

Into the Promise: A Journey Through Joshua
Lesson Two: Tie This Cord of Scarlet Thread
Joshua 2

*Faith is more than thinking something is true.
Faith is thinking something is true to the extent that we act on it.* ¹
~W.T. Purkiser

For forty long years, Joshua had quietly waited for this moment. As one of the twelve spies sent to spy out the land, only he and Caleb returned with a good report. The other ten said, “We are not able to go up against the people, for they are too strong for us... We became like grasshoppers *in our own sight*” (Numbers 13:31; 33, emphasis mine). Joshua has watched with dismay, as fear and unbelief ran unchecked throughout the children of Israel upon hearing these words. At peril of his own life, Joshua attempts to rally the people to reconsider the ten spies’ report. He pointed to the promises of God, but to no avail. The people purposed in their hearts to shrink back in fear, a decision that would have devastating consequences. Now, as the newly commissioned leader of God’s people, Joshua is taking the first step of fearless faith, leading the next generation *Into the Promise* of the land of Canaan.

I. The Spies (Joshua 2:1a)

As a wise leader, Joshua sends two unnamed men to go and view the land while the Israelites remain encamped on the far side of the Jordan.

II. The Lies (Joshua 2:1b-14)

The two men “went and came into the house of a harlot whose name was Rahab, and lodged there” (Joshua 2:1).

The Hebrew word translated “harlot” can also mean “one who keeps an inn.” If all we had was the Old Testament text, we could absolve Rahab of immorality and call her the “proprietress of an inn.” But there is no escape, for in James 2:25 and Hebrews 11:31, the writers use the Greek word that definitely means “a prostitute.” ²

Rahab’s house is probably an inn or a tavern, a popular gathering place that could prove to be a great place to gather intel. And, entry into a harlot’s establishment would not arouse suspicion from the local residents, a fact that may have played into their decision making. Of course, we recognize that above all, their encounter with Rahab is a divine appointment.

While we might be tempted to “sanitize” the story and spare Rahab of the embarrassment of her immoral moniker as a harlot, there is no getting around the fact that she was a prostitute. To try to rewrite her profession would lessen the impact of her redemption story. Rahab is a Gentile and, as a harlot, a social outcast. Yet, God in His infinite mercy, saves her and elevates her to a daughter of the King. God delights to take the broken, discarded, marginalized people of the world and make them a part of His Kingdom.

God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong, and the base things of the world and the despised God has chosen, the things that are not, so that He may nullify the things that are, so that no man may boast before God (1 Corinthians 1:27-29).

The men could not have known that before they first encountered Rahab, God had been doing a work in her heart. No doubt she had heard rumors and random reports of the exploits of Israel's God from various travelers crossing the Middle East from Egypt to Arabia. These men may have stopped by her establishment, bringing stunning reports of God's miraculous acts. The parting of the Red Sea and Israel's victory over the two kings of the Amorites pointed to the fact that Israel's God was the one true God. Somehow, in ways Rahab could not fully articulate, a seed of faith had already begun to germinate.

When the two Israelites appear at her door, she brings them inside. Despite the men's best efforts to avoid detection, word of their arrival gets back to the king who dispatches men to Rahab's house. "But the woman had taken the two men and hidden them" (Joshua 2:4) under "the stalks of flax which she had laid in order on the roof" (Joshua 2:6). Joshua 2:8 says, "Now before they lay down, she came up to them on the roof" and made her declaration of faith recorded in Joshua 2:9-11. The germ seed of faith has come to full bloom.

When she is questioned about the men's whereabouts, she lies to the guards and sends them on a wild goose chase. At this point we need to pause and address the complicated issue of whether Rahab is justified in "lying" to the king's sentries. The Biblical account of Rahab is not intended to be a lesson on lying. We need to distinguish between what the Bible *reports* and what it *recommends*. There is a difference between *descriptive texts* and *prescriptive texts*.

A similar example is found in the biblical account of the Hebrew midwives during the Israelites' sojourn and subsequent enslavement in Egypt. The Hebrew midwives, Shiphrah and Puah, misled Pharaoh when he demanded they kill all the newborn baby boys.

The midwives feared God, and did not do as the king of Egypt had commanded them, but let the boys live. So the king of Egypt called for the midwives and said to them, "Why have you done this thing, and let the boys live?" The midwives said to Pharaoh, "Because the Hebrew women are not as the Egyptian women; for they are vigorous and give birth before the midwife can get to them." So God was good to the midwives, and the people multiplied, and became very mighty. Because the midwives feared God, He established households for them (Exodus 1:17-21).

God honored their commitment to protect the lives of newborn boys.

Rahab's concern for the safety of her family is further evidence of her conversion. Knowing the annihilation of Jericho is first on Israel's agenda, Rahab asks the spies to spare her and her family when Israel conquers Jericho. The men vow to do so.

III. The Ties that Bind (Joshua 2:15-24)

As Rahab lets the men down by a rope, she tells them how to escape detection by the king's soldiers. The men tell her to tie a cord of scarlet thread in the window and bring all her family into the house. Everyone inside the home marked by the scarlet cord will be saved.

There is a scarlet thread that runs throughout the Scripture, from Genesis to Revelation, that speaks of the shed blood of Jesus Christ. Jesus was the once for all sacrifice for sin when He was crucified on Calvary. In 2 Corinthians 5:21 the Bible says that God "made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him." All who believe on Him and receive Him *by faith* will be everlastingly saved. This truth is gloriously pictured for us in the story of Rahab.

If the account of Rahab the harlot stopped there, it would be a miraculous story of redemption. But wait, there is more! In Matthew 1:1-17, we read the genealogy of Jesus. Included in His lineage is Salmon who married Rahab, who bore Boaz, who married Ruth, who bore Obed, who birthed Jesse, who was the father of King David. The genealogy tracks all the way to Joseph, the husband of Mary, the mother of Jesus. Rahab, the Gentile harlot, who gave her life to God was grafted into the lineage of Christ through her marriage to Salmon. And here, in Matthew where she is named among those who were in Christ's ancestral line, is the only time that the moniker "the harlot" is not used in conjunction with her name. Praise God, in Christ we are not defined by our past sins! Beloved, we are not the compilation of our past. In Christ, we are daughters of the King! Hallelujah! What a Savior!

In Colossians 1:19 Paul writes this declaration, "For it was the Father's good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him, and through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross; through Him, I say, whether things on earth or things in heaven. And although you were formerly alienated and hostile in mind, engaged in evil deeds, yet He has now reconciled you in His fleshly body through death, in order to present you before Him holy and blameless and beyond reproach." Beloved, we are new creations in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17). Do not let the devil accuse you with your past! Romans 8:1 tells us "There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." That is, our past is under the blood of Jesus Christ. Therefore, Paul goes on to write "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect" (Romans 12:2). Beloved believer, step *Into the Promise* of abundant life in Christ.

¹ Gangel, K. O. (2002). *Joshua* (M. Anders, Ed.; p. 28). Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group.

² Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *Be Strong*, p. 36. Victor Books.