

Rahab

Opening Hymn: #300 — “Light after Darkness”

Heb. 11:6 [NIV] Without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.

At the beginning of the second chapter we read about Joshua’s first battle:

Joshua 2:1 [NIV] Then Joshua secretly sent two spies. “Go look over the land,” he said, “especially Jericho.” So they went and entered the house of a prostitute named Rahab and stayed there. The king of Jericho was told, “Look! Some of the Israelites have come here tonight to spy out the land.” So the king of Jericho sent this message to Rahab: “Bring out the men who came to you and entered your house, because they have come to spy out the whole land.” But the woman had taken the two men and hidden them. She said, “Yes, the men came to me, but I did not know where they had come from. At dusk, when it was time to close the city gate, the men left. I don’t know which way they went. Go after them quickly. You may catch up with them.” (But she had taken them up to the roof and hidden them under the stalks of flax she had laid out on the roof.) [vs. 8] Before the spies lay down for the night, she went up on the roof and said to them, “I know that the Lord has given this land to you and that a great fear of you has fallen on us, so that all who live in this country are melting in fear because of you. We have heard how the Lord dried up the water of the Red Sea for you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to Sihon and Og, the two kings of the Amorites east of the Jordan, whom you completely destroyed. When we heard of it, our hearts melted and everyone’s courage failed because of you, for the Lord your God is God in heaven above and on the earth below. Now then, please swear to me by the Lord that you will show kindness to my family.”

“Jericho is located in the Jordan Valley, north of the Dead Sea and west of the Jordan River. It is the world’s oldest known settlement [with significant archaeological remains dating back as far as 8000 BC]. It is about 800 ft below sea level making it one of the lowest cities in the world.” [Encarta Encyclopedia] It is about five miles west of the Jordan River.

The king of Jericho was more or less the city manager. Notice that there is no-one he can ask for help against this formidable adversary coming against him from out of the wilderness. If all the kings of Canaan had been united together in a mutual-protection confederacy, they might have had a better chance of resisting Israel.

Joshua’s parents named him Oshea meaning savior, or salvation. But Moses put a “Je” in front of his name and that changed its meaning into “he by whom Jehovah will save.”

Numbers 13:16 And Moses called Oshea the son of Nun Jehoshua.

Here is what God says to him when he becomes Israel’s leader when Moses died:

Joshua 1:5 There shall not any man be able to stand before thee all the days of thy life: as I was with Moses, so I will be with thee: I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee.

Having just received God’s promise to be with him, and possessing a name meaning “Jehovah brings salvation,” why did Joshua send out spies? He knows victory is certain. But he also knew one more

thing: if he did not use the counsel, prudence, and strength which he had received from God, he would not succeed. Although he was depending on divine direction and power, he also knew it would be prudent to embark on an “intelligence gathering” expedition. There is a lesson here for us: We cannot expect success, either in things spiritual or temporal, unless we also exercise prudence. Yes, God is in command of our experiences. But we are workers together with God. (2 Cor. 6:1) Let us do everything we should do as though success actually depended upon our own efforts.

Because the Jordan was relatively easy to cross at this point, Jericho became a popular rest stop for the many trade caravans that traveled between Mesopotamia, Egypt, and Phoenicia. Foreigners and strangers were frequently within the city which may be why the spies felt bold enough to walk right in. But where would they stay for the night? Why at the place known to welcome strangers: an inn operated by a woman who on occasion offered more than bed and breakfast. It would be these many travelers who would bring the news of the day, who would tell Rahab about what had happened to Israel over the last forty years. The reaction of almost everyone in the city was fear and dread. But Rahab came to the correct conclusion that Israel was serving the true God; all other gods were false. When the spies came to her house, they found the only person in the city of Jericho who was friendly to their nation. Rahab **believed**. Soon she showed she had more than belief. Rahab had **faith**.

Undoubtedly the spies were not the only ones at her house that afternoon. Their manner of speech probably betrayed their nationality so a message soon gets back to the king that spies from Israel have entered the city. Rahab can guess that’s happening so she hides the spies on her flat roof.

