman's conversion will also place her in a most unlikely place—she will become the ancestor of Jesse and David and Jesus.

Rahab The Harlot Reconsiders Her Life (vv.1-7)

Joshua 2:1–24 (NKJV) Now Joshua the son of Nun sent out two men from Acacia Grove to spy secretly, saying, "Go, view the land, especially Jericho." So they went, and came to the house of a harlot named Rahab, and lodged there.

Our story begins with the spies assignment. The mission is classified: Top Secret. Joshua was himself a seasoned spy. He along with Caleb and ten other men were tasked with spying out the land. His experience at Kadesh Barnea had left a permanent scar (Numbers 13-14). Joshua would conceal the mission even from the other tribes in case the spies came back with an unfavorable report. We learn of the Acacia Grove in Numbers 25:1—this is the last stop before Israel crosses the Jordan.

The mission: view the land—focus on Jericho—a strategic city that controlled the trade routes. The city of Jericho was ancient and for centuries considered among the world's longest continuously occupied human settlements. Joshua and the tribes were camped on the plains of Moab close to the Jordan River—very close to Jericho. Remember—within three days they were break camp and begin conquest of the land.

The spies make their way into the land and find themselves in the house of a harlot named Rehab.

All the names of the inhabitants of Jericho from the spies entry into the city are lost to time. We are not given the spies names—or the name of the king of Jericho. Only Rahab. She appears a very unlikely candidate to be the heroine of the story. She is called a harlot. She is a sinner. She is living in a doomed city destined for judgment. This is the story of all humanity. We are sinners living in a world destined for judgment. What a picture of hope! Wicked individuals living in a place of judgment can experience God's grace and mercy and turn to God in faith for deliverance!

The Covenant With Rahab

Joshua 2:1-24

We should pause for a moment and consider the claims of the critics. The critic claims that the God of the Bible and the people of Israel are embarking on a genocidal campaign to wipe out an innocent people in order to occupy a land that does not belong to them.

The Lord God promised the land to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Moses. Also Jericho and its people were the object of God's divine judgment. The Lord God reserved the right to use Joshua and the children of Israel to be the instruments of that divine judgment. The people of Jericho were hopelessly depraved (see Lev.18:24-26)—and had chosen to fight and resist Israel instead of seeking mercy like Rahab.

And this of course is the critic's real concern. Does God have the right to punish sin? The people in Jericho did not believe God! Think for a moment. Rahab believed God would destroy Jericho! Do you think she was alone in that belief?

What do we know about Rahab? She was a sinner (a harlot). Some early Jewish commentators and even Josephus suggest that perhaps Rahab was an innkeeper since the Hebrew word can be translated innkeeper. We do find in Hebrews 11:31—*“By faith the harlot Rahab did not perish with those who did not believe, when she received the spies with peace.”*

And James 2:25—*“Likewise, was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out another way?”*

She was under condemnation—God had already decided to overthrow and destroy Jericho. It was just a matter of time—everything and everyone in the city was about to be destroyed (see chapter 6:1). Do you think the people inside felt doomed or were resigned to the fact that God would judge them? I think not. It becomes a picture of our world. Clearly there are those who stress about the end of the world, whether by asteroid or climate catastrophe or plague or nuclear exchange. But do people go to bed at night wondering if what the Bible says about humanity's future is true?

2And it was told the king of Jericho, saying, “Behold, men have come here tonight from the children of Israel to search out the country.”

Somehow the secret mission was exposed. The King of Jericho was the ruler of the city-state of Jericho.

A great deal of archeological research has been conducted at the ruins of Jericho. In the time of Joshua the city covered about eight acres with both an outer wall and an inner wall. The inner wall was twelve feet thick and the outer wall was about six feet thick and there were houses on the wall (see v.15). Excavations show that the walls were violently destroyed.

The Covenant With Rahab

Joshua 2:1-24

3So the king of Jericho sent to Rahab, saying, “Bring out the men who have come to you, who have entered your house, for they have come to search out all the country.”

Why did the king seek out Rahab and how did he come to know that Rahab had knowledge of the spies?

We are not told. We also have every reason to believe that the spies were unaware at this point of the danger to their lives.

But we might speculate.

We have to remember that Rahab saved and spared the lives of the two spies. She could have turned them at any moment. Why didn't she?

Clearly she makes the courageous decision—to hide the spies and not reveal their presence.

4Then the woman took the two men and hid them. So she said, “Yes, the men came to me, but I did not know where they were from.

5And it happened as the gate was being shut, when it was dark, that the men went out. Where the men went I do not know; pursue them quickly, for you may overtake them.”

6(But she had brought them up to the roof and hidden them with the stalks of flax, which she had laid in order on the roof.)

The stalks or stems would have been about three or four feet long soaked in water and then laid out on the roof to dry.

What would lead us to believe that Rahab had a change of heart?

