

What was going through her mind?

Why would this prostitute welcome spies from a nomadic people  
lurking across the Jordan River from her city?

One could propose a secular argument:

she may have been disenchanted with the current regime  
and thought she could advance further under Israelite leadership.

Or maybe there was a feud between two families,  
and this her way of trying to get rid of the other family.

Maybe so.

But whatever else may have been going on in Jericho,

Rahab the prostitute was convinced that Yahweh, the God of Israel,  
was going to give his people victory over Jericho,  
and that if she wanted to live, she must ally with Yahweh.

People often do things out of mixed motives.

Walking by faith does not mean that your motives are entirely pure!

Walking by faith means that – whatever else may be going on –  
you believe the gospel, and you act accordingly!

### **1. The Salvation of the Spies (2:1-7)**

*And Joshua the son of Nun sent<sup>[a]</sup> two men secretly from Shittim as spies, saying, “Go, view the land, especially Jericho.” And they went and came into the house of a prostitute whose name was Rahab and lodged there. <sup>2</sup> And it was told to the king of Jericho, “Behold, men of Israel have come here tonight to search out the land.”*

The first five chapters of Joshua are all about “going over.”

Israel is called to take possession of the land of promise,  
and to do that they must “go over” – they must cross the River Jordan,  
and fight against the armies and cities of Canaan.

But they are to do so with wisdom.

Faith in God is not a leap in the dark.

To believe God’s promises means that Joshua must lay wise plans for battle.

And then to go into battle against overwhelming odds,  
trusting that God will do what he has promised.

But God did not promise that he would spy out the land and train the soldiers.

That is what Joshua must do.

And so Joshua sends out 2 spies.

It is perhaps not surprising that the man who had been one of two faithful spies

chose the number 2.  
He does not send out 12 spies, one from each tribe,  
as though this was a group decision.  
He is the covenant mediator.  
Israel's inheritance depends upon him alone (as we saw last week).  
Therefore he sends out 2 faithful spies who will give him  
the information he needs as a general.

The spies go to Jericho,  
and there they lodged in the house of a prostitute.  
What were the spies doing at Rahab's house?  
We may hope that it was honorable, but the text doesn't say that.  
It may have been a good place to take cover,  
or it may have been that they blew their cover through stupidity.  
Either way, their arrival at Rahab's house prompts suspicion,  
and the king of Jericho hears that the people of Israel are on the prowl.  
So the king does what any good king would do  
if he is concerned with homeland security.  
He sent messengers to Rahab saying, (verses 3-6)

*<sup>3</sup> Then the king of Jericho sent to Rahab, saying, "Bring out the men who have come to you, who entered your house, for they have come to search out all the land." <sup>4</sup> But the woman had taken the two men and hidden them. And she said, "True, the men came to me, but I did not know where they were from. <sup>5</sup> And when the gate was about to be closed at dark, the men went out. I do not know where the men went. Pursue them quickly, for you will overtake them." <sup>6</sup> But she had brought them up to the roof and hid them with the stalks of flax that she had laid in order on the roof. <sup>7</sup> So the men pursued after them on the way to the Jordan as far as the fords. And the gate was shut as soon as the pursuers had gone out.*

Did Rahab tell the truth?

No.

Did Rahab sin by lying to the king?

Let me put it another way:

Did Rahab sin by protecting the servants of the Lord's anointed  
from their enemies who desired to kill them?

We looked recently at the ninth commandment.

"You shall not bear false witness."

The commandment is especially concerned with speaking the truth to power.

In the court of law—

In the courts of the church—

In the court of father and mother—

you must tell the truth.

But that does not mean that you must tell the truth

to those who wish to use the truth for wicked purposes.

Rahab is commended for her faith.

What is more

James 2:25 says, “was not also Rahab the prostitute justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way?”

Rahab’s lie is called an act of faith,  
by which she was justified.

If Rahab had said, “I believe that God will destroy Jericho,  
but I have to tell the truth to the king,”  
then she would have denied her faith by her works.

For Rahab, believing God required her to speak in a way that would deceive the king.

This doesn’t happen very often.

If you are lying to protect *yourself* – that’s just wrong!

I don’t think that I have *ever* been in this sort of situation.

I have never been in a place where a lie would be necessary to obey God.

But then Rahab explains why she believes.

She has heard of the mighty works of the LORD.

Notice how she starts (v9):

“I know that Yahweh has given you the land...”

## 2. The Oath of the Spies (2:8-21)

<sup>8</sup> Before the men<sup>[b]</sup> lay down, she came up to them on the roof<sup>9</sup> and said to the men, “I know that the LORD has given you the land, and that the fear of you has fallen upon us, and that all the inhabitants of the land melt away before you. <sup>10</sup> For we have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red Sea before you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to the two kings of the Amorites who were beyond the Jordan, to Sihon and Og, whom you devoted to destruction.<sup>[c]</sup> <sup>11</sup> And as soon as we heard it, our hearts melted, and there was no spirit left in any man because of you, for the LORD your God, he is God in the heavens above and on the earth beneath.