Now it might seem strange that the king’s messengers didn’t just enter the house and search it. But in those days a woman’s tent or apartment was private and her privacy was **never** violated. Rahab hid the spies so that there would be no obvious evidence of their presence to anyone who came to the door. Then she lies. She says, “Yes, they were here, but they’re gone now.”

Lying

Do you lie? Do you think there are circumstances that justify lying? Have you ever lied and later regretted it? Here’s a true story that happened in an eastern European country in 1997. Brethren were on a train. They had no tickets because of circumstances outside their control. So they paid conductors what they wanted from time to time. This is illegal, but once on the train without tickets they had no choice. Near the end of the trip the conductor tells them the police are on this segment and are checking tickets. He suggests that they tell the police they got on the train at the last stop. This would reduce their fine to a much lower level, an amount they had the money to pay. But if the police knew they had traveled a long distance without tickets, there was the real possibility they would be taken to jail. *[pause]* What would you do if you were in this group of brethren?

Now it’s one thing to say we should always tell the truth, but when there is the possibility of going to jail, might this not be an exception to the rule? How do we decide?

We know how Rahab decided. She lied, and she did it convincingly. The king’s messengers went off toward Jordan hoping to catch the spies. Later that night she lowered them over the city wall using a rope and told them to flee in the opposite direction and hide several days in one of the many mountain caves. I suppose it’s possible that someone could claim that because she lied, she became a great hero of faith:

Hebrews 11:31 [NIV] By faith the prostitute Rahab, because she welcomed the spies, was not killed with those who were disobedient.

James 2:25 [NIV] Was not even Rahab the prostitute considered righteous for what she did when she gave lodging to the spies and sent them off in a different direction?

There is nothing here that praises Rahab because she lied. To say that she is listed as a hero of faith because she lied would be to say that Abraham is listed because he lied about Sarah's relationship to him [twice], or that Jacob is listed because he lied to his father about his identity when he wanted his father's blessing, or that David is listed because he murdered the husband of a woman he wanted for himself.

Lying is so easy. Cain is the son of parents who were created perfect. When God asks, "Where is your brother Able?" he replies: "I don't know. Am I my brother's keeper?" [NIV of Gen. 4:9] How can we know under what circumstances it is justifiable to lie? Easy: it is never justifiable.

We have given up our own will to do the will of the Heavenly Father. How do we know what that is? One way is to follow the pattern of Jesus who always did the will of his Father. If we do what he did, we may be sure we're doing the will of the Father. And there is not one single instance where Jesus lied. Not one. This should not be surprising. God cannot lie:

Hebrews 6:18 That by two immutable things, in which it was **impossible for God to lie**, we might have a strong consolation . . .

Lying is part of the old man. The world thinks there are times when it is appropriate; it is never appropriate for us. Even in the world, it is hardly the best policy. Would you want to live in a world where people lie as easily as they speak truth? Bible Students are so unsuspecting that lies are used to manipulate them. Beware of words like "well, I've heard it said that..." or "he believes or doesn't believe..." In nearly every instance when I was a manager, the stories brought to me about the people in my department were not what they seemed. I found the truth only when I went looking for it.

Anecdote: The little girls were by themselves making paintings. Nannette heard Analisa start to cry loudly. She investigated. Analisa said Tiffany said she didn't like her painting. Tiffany said, "Analisa asked me if I liked her painting and I said no. Our mother says when you ask someone's opinion about something, you have to prepare yourself for the answer no matter what it is." Nannette had to agree that that was true.

Col. 3:9 **Lie not** one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds.

Another Anecdote: [behavior is taught by example] It was a sunny Saturday afternoon and Bobby Lewis was taking his two little boys to play miniature golf. He walked up to the fellow at the ticket counter and said, "How much is it to get in?" The young man replied, "\$3.00 for you and \$3.00 for any kid older than six. It's free for those six or younger. How old are they?" Bobby replied, "The young one's three and the older one is seven, so I guess we owe you \$6.00." The man behind the counter said, "You could have saved yourself three bucks by telling me the older one was six; I wouldn't have known the difference." Bobby replied, "Yes, that may be true, but the **kids** would have known the difference." —*Chicken Soup for the Soul*, p. 103.

