

Joshua 2:2-24, Rahab's Conversations

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Overview

Rahab and the Spies. Two NT passages comment on this history, and show us what we should learn from it:

Heb. 11:31, "By faith the harlot Rahab perished not with them that believed not, when she had received the spies with peace."

- Identifies her visitors as *spies*.
- Emphasizes her *faith*. This is what it takes to receive "spies," the enemy.
- Faith exhibited by *receiving* the spies. Although they were the "enemy," yet she did not harm them, but on the contrary allied herself with them and with their people.

James 2:25, "Likewise also was not Rahab the harlot justified by works, when she had received the messengers, and had sent [them] out another way?"

- Identifies her visitors as *messengers*. This was not the function Joshua gave them, but it certainly is the one they performed toward her. (Josh. 6:17,25 calls them this, *mal'ak*, the same term used for the envoys sent to offer peace to Sihon in Deut. 2:26.)
- Emphasizes her *works*. This is the true response to a message.
- Works consist of receiving and then *sending* them out another way. Note that works is supplemental to, and builds upon, faith. First comes faith, manifest in receiving. Then comes works, manifest in sending.

Joshua 2:2-21 has two sections, each occupied with conversations between Rahab and a specific party. At the center of each is one of the two actions mentioned in the NT, Receiving and Sending.¹

	Rahab's conversation with...	Action
2:2-7	King of Jericho	4a, "took them"
2:8-21	Spies	15-16, sent them (cf. 21)

2-7, Rahab and the King of Jericho: Rahab's Faith

2, Opening Events

"It was told." Passive. We don't know who saw them or spilled the beans. Satan's spies are everywhere, seeking to frustrate the work of God's children.

¹ Each section consists of five sections: Opening events; Discourse; Rahab's distinctive action; Discourse; Closing events. The roughly chiasmic arrangement with discourse on either side of a focal act may explain some of the chronological dilemmas, in particular her letting them down over the wall before the latter half of the conversation. But note the perfect verb *hwrtdmu* in 18, which reinforces the chronological order of the text.

3, *The King's Men speak to Rahab*

The king knows

- that strangers are in town;
- that they are Israelites;
- that their motives are not friendly
- that they are lodging with Rahab.

4a, *Rahab's Action*

The word "took" *lqx* is the LXX reflex of *dexomai*, the word used in Heb. 11:31 and (in an intensified form) James 2:25, and this is the only place that word occurs in Joshua 2.² So they probably have this verse in mind. But just what does the phrase mean?

Usual translation: just a helper verb to the main idea, "she took them and hid them." No special content. Problem: the suffix on "hid" is singular, not plural: "She took *them* and hid *it*." If "took" is just a helper verb, then "it" must refer to the spies, but this would be clumsy grammatically, and also not fit the plot. What has happened up to this point that would lead them to reveal themselves to her as Israelites, and lead her to conceal them?

Hebrews and James suggest that the "taking" or "receiving" is stronger than that, something that results from her faith, and something that she may well have wanted to hide from the king's messengers. Then "hid it" refers to the fact of her receiving them. She received the two men, and didn't tell the king about it.

But now: what does it mean to receive them? Can't mean simply that she let them into her house.

- She doesn't hide that. Her first words of response are, "There came men unto me."
- Admitting two strangers into an inn is hardly an act of faith (Hebrews) or a good work to justify one (James).

A good clue is Matt. 10:41, "He that receiveth [*dexomai*] a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward; and he that receiveth a righteous man in the name of a righteous man shall receive a righteous man's reward." Our reception of someone includes our attitude toward them.

- Originally, she received them as lodgers.
- The king wants her to recognize them as spies, and hand them over to him.
- But with a heart prepared by God and already fearing him, she receives them sympathetically, as potential "messengers" (James), and resolves to hide both them and her sympathy for them from the king.

Summary: When she heard the king's demand, she resolved to protect the men as God's messengers, and to conceal from the king the fact of their presence in her house.³

² But here LXX uses *lambanw*, which is the more common reflex of *lqx*. LXX Joshua nowhere uses *dexomai*.

4b-5, Rahab Responds to the King

She makes two true statements, two false ones, and a recommendation.

