

# The Harlot Friend & The Scarlet Thread

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[ 0 : 00 ] Take your Bibles and open them to Joshua.

Book of Joshua. We're going to be in chapter 2 tonight.! Book of Joshua. And what I want to do first is read the entire chapter.

And I'm going to make a few comments along the way. And then spend the rest of our time, or the time that I'm allotted for preaching, to focus on two key characters in this chapter.

The two main characters. One of them is Rahab, of course. And the other one, well, let's find out. Let me go ahead and read, starting with chapter 2, verses 1.

Really, through the entire chapter. Now, Joshua, the son of Noon, sent out two men from Acacia Grove.

[ 1 : 17 ] Some of you have a different word there, Shittim. And that appears in most translations. But they sent them from these men to spy secretly.

And we'll see here pretty soon that didn't work out so well. Saying, Go view the land, especially Jericho. So they went.

Came to the house of a harlot named Rahab and lodged there. Verse 2, And it was told the king of Jericho. So I guess the cat's out of the bag.

Somehow the king heard all about it. Saying, Behold, men have come here tonight from the children of Israel to search out the country. So the king of Jericho sent to Rahab.

So he not only knew they were there in the city, but he knew exactly where they were. Interesting. Sent to Rahab, saying, Bring out the men who have come to you, who have entered your house, for they have come to search out all the country.

[ 2 : 20 ] Then the woman took the two men and hid them. So she said, Yes, the men came to me, but I did not know where they were from.

And it happened as the gate was being shut, when it was dark, that the men went out. Where the men went out, I do not know. Pursue them quickly, for you may overtake them. Stop right here. Which was, of course, a bold-faced lie. Now what do you do with that? I'll give you three views on this.

And I decided I would do this because somebody asked me about that not too long ago. You know, what about this? Rahab lied, and yet she was honored, you know, and so forth.

Well, there are three views. Some of these are kind of technical, but not really. The first view is under this name, conflicting absolutes. So if you take notes, this is view number one.

[ 3 : 25 ] Conflicting absolutes. How about if we throw that term away and say, Choosing the lesser of two evils. Understand that better, don't we? All right, so she could lie, thus save the lives of the spies.

Or she could tell the truth to the king and thus forfeit the lives of the spies. And maybe even, you know, of course, it's difficult to say this because God is great and sovereign.

But maybe even thwart Israel's plans to conquer the city. All right, so what's she to do? Now, those who hold this position argue that in a fallen world, so they would apply this to us as well, in a fallen world, sometimes two or more absolute principles of moral behavior conflict with one another.

And so that there is no recourse in that situation but to commit a lesser sin. All right?

In this case, lie. And thus save the lives of the spies. Okay? And then repent later. That's basically the idea here.

[ 4 : 42 ] I know this is a lie, but if I don't lie, such and such is going to happen. These are two absolutes. If I lie, it's a sin. If I don't lie, it's a sin. And so what am I to do? Well, I'll just choose the lesser of the two evils and then repent later.

That's basically the view. You like that one? Second view is called graded absoluteism. Or, and you'll like this one, hierarchicalism.

I'm giving you time to write that down, your notes. In this view, there is an order or hierarchy of absolutes.

That sounds similar to the first one. And so, in essence, it's some have, some absolutes have priority over others. I mean, just by their very nature.

So it differs from the first one. I mean, we have two that seem equal. So we're just kind of weighing which one would be the lesser of two. But in this sense, there are some that are clearly of more value.

[ 5 : 49 ] The absolute is of a higher level. And you've got to figure that out. And so when there's a conflict, making it impossible to obey both commands, then we should act according to the greater good.

And therefore, that makes us exempt from the lesser absolutes. So in effect, Rahab did not sin. She lied and there was no sin in it.

Third, I know this is just so important to you. You know, and you're going to go away here tonight thinking, I've really learned something here tonight. Well, I hope you learn more than just this.

But somebody asked the question, so I'm answering it. The third one is non-conflicting absolutes. So you have conflicting absolutes, graded absolutism, and then non-conflicting absolutism.

