

Risk-Takers: The Adventure of Walking by Faith

Session 3

June 15, 2025

Rahab: A Faith Not Held Back by Fear

The Point: Faith acts when others are paralyzed by fear.

Session Passages: Joshua 2:1-4a,8-14; 6:22-25

Joshua 2:1-4a

Connection to the Point. Rahab courageously hid the Israelite spies, defying her king's command.

Joshua the son of Nun (v. 1). The author of the book of Joshua refers to Joshua as only “Joshua” in about 140 verses. Meanwhile, he refers to the leader as “Joshua the son of Nun” only ten times. Most of the time, as is the case here, the author used Joshua's full name to indicate a major plot movement in the narrative of the account that he was relating. In this case, the author was signaling the significance of both a place and a person. The city of Jericho would serve as a prominent place in the narrative of the book of Joshua. Meanwhile, the character of **Rahab** would serve not only as a significant person in the storyline of the book of Joshua but also throughout the Bible as a whole.

Sent . . . two men to spy (v. 1). Like Moses before him, Joshua sent *spies* to spy out the promised land. Joshua had been one of the spies Moses sent, and he had seen how good the land was. But forty years had passed since Joshua had seen the lay of the land and much could have changed during that span. In the previous instance, Moses had sent out twelve spies but only two, Joshua and Caleb, demonstrated faith in the promise of God that He would deliver the land into the hands of His people. Joshua only sent two spies this time, and both would be found to be faithful.

Jericho (v. 1). Jericho was the first city the Hebrew spies encountered as they entered the land of promise from the land of Moab. Jericho was a tactical refuge situated near a vital crossing point of the Jordan River. From the city of Jericho, there were three pathways into the mountains in the center portion of the promised land. From Jericho, Joshua and the people of Israel would be able to wage military campaigns to both the north and the south of the promised land.

The house of a prostitute (v. 1). There are a few different interpretations as to the nature of this house. First, it is possible that the house was exactly as it sounds—the house of a prostitute. Hosea the prophet was called to pursue and marry Gomer, a prostitute, so there is biblical warrant for the idea that God is willing to work His will even among the most scandalous and sinful of professions. Second, it is possible that the house where Rahab lived was more like an inn or a tavern which included, though not exclusively, the housing of prostitutes. James, the brother of Jesus, was not ashamed or shy about referring to Rahab as a prostitute—even as he used her as an example of faith being accompanied by works (Jas. 2:25-26). Actually, Rahab herself would play a somewhat surprising role in the New Testament. In the Gospel of Matthew, Rahab is one of only a few women who are featured in the genealogy of Jesus (Matt. 1:5). She was also put forward as an example of faith by the writer of Hebrews in what is often referred to as the Hall of Fame of Faith (Heb. 11:31).

The king of Jericho (v. 2). Historically, mass migration always causes governments, including kings, to be concerned. Even in today's world, mass migration can lead to economic, political, and safety concerns for any government in the path of the moving throng. Additionally, the *king of Jericho* would have been concerned about the security of his own land and people due to the reports that he almost certainly had heard about the power of the God of Israel. Just as God had said (Ex. 23:27-31), His mighty acts—including sending plagues upon one of the most powerful nations in the world at the time—had become known around the world, and His power became known to the people in the promised land. The Lord was not only known for sending plagues but also for freeing His people from the bondage of slavery in Egypt.

Hidden them (v. 4). *Hidden* translates a word that also means to store up (Ps. 31:19) or to treasure (Job 23:12). Rahab put her faith to work by treasuring the lives of the spies. We will see her confession of faith later in the chapter, but here we see Rahab's faith in action. Jesus's brother James used Rahab as his example that saving faith is always accompanied by action: "In the same way, wasn't Rahab the prostitute also justified by works in receiving the messengers and sending them out by a different route? For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead" (Jas. 2:25-26).

Joshua 2:8-14

Connection to the Point. While those around her lived in fear, Rahab aligned herself with the Israelites and sought their protection.

The Lord has given you this land (v. 9). Rahab was confident the people of Israel would succeed in conquering the land of promise. She, like the other residents of Canaan, had heard all that God had done for the people of Israel. Through His mighty power, God brought the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt. Similar language to **terror of you has fallen on us** had been used in Exodus 15:15 and 23:27. God's power is a terror to those who fall under His judgment, but through that same judgment the people of God are saved.

The Lord your God, he is God (v. 11). Most people during this time were either polytheists (believing in and worshiping many gods) or henotheists (believing in many gods but primarily worshiping the god of one's own people). With this statement, Rahab made several amazing proclamations. First, she declared the God of Israel (Yahweh) controlled **heaven above, and . . . earth below**. Canaanites believed different gods were in charge of different parts of heaven and earth. By declaring Yahweh to be the God of these two vast areas, she was confessing He was very powerful. Second, by using Yahweh's name (*Lord*), Rahab was expressing faith in Him, not the Canaanite deities who were not really gods at all. Third, by saying *heaven above, and . . . earth below*, Rahab echoed language used in Exodus 20:4 and Deuteronomy 4:39; 5:8 where Yahweh declared His sovereignty and sole worth of worship.