Two True Statements

"The men came here." True enough.

"I didn't know where they came from." Probably also true.

- They are not likely to have announced to her their nationality. After all, they are spies!
- But now she does know, and her Spirit-prepared heart thrills at the thought of the opportunity this gives her. But she must first dispose of the king's messengers.

Two False Statements

"They left just before the gate was closed for the night, and I don't know where they went."

- Ancient cities had huge gates that were closed at night to keep out bandits and wild beasts.
- A small door through the gate let people pass through one at a time, but each one had to be let out separately, and so would come under scrutiny.
- Someone who wants to avoid being trapped in the city must leave before the gates are shut. So her alibi is entirely credible.

Her Recommendation

"They've only just left. Hurry up and you'll catch them for sure." Calculated to avoid any search of her property and get the threat away from the men, so that she can talk with them.

6-7, Closing Events

Three little snapshots, all happening more or less concurrently.

Rahab hides the spies. No need for perfect tense. She caused them to go up to the roof, and hid them, probably until the sun was well down and they would not be seen leaving the city. Note the time of year:

- She had flax drying on her roof. Flax is cut in March/April (Gezer calendar)
- The Jordan is in full flow (3:15), something that happens in April/May, after the winter rains.
- Thus these events are in full spring, after the equinox. The days are growing longer. They must wait until darkness falls completely before being seen.

The pursuers leave the city: They make the natural assumption that the spies will be on their way back to the huge encampment on the other side of the Jordan, and head for the ford, about 10 km away. Her ruse has been successful in diverting attention from her house.

³ Is *lqx* used in the sense of receiving someone into a company? *qbl* is used this way once, in 1 Chr. 12:18, but in the Qal it is only a late word, and relatively scarce (12 occurrences). *lqx* may be used this way in Ezek 16:61, but there it may be in the sense of a gift. Still, her receipt is stronger than just opening the door to them; she is protecting them.

The gate is shut: She has already noted that it is almost time for the gate to shut. Now it closes behind the pursuers, and we are to realize that the men are now in fact trapped within the city.

Application

Rahab's Lie⁴

We cannot expect her, still an unbeliever, to have a good hold of the niceties of biblical morality. God causes the wrath of men to praise him (Ps 76:10); he does not approve of her sin, even though by it his will is accomplished.

Rahab's Faith

In this part of the story, so far she has only "received" the spies. Not until the next conversation does she "send them out." According to Heb. 11:31, this reception is an index of her faith. What has she done? Not yet made great confession—that is to follow in 9-11. But she has recognized in these men her chance to ally herself with the God of Israel, and has committed herself to them by concealing them and distracting their pursuers.

8-21, Rahab and the Spies: Rahab's Work

The section is broadly chiasmic.

- The point that James 2:25 emphasizes, "sent them out another way," is at the center in 15-16.
- On either side is conversation between the woman and the spies. Each conversation consists of a request on one part and acquiescence on the other.
- In the first case the woman requests and the spies acquiesce; in the second, the spies request and the woman acquiesces. Thus the ordering of the speakers is chiasmic.

8, Opening Events

Now we are zooming in on the activities of v.6. There, she "sent them up" to the roof (Hebrew: Hiphil of *'lh*). Now she joins them, and before concealing them in the stalks of flax that are drying there, she opens her heart's yearning to them.

9-14, First Exchange: Rahab asks asylum.⁵

9-13, Rahab's Request to the Spies ('el)

Her request begins with a confession.

4 Woudstra approvingly quotes Holwerda's notion that Israel had a different standard of "truth" than we do, one of "loyalty toward the neighbor and toward the Lord." Cf. Ex. 1:19 (the midwives); 2 Sam. 16:18,19 (Hushai's lie to Absalom); 2 Sam. 17:19, 20 (the woman's lie to the searchers); 2 Kings 6:19 (Elisha's lie to the Syrians). Then this would not be a "lie" at all. But this approach is susceptible to great abuse.

⁵ Notice how initiating speech designates addressee with *el*, while continuing or responding speech uses *l-* or null! Cf. also the king's words in v.3, initiating with *el*! Is this a general pattern in discourse?