Returning to Rahab: Could she have saved the spies without telling a lie? Based on the customs of her time, it would never occur to her to try. Within her culture she certainly had **not** been taught the value of speaking only the truth. Arabs to this day lie effortlessly—Yassar Arafat is Exhibit A. Even though the world knows this, it amazes me so many accept whatever he says at face value.

“Strict truth, either in Jew or heathen, was a virtue so utterly unknown before the promulgation of the Gospel that, so far as Rahab is concerned, the discussion is quite superfluous.”—*McClintock & Strong*

Adam Clarke comments on this subject: “There is a lax morality in the world that recommends a lie rather than the truth when the purposes of religion and humanity can be served by it. But when can this be? The religion of Christ is one eternal system of truth, and can neither be served by a lie nor admit one.” He goes on to say that the next [false] step is to say: “Let us do evil that good may come of it”—which was one of the accusations leveled against the Apostle Paul by his critics:

Rom 3:8 [NIV] Why not say—as we are being slanderously reported as saying and as some claim that we say—“Let us do evil that good may result”?

Undoubtedly the Spanish Inquisitors thought their torture and persecution of heretics was necessary because of the good that would come from it.

lie *n.* **1.** A false statement deliberately presented as being true. **2.** Something meant to deceive or give a wrong impression

If lying is evil, it’s evil . . . no matter what the eventual result may be. And white lies? "Those who think it permissible to tell white lies soon grow colorblind!"

The Scarlet Thread

Rahab and the spies discuss what she is to do to identify her house so the soldiers will know to save her and her family. The King James says:

Joshua 2:18,21 Behold, when we come into the land, thou shalt bind this line of scarlet **thread** in the window which thou didst let us down by. [21] And she sent them away, and they departed: and she bound the scarlet **line** in the window.

The NIV said it was a scarlet cord, but I think it was a **cloth** woven with scarlet thread, a kind of red flag. Rahab hid the spies among stalks of flax drying on the roof. Flax is used to make linen, and Rahab probably made cloth. One of the spies might have seen some red cloth in her home and he realized it could be used as an identifying flag. The “red” was a sign or pledge of safety to all within that house.

Marking the outside of a home with red reminds us of the Exodus. Israelites marked their doorposts and lintels with red blood so the death angel would pass over their house during the night of death. It showed faith by a family that splashing blood would do any good at all. Rahab also had faith that this red flag would save her.

And of course it did save her. She and her family became the first proselytes of Judaism after Israel entered Canaan. She was fully accepted by the Israelites. Her past was in the past. In fact she married a prince of Judah:

Matthew 1:5 [NIV] Salmon the father of Boaz, **whose mother was Rahab**, Boaz the father of Obed, whose mother was Ruth, Obed the father of Jesse, and Jesse the father of King David.

It is a great many years from the marriage of Salmon and Rahab to the birth of Jesse. I believe there were more intermediate steps than just Boaz and Obed who are named here. The Jews could say a grandfather or a great-grandfather was the father of someone. In Matt. 3:9 the Pharisees say they have Abraham for their father [not ancestor]. In the book of Hebrews unborn Levi is considered to be affected because his great-grandfather Abraham paid tithes to Melchisedec (Heb. 7:2).

Salmon's father was Nahshon. When he died in the wilderness, Salmon would have succeeded him. What could have possessed Salmon to marry a heathen prostitute? First of all, when he married her she was neither heathen nor a prostitute. All that was in the past. Although we can't prove it, it is likely Salmon was one of the two spies that fateful night. He saw Rahab's faith firsthand and fell in love with her. Although initially she was outside God's covenant nation, Rahab was fully accepted and became part of the genealogical chain extending from Adam to Jesus Christ. How like our loving God to do the unexpected, to take one here one there who may be considered undesirable by those who think they know better:

Matthew 21:31 [NIV] The tax collectors and the prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God ahead of you.

What does God think of prostitutes? He loves them. And if they accept his love, they can become transformed:

1 Cor. 6:9-11 [NIV] Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers . . . will inherit the kingdom of God. And that is what some of you were [pause] but you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.