And in this view, there is no conflicting absolutes. There aren't any. And so, in situations where there seems to be a conflict between two things, there will always be some third way.

[ 6 : 58 ] And you've got to look for it. Because with God, the ends do not justify the means. Romans 3.8, Paul rejected this notion.

Remember this one? Let us do evil that good may come. He rejects that. Right? 1 Corinthians 10.13 is another passage that would support this.

No temptation has overtaken you except such is common to man. But God is faithful who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape that you may be able to bear it.

All right, therefore, Rahab should not have lied. She should have trusted God to provide her a way to protect the spies that did not necessitate sinning.

Scripture nowhere, by the way, nowhere commends Rahab for lying. And so, the premise is flawed from the very beginning. We think there's no way to reconcile this, that she sinned.

[ 8 : 12 ] She lied and sinned. And how could that be when she's been so commended by Scripture? Well, nowhere does Scripture commend her for lying. So, she did sin. She was a new believer.

Brand new believer, as we're going to discuss here in a moment. And so, you know, she sinned. And even believers who've been believers a long time still sin.

So, the issue is not an issue. I've got to accept the third possibility. That at no time would God require you to lie or would put you in a position where there's no choice but to sin that we must always seek a third possibility or that way of escape.

And I've dealt with this and struggled with this in my first visit to China because we were there, you know, couldn't tell anybody who we were.

And, you know, and so when we're asked, we have to answer truthfully but vaguely. You know, what do you do, Don?

[ 9 : 32 ] In America, I'm a teacher. And I am. Okay. There was one situation where someone asked one of the other fellows on our team, you sound like a preacher, he said.

Are you a preacher? And he said, no, I'm not. I would have had to say, yes, I am. You know, so it's a difficult issue.

I don't think it's any big deal, but I just thought I would like to cover that about Rahab's lie just in case you're wondering. Let's go on with the reading of the text. But she had brought them up to the roof.

This is verse 6.

So the men answered her,

[ 11 : 50 ] And she said, And she said, If none of you tell this business of ours, and it shall be when the Lord has taken us, given us the land that we will deal kindly and truly with you.

Then she let them down by a rope through the window, for her house was on the city wall. She dwelt on the wall. And she said, or really literally had said to them, Get to the mountain, lest the

pursuers meet you.

Hide there three days until the pursuers have returned. Afterward you may go on your way. So the men said to her, We will be blameless of this oath of yours which you have made us swear, unless when we come into the land you bind this line of scarlet cord in the window through which you let us down.

And unless you bring your father, your mother, your brothers, and all your father's household to your own home, so it shall be that whoever goes outside the doors of your house into the street, his blood shall be on his own head.

And we will be guiltless. And whoever is with you in the house, his blood shall be on our head if a hand is laid on him. And if you tell this business of ours, then we will be free from your oath which you made us swear.

[13:09] Then she said, According to your words, so be it. And she sent them away, and they departed. And she bound the scarlet cord in the window. They departed and went to the mountain and stayed there three days until the pursuers returned.

The pursuers sought them all along the way but did not find them. So the two men returned, descended from the mountain, and crossed over. And they came to Joshua, the son of Nun, and told him all that had befallen them.

And they said to Joshua, Truly the Lord has delivered all the land into our hands, for indeed all the inhabitants of the country are faint-hearted because of us. All right, that's chapter 2.

Now, there's a lot here in this chapter that we could all pick apart, some historical things, some nitpicky things.

But really what I want to do tonight, and I want to do this rather quickly, is to focus on these two key characters. And the first one, of course, is Rahab.

[14:12] And so I'm going to divide my message here tonight into two parts. Number one, the harlot friend. The harlot friend of the spies.

The harlot friend. Historically speaking, I mean, you can't deny this as you read the chapter, and you've heard it read, that Rahab is the main character in this chapter. Now, we have the spies, but they're not named.

We have a suspicion about one of them, what his name is, because who Rahab married eventually. But we don't know their names. So the key character, the one that's named, the one who's front and center, the one that we remember the most from this chapter is Rahab.

