

## “THE LORD YOUR GOD IS GOD”

Joshua 2:1-24

Key Verse 2:11

*“When we heard of it, our hearts melted and everyone’s courage failed because of you, for the Lord your God is God in heaven above and on the earth below.”*

In this chapter, we learn about the faith of a woman named Rahab. This woman had a dubious past. She was a prostitute. She was the last person one would think God would use in his redemptive history. But because of her act of faith, she became an important figure in God’s history. Her faith was critical for the Israelites in conquering Jericho. More importantly, Rahab became the great-great grandmother of our Lord Jesus. Her salvation teaches us about the nature of God’s love. Any person, no matter how terrible sinner he or she may be, can be used in God’s history if only he or she has faith in God and acts on faith. We also learn that our salvation not only affects us, but also all those around us.

### I. RAHAB PROTECTS THE SPIES (1-7)

Look at verse 1. *Then Joshua son of Nun secretly sent two spies from Shittim. “Go, look over the land,” he said, “especially Jericho.” So they went and entered the house of a prostitute named Rahab and stayed there.* Before taking on his military campaign, Joshua sent two spies into the promised land from Shittim where the Israelites at this time were stationed. It was just across the Jordan River, about 12 or 13 miles. Why did Joshua have to send spies if he was trusting in the Lord? Didn’t God promised to give them the land? What can we learn from Joshua? For one thing, God did not exactly tell him how he would help them to conquer the promised land. They had the promise of God, but they still had to wait on God. To Joshua, this meant to gather information about the enemy in order to prepare for the upcoming battles. Joshua did not go ahead of God but did what he could to wait on God. We learn that we should not presume on God but do what we can as we trust in him.

So the two spies somehow infiltrated the fortified city of Jericho. Verse 1 says that they went to the house of a prostitute named Rahab and stayed there. Why did they go to a prostitute’s house? It sounds strange, but it was a good choice. The NIV footnote says that Rahab was an innkeeper. She entertained many travelers and strangers in her house. So the Israelite spies could enter the house without raising much suspicion from the natives. It was also a good place to gather information. In addition, it was an ideal location for a quick escape in case they were chased, because the house was built into the city wall (2:15). But most of all, it was a good place because God had opened Rahab’s heart towards him and his people. Rahab welcomed the two spies.

However, Rahab was not a woman of honor. She was a prostitute. She was a sinner. In this world there are many types of occupations. Prostitution is one of the most degrading kinds of job. A woman in prostitution sells her body for money. We hear that some of them make very good money, catering to wealthy clients. But most of them

don't get to keep the money. Usually the pimps get the money. When they get old, they are abandoned, like used cars. Amazingly, some of such women may have a very soft spot for God in their hearts. And this was the case for Rahab. No one in Jericho dared to even think of harboring the enemy spies. But Rahab welcomed them, risking her own life. Similar examples can be found in the ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ. When Jesus came preaching the message of repentance, many Jews rejected him. Especially the religious leaders rejected him. But Mary Magdalene opened her heart and welcomed him. She followed him everywhere and served him behind the scene. God's grace is amazing. Even the seemingly most despicable sinners can be used in his redemptive history. Praise God for his grace and mercy! In fact, today's scripture is really a story about the grace of God. The battle of Jericho was not only about the conquest of the strategically important city, but also about the salvation of a woman named Rahab.

Look at verses 2-3. Through the intelligence network, the king of Jericho learned that two spies entered Rahab's house. So the king sent this message to Rahab: "Bring out the men who came to you and entered your house, because they have come to spy out the whole land." This wasn't an inquiry. The king already knew about the spies. How fearful Rahab must have been! She could have succumbed to fear of the king and handed over the spies to save her life. The king had the power to punish her to death in any way he pleased. Rahab had to make a quick decision.

Look at verses 4-5. *But the woman had taken the two men and hidden them. She said, "Yes, the men came to me, but I did not know where they had come from. At dusk, when it was time to close the city gate, the men left. I don't know which way they went. Go after them quickly. You may catch up with them."* Rahab decided to hide the spies. She acknowledged that they had come to her house. But she said, "I did not know where they had come from." Rahab was very bold. She knew that the king's soldiers might search her house thoroughly. But she decided to protect the spies. She took on the side of the Hebrews, not her own people or her own king. Some people may criticize her for betraying her own people. They may also criticize her for lying. I am sure the situation presented an ethical dilemma to her. But Rahab knew what she was doing. She believed in a great God, the God of the universe. And as for the lying, she had no choice. If she told the truth, the two men would certainly be killed. So Rahab chose life, not death in the city that was under God's judgment.