I showed kindness to you (v. 12). Rahab allowed the spies to stay in her house. Additionally, Rahab sent her own countrymen out with erroneous directions when they sought the Israelite spies (v. 5). Hospitality towards travelers and guests was a high value in many countries around the world. However, Rahab's behavior exceeded all hospitality norms expected of an individual in those cultures. In one sense, Rahab took a huge risk. By defying her king's order and misleading his men, Rahab put herself and her entire

household in danger of incurring the king's wrath. From another perspective, her behavior was completely rational and came with no risk at all. She had come to know and believe that the God of Israel is the one and only true God, so defying His plan would be foolish. As the martyred missionary Jim Elliot wrote, "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose."

Please swear to me . . . (v. 12). Rahab had confessed faith in Yahweh. She believed He was powerful enough to save her and her family. Her request to the spies was the outworking of her new faith. She was no longer trusting the gods of her family or her people. Instead, she was professing and confessing her faith in the God of Israel alone. She had come to know and believe that Yahweh alone has the power to save, so she publicly declared her allegiance to God through His people—the spies sent into the promised land.

The spies' response. The Israelite spies responded to Rahab's confession of faith in Yahweh and her request for a sign with a condition. They would ensure she and her family were kept safe when Joshua and the Israelite army came into Canaan as long as she did not report their mission to the authorities of Jericho (v. 14). Her house was built into the wall of the city, so it was easy for her to let the spies out of a window (v. 15). The conditions for Rahab's safety continued. Not only must she remain silent about their mission, she also needed to demonstrate faith in their goodwill and power to save her. The Israelite spies told her to do two things. First, she was to hang a scarlet cord from the window of her house (v. 18). Second, she was to gather into her house all those whom she wanted to keep safe and keep them there (vv. 18-19). These simple acts of faith would demonstrate that Rahab truly did trust in Yahweh to save her and her family. After leaving Rahab, the two spies returned to Joshua and told him everything that happened while they were in the land.

Joshua 6:22-25

Connection to the Point. Rahab's courageous faith led to the rescue of her whole family.

Context. Joshua was preparing to lead the people of God into the land of promise when he encountered a being who looked like a man prepared for battle—complete with his sword drawn. Joshua asked him whose side he was on, and he responded that he was neither for Joshua or his enemies but was "the commander of the Lord's army" (5:14). There is some debate as to who this figure was and which army he was referring to when he said that he was its commander. It is possible he was referring to the Israelite army and thus was correcting Joshua's presumption that he himself was the army's leader. It is also possible that the man was referring to a heavenly army who would be fighting an invisible war alongside the army that Joshua was leading. In either case, after bowing down before this man, Joshua was told to remove his sandals (v. 15)—just as Moses had been told to do when he encountered God at the burning bush in the wilderness (Ex. 3). Whoever this man was, Joshua dutifully submitted to his power and authority.

The power of this man and his army is displayed in 6:1-21. Conventional military movements would have had Joshua and his army attacking the walls of Jericho in order to destroy them. However, Joshua listened to the word of God and followed His instructions. The people of Israel marched around Jericho and trusted the Lord to use His power to bring down the walls of Jericho and thereby deliver the city into their hands. The Lord showed Himself to be faithful and mighty by miraculously bringing down the walls

of Jericho and allowing Joshua and his troops to march straight in and capture the city. The Lord's plans are perfect and following His instructions imperative—even when the instructions are counterintuitive and/or contrary to worldly wisdom.

All who are with her (v. 22). Joshua was faithful to keep the promises made by the two spies whom he sent to spy out the land. He sent the same two men into Jericho to find Rahab and her family. Once they found Rahab and her family, she and her family were spared the destruction that came upon the rest of the city of Jericho. In this way, Rahab serves as a reminder of the story of Noah. Just as Noah and the other seven who were with him inside the ark were safe, so Rahab and all those with her inside her house were safe. The only way we are saved is by grace through faith in Christ alone. The New Testament sometimes speaks of our salvation as being found in Christ. Paul said that Christians are saved through their identification with Christ in His baptism (Gal. 3:26-27)—which Peter corresponded with the salvation that Noah and his family found in the ark (1 Pet. 3:18-22).

She still lives in Israel today (v. 25). At the time the book of Joshua was written, the writer said that Rahab still lived in Israel. There are a couple possible interpretations to this statement. First, it is possible that Rahab herself was still alive when the book was written down—indicating the accounts of the book were written shortly after the events described therein. Second, it is also possible that the author was referring to Rahab's descendants who were still living in Israel at the time—thus maintaining her legacy.

Rahab's faithfulness to the Lord is rewarded. Rahab's faithfulness was rewarded not only in her lifetime but beyond her lifetime. First, in the Gospels, Rahab appears as one of only a few women in the ancestry of Jesus (Matt. 1:5). In addition to being one of the only women, she is also one of the only Gentiles in the list. Second, Rahab also appears in the "Hall of Faith" in the letter to the Hebrews (Heb. 11:31). There, Rahab's actions are put forward as an example of faith being the "reality of what is hoped for, the proof of what is not seen in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not" (v. 1). Finally, Rahab's actions serve as an example of works accompanying one's faith: "In the same way, wasn't Rahab the prostitute also justified by works in receiving the messengers and sending them out by a different route? For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead" (Jas. 2:25-26). Taken together, the New Testament presents this Gentile woman as an example of faith not only to the early church made up mainly of Jewish believers but also to the worldwide church today, that will one day be made up of some from "every nation, tribe, people, and language" (Rev. 7:9).