This is faith!

Israel hasn’t even crossed the Jordan yet!

And yet she is confident that God will give them the Land.

Why?

1) The Red Sea (Ex 14)

2) Sihon and Og (Num 21:21-35)

The crossing of the Red Sea happened 40 years ago.

Yet the story was still being told in Jericho of this mighty deed  
that Yahweh had wrought for the sons of Jacob.

Sihon and Og were more recent, but that only demonstrated to the

people of Jericho that this Yahweh was not finished with Israel.  
Their hearts now melted  
as they realized that Israel was right across the Jordan River,  
and was headed their way.  
How do you stop a god?

But Rahab's response is different from the rest of the people of Jericho.  
Their hearts melt in fear.  
Her heart melts in faith.  
Her only hope is to entrust herself to the God of Israel.

So then she asks for mercy (12-13).

*<sup>12</sup> Now then, please swear to me by the LORD that, as I have dealt kindly with you, you also will deal kindly with my father's house, and give me a sure sign <sup>13</sup> that you will save alive my father and mother, my brothers and sisters, and all who belong to them, and deliver our lives from death."*

We are often troubled by Rahab's lie.  
But how often are you troubled by the spies oath?  
God's command was clear:  
Kill all the Canaanites – men, women, and children.

Why are they making an exception to God's command?

It's because the spies can tell that this is no ordinary Canaanite.  
The reason they were to destroy the Canaanites was because of their wickedness.  
But here is an exception—a Canaanite who trusts Yahweh!

If you would keep God's commandments,  
you have to understand the purpose of God's commands!  
Some people today are saying,  
"Well, God says, 'you shall not kill' –  
therefore it is always wrong to kill.  
But the same God who said "you shall not kill" –  
also commanded his people to use the death penalty for murderers,  
and other heinous crimes.

The spies understand the purpose of God's commands!

And so the spies accept her terms, and swear an oath to her.

*<sup>14</sup> And the men said to her, "Our life for yours even to death! If you do not tell this business of ours, then when the LORD gives us the land we will deal kindly and faithfully with you."*

So

*<sup>15</sup> Then she let them down by a rope through the window, for her house was built into the city wall, so that she lived in the wall.*

The ancient city of Jericho had two walls.

The inner city was for the king and his important people.

The outer city was for the ordinary folk.

Apparently her house was in the outer wall –

which was common enough – since the wall would be quite thick –

and she had a window (high off the ground).

*<sup>16</sup> And she said<sup>[d]</sup> to them, “Go into the hills, or the pursuers will encounter you, and hide there three days until the pursuers have returned. Then afterward you may go your way.” <sup>17</sup> The men said to her, “We will be guiltless with respect to this oath of yours that you have made us swear.*

*<sup>18</sup> Behold, when we come into the land, you shall tie this scarlet cord in the window through which you let us down, and you shall gather into your house your father and mother, your brothers, and all your father's household. <sup>19</sup> Then if anyone goes out of the doors of your house into the street, his blood shall be on his own head, and we shall be guiltless. But if a hand is laid on anyone who is with you in the house, his blood shall be on our head. <sup>20</sup> But if you tell this business of ours, then we shall be guiltless with respect to your oath that you have made us swear.”*

She asked for a sign – and they give her one.

They give her a scarlet cord.

This is a sign of their covenant with her.

In 1 Clement, which was written around the year 100,

Clement says that this scarlet cord depicted the blood of Christ.

Clement understood the picture here in Joshua chapter 2.

Israel is about to enter the promised Land.

In a few days they will cross the Jordan River,

and then they will celebrate the Passover.

Immediately after celebrating the Passover,

they will head to Jericho.

And when they get to Jericho, they are commanded by God to be the angel of death, bringing judgment on the Canaanites – just like the angel of death brought judgment on Egypt.

Oh – but as you pass through Jericho – destroying the people –  
when you see the house with a scarlet cord –  
bright red – like the blood of a lamb –

pass by that house!  
Do not kill anyone in it!

Every Israelite warrior who saw the scarlet cord in Rahab's house,  
would have remembered the blood of the Passover Lamb!

And so, yes, the scarlet cord is most certainly a picture of the blood of Christ!

But if anyone goes out of the house,  
they are not protected by this sign!

In other words, you have to believe God!  
When Jericho is destroyed,  
how many people were saved in Rahab's house?  
All those who had faith in Israel's God.

How do I know?  
Well, if they were there, they had faith.  
We often think of faith as a feeling.  
It's not.