Look at verses 6-7. Rahab had taken the spies up to the roof and hidden them under the stalks of flax. Meanwhile, based on her false information, the Jericho policemen set out in pursuit of the spies on the road that led to the fords of the Jordan, and as soon as the pursuers had gone out, the gate was shut. Rahab knew what she was doing was morally wrong. She betrayed her own people. She lied to the king. She protected the spies of her people's enemies who were spying out the land to destroy it. But she still made a decision to protect the spies. It wasn't because the army of Israel was stronger than that of the Canaanites. It was because she believed in God. She trusted God. She acted on her faith.

In James 2:25, St. James cites Rahab's action as an example of genuine faith. "In the same way, was not even Rahab the prostitute considered righteous for what she did when she gave lodging to the spies and sent them off in a different direction?" Rahab is

recognized not for what she spoke about or thought about, but for what she did. Rahab's faith was in her action—she gave lodging to the spies and sent the pursuers off in a different direction. Faith is not some abstract ideas or feelings. Faith must be real. Genuine faith is shown by one's action or decision to obey the word of God. There is a funny story about a man who lost his footing at the edge of a cliff. In his plunge, he managed to grab onto a bush. The bush was the only thing that held him from falling down to the bottom of the cliff and a crushing death. Filled with terror, he called out toward heaven, "Is there anyone up there?" A voice came from above, "Yes?" The man pleaded, "Oh, God, can you help me?" The voice replied, "Yes, I can. What is your problem?" "I fell over the cliff and am dangling in space holding to a bush. I cannot hold on any longer." The voice from above said, "I can help you if you trust me. Do you believe in me?" "Yes, yes, I believe." "Do you have faith?" "Yes, yes. I have strong faith." The voice said, "Well, in that case, simply let go of the bush and everything will be fine." There was a pause, and then the man yelled, "Is there anyone else up there?"

Rahab showed her faith in God by doing an unthinkable thing—she harbored the spies sent by her enemy. Her faith is so remarkable that she was inducted into the Hall of Faith in the book of Hebrews. Hebrews 11:31 says: "By faith the prostitute Rahab, because she welcomed the spies, was not killed with those who were disobedient."

## II. RAHAB'S CONFESSION OF FAITH (8-13)

Look at verses 8-9. *Before the spies lay down for the night, she went up on the roof and said to them, "I know that the LORD has given this land to you and that a great fear of you has fallen on us, so that all who live in this country are melting in fear because of you."* Here we learn that the relationship between Rahab and the spies was spiritual. They had a godly conversation. Rahab made a beautiful confession of faith. Her confession of faith had two important elements—the sound knowledge of God and a godly view of the people of the city of Jericho. Rahab explained why she decided to hide the spies. Rahab acknowledged God who had given the promised land to the Israelites. With the eyes of faith she viewed the situation facing her people in Jericho. In the past she probably saw the people of Jericho with the eyes of a prostitute. She probably envied the powerful people while feeling disgusted with her own life. Now, with the eyes of faith she saw how fearful the people of Jericho were! The people trembled with fear, but Rahab began to build her trust in the Almighty God in her heart. Let's learn more about her confession to find out how this pagan woman came to believe in our God.

Look at verse 10. *"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 Sihon and Og, the two kings of the Amorites east of the Jordan, whom you completely destroyed."* Rahab heard about how God delivered the Israelites from the land of Egypt. Hearing about what God did was a beginning point of her faith. She had the ears to hear. As we know, hearing is important. Romans 10:14-15 says: "How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written, 'How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!'" Rahab came to believe in God by hearing about what God did. She praised God

who dried up the Red Sea. She recognized the complete victory of the Israelites over the two kings of the Amorites.

So what was her conclusion about the God of Israel? Let us read verse 11. *“When we heard of it, our hearts melted and everyone’s courage failed because of you, for the Lord your God is God in heaven above and on the earth below.”* Rahab believed in the God of heaven above and the earth below. She came to believe that God is the God of not only the Hebrews but also of the universe. She accepted the God of Israel as her own God. Amazingly, this woman recognized the nature of God that many Israelites did not. The God of Israel is the God of heaven. He is not an ordinary god like the Canaanite idols. She believed in the God of heaven and did an act of courage because of her faith in the almighty God.

Look at verses 12-13: *“Now then, please swear to me by the LORD that you will show kindness to my family, because I have shown kindness to you. Give me a sure sign that you will spare the lives of my father and mother, my brothers and sisters, and all who belong to them, and that you will save us from death.”* Rahab had concerned faith. She did not just seek for her own safety. She asked them to spare her entire family, her father and mother, brothers and sisters. We can say that she had a shepherd’s heart towards her family. She wanted to share the grace of God with the people she deeply cared about.

At this time, let’s think about the importance of confession of faith. Rahab’s confession of faith had two elements—the sound knowledge of God and a godly view of the world. Likewise, we must come to know personally the Almighty God who created the universe through our personal Bible study. We worship God who rules the world. Through Bible study we must learn about Jesus’ love and his mighty work. Even for our jobs, it is important for us to have expert knowledge in our chosen area. As God’s people we must know God personally to love him with all our heart, all our soul and all our strength. We commit ourselves to God because we know him. Then God gives us the spiritual eyes to see the world from God’s point of view. Before we met Christ, we used to view the world with the eyes of unbelief. We judged people based on what we saw with our physical eyes. But with the eyes of faith we can now see how many people are lost because they don’t know Christ. They are like sheep without a shepherd. They need to come to Jesus the Savior. They need to hear the good news.

