

## p 21 WEEK 3: SENDING IN THE SPIES, FINDING A SURPRISE

Joshua 2:1–24

### The Place of the Passage

Israel has been here before. Forty years earlier, at the edge of the land, Moses sent in 12 spies to bring a report. The result was a disaster, not because of the intimidating reality beyond the Jordan but because of the faithless timidity of the spies who insisted Israel not go in. God had proven himself trustworthy, but his people would not trust him, and so that generation died in the wilderness. Now, 40 years later, Joshua secretly sends two spies. He trusts God, but perhaps he is not so trusting of men. Joshua does not send his spies to decide whether to enter the land but to decide *how* to enter. Their report is optimistic in ways he could not have imagined.

### The Big Picture

Joshua sends two spies into Canaan, who return with a favorable report and a surprising story, confirming God's sovereignty and hinting at his global purposes.

### p 22 Reflection and Discussion

**Read through Joshua 2:1–24, then engage this section of Scripture with the questions below. (For further background, see the *ESV Study Bible*, pages 396–397; available online at [www.esvbible.org](http://www.esvbible.org).)**

#### 1. A Visit with a Prostitute (2:1–14)

One way the writer of Joshua draws attention to features in his story is through surprise. Surprises make up this chapter, although they may be obscured if you're familiar with the account. With an eye to these surprises, read verses 1–14 and list unexpected things that happen. Which surprise is most significant?

It seems suspect for Israel's spies to enter the home of a prostitute. Does the context suggest any wrongdoing? Why might it have been strategic to enter a prostitute's house?

Rahab's confession is probably the last thing these men expected. She is a female, Gentile prostitute in a Canaanite city. Read Rahab's confession in 2:9–13 and list everything you learn she believes about God. What does it tell us about Rahab's knowledge of Yahweh that she would appeal to these men for help?

p 23 **2. A Sneaky Escape (2:15–24)**

What surprises do you see in this second half of the story?

With the city gate closed behind them, the spies were no doubt relieved by Rahab's getaway plan. By her actions Rahab demonstrated her creativity and intelligence, but the most important thing about Rahab was her faith in Israel's God. How would you respond to someone who said, "I find it hard to believe that this Gentile prostitute really believes what she says. Where's the proof?"

The spies' meeting Rahab was not accidental. What purpose does Rahab serve in God's plan of salvation? What do we learn from her about God's concern for the nations?

Prostitutes don't normally receive praise for their actions, yet Rahab did. What do her mentions in Matthew 1:5 and Hebrews 11:31 tell us about who God is and the kind of people he saves?

p 24 **Read through the following *Gospel Glimpses*, *Whole-Bible Connections*, and *Theological Soundings*. Then take time to consider the *Personal Implications* these reflections have for your walk with the Lord.**

## **Gospel Glimpses**

**GOD'S SURPRISING SOVEREIGNTY.** This story is full of danger for Israel's spies. Jericho's king smelled blood, and only a prostitute stood between Israel's spies and the king's officials. The officials left the city, but then closed the gate behind them. This desperate situation, however, was actually quite positive. Jericho "melted" in fear (Josh. 2:11), but Rahab believed, showed them a window, and mapped their way home. Thus the spies were right to declare, "Truly the LORD has given all the land into our hands" (v. 24)—precisely what Rahab had already told them, in faith (vv. 8–9). If ever we're tempted to doubt the possibility that God can save this or that person, remember how God brought his spies home, and more importantly, how he brought this unlikely woman to himself.

**DELIVERER FROM DEATH.** Rahab knew her problem: she was a Canaanite, a sinner, and the object of God's coming judgment. She also knew her only hope: God's mercy. So, after a beautiful confession, Rahab pleaded for her life: "Please swear to me by the LORD that ... you will ... deliver our lives from death" (2:12–13). God didn't owe her for helping the spies, yet she asked for mercy—and God granted it, proving this truth: "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved" (Rom. 10:13). Nothing is more terrifying than death. No one is safer to trust than the Lord of life.