There are several reasons. It would seem that she is willing to turn from her old life and embrace a new life with Israel's God and Israel's people. Clearly Rahab's actions are treason against Jericho. Her courage and other signs of faith include the fact that she hides the spies; she admits the strangers had come but denies knowledge of their intent (v.4). She claims the spies left the city before nightfall and the closing of the city gate—however she doesn't know their whereabouts (v.5); she suggests that they might be captured if the guards act quickly (v.5). She hides them on her roof under stalks of flax—flax was used to make yarn—to spin for clothes or other linen items.

7Then the men pursued them by the road to the Jordan, to the fords. And as soon as those who pursued them had gone out, they shut the gate.

The king's patrol headed out in hot pursuit.

The Covenant With Rahab

Joshua 2:1-24

The fords are the places to cross the river and were east of the city. This gives us a clue that Rahab's house was on the western wall—the wall that faced the mountains—verse 16. She sent the soldiers in the opposite direction of the spies.

Does the Bible forbid lying? The answer is yes. The Bible commends her faith—not her lying (see Hebrews 11:31; James 2:25). Rahab is given a measure of faith—God spares her and her family and then includes her in the Messianic line—Matthew 1:5.

Rahab has made a decision. She will leave her old life. And embark on a new life with the people of God. That's what we do. We forsake sin and embark in a new life in Christ. We repent. We turn from sin and turn to the Savior. “And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commands all men every where to repent” (Acts 17:30).

Rahab Believes The Testimony Concerning The God Of Israel (vv.8-11)

*8Now before they lay down, she came up to them on the roof,
9and said to the men: “I know that the Lord has given you the land, that the terror of you has fallen on us, and that all the inhabitants of the land are fainthearted because of you.
10For we have heard how the Lord dried up the water of the Red Sea for you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to the two kings of the Amorites who were on the other side of the Jordan, Sihon and Og, whom you utterly destroyed.
11And as soon as we heard these things, our hearts melted; neither did there remain any more courage in anyone because of you, for the Lord your God, He is God in heaven above and on earth beneath.*

Rahab confesses “I know that the Lord has given you the land”! Rahab believes the testimony of God. She believes what she has heard about the true and living God. Again keep in mind—Rahab could have betrayed the spies—at any time. She opens her heart to God and the spies under the strong conviction of the Holy Spirit. In that conviction she gives important information to the spies about the people and their state of mind. This is the information that Joshua needs. The people were gripped by terror and fear—over the presence of the people of Israel. Rahab believed what she heard—that God had delivered the people out of Egypt and slavery—parted the waters—of the Red Sea. Rahab believed God gave them victory over Sihon and Og—the two kings of the Amorites (see Numbers 21:21-35 for more details). And of course she shares the information—most necessary for success—the people of Jericho were already gripped with a spirit of defeat—their hearts melted with fear—they did not have the courage to stand against the people of Israel—because of what they had already heard about the mighty power of God.

Rahab confessed that God was the God of heaven and earth (v.11) and in that confession that God was personal, powerful, Supreme, true—and that the God worshipped by the people of Israel would keep His promises to His people—about the LAND.

The Covenant With Rahab

Joshua 2:1-24

Rahab believed the testimony about God and we must believe the Bible's testimony about Jesus.

Rahab Requests Salvation For Herself And Her Family (vv.12-16)

12Now therefore, I beg you, swear to me by the Lord, since I have shown you kindness, that you also will show kindness to my father's house, and give me a true token,

13and spare my father, my mother, my brothers, my sisters, and all that they have, and deliver our lives from death."

14So the men answered her, "Our lives for yours, if none of you tell this business of ours. And it shall be, when the Lord has given us the land, that we will deal kindly and truly with you."

15Then she let them down by a rope through the window, for her house was on the city wall; she dwelt on the wall.

16And she said to them, "Get to the mountain, lest the pursuers meet you. Hide there three days, until the pursuers have returned. Afterward you may go your way."

In brief Rahab makes a desperate plea—that she and her family be saved from death. She wants a guarantee of safety that no harm will come to her family (v.12). She expresses the sincere belief that the people of Israel will prove victorious—spare my family from death. She is given the assurance that she and her family will be saved (v.14). The spies make an oath—one that must be honored by Joshua and the incoming army. The spies pledged their word and their lives. The spies are offering their lives in pledge for the promise. Their lives become the guarantee of Rahab and her families safety. However Rahab must not betray them. If they are betrayed they are released from their oath (v.20). Now Rahab will demonstrate that faith—in a real way—in a tangible—recognizable way—she will allow her faith to become real—or put into action. She helps the spies escape and even advises them to seek shelter in the mountains knowing that she will send the kings soldiers in the opposite direction. Think about what is happening. She is calling on the spies to spare her family. We call upon the Lord to be saved. We call upon Him—because we believe Him and trust Him. “For there is no difference between Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him. For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved” (Rom. 10:12-13).

Rahab Receives Instructions For Herself and Her Family's Salvation (vv.17-21)

17So the men said to her: "We will be blameless of this oath of yours which you have made us swear,

18unless, when we come into the land, you bind this line of scarlet cord in the window through which you let us down, and unless you bring your father, your mother, your brothers, and all your father's household to your own home.

