

God Protects

Focal Verses • Joshua 2:3–9, 15–16, 22–24

Aim for Change

By the end of the lesson, we will AFFIRM that God protects us and that we can trust in Him, APPRECIATE God’s protection, and EXPRESS praises to God for His protection and faithfulness.

In Focus

Andre turned to his doctor as he was preparing to leave the examination room and said, “Dr. Harris, I am afraid to die. Tell me what lies on the other side.”

Very quietly, Dr. Harris said, “I don’t know.”

“You don’t know? You, a Christian man, do not know what is on the other side?”

Dr. Harris was holding the handle of the door. On the other side came a sound of scratching and whining, and as the doctor opened the door, a dog sprang into the room and leaped on him with an eager show of gladness. Turning to his friend Andre, Dr. Harris said, “Did you notice my dog? He’s never been in this room before. He didn’t know what was inside. He knew nothing except that his master was here, and when the door opened, he sprang in without fear. I know little of what is on the other side of death, but I do know one thing—I know my God is there, and that is enough.”

When we face the unknown, it is an opportunity to trust God in new ways. When have you had to trust God to keep you in an uncertain situation?

Keep in Mind

“And they said unto Joshua, Truly the LORD hath delivered into our hands all the land; for even all the inhabitants of the country do faint because of us” (Joshua 2:24, KJV).

Say It Correctly

Bashan – ba-sh n

Eleazar – ehl-ih-EE-zar

Shittim – SHIH-tim

KJV

Joshua 2:3–9, 15–16, 22–24

2:3 And the king of Jericho sent unto Rahab, saying, Bring forth the men that are come to thee, which are entered into thine house: for they be come to search out all the country.

4 And the woman took the two men, and hid them, and said thus, There came men unto me, but I wist not whence they were:

5 And it came to pass about the time of shutting of the gate, when it was dark, that the men went out: whither the men went I wot not: pursue after them quickly; for ye shall overtake them.

6 But she had brought them up to the roof of the house, and hid them with the stalks of flax, which she had laid in order upon the roof.

7 And the men pursued after them the way to Jordan unto the fords: and as soon as they which pursued after them were gone out, they shut the gate.

8 And before they were laid down, she came up unto them upon the roof;

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9 And she said unto the men, I know that the LORD hath given you the land, and that your terror is fallen upon us, and that all the inhabitants of the land faint because of you.

2:15 Then she let them down by a cord through the window: for her house was upon the town wall, and she dwelt upon the wall.

16 And she said unto them, Get you to the mountain, lest the pursuers meet you; and hide yourselves there three days, until the pursuers be returned: and afterward may ye go your way.

2:22 And they went, and came unto the mountain, and abode there three days, until the pursuers were returned: and the pursuers sought them throughout all the way, but found them not.

23 So the two men returned, and descended from the mountain, and passed over, and came to Joshua the son of Nun, and told him all things that befell them:

24 And they said unto Joshua, Truly the LORD hath delivered into our hands all the land; for even all the inhabitants of the country do faint because of us.

NLT

Joshua 2:3–9, 15–16, 22–24

2:3 So the king of Jericho sent orders to Rahab: “Bring out the men who have come into your house, for they have come here to spy out the whole land.”

4 Rahab had hidden the two men, but she replied, “Yes, the men were here earlier, but I didn’t know where they were from.

5 They left the town at dusk, as the gates were about to close. I don’t know where they went. If you hurry, you can probably catch up with them.”

6 (Actually, she had taken them up to the roof and hidden them beneath bundles of flax she had laid out.)

7 So the king’s men went looking for the spies along the road leading to the shallow crossings of the Jordan River. And as soon as the king’s men had left, the gate of Jericho was shut.

8 Before the spies went to sleep that night, Rahab went up on the roof to talk with them.

9 “I know the LORD has given you this land,” she told them. “We are all afraid of you. Everyone in the land is living in terror.

2:15 Then, since Rahab’s house was built into the town wall, she let them down by a rope through the window.

16 “Escape to the hill country,” she told them. “Hide there for three days from the men searching for you. Then, when they have returned, you can go on your way.”

