



A SURPRISING CONVERSION

Joshua 2

Faith is sometimes found in unexpected places. Rahab was living a wicked life among wicked people, but the grace of God reached her in a most amazing way. Her faith in Israel's God would preserve her from the judgment of God upon her city.

The book of Joshua is a book of battles, as the children of Israel enter the promised land of Canaan. And it's not going to be easy. The Canaanite people are by this time defiant nations. God had given them plenty of time to repent of their idolatry and immorality and follow Him as creator God. In fact, God had given them forty years to repent after they learned that Israel had miraculously crossed the Red Sea and were heading their way.

But the Canaanites are determined to fight God's chosen people to the bitter end. And Israel is about to serve as God's instrument of judgment. As we come to Joshua chapter 2, Israel is preparing for battle; and this is going to be a big one—they are going to march against the fortress city of Jericho.

We are told in the New Testament that the history of Israel was recorded to teach us how to live by faith (1 Corinthians 10:11; Hebrews 12:1). So, as we work through this chapter, let me give you some timeless principles for New Testament Christians today.

First, *we need to prepare for battle even though God has promised us the ultimate victory.* God had already told Joshua in chapter 1, "The LORD your God . . . will give you this land" (verse 13).



Jericho

Victory was already guaranteed. So, Joshua could relax, right? No, he prepares for the battle. Here in chapter 2, we read that Joshua "sent two men secretly . . . as spies, saying, 'Go, view the land, especially Jericho'" (verse 1). You see, Jericho is the front door into the land of Canaan; so these men are going to go check it out.

Joshua is an illustration of New Testament soldiers. We are to put on the armor of God. We're in a spiritual battle against ideologies and false religions; we don't battle with guns and bombs but with truth, using "the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God" (Ephesians 6:17). So, let's be prepared, even



though God has promised us the ultimate victory through Christ.

Second, *we need to remember that God includes the most unlikely people in His plans.* Verse 1 goes on to tell us that the two spies entered the city of Jericho and eventually camped out that night in “the house of a prostitute whose name was Rahab.” Why would they hide out in a brothel? For one thing, that would be the last place anybody would ask their names.

The Hebrew word for prostitute is *zonah*, which can be translated either “prostitute” or “innkeeper.”¹ Some have tried to soften the edges of this account by suggesting that Rahab was simply an innkeeper. But the New Testament passages that describe Rahab (Hebrews 11; James 2) use the Greek word *pornē*, which means “fornicator.” Let me tell you, Rahab is not running a motel.

We are told here that these spies had been detected. The king has his own spies, and they had watched these Israelites make their way to Rahab’s brothel. So, when it grows dark, the king sends soldiers to capture them, but Rahab has already hidden them.

When the king’s men knock on her door, Rahab says in verse 4:

“The men came to me, but I did not know where they were from. And when the gate was about to be closed at dark, the men went out. I do not know where the men went.”

Now Rahab just told one lie after another, didn’t she? And this brings up another timeless principle: *We need to carefully distinguish what the Bible reports from what the Bible recommends.*

Many people have been confused that God would use Rahab when she lied. But you will notice the Bible does not commend her for lying. By the way, the Bible doesn’t recommend that you spend the night in a brothel either. It simply records what happened, without any comment.

Now it’s possible God would have done something miraculous to make these men invisible had Rahab told the truth. God didn’t depend on her lying; He simply records it.

After the soldiers leave, Rahab goes upstairs to where she has hidden the spies, and I want you to notice her surprising testimony to these two men:

“I know that the LORD has given you the land, and that the fear of you has fallen upon us, and that all the inhabitants of the land melt away before you. For we have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red Sea before you when you came out of Egypt . . . our hearts melted, and there was no spirit left in any man because of you.”

(verses 9-11)

Let me add a fourth principle here: *We often underestimate what God is doing in the hearts of unbelievers.* Who would have imagined that the Canaanites had been terrified of Israel for the past forty years? All that time the Israelites were convinced they were grasshoppers compared to these Canaanite warriors, while the Canaanites were shaking in their boots.

And look at what had happened to Rahab. She says in verse 11, “For the LORD your God, he is God in the heavens above and on the earth beneath.” In other words, “I believe your God is the true and living God.” Wow, they didn’t expect that!

With that testimony of her faith, the spies promise to protect her and her family when Jericho is conquered. They tell her to tie a scarlet cord in the window to identify her house when the Israelites enter the city.



The Hebrew word for “cord” here in verse 18 is *tiqvah*, translated often in the Old Testament with the word *hope*. So, Rahab is literally flying the banner of hope that God will rescue her and forgive her and keep her from judgment and death.

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Let me give one final principle here: *Past sin does not erase the potential of future blessing.* Two of the three times Rahab is mentioned in the New Testament, she is referred to as “Rahab the harlot.” God evidently wants to remind us of her sinful past so that He can highlight the beauty of His grace.

I preached in a rally in Colombia, and after the service a woman came to the platform. I was told later she was a well-known prostitute in that city, on the payroll of a drug cartel. Through a translator this woman told me that a friend had invited her to attend that night; and with tears streaming down her cheeks, she told me she had given her life to Jesus Christ. Oh, she had a past, but let me tell you, she now had a future!

Rahab will be rescued and go on to marry an Israelite man name Salmon; they have a baby boy they name Boaz. Boaz grows up and, just like his father,

he marries a former Gentile idolater who chose to follow God; her name is Ruth. Both Rahab and Ruth are included in the family tree of the Messiah, Jesus Christ, recorded in Matthew chapter 1.

What about you? Have you been rescued by the grace of God? “Oh, but Stephen you don’t know my past. You don’t know my sin.” I don’t, but God does, and He sent His son to die for every one of your sins.

Just hang that banner of hope out the window of your heart—hope in Christ alone. And God will forgive you and save you and make you a member of His family tree.

God promises victory, but believers must prepare (Ephesians 6:10-18).

Practically, how do you prepare yourself spiritually each day to serve and sometimes battle along with God? How can couples prepare? Parents with their children? Friends or co-workers with each other?

What heart attitudes or habits in believers lead them to underestimate what God is doing in the hearts of unbelievers? What spiritual disciplines or truths have the potential to reverse those assumptions? What role does Satan play in this spiritual reality of underestimating God?

¹ Dale Ralph Davis, *No Falling Words: Expositions of the Book of Joshua* (Christian Focus, 2012), 29.