9-11, Confession

Organized very nicely:

1. Three point summary in v.9
2. Each point amplified in 10-11a
3. Then she draws the conclusion in 11b.

Consider the three points in turn.

9a, The Lord has given you the land.—10 details two instances of this.

- Drying up of the Red Sea to open the way before them. Shows that they have the *divine power* to conquer the land.
- Their victory over two renowned kings of the Amorites, Sihon and Og, “whom you utterly destroyed,” lit. “devoted to the ban,” the sacred command to destroy all living things. Shows the *manner* in which they will conquer the land.

9b, Your terror is fallen upon us.—First person, the effect on the inhabitants of Jericho.

Developed in 11a, “As soon as *we* had heard these things, *our* hearts did melt.”

9c, All the inhabitants of the land faint.—Broader assertion, that the response of Jericho is not just local, but one that extends even to those who cannot look out over the plains of Moab and see the huge encampment on the other bank of Jordan. Thus 11b, “neither did there remain any more courage in *any man*.”

Her conclusion.

The particle that begins this sentence is translated here, “For,” as though it gives the reason for the peoples’ terror, but in fact most of them do not recognize the Lord as she does. The particle can also be used in the sense of “Indeed,” and that is probably the sense here: “Indeed, The LORD your God, he [is] God in heaven above, and in earth beneath.” She sees beyond Israel to Israel’s God, and discerns in the political movements of the day, the underlying divine purpose. This is the same conclusion that Israel is to draw from the events of the conquest (Deut. 4:39).

12-13, Request Proper

She has dealt faithfully with them, not betraying them to the king of Jericho. Now she asks that they reciprocate by preserving alive her and her family, and that they will attest to that in two ways. These correspond to two Hebrew words that often come together in describing dealings of people with one another, *xesed* “mercy, lovingkindness” and *emet* “truth.”

1. “Swear unto me by the Lord that you will show kindness [*xesed*],” which they do in v. 14.
2. “Give unto me a true token [*‘owt ‘emet, “token of truth”*],” which they do in v.18 with the scarlet cord. (Ties the two halves of the conversation together.)

xesed “kindness”

Generally, “covenant faithfulness.” Three big ideas:

1. It is active, not just a feeling or sympathy. One does not “feel” *xesed*”; in the most common idiom (about one-fifth of the occurrences), one “does” or “shows” *xesed*.
2. It is kindness, helping others with their areas of need. Leads to LXX translation *eleos* “mercy,” which focuses on our need and is typified by the action of the Good Samaritan toward the victim on the road (Luke 10:37). (Distinguish mercy, which focuses on our need, from grace, which focuses on our unworthiness.) You can't show *xesed* to someone who doesn't need anything (and in fact, though God is often said to show *xesed* toward us, we are never said to show *xesed* toward him).
3. It is reciprocal. This is where the covenant idea comes in. Characterizes relations in a family, or between participants in a covenant. One twist is that though we cannot reciprocate God's *xesed* with *xesed* toward him, we are required to reciprocate it with *xesed* toward one another. This general pattern in the OT is articulated clearly in the NT:
 - 1 John 4:11, “Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another.”
 - The parable of the debtor in Matt. 18:33, “Shouldest not thou also have had compassion on thy fellowservant, even as I had pity on thee?” (where “compassion” and “pity” are both *eleos*).

Rahab has showed *xesed* (“kindness,” 2:12) in protecting the spies: her role is active and take account of their need. Now she calls it to their attention as the grounds for reciprocity, and requests active kindness toward herself and her family.

***emet* “truth”**

The basic sense of the word is “reliability.” She asks not only for an oath of active kindness, but also for a sign of reliability. Don't just promise in the heat of the moment's danger and then forget. Compare Hos. 6:4, “O Ephraim, what shall I do unto thee? O Judah, what shall I do unto thee? for your goodness [*xesed*] [is] as a morning cloud, and as the early dew it goeth away.” Give me some tangible sign that we can both recognize when the time comes as evidence of this promise.

14, The Spies' Agreement (I-)

1. They agree to the requested reciprocity.
2. Condition: she mustn't say a word to anyone.
3. They promise to “deal kindly and truly” (lit. “do *xesed* and *emet*”).