2:22 The spies went up into the hill country and stayed there three days. The men who were chasing them searched everywhere along the road, but they finally returned without success.

23 Then the two spies came down from the hill country, crossed the Jordan River, and reported to Joshua all that had happened to them.

24 “The LORD has given us the whole land,” they said, “for all the people in the land are terrified of us.

The People, Places, and Times

The Immorality of Canaanite Religions. The first books of the Bible present the Canaanites’ religion and lifestyle as immoral. They served false gods and used religious prostitution during their worship ceremonies. Rahab could have been one of the religious prostitutes. God warns the Israelites not to interact with the Canaanites. The text reads, “Thou shalt not bow down to their gods, nor serve them, nor do after their works: but thou shalt utterly overthrow them, and quite break down their images....Thou shalt make no covenant with them nor with their gods. They shall not dwell in thy land, lest they make thee sin against me: for if thou serve their gods, it will surely be a snare unto thee” (Exodus 23:24, 32–33,

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KJV). God also revealed to his people that the Canaanites had a period that they would rule in sin, but eventually they would be defeated, and He would give the land to the Israelites. (See Genesis 15:16).

Background

Numbers 22–25 provide important information about the Israelites' situation in the book of Joshua. To summarize, when the king of Moab saw how the Israelites had defeated superior forces of both Sihon, king of the Amorites, and Og, king of Bashan, he realized that these Israelites would never be defeated by military might alone. Instead of assembling his army and attacking the Israelites, Balak, the king of the Moabites, recruited a prophet from Mesopotamia named Balaam to curse Israel. He thought the well-known prophet would be able to bring evil to the Israelites by influencing the will of the gods. However, instead of cursing the Israelites, God caused Balaam to bless them. Despite God's protection, the Israelites willfully gave themselves over to idolatry (Numbers 25:1–3).

God commanded Moses to apprehend the ringleaders of the idolatry and execute them in broad daylight so all the people could witness their punishment. One of the men was so bold that he paraded a Midianite woman before Moses and all the people and took her into his tent to sleep with her. His actions so enraged Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, the high priest, that he took a spear and rushed into the man's tent and drove the spear through him and the woman simultaneously.

The killing of this man and the leaders of the unfaithfulness appeased God's anger, and He ended the plague against the people, but not before 24,000 of them had perished. The 24,000 who died from the plague were the last of the generation who revolted against God and Moses before entering the promised land. (see Numbers 26:64–65).

Two years after these incidents, the Israelites were still camped at the Acacia Grove. Now, they were under the leadership of Joshua, preparing to go in and take their inheritance.

Why might God use a pagan prostitute (like those who ensnared the Israelite men) to accomplish His will?

At-A-Glance

1. God Protects the Spies (Joshua 2:3–9, 15–16)
2. The Spies Encourage Joshua (vv. 22–24)

In Depth

1. God Protects the Spies (Joshua 2:3–9, 15–16)

Before launching an attack, a good leader will always try to gather as much information about their enemy as possible. However, Joshua remembered what had happened when Moses publicly sent the 12 spies on a mission to gather information on the opposition they faced. The men brought back a report that struck fear into the people's hearts and caused them to revolt against Moses and God. This commander was taking no chances. He secretly sent out two spies to check out the land of Jericho and report back to him.

Somehow, the two men traveled across the Jordan River and the eight miles through the land to Jericho without being spotted by any lookouts. They made their way to an inn being run by a prostitute named Rahab and stayed there. God's divine protection is not only in the fact that the two men managed to cross the Jordan River and reach the city undetected but also in their chosen house. The entire city must have been on alert for strangers coming to spy on the city.

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However, God directed the Israelite spies to one person in Jericho whom He had chosen for divine appointment. Scripture describes her as “Rahab, the prostitute.” In pagan Canaan, prostitutes who served in the worship of BaalPeor were highly honored and respected in the community (see Numbers 25:1–2). It was not unusual for strangers and foreigners to go to Rahab’s home so the spies would not appear suspicious there. Others who passed through the house would provide the spies with information on the situation in Jericho.