And what do we know about this woman? Well, the Bible says that she is a harlot. And a harlot means a harlot. She was a prostitute.

Now, she was probably very wealthy. And very likely, because they stayed at her house, it probably was an inn, a tavern of some kind.

[15:16] Now, I know that there have been other interpretations about, you know, Rahab, other interpretations as to her morality, that maybe harlot means something else.

And I've heard a pretty good argument that in those days, you know, innkeepers, sometimes if they're women, were called harlots, even if they were not immoral.

But you just have to leave it with harlot, because there's just no other description but that in Scripture. In fact, it's not just here in Joshua, but we see the term used also in the New Testament. And so there's nothing in Scripture to support any other interpretation that this woman was a harlot. And I think that it clearly highlights God's grace that He could use, not only use for His purposes, but also redeem out of His grace a woman who is immoral, who has been a prostitute.

All right, so we know that about her, don't we? We don't really have to talk much about that. She was a harlot, a prostitute. The second thing we know is that Rahab was the first Canaanite convert to Yahweh God.

[16:37] Israel has not even crossed over the Jordan yet. Just the spies have crossed over, spy out the land, particularly Jericho. And even before God's people get to the land, He has shown His grace.

He has saved a Canaanite woman. And this woman, Rahab, a harlot, immoral woman, prostitute, was the first convert, first one to believe on the Lord.

Now, how do we know that? Well, we know that a couple of places right here in the passage that are really very clear. And as we look at the evidence, we can kind of see a pattern that's very typical, a pattern that fits what happened to us as well and what happens to all who eventually

come to Christ, who become believers.

In the first place, Rahab heard the truth. She heard the truth of God. They heard the truth about what God had done. And that's how it begins.

Verse 10, She said to the spies, For we have heard how the Lord dried up the water of the Red Sea for you when you came out of Egypt. That's from Exodus 14. And what you did to the two kings of the Amorites who were on the other side of the Jordan, Sihon and Og, whom you utterly destroyed.

[18:01] That's found in Numbers 21. So she had heard about what God had done. That's where it begins. This is the first observable step, I think, toward, if not observable, first conscious step that a person takes in conversion.

Hearing. Hearing the truth. The Bible says in Romans 10, 17, What? By... So then faith comes by hearing, literally the thing heard.

Faith comes by the thing heard, and hearing by the Word of God. That thing heard is the Word of God. But now, hearing the truth is not enough, is it?

A lot of people have heard the truth. In fact, Rahab said, We have heard. We have heard. That is, all Jericho.

And the implication is, all Canaan has heard what God has done. And yet, they all did not turn in faith.

[19:08] They all did not believe in Yahweh God, did they? Certainly not. So notice the second step. Rahab believed what she heard. She heard it, and she believed it.

She believed it, that is, to be true. And that's the way it works. In verse 11, As soon as we heard these things, she said, Our hearts melted, neither did there remain any more courage in any because of you.

For the Lord, your God, He is God, in heaven above and on earth beneath. What a confession from Rahab.

You see, it's one thing to hear the gospel. It's quite another thing to believe it to be true. Right? I mean, there are countless number of people who know that the word, what the word of God says, but only a small percentage of those believe it to be true.

And so is that salvation? Believing that the word is true. Is that salvation? No. It's not. Not salvation. Not yet. And notice again, Rahab said in verse 11, We heard, Our hearts did melt.

[20:25] Courage left us. Yet they did not turn, everyone did not turn, to Yahweh God. Now, there's a great host of people living today who believe in the historical Jesus.

You know that, don't you? And they don't even doubt that. Have known that all their lives. They believe in Jesus in that sense. Great number. And I think that number is dwindling in our country because we're becoming more and more pagan, more and more secular.

In fact, it's astounding. I think it would astound us all if we really knew how many people have no idea about Jesus, have not a clue, no reference, other than they've just heard about some man, you know, hanging on a cross or something.