This surely is the oath that she requested, but what about the “sign of truth”? Probably not this, but the scarlet cord, to be discussed later in the chapter.

15-16, Rahab delivers the Spies

This is the critical event to which James 2:25 points, sending them out another way (that is, toward the mountain rather than back toward the camp), thus evading the pursuers. These two verses deal successively with the staging events of 6-7:

- The gate is shut, so they cannot easily leave the city. Thus in 15 she lowers them through a window of the house that looks out through the wall. “Upon the wall” is a bit misleading: her

house was built against the inside of the wall, but the wall would be much taller than her house, so she cannot simply drop them over the edge of the wall.

- The pursuers are abroad, so even if they do leave the city, they are at risk of being discovered. Thus in 16 she directs them not to return directly to the fords of the Jordan, but instead to go in the opposite direction and hide in the mountain to the west of the city for three days.

Photos here.

17-21a, Second Exchange: The Spies set conditions.⁶

17-20, Conditions for the Oath ('e/)

They place three conditions on her.

18a, Mark the house with a scarlet thread

Probably not the cord with which she let them down:

- The word is different. That was a *xebel*, a cord or rope. This is a “thread,” which by itself is easily broken (Judg 16:12), but when tripled is difficult to break (Eccl 4:12), something on the order of light string.
- Scarlet goods were a luxury item, characteristic of favored women (2 Sam. 1:24; Jer 4:30); used extensively in the decoration of the Tabernacle. One would not waste this dye on a utility rope. They may have brought it with them as a means of marking locations for easy identification by the host during the invasion.

The word “line” in the phrase “line of scarlet thread” is usually translated “hope” or “expectation,” 32/34 times, and rendered “line” only here and v.21. I suspect it should be “hope” here also, in the sense of a token of her hope or expectation. In English, “remembrance” can mean either a memory or a tangible souvenir. So they give her a scarlet thread as a tangible pledge of the delivery that they have promised her. Thus this becomes the “sign of truth” that she requested of them.

18b-19, Gather your family into this house

The invading army will identify them by their location in the marked house. “His blood shall be upon his head” is an idiom meaning, “he will bear the responsibility for his death.”

Application: It is impossible to miss the parallel with the first Passover. In both cases, those within the house marked with scarlet are delivered from the general destruction. Both illustrate the need to take refuge beneath the blood of the Lord Jesus if we are to escape God's wrath.

⁶ The timing is confusing. It seems strained to have the spies conducting this negotiation while they are standing on the ground outside the city, yet *howrad:t./"nw.* in v.18 seems to require this (against Woudstra).

20, Don't mention our mission to anyone

They do not yet know just how the attack will proceed. If it is a conventional attack, and if the defenders learn of her privileged position and marshal their greatest forces in her vicinity of the wall, it may become impossible to treat her with special favor.

21a, She acquiesces (null marker)

21b-23a, Closing Events

Each party carries out the instructions given them by the other. Confirms the good faith between them.

- 21b, She faithfully obeys the first condition they have laid upon her, immediately tying the scarlet thread in her window, per v.18. A symbol of her faith, much as baptism is for the believer.
- 22-23a, The spies carry out her instructions per v.16. Shows that they trust her. If she were to betray them, their adherence to her instructions would be disastrous.

23b-24, The Spies' Report

Inclusio with 2:1. Note points of correspondence:

- Joshua sent them secretly; now they report only to him.
- Recall the three potential areas of exploration (people, cities, fruitfulness), per Num 13:18-20, and Joshua's instructions to focus on the city this time, 2:1. In fact, they come back with information they weren't seeking, on the state of mind of the people.

Contrast this report with that of Num 13:31. Each report has two clauses, corresponding between the two reports.

	Israel's Prospects	Description of the enemy
Num 13:31	We be not able to go up against the people	for they [are] stronger than we.
Josh 2:24	Truly the LORD hath delivered into our hands all the land	for even all the inhabitants of the country do faint because of us.