## Whole-Bible Connections

**SALVATION TO A GENTILE.** When God came to Abraham, he gave him this promise: “In your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed” (Gen. 22:18). Rahab was a Gentile, but by faith she became a child of Abraham (see Rom. 4:16), and so enjoyed an early installment of God’s fulfillment of his promise to Abraham to extend his blessing to the nations. This is the way God works: the first believer in the land was a former Gentile marked for judgment, who would herself join the genealogy of Jesus Christ (Matt. 1:5).

**FAITH AND WORKS.** Rahab’s story shows us the beautiful and interlocking relationship between faith and works. “By faith,” writes the author of Hebrews, “Rahab the prostitute did not perish with those who were disobedient, because she had given a friendly welcome to the spies” (Heb. 11:31). Similarly, James [p 25](#) finds in Rahab an example of the inevitable expression of saving faith: “Was not also Rahab the prostitute justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way?” (James 2:25). How did Rahab’s faith lead to these concrete actions? Based on what she had heard of Israel’s God (Josh. 2:9–11), she considered herself safer helping the spies than turning them in, for—as far as she was concerned—the land was already theirs (v. 9). Her actions were driven by her faith. She hung the scarlet cord because she entrusted her life to God’s mercy for salvation from the wrath to come. Salvation always comes to sinners by faith, and always produces good works (Rom. 4:1–5; James 2:21).

## Theological Soundings

**ONE TRUE GOD.** Rahab gets it right when she says, “The LORD your God, he is God in the heavens above and on the earth beneath” (Josh. 2:11). Rahab’s monotheism is a great surprise and on the high point of this passage. The Canaanites were polytheistic, believing in myriad gods who were unjust, jealous, and in competition. They were takers, requiring even the sacrifice of children. According to the prophet Jeremiah, these idols, which are really nothing, “have to be carried, for they cannot walk.... The LORD is the true God” (Jer. 10:5, 10). Turning from false gods to the only true God is evidence of true salvation, just as it was for first-century Christians who “turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God” (1 Thess. 1:9).

**HARDNESS OF UNBELIEF.** Rahab’s faith is such a prominent part of this story that we might miss an important lesson in the shadows of this passage. The men knocking at Rahab’s door weren’t there to plead for mercy. They knew of God’s wonders but were there at the king’s command to capture Israel’s spies (Josh. 2:10–11). Surely, in Jericho’s “melting” (see v. 11) we see a picture of the hardness of human sin. They knew and yet resisted God’s power. In the salvation of Israel, Yahweh is going to bring judgment upon the people of Canaan, just as he said to Abraham 400 years before (Gen. 15:16). In God’s perfect timing, God’s judgment would come upon a people totally devoted to sin and unrelenting in their hardness of heart.

**A FAITHFUL LIE?** Some questions not raised directly by the text are nonetheless raised in our minds as we read Joshua 2. Was Rahab right to lie to the local officials? God’s people are strictly prohibited from lying, yet the New Testament unblushingly commends Rahab as a model of faith

(Heb. 11:31; James 2:25; see also Ex. 1:17–22; Heb. 11:23). What are we to make of this? First, narrative texts such as this may describe events without commending the actions in the story. Second, given Rahab’s background, we should not be surprised at her decision under these circumstances. Third, it is fair to suggest that Rahab is playing by [p 26](#) rules appropriate for just warfare, deceiving with words just as camouflage does with cover. Whatever the case may be, we should be cautious in our application of texts like this. We should also be cautious not to miss the main point of the passage: the surprising faith of this unlikely character. Focusing on the main purpose of the text will provide the best interpretation and application.

## **Personal Implications**

**Take time to reflect on the implications of Joshua 2:1–24 for your life. How does this passage lead you to praise God, repent of sin, and trust in his gracious promises? Write down your reflections under the three headings we have considered and on the passage as a whole.**

**1. Gospel Glimpses**

**2. Whole-Bible Connections**

**3. Theological Soundings**

**4. Joshua 2:1–24**

## **As You Finish This Unit ...**

**Praise God for his sovereignty to save sinners from among the nations, and pray for God’s help to demonstrate your faith in Christ in the details of life.**