Somehow, the spies were spotted before they reached Rahab’s house. The news was reported back to the king of Jericho. When the king heard the news of the two spies in the city, he immediately dispatched a contingent to Rahab’s house to capture them. Somehow, Rahab had been alerted to the coming of the king’s men and had hidden the two spies. She met the king’s men at the door and deceived them into thinking the spies had gone. She first acknowledged that the men had arrived earlier but denied knowing who they were. Then she lied to the king’s men: “I don’t know where they went. If you hurry, you can probably catch up with them” (v. 5, NLT).

Many have argued whether Rahab’s lying was justified, but the argument misses the point. Rahab was a pagan. She was acting according to her convictions, not the Law. God knew what Rahab what do. The means did not justify the end, but when she later turned to God (v. 11), her lying, as well as her pagan prostitution, were forgiven.

Is it ever faithful to do the wrong thing for the right reasons? Why or why not?

2. The Spies Encourage Joshua (vv. 22– 24)

After confessing her trust in the one true God, Rahab demanded a promise from the spies: “Now swear to me by the LORD that you will be kind to me and my family since I have helped you. Give me some guarantee that when Jericho is conquered, you will let me live, along with my father and mother, my brothers and sisters, and all their families” (Joshua 2:12–13, NLT). The two spies agreed to her terms, and she later helped them escape.

The walls of Jericho were said to be more than 10 feet high and 12 feet thick; this allowed for houses such as Rahab’s to be built into the wall themselves. Using a rope, the two spies lowered themselves through her window to the ground outside the city. Rahab instructed them to go into the hills and wait three days before returning across the Jordan River. The spies instructed Rahab that when they returned with the Israelite army, she would tie a scarlet cord in the window they had just climbed down from. This cord would serve to identify Rahab’s house to the attacking Israelites and cause them to spare all within (v. 18). The scarlet cord reminds us of the lamb’s blood above the doorpost in Egypt which caused the “death angel” to pass by the houses of the Israelites (Exodus 12:1–23); the cord also looks forward to the redemptive work of Jesus that saves us all (Mark 14:12–16; John 1:29; Hebrews 11:26–28). The spies departed, went to the mountains, and waited as Rahab instructed.

Meanwhile, the king’s men continued to search diligently for them but to no avail. After three days had passed, the spies descended from the mountains, made their way back across the Jordan River, and gave their report to Joshua: “The LORD has given us the whole land,’ they said, ‘for all the people in the land are terrified of us” (Joshua 2:24, NLT). Joshua’s trust in God was rewarded with a glowing report from the spies.

Has God ever protected you in an unexpected way? Share that story.

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Search the Scriptures

1. How did Rahab respond to the king's order to bring out the two men who had entered her house (Joshua 2:4–5)?
2. What promise did Rahab extract from the two men for hiding them and helping them escape (vv. 12–13)?

Discuss the Meaning

1. When the king's men arrived at Rahab's house to apprehend the two spies, Rahab lied and told them they had gone. Was she justified in lying to protect God's people?
2. Can God use other people's wrong actions for the benefit of His people? Why or why not?

Liberating Lesson

Before gaining salvation and knowledge of the Lord, Rahab earned her living as a prostitute. Yet this woman married a man who was an ancestor of King David and is listed in the bloodline of Christ (Matthew 1:5–6). Both James and the writer of Hebrews commend her for her faith (Hebrews 11:31; James 2:25). How does Rahab's story relate to the undesirable people in our community? Is it possible that God has a special mission for some gang member, drug dealer, or prostitute in our communities?

Application for Activation

Rahab demonstrated her faith in God by being very kind to two strangers she had never met. This week, pray and ask God to direct you to a stranger who needs a bit of kindness. Then, show your love and faith in God by extending that kindness.

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do?

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned?

More Light on the Text

Joshua 2:3–9, 15–16, 22–24, KJV

3 And the king of Jericho sent unto Rahab, saying, Bring forth the men that are come to thee, which are entered into thine house: for they be come to search out all the country.