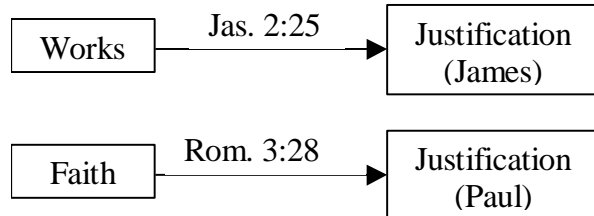
- Notice first the description of the enemy. The ten spies focused on the physical condition of the enemy ("stronger than we"), while the two realize their spiritual weakness.
- Then notice where they look for encouragement. The ten conclude, "We be not able," and that is in fact true. The two do not challenge this, but turn their attention from themselves to the Lord and what he has done.

Application: When facing challenges, looking at the physical obstacles and our own abilities will always lead to discouragement. We should learn to evaluate situations spiritually and to focus on what the Lord has promised to do.

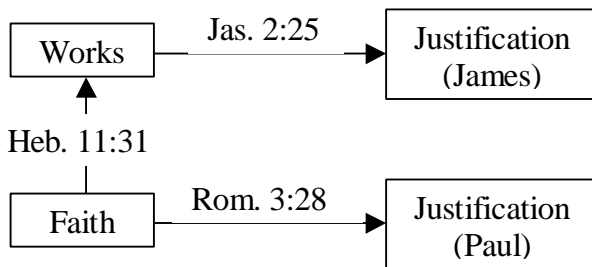
Deeper Lessons

Faith and Works in Rahab

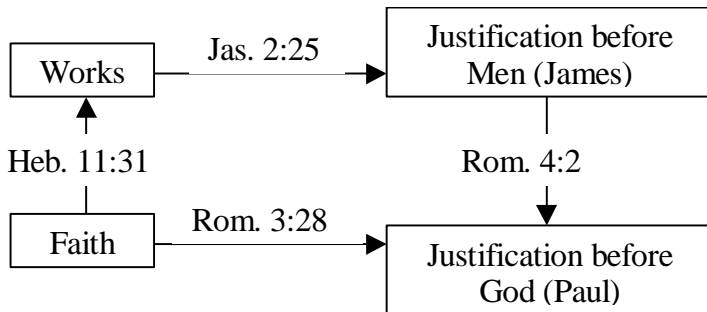
James cites Rahab as evidence for his claim that we are justified by works. The apparent contradiction between this and the teaching of Paul that we are justified by faith led Martin Luther to reject James as non-canonical.



Yet Hebrews cites Rahab specifically for her faith! Clearly, the works of which James speaks issue from faith, and it is these works that justify her. So we must modify our picture:



Perhaps James and Paul are not so far apart after all. Compare Rom. 4:2, which assumes that Abraham *was* justified by works after all, but in the sight of men, not of God.



- God will not recognize our man-made righteousness of works, and so justifies us only by faith.
- Men cannot see our God-given righteousness unless it shows itself through our works.

Application: Notice the inescapable combination of these two in verses like Eph. 2:8-9,10 and Titus 3:4-7,8. Heb. 12:14, "Follow peace with all [men], and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord."

How can the Spies spare Rahab?

Israel's instructions from the Lord (Deut. 20:16-18) were to "save alive nothing that breatheth." Cf. Deut. 7:2, "thou shalt smite them and utterly destroy them; thou shalt make no covenant with them, nor show mercy unto them." What right had these spies to spare Rahab and her family?

This event illustrates in action what God will finally articulate clearly 800 years later, when Israel herself is driven out of the land by the Babylonian invader. Then God makes clear that his promises of judgment and salvation alike are contingent on the faith or rebellion of the people involved. Jeremiah 18 makes this clear at the national level; Ezek 18 makes it clear for the individual.

		Direction of Change	
		Repent: escape Judgment	Rebel: lose Blessing
Scope of Effect	Nation	Jer 18:7-8	Jer 18:9-10
	Individual	Ezek 18:21-23	Ezek 18:24

Though this clear statement is late in Israel's history, there is no reason not to invoke it here, for it describes the character of our God, who "changes not, therefore" his people "are not consumed," Mal. 3:6. His unchanging character is one that will not trifle with sin but that also will never turn away the one who sincerely turns to him in repentance and faith. John 6:37, "him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out."