19So it shall be that whoever goes outside the doors of your house into the street, his blood shall be on his own head, and we will be guiltless. And whoever is with you in the house, his blood shall be on our head if a hand is laid on him.

The Covenant With Rahab

Joshua 2:1-24

20And if you tell this business of ours, then we will be free from your oath which you made us swear.”

21Then she said, “According to your words, so be it.” And she sent them away, and they departed. And she bound the scarlet cord in the window.

Many have seen in the scarlet cord of Rehab safety through sacrifice (see Scofield's Notes p. 269).

Sir Arthur Helps asked “Was anything real ever gained without sacrifice of some kind?”

Rahab was given three conditions for saving herself and her family. Before leaving the spies spell out exactly what must be done. The conditions are spelled out and must be followed to the letter.

1. Rahab must leave the scarlet rope lying in her house and tie it to the window (v.18). The rope would identify her house as the house of safety. The soldiers would pass by her house in the execution of judgment. What a picture of sacrifice, of blood, and the Passover Lamb. More about that later.

2. Rahab must bring her family into that house—and keep them there (vv.18-19). She had to make sure that no one would leave the ‘safe-house’. If any member of her family would not come—and would not stay—if any member decided to rejoin the people of Jericho they would perish in the judgment.

3. Rahab must remain true—to her promise—not to betray the spies but rather protect them (v.20). If she broke her commitment to protect them—she would die.

We see in these conditions some interesting pictures for the Christian. The scarlet rope is a picture of the blood of Jesus. Remember it was the instrument used to escape Jericho. The house of Rahab is like a picture of separation—if refusing to return to the world and its sinful ways—separation from the place of judgment. And finally Rahab's commitment to not betray God or the people of God—become a type a picture—of not turning back—of not deserting the Lord's mission. This becomes the seal (proof) of her salvation—she does not betray her commitment—she will tie the rope to the window.

We trust Christ's blood. We repent and separate from the world. We must not turn back.

Rahab's Saving Faith (vv.22-24)

22They departed and went to the mountain, and stayed there three days until the pursuers returned. The pursuers sought them all along the way, but did not find them.

23So the two men returned, descended from the mountain, and crossed over; and they came to Joshua the son of Nun, and told him all that had befallen them.

The Covenant With Rahab

Joshua 2:1-24

24 And they said to Joshua, "Truly the Lord has delivered all the land into our hands, for indeed all the inhabitants of the country are fainthearted because of us."

And what were the results of Rahab's faith? She saved the spies. She saved others. The spies were able to return and give their full report to Joshua. The spies took advantage and heeded the advice of Rahab. They stayed in the hills for three days while king's guard searched carefully for them. When they could not find them they returned to issue their own sad report. Clearly they spoke of Rahab's help and the promises they made. By the way we will see how it all works out in Joshua 6:1-27). And look at the spies' faith—the Lord has given us the land—the Canaanites are terrified—panic stricken.

Conclusion

This woman Rahab will find her way into the genealogy of Jesus. A harlot—a pagan—a sinner—condemned by God—living in a world destined for judgment. She was given a period of grace—the city had been under condemnation and judgment for over 400 years (Deut. 7:1-5; 23-24; 12:2-3). Genesis 15:13-16 reminds us that God waited patiently to execute this judgment. Rahab and the inhabitants of Jericho were aware of Israel's bondage and slavery, the miracles that accompanied their release which had taken place 40 years earlier. Joshua 4:19 and 5:10 give a few more days of waiting, leading up to an additional week before Israel marches around the city. God is patient. God is kind. Grace precedes judgment. Every day we live in a world destined to die—but today today is a day of grace. Rahab heard the Word of God—it was a message of Judgment—and rather than say—why don't you tell me about His love—His grace and His patience—she hears—and calls Him "the LORD". She hears the Word and believes the Word—and we know that faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of the Lord. She proves her faith by her works—she risks her life, to receive and hide and protect God's men. She willingly identifies with the people of God rather than the place destined for destruction. She sought to win others—she is not willing that she simply be saved—she wants her whole family safe! Who can blame her? And of course she will be delivered from judgment. First there was a shaking that destroyed the city—second there was a fire that destroyed its contents. Rahab's house was on the wall (2:15) but apparently that section of the wall did not fall! Rahab and her loved ones were taken to safety. Joshua commanded the rest of the city to be burned with fire. I am sure that Rahab and her family must have been alarmed when the walls began to fall—but were made perfectly safe by the people of God (6:22). Clearly we see a world beginning to shake. We see a world destined for judgment. But we are safe in the promises of Jesus.

And by the way—Rahab in Matthew 1:5 has a wedding in her future! A harlot finds a husband. While Jericho perishes—a marriage feast and ceremony are in her future! Rahab was saved by faith. Not by character or even religious works. This is how God saves people. By faith. Rahab will have to place her faith—in Joshua—and the spies—to make good their promises. Have you placed your faith in Jesus?