The Hebrew word for “king” is *melek* (MEH-lek). A large, heavily fortified city like Jericho was like a small kingdom with its own king. This was true of other similar cities in Canaan. We are not told the name of the king of Jericho, but we discover that the king quickly finds out about the spies’ “secret” mission (see verse 1). He knew that two spies had been sent to Jericho, and they were at Rahab’s home. So, the spies were failures as covert agents, but God used this mission to encourage His people.

Verse 2 tells us that the spies went to the house of Rahab, the prostitute. Her home was an inn, the place for many to pass through. Though a few commentators have thought that the spies went here for sexual purposes, the inn of the prostitute was a natural place for spies to get information since many people were in and out of there, and much news and gossip were sure to be shared. When we look at Joshua 7:24–25 and see how severely God punished the sin of greed in Achan, we are sure that God would not be blessing the spies’ mission if they had so blatantly disobeyed God and not kept themselves pure.

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Joshua 2:1 seems to imply that the spies were being sent to spy out the entire land, and the king of Jericho thought so, too. However, Joshua's previous direction to the people was to gather food for only three days (1:11), indicating that the spy mission was expected to be brief—only to check out the city of Jericho.

The Hebrew word for “search” is *chaphar* (khaw-**FAR**), and it also implies “to pry into” or “to spy.” Thus, the spies’ mission was known to the enemies at the highest levels. Rahab’s hiding of the spies was treason, so she was, in effect, risking her life and casting herself with the Israelites and their God.

4 And the woman took the two men and hid them, and said thus, There came men unto me, but I wist not whence they were:

“Wist” is an old-fashioned word for “know,” and in Hebrew is *yada* (yaw-**DAH**). This indicates the beginning of Rahab’s deceit. Though Scripture does not comment on the morality of her lies, Scripture has always taught that honesty is always God’s Law. However, Rahab, as a prostitute and a Canaanite, may not have even realized that this lie was wrong. Biblical scholars have long debated over this issue: Is it ever right to lie to protect human life?

5 And it came to pass about the time of shutting of the gate, when it was dark, that the men went out: whither the men went I wot not: pursue after them quickly; for ye shall overtake them.

When the light of the day turned into darkness, ancient cities’ gates (or gates in some cases) were closed for safety’s sake. Rahab’s deceit continued, but her suggestion that the posse hurry after the spies assured her that they were not lingering to make a more thorough search of her home. Although the text does not mention it, surely God was protecting Rahab and the men in this instance. It is surely true in our own lives that we are unaware of the many times God is protecting us.

6 But she had brought them up to the roof of the house and hid them with the stalks of flax, which she had laid in order upon the roof.

“Flax,” which in Hebrew is *pishteh* (pish-**TEH**), is the plant from which linen fabric is made. Egyptians cultivated flax before the Exodus, and the Canaanites were cultivating it when the Israelites arrived. The process involved pulling and drying the stalks and was often a household task. The stalks were deseeded, soaked, and then redried. The fiber was coarse and short and could be woven into cloth. The seeds could also be used to make linseed oil. So, this picture of Rahab hiding the men under the flax as it dried would be a picture of life in that era.

7 And the men pursued after them the way to Jordan unto the fords: and as soon as they which pursued after them were gone out, they shut the gate.

This was the logical direction for the pursuers to go—toward the Jordan River since the Israelites were encamped on the other side of the river. Rahab acted like she did not know where the spies had gone, but she suggested that the king’s men take off after the two men quickly. This was smart because it got them out of her house quickly before the Canaanites had time to look through it more carefully. As soon as the pursuers left, the city gate was shut. This gives us a picture of a very heavily guarded city. Rahab knew it would not be smart to take the spies out through the city gate anyway.

The Hebrew for “fords” is *ma’abar* (mahab-**AWR**) and means “places for crossing a river.” We read in Joshua 3:15 that this was the harvest season, and the Jordan River was overflowing its banks, making it very dangerous to cross the Jordan. At this point, the spies entirely depended upon Rahab for their safety. The gates were shut, and she alone could provide another way out of Jericho.

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8 And before they were laid down, she came up unto them upon the roof;

The word “roof ” in Hebrew is *gag* (gawg). As in the Middle East of the era, roofs were flat. People often slept on the roof on warm evenings, but the spies had not yet slept.