God did something similar for another woman who was born outside the chosen nation. Consider what he had previously said about the Moabites:

Deut. 23:3 An Ammonite or Moabite shall not enter into the congregation of the LORD; even to their tenth generation shall they not enter into the congregation of the LORD for ever.

Strong language, but even so, there could be exceptions:

Ruth 1:22 So Naomi returned, and Ruth the Moabitess, her daughter in law, with her, which returned out of the country of Moab: and they came to Bethlehem in the beginning of barley harvest.

Of course Ruth eventually married Boaz and became part of the genealogical chain from Adam to Jesus Christ.

Summary

The experience of Rahab and the spies contains interesting lessons for us:

1. Let us like Joshua use wisdom in undertaking the work of the Lord and try to do everything carefully even though we know the results are from the Lord.

2. “Without faith it is impossible to please God.” Rahab says, “the LORD your God, he is God in heaven above, and in earth beneath.” (Josh. 2:11) She was determined to serve that God, not something less. She survived because of her faith. We know so much more than she did about this God. Let us never lose our faith in Him.
3. Lying is wrong. Period. It is sad to see brethren lie. Learn to say, “I’d rather not answer that question,” or “I don’t know.” Speak the truth, or don’t speak at all. The “ends” never justify the means. Satan is the father of lies (John 8:44). The God whom we serve is the father of truth.
4. God is able to reach outside of his “chosen” people to find one here one there to bless. Many of us are in the truth thanks to the faith of other family members. But how wonderful to see that the privilege of being a part of the bride of Christ also goes to those with no family connection with the truth movement.

“He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked.”—1 John 2:6. He is to walk as our Lord walked, in his general deportment and relationship to everything that is good and correspondingly to avoid everything that is evil. He is to walk as nearly as possible in the footsteps of Jesus. This, however, does not mean that he either should or could, in an imperfect body, walk up to all the perfection of his Lord, who even in his flesh was perfect. It means just what it says, that we should walk as he walked—in the same way, in the same direction, toward the same mark and standard that He recognized and established.—Manna, November 16

Col. 3:9,10 [Living Bible] Don’t tell lies to each other; it was your old life with all its wickedness that did that sort of thing: now it is dead and gone. You are living a brand new kind of life that is continually learning more and more of what is right and trying constantly to be more and more like Christ who created this new life within you.

1 Peter 3:8–11 [Living Bible] Be like one big happy family, full of sympathy toward each other, loving one another with tender hearts and humble minds. Don’t repay evil for evil. Don’t snap back at those who say unkind things about you. Instead, pray for God’s help for them, for we are to be kind to others, and God will bless us for it. If you want a happy, good life, keep control of your tongue, and **guard your lips from telling lies.** [vs. 14] God will reward you.

Closing Hymn: #255 — “Salvation”

[First given at Paterson, November 1997]

LYING IS LIKE RECKLESS DRIVING 271.5

Sometimes lying makes our lives easier. If you want the day off, just call in sick. If your boss asks if you've finished a report, say you left it at home. And if an irate customer calls, just make up a good cover-up story. Sure, technically these are lies but since no one is hurt, what's the big deal?

We tell ourselves these sorts of lies are harmless. But are they really? Telling lies is like drunk driving. If we're lucky, we won't get caught and no one will get hurt. Still, drunk driving is wrong because it's irresponsible to recklessly endanger human life. Most lies are wrong because they recklessly endanger human relationships. What's more, lies are habit forming -- the more lies we tell the easier it becomes, so we tell more lies.

Self-serving lies that help us get out of a jam or look better are like land mines. Many of them may lay dormant, but sooner or later some of them will explode, damaging both credibility and reputation. The ethical duty to be worthy of trust does not bend to our needs, convenience or desire to avoid unpleasant consequences. Besides being dishonest, lying is disrespectful because it deprives the victim of true information needed to make sensible decisions.

Lies damage personal and business relationships because they generate suspicion and distrust. Once lied to most people think, "What else will he lie to me about?" This is not a healthy basis for any relationship.

This is Michael Josephson reminding you that character counts.