

MOVING AHEAD TOGETHER WITH
A WINNING MINDSET

STUDY THREE

Are Spies and Lies Okay in God's Eyes?

Selections from Joshua 2

Where sin abounded, grace superabounded. Grace is greater than all our sins.
—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

PEOPLE sometimes think of grace as a New Testament concept, but the theme weaves like a beautiful scarlet thread through the Old Testament too. When the first humans sinned and corrupted God's creation, God launched a plan of grace to rescue humanity from evil and death and to redeem and restore His work of creation.

By grace, the Lord chose Abraham and his descendants to convey the seed of the Savior. "All the families on earth will be blessed through you," God promised Abraham (Genesis 12:3). By grace, God passed His promise to Isaac (26:2–5) and then to Jacob (28:12–15).

When Jacob's descendants fell into bondage in Egypt, God rescued them. He led them through the Red Sea as a kind of baptism and brought them to the promised land. Along the way, God dwelled with His people in the tabernacle. He established the sacrificial system through which sinful people could approach God, give thanks to God, and receive mercy.

Strangers and foreigners were welcome to join God's movement of grace. Most, like Pharaoh, hardened their hearts against the Lord. A few, however, humbled themselves before God. They picked up His scarlet thread of grace and clung to it like a lifeline—like the Canaanite woman in the passage for this *Searching the Scriptures* study.



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PREPARE YOUR HEART

Open God's Word with a prayer of gratitude for God's grace in your life.

Father, when I was lost in sin, You found me and whispered words of grace to my heart. I cling to them now as I did the first moment I believed. Thank You for Your Son, who sought me when I was a stranger and bought me with His precious blood. In His name, amen.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

The account of Rahab in [Joshua 2](#) is a prime example of God finding and rescuing a single lost soul in a sea of sinners. Like all Canaanites, Rahab worshiped Baal and Ashtaroth. Moses had warned the Israelites about the foreigners in the land, not to “imitate their detestable customs in the worship of their gods” (Deuteronomy 20:18). But Rahab was not only an idolator; she was also a prostitute.

The New Testament authors referred to her as “Rahab the prostitute” (Hebrews 11:31; James 2:25). They used that label to not identify her ongoing way of life but her former life—like “Simon the leper” (Matthew 26:6 NASB). Simon was a leper until Christ healed him. Similarly, Rahab was a prostitute until she put her faith in the God of Israel. The Scriptures don't say exactly when that moment happened, perhaps before the spies arrived.

Certainly, the spies' arrival was perfectly orchestrated to meet Rahab on her road to faith at just the right time. Rahab was the *only* person in Jericho whose heart was open to grace, and, in God's providential plan, it was *her* door to which the Hebrew spies came knocking.



Observation: Rahab's Daring Acts of Faith

The biblical genre of Joshua 2 is narrative, which records the actions and dialogue of characters in a setting. The narrator seeks to bring us into the scene. We sense the tension in the air, the danger of the situation, and the relief that follows when the narrative resolves. Look for literary tools, such as irony and plot twists. All these elements are present in the account of Rahab. Read [Joshua 2](#) to get the flow, and then answer the following questions.



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Years earlier, Joshua had been one of the twelve spies Moses sent into the promised land (*Numbers 13:1–16*). What do you observe about Joshua's plan to send spies in *Joshua 2:1*?

Despite their attempts to blend in, the spies were spotted at Rahab's house. The ancient Jewish historian, Josephus, called Rahab an innkeeper, which would have meant her house was an inn.¹ How did Rahab protect the spies? What four lies did she tell to mislead the king's men so the spies could escape, according to *2:2–7*?

Rahab courageously put her life on the line to protect the Hebrew spies, an act of bold faith. How did Rahab express her faith in Israel's God, according to *2:8–11*, particularly verse 11? How did her confession of faith in *Yahweh* mirror the Hebrews' confession in *Deuteronomy 4:39*?



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What did Rahab request? What agreement was made between the spies and Rahab, according to *Joshua 2:14–21*?

While the king's men went east to hunt for the spies along the Jordan, the spies went west into the hill country until the way back to the Israelite camp was clear. What did the spies report? What was Joshua's response in *2:22–24*?