9 And she said unto the men, I know that the LORD hath given you the land, and that your terror is fallen upon us, and that all the inhabitants of the land faint because of you.

This verse provides the military intelligence that the spies need. Although Jericho and many other Canaanite cities were heavily fortified, the people were demoralized concerning their ability to fight against God’s people. It was already prophesied that the hearts of the land’s inhabitants would melt for fear (Exodus 15:15). However, only Rahab allowed this frightening situation to draw her to side with the Lord God. The Hebrew word for “know,” *yada`* (yaw-DAH), is the same as for “wist” in verse 4. Before, she lied and said she did not know. Now, she begins her declaration with “I know” as she describes how she has come to put her trust in the God of the Israelites.

This verse is just the beginning of Rahab’s great statement of faith. She confesses that she knows that Yahweh (LORD) has given the land to the Israelites. God revealed Himself to Moses by this name (Exodus 3:15).

In Joshua 2:10 and 11, Rahab accurately recounted how the Lord parted the Red Sea for the Israelites (Exodus 14) and empowered His people to overcome the Amorites and their kings, Sihon and Og (Numbers 21:21–35). Then Rahab gave this amazing testimony, “The LORD your God, he is God in heaven above, and in earth beneath” (Joshua 2:11). Rahab was a Canaanite, and the Canaanites had many gods. They believed that the most powerful god was Baal and, secondly, his consort Asherah. But when Rahab made her statement of faith, she declared that there is only one God, and Yahweh (LORD) is His name.

15 Then she let them down by a cord through the window: for her house was upon the town wall, and she dwelt upon the wall. 16 And she said unto them, Get you to the mountain, lest the pursuers meet you; and hide yourselves there three days, until the pursuers be returned: and afterward may ye go your way.

Rahab continued showing concern for the spies’ safety as she directed them to hide in the hills west of Jericho. The Hebrew word for “mountain” is *har* (har), meaning mountain or a range of hills. The hills referred to here were the Qarantal Hills, west of Jericho, filled with many caves and caverns where spies could hide. This was the opposite direction from going back toward the Israelites on the other side of the Jordan River. Rahab had already seen that the posse went east toward the Jordan. So she directed the two men to stay in the hills for three days when the posse pursuing them would have given up the search.

2:22 And they went, and came unto the mountain, and abode there three days, until the pursuers were returned: and the pursuers sought them throughout all the way, but found them not.

The two spies were not found by their pursuers, but again, this is surely a case of God’s unseen hand protecting His people. It also points to the spy’s obedience to Rahab’s instructions. God protected His people, but His people had to follow the instructions.

23 So the two men returned, and descended from the mountain, and passed over, and came to Joshua the son of Nun, and told him all things that befell them:

As mentioned earlier, the Jordan River was in flood stage, and crossing it was hazardous. The two spies were probably very strong swimmers, but we are sure God was caring for them all the way. We can

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imagine the spies sitting down with Joshua and telling him the long story of hearing Rahab's testimony, hiding under the flax, and camping in the mountains.

24 And they said unto Joshua, Truly the LORD hath delivered into our hands all the land; for even all the inhabitants of the country do faint because of us.

The report of the spies in this verse is almost an exact quotation of Rahab's witness to the spies in verse 9. The book of Joshua presents the Israelite hero—Joshua—but in this chapter, we see a Canaanite heroine. She encouraged the chosen people who would conquer the Promised Land and reminded us of God's promise to Abraham that in his descendants, all families of the earth would be blessed (Genesis 12:3).

Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY

Leviticus 14–15

Psalm 19:1–6

TUESDAY

Leviticus 16–18

Psalm 19:7–14

WEDNESDAY

Leviticus 19–21

Psalm 20:1–5

THURSDAY

Leviticus 22–23

Psalm 20:6–9

FRIDAY

Leviticus 24–25

Psalm 21:1–7

SATURDAY

Leviticus 26–27

Psalm 21:8–13

SUNDAY

Numbers 1–4

Psalm 22:1–5