I like how our Confession says this: (ch 14)

1. The grace of faith, whereby the elect are enabled to believe to the saving of their souls, is the work of the Spirit of Christ in their hearts, and is ordinarily wrought by the ministry of the Word, by which also, and by the administration of the sacraments, and prayer, it is increased and strengthened.
2. By this faith, a Christian believeth to be true whatsoever is revealed in the Word, for the authority of God himself speaking therein; and acteth differently upon that which each particular passage thereof containeth; yielding obedience to the commands, trembling at the threatenings, and embracing the promises of God for this life, and that which is to come. But the principal acts of saving faith are accepting, receiving, and resting upon Christ alone for justification, sanctification, and eternal life, by virtue of the covenant of grace.

In other words, faith believes God and shows up where God says to be.  
For Rahab's family and friends,  
there may have been some who were mostly just afraid of dying,  
and so they showed up!  
That's fine.

Faith often starts small!

But the point is that faith believes God – and so shows up where God says to be –  
and then does what God says to do!

*<sup>21</sup> And she said, “According to your words, so be it.” Then she sent them away, and they departed. And she tied the scarlet cord in the window.*

Hebrews 11:31 comments on this –

“By faith Rahab the prostitute did not perish with those who were disobedient,  
because she had given a friendly welcome to the spies.”

There is another place where Rahab is mentioned in the NT.

In Matthew 1, where Matthew reports the genealogy of Jesus.

Rahab the prostitute, it turns out, married a man from Judah named Salmon.

By faith she entrusted her life to a pair of strangers, hoping in the grace of Yahweh.

His grace was greater than she would ever know in her lifetime.

But she became the mother of Israel’s kings,

and indeed, the mother of the King of kings himself,

our Lord Jesus Christ.

We don’t know the names of the spies –

but many have wondered if one of them was Salmon!

What we do know is that Rahab and Salmon’s son was named Boaz.

And when Boaz was an older man,

probably at least 50-60 years after conquest of Jericho,

he met a young widow from Moab.

No doubt he remembered the stories he was told by his mother!

His mother, after all, was a Canaanite!

A former prostitute.

And now he sees this desolate foreigner – Ruth –

and he recognizes the faith of his mother Rahab...

Meanwhile, back in Jericho...

### **3. The Report of the Spies (2:22-24)**

*<sup>22</sup> They departed and went into the hills and remained there three days until the pursuers returned, and the pursuers searched all along the way and found nothing. <sup>23</sup> Then the two men returned. They came down from the hills and passed over and came to Joshua the son of Nun, and they told him all that had happened to them.*

After remaining in hiding for three days, the spies return to Joshua and give their report.

They came down from the hills and “passed over.”

Three days later Israel will “pass over” the Jordan,

but the author uses the same word here to anticipate  
the great crossing of the Jordan in the following chapters.

The spies report in faith:

*<sup>24</sup> And they said to Joshua, "Truly the LORD has given all the land into our hands. And also, all the inhabitants of the land melt away because of us."*

Notice how they say it!

The LORD has given all the land into our hands."

It's already finished!

All we have to do is believe God's promises, and it is done!

Martin Luther once said,

Faith is not what some people think it is. Their human dream is a delusion. Because they observe that faith is not followed by good works or a better life, they fall into error, even though they speak and hear much about faith. "Faith is not enough," they say, "You must do good works, you must be pious to be saved." They think that, when you hear the gospel, you start working, creating by your own strength a thankful heart which says, "I believe." That is what they think true faith is. But, because this is a human idea, a dream, the heart never learns anything from it, so it does nothing and reform doesn't come from this 'faith,' either.

Instead, faith is God's work in us, that changes us and gives new birth from God. ([John 1:13](#)). It kills the Old Adam and makes us completely different people. It changes our hearts, our spirits, our thoughts and all our powers. It brings the Holy Spirit with it. Yes, it is a living, creative, active and powerful thing, this faith. Faith cannot help doing good works constantly. It doesn't stop to ask if good works ought to be done, but before anyone asks, it already has done them and continues to do them without ceasing. Anyone who does not do good works in this manner is an unbeliever. He stumbles around and looks for faith and good works, even though he does not know what faith or good works are. Yet he gossips and chatters about faith and good works with many words.

Faith is a living, bold trust in God's grace, so certain of God's favor that it would risk death a thousand times trusting in it. Such confidence and knowledge of God's grace makes you happy, joyful and bold in your relationship to God and all creatures. The Holy Spirit makes this happen through faith. Because of it, you freely, willingly and joyfully do good to everyone, serve everyone, suffer all kinds of things, love and praise the God who has shown you such grace. Thus, it is just as impossible to separate faith and works as it is to separate heat and light from fire! Therefore, watch out for your own false ideas and guard against good-for-nothing gossips, who think they're smart enough to define faith and works, but really are the greatest of fools. Ask God to work faith in you, or you will remain forever without faith, no matter what you wish, say or can do.



*An excerpt from "An Introduction to St. Paul's Letter to the Romans," Luther's German Bible of 1522 by Martin Luther, 1483-1546*

This is at the heart of the spies' report:  
The LORD has given us the land!  
So let us go forth in faith!