Before the spies came, something must have happened in Rahab's heart so that she would be brought to faith in God as the supreme God of heaven and earth. She was a Canaanite. She was a Gentile, but she embraced the God of the Scriptures. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



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Interpretation: "Passover" at Jericho

After the spies escaped through the window in the wall, Rahab followed the spies' instructions and hung a scarlet cord out the window. The scarlet cord identified her house, which the spies promised would be a sanctuary for her and her family when the Israelites invaded (*Joshua 2:17–19*).

How would the early Israelites reading this account have understood the blood-red cord marking Rahab's house of faith? Perhaps they would have recalled the lamb's blood smeared over the doorposts of the Hebrews' homes the night they escaped Egypt. Under the cover of blood, the Hebrews' families were spared God's judgment. At the time of the exodus, what did Moses promise the Israelites, according to *Exodus 12:21–23*?

In a similar way, Rahab's family was "passed over" when Joshua's army descended on Jericho. What was the "plot twist" in Rahab's situation compared to the original Passover? What was the lesson in grace?

By faith, the people of Israel sprinkled "blood on the doorposts" (*Hebrews 11:28*). By faith, Rahab hung a scarlet cord from her window. Likewise, by faith, we confess Christ as Lord and mark our lives with the scarlet cord of His blood to save us (*10:21–23*).

Rahab probably wrestled with a guilty conscience. But as far as the east is from the west, so far has God removed our wrongdoings from us (Psalm 103:12). —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



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Correlation: Lies or Acts of Faith?

The Scriptures look kindly on Rahab, despite her sordid past and the lies she told to protect the spies. Rahab's portrait even hangs in the hall of faith alongside the portraits of Noah, Abraham, Sarah, and Moses. That's quite an honor! What does *Hebrews 11:30–31* say about Rahab's faith?

James also featured Rahab as an example of faith. How did James hold up Rahab alongside Abraham as a model for all Christians in *James 2:21–25*?

How are David and Jesus related to Rahab, according to *Matthew 1:5–6*?



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Rahab's lies were not counted against her; rather, they were a sign of her faith in action! In what circumstances might telling a lie be ethically acceptable, even an act of faith?

Corrie ten Boom and Oskar Schindler are recognized in the avenue of righteous Gentiles at the Yad Vashem Holocaust Museum in Jerusalem. But you say, "They were liars and deceivers." They saved lives. It was a circumstantial necessity. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Application: Questions to Ponder

After Joshua rescued Rahab and her relatives from Jericho's collapse, the text adds this interesting note: "And she lives among the Israelites to this day" (Joshua 6:25).

How do you think the other Hebrews treated her? Rahab and her family were hated Canaanites and former idol-worshippers . . . and Rahab was a former prostitute. Would you have seen her scarlet letter or the scarlet cord of God's grace? Would you have welcomed her family into your home? Allowed your children to play with Rahab's children?

Some people consider those whom God has cleansed as still stained by their past sin. To help us avoid the pitfall of prejudice, here are three questions to ponder.

First, put yourself in the place of the spies. Would you have trusted a person who was a former prostitute like Rahab? Would you have believed her confession of faith in God? We have to make a choice to release others from their past and see them as new creations in Christ.



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Harshly judging others ensnares people rather than sets them free. Search your heart for a judging spirit. Do you find it difficult to show grace to others? How so?

What change in mind-set can help you be more gracious?

Second, put yourself in the place of Rahab. Do you believe that God, in His grace, would look past your lies and see your motive to protect another person? Grace releases the shackles of guilt when we must make hard ethical choices for the sake of others.

Third, again, put yourself in the place of Rahab. Do you think that God's grace leaves room for all your mistakes, failures, and imperfections? Does God forgive every sin? Sometimes, we have more trouble releasing the guilt of our sins than God does.



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Have you been able to completely receive God's grace and let go of the shame of your past? What are you still clinging to that you might need to release?

As sinners, we hold tightly to the scarlet cord of grace in Christ. In Him, we "go right into the presence of God with sincere hearts fully trusting him" (Hebrews 10:22). We enter God's presence with confidence, knowing that:

our guilty consciences have been sprinkled with Christ's blood to make us clean, and our bodies have been washed with pure water. (10:22)



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, Your grace astounds me. The story of Rahab is yet another example of how You welcome all those who come to You in faith. Help me to be as accepting as Your Son, who came to seek and to save the lost—of whom I was one. In His name, amen.

ENDNOTE

1. Thomas L. Constable, "Notes on Joshua," *Constable's Notes*, netbible.org, note on Joshua 2:1.