But, a lot of people believe in the historical Jesus. And the same, really the same as they believe in the historical Napoleon. You know. And so, they have heard about Napoleon through history books, heard about him, read about him.

They believe what they heard to be true. But that's not the same. They believe in Napoleon, but that's not the same as believing in Christ into salvation. And so, that's what a lot of people have done, but they're not saved.

[21:42] And so, there's a third step here. Rahab heard the truth. Rahab believed what she heard. And then third, Rahab acted upon what she heard and believed. She acted upon it.

She responded with faith. She trusted her life into the hands of God, the God she had heard about, and the God that she now believed in.

And that's what you have in verses 12 through 14. Look at it again. Verse 12, Now therefore, I beg you, swear to me by the Lord, since I have shown you kindness, that you also show kindness to my father's house, and give me a true token.

Spare my father, my mother, my brothers, my sisters, and all that they have, and deliver our lives from death. So the men answered, our lives for yours, and so forth. So she acted upon it and hid the spies there in her home.

Now, you might be thinking there might be somebody who would object and say, well, you know, that doesn't necessarily mean that she was saved. How do we really know that she came to

genuine faith in the one true God?

[ 22 : 52 ] And my answer to that is, we know Rahab became a believer because God has already told us. He told us in the New Testament, in Hebrews 11, 31.

I mean, that great list of men and women of faith, that famous chapter in Hebrews 11, and what does it say in verse 31? By faith, the harlot Rahab did not perish with those who did not believe, implying she did believe, when she had received the spies with peace.

And so it's very clear. We can even look at James chapter 2 in verse 25, where the Bible says, likewise, was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out another way?

For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also. She, James said, was justified by works.

Justified not in the technical, salvific sense. She, she, she was really in the sense that she was proved righteous by her works because faith without works is a dead faith.

[ 24 : 05 ] And so these are two testimonies from the New Testament that Rahab was indeed a bona fide believer and she had come to faith. So that's what we know about her.

So we know that she was a harlot and that highlights, I think, the grace of God. We know that she became a believer in Yahweh God. And third, Rahab appears in the genealogy of Jesus.

Now we don't get this from Joshua, but we need to connect her to the genealogy of Jesus because that's key in who she was and the significance of her life.

I mean, you cannot read five verses into the New Testament before you come face to face with her name. Rahab, it's right there. She's David's great-grandmother, King David's.

And so that leads me to the second main point of my teaching tonight from this chapter and that is, first of all, we have the harlot friend, that's Rahab, and now we have the scarlet thread, and that's Christ.

[ 25 : 07 ] He's the main character. Historically speaking, Rahab is the main character in the text, but spiritually speaking, in redemptive history, Jesus is the main character of the text.

Verse 18, the men said to her, we will be blameless of this oath of yours which you have made us swear unless when we come into the land you bind this line of scarlet cord in the window through which you let us down, and unless you bring your father, your mother, your brothers, and all your fathers' household to your own home.

So it's the scarlet thread, that famous scarlet thread. And I really do believe that it points to this reality that in every book of the Bible you're going to find Jesus.

Every book of the Bible. And Jesus, in this sense specifically, his blood atonement is symbolized in the chapter by this red cord or red, blood red thread.

And so just as, and we can link that with the event there in Egypt when God delivered his people just as the red blood of lambs caused the destroyer to pass over the Israelites and not kill the firstborn of their home but kill the firstborn of Pharaoh's house and the Egyptians' households.

[ 26 : 32 ] And that was his way to, final way to deliver them from Egypt. So just as the red blood of lamb was able to save them, the judgment of God upon Jericho would pass over Rahab and her family because of that scarlet thread, that blood red thread.

The Bible says, and it's consistent with Scripture, without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness, no forgiveness, the scarlet thread.

So the main character of Joshua, chapter 2, is Rahab, historically. She's the character there, the immediate person that we have to do with.

And yet the spiritual, the redemptive, in a redemptive sense, the main character of the book of Joshua, really the entire book of Joshua, is the Lord Jesus Christ himself.

Thank you. Thank you.

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