Finally, we learn from Rahab’s confession that our faith in God can have tremendous impact on people around us, especially those whom we love. If we have faith in God, we can truly love our parents, our children, our friends and neighbors. Acts 16:31 says: *“Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household.”* This week we will be sharing our key verse testimonies for 2003. We want to make confessions of faith and love to God. May God help each of us to make a confession of faith so that we may be used by God in his redemptive history!

### III. THE COVENANT OF THE SCARLET CORD (14-24)

Look at verse 14. *“Our lives for your lives!”* the men assured her. *“If you don’t tell what we are doing, we will treat you kindly and faithfully when the LORD gives us the*

*land.*” The spies assured her of her future safety because she protected their lives. Then Rahab let them down by a rope through the window, for the house she lived in was part of the city wall. She also told them, “Go to the hills so the pursuers will not find you. Hide yourselves there three days until they return, and then go on your way.”

Look at verses 17-20. *The men said to her, “This oath you made us swear will not be binding on us unless, when we enter the land, you have tied this scarlet cord in the window through which you let us down, and unless you have brought your father and mother, your brothers and all your family into your house. If anyone goes outside your house into the street, his blood will be on his own head; we will not be responsible. As for anyone who is in the house with you, his blood will be on our head if a hand is laid on him. But if you tell what we are doing, we will be released from the oath you made us swear.”* At that time, a scarlet cord in the window was the sign of a prostitute’s house. It was the mark for a house of sin. However, because of Rahab’s faith in God and her commitment to the God of Israel, it became a sign of salvation. Only Rahab and her family who stayed inside the house marked with the scarlet cord would be saved.

Notice that it was not Rahab who suggested the scarlet cord as a sign. It was the sign of salvation that the Israelite spies gave to her. Then Rahab trusted the promise of salvation. Likewise, God saves those who follow his way of salvation. For example, God saved Noah and his family when he obeyed God’s word by building a huge ark. Many people laughed at him. But he believed in God’s promise and was saved. The Israelites experienced the same in Egypt. God provided the way of salvation through the blood of the lamb smeared on the doorposts. Exodus 12:12-13 says: “On that same night I will pass through Egypt and strike down every firstborn—both men and animals—and I will bring judgment on all the gods of Egypt. I am the LORD. The blood will be a sign for you on the houses where you are; and when I see the blood, I will pass over you. No destructive plague will touch you when I strike Egypt.”

By faith Rahab accepted the way of salvation for her and her family. Look at verse 21. *“Agreed,” she replied. “Let it be as you say.” So she sent them away and they departed. And she tied the scarlet cord in the window.* Rahab did exactly what the spies told her to do. When the Israelites captured the city of Jericho, they did exactly what the spies promised to her. By seeing the scarlet cord in the window they spared all the people in the house. Likewise, cross was once a symbol of cruel punishment. But it became the sign of God’s love and salvation when Jesus shed his precious blood on it to wash away all our sins. The cross of Jesus became the ultimate sign of salvation. Our salvation comes from trusting this sign of God.

Look at verse 24. *They said to Joshua, “The LORD has surely given the whole land into our hands; all the people are melting in fear because of us.”* The spies reported to Joshua that the LORD God had surely given the whole land into their hands. Rahab’s faith encouraged Joshua and all the people of Israel. They were now sure of God’s victory. Through the action of Rahab the spies were convinced of God’s victory. Rahab was instrumental for their victory.

So what happened to Rahab? This woman, who once was a prostitute, became a beautiful daughter of God. In God’s time something wonderful happened. Rahab

married Salmon who may have been one of the two spies. Salmon became the father of Boaz. Boaz married Ruth, another Gentile woman of faith. Ruth became the great grandmother of David. In that way, Rahab became the great-great grandmother of King David. From the lineage of King David our Lord Jesus Christ came as the Savior of the world. How was that possible? Rahab put herself in the hands of God. She was like a beautiful rose in a garbage dumpsite. God picked her up and transformed her as his precious instrument. And it all began when she opened her heart toward God after hearing about his mighty acts.

In today's passage, we learned what it means to have an active faith. Rahab was a despised woman living in a city that was soon to be destroyed. But after hearing about what God had done, she believed in the Creator God. She said, "The Lord your God is God in heaven above and on the earth below." She decided to commit her life to this God. Her faith in the God of the universe transcended her national and ethnic affiliations. Because of her faith, she became one of the only five women included in the genealogy of Jesus. May the Lord help us to have faith in God so that we may actively participate in the life-giving work of God in our generation!