

The Conversion of a Shady Lady

Joshua 2

Introduction

There are some passages of scripture that need very little interpretation, while some need a lot. Some passages are ones that we study and spend a lot of time observing, interpreting and then, applying the text. Today, the passage before us is Joshua, chapter 2, which basically, interprets and preaches itself! It is, in fact, the type of chapter that we could read and then, try to get out of the way because it makes itself very clear. So today, we are going to turn to Joshua 2, read the chapter, and then, dismiss.

You do not believe me, do you?! No, we are going to make nine points of application from this chapter. However, we do not need to spend a lot of time interpreting these points. Instead, we will observe the text by simply reading it. So follow along as I read, in its entirety, chapter 2 of Joshua.

Then Joshua the son of Nun sent two men as spies secretly from Shittim, saying, "Go, view the land, especially Jericho." So they went and came into the house of a harlot whose name was Rahab, and lodged there.

It was told the king of Jericho, saying, "Behold, men from the sons of Israel have come here tonight to search out the land."

And the king of Jericho sent word 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 land."

But the woman had taken the two men and hidden them, and she said, "Yes, the men came to me, but I did not know where they were from."

"It came about when it was time to shut the gate at dark, that the men went out; I do not know where the men went. Pursue them quickly, for you will overtake them."

But she had brought them up to the roof and hidden them in the stalks of flax which she had laid in order on the roof.

So the men pursued them on the road to the Jordan to the fords; and as soon as those who were pursuing them had gone out, they shut the gate.

Now before they lay down, she came up to them on the roof,

and said to the men, "I know that the Lord has given you the land, and that the terror of you has fallen on us, and that all the inhabitants of the land have melted 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, and what you did to the two kings of the Amorites who were beyond the Jordan, to Sihon and Og, whom you utterly destroyed.

"When we heard it, our hearts melted and no courage remained in any man any longer because of you; for the Lord your God, He is God in heaven above and on earth beneath.

"Now therefore, please swear to me by the Lord, since I have dealt kindly with you, that you also will deal kindly with my father's household, and give me a pledge of truth,

"and spare my father and my mother and my brothers and my sisters, with all who belong to them, and deliver our lives from death."

So the men said to her, "Our life for yours if you do not tell this business of ours; and it shall come about when the Lord gives us the land that we will deal kindly and faithfully with you."

Then she let them down by a rope through the window, for her house was on the city wall, so that she was living on the wall.

She said to them, "Go to the hill country, so the pursuers will not happen upon you, and hide yourselves there for three days until

the pursuers return. Then afterward you may go on your way.”

The men said to her, “We shall be free from this oath to you which you have made us swear,

“unless, when we come into the land, you tie this cord of scarlet thread in the window through which you let us down, and gather to yourself into the house your father and your mother and your brothers and all your father’s household.

“It shall come about that anyone who goes out of the doors of your house into the street, his blood shall be on his own head, and we shall be free; but anyone who is with you in the house, his blood shall be on our head if a hand is laid on him.

“But if you tell this business of ours, then we shall be free from the oath which you have made us swear.”

She said, “According to your words, so be it.” So she sent them away, and they departed; and she tied the scarlet cord in the window.

They departed and came to the hill country, and remained there for three days until the pursuers returned. Now the pursuers had sought them all along the road, but had not found them.

Then the two men returned and came down from the hill country and crossed over and came to Joshua the son of Nun, and they related to him all that had happened to them.

They said to Joshua, “Surely the Lord has given all the land into our hands; moreover, all the inhabitants of the land have melted away before us.”

Principles of Application

Now let us start at the beginning of chapter 2 of Joshua, and look at nine principles of application.

1. Number one, confidence in God does not eliminate the responsibility to prepare for battle.

Go back to Joshua 1:13. Joshua is speaking to the people and says,

Remember the word which Moses the servant of the Lord commanded you, saying,

“The Lord your God gives you rest and will give you this land.”

Think about this – the Israelites were under the special, divine protection of the living God!

God had said to Joshua personally,

*. . . I will not fail you or forsake you. . . .
(Joshua 1:5)*

Imagine having that guarantee! It would be like going into battle, knowing the enemy is shooting, but also knowing they are firing blanks. You would go in with your head held high.

The principle in this is not only that Joshua could become impudent or brash, but that Joshua still needed to prepare. Joshua would live and fight as if victory was dependent upon his expertise and his availability. Even though he knew the victory ultimately, was dependent upon God, Joshua still prepared.

Let us look at the New Testament application of this. We are commanded to put on the armor of God. At the time of our salvation, an invisible hand does not strap it onto us and leave it there forever – we are told to put it on.

If we leave the sword of the Spirit laying in the dust, we cannot expect to be able to step back and see the Spirit of God at work in our lives. No, we have to pick that sword up and swing it – it is an offensive weapon.

Joshua knew victory was his, yet he prepared.

He needed to know some things. Joshua needed to know these things because he was very strategic in the Israelites’ battle to conquer the land. This place was, in effect, the doorway into the lowlands and the highlands. It was the first opposition. This city; this walled opponent was in such a location that it could have been perceived as the doorway into the land of Canaan. It must be conquered first.

Joshua needed complete information, so he sent out spies. They were to find out information such as, “How many gates? What’s the fortress like? What’s the morale of the people? Who are they? Are they ready for us? What are their armaments? What are their weapons of warfare?”

Why did God not pull Joshua to the side and say, “Joshua, save yourself all of this trouble. I’m going to have you just walk around the city and then, blow the trumpets. After that, the walls are going to come

tumbling down. My people are going to sing about this for generations.”

Why did God not tell Joshua that? I think it is because Joshua is an illustration of what we are to be as soldiers. We fight from the position of victory, but the experiences of victory are only for those who prepare and who fight the battle.

This leads to the second principle.

2. Number two, a well fought battle demands an understanding of the enemy.

Paul tells us, in the New Testament, not to be ignorant of five things. He makes a specific point to tell the church, “Don’t miss this!”

One of the five things Paul says not to be ignorant of are the wiles, or the schemes, of the devil. He says to the Ephesian church, “I want you to sit up and take note and make your enemy a study. Know how and when and where he attacks. Know what he most often uses against you. Know who your enemy is.”

What an enemy we have. Paul refers to several things about him. He talks of the schemes of Satan, which implies reasoning. He talks about the wiles, or the “methodia,” the methods of the devil, which implies skill. Paul is saying that this enemy of your soul, that would keep you from conquering the land and experiencing victory, is skillfully, logically, brilliantly devising strategy to keep you and I at sword’s edge in defeat.

There are implications in this enemy’s name. He is called:

- Satan – meaning adversary or opposer and implying that he is the enemy of everything that is holy;
- the devil – referring to his slandering and the fact that he is a false accuser;
- Beelzebub – literally meaning “the lord of the flies,” and implying that he is the mastermind of all corruption and a brilliant individual;
- a murderer – referring to his destructive nature;
- a liar – referring to his deceitfulness;
- the dragon – referring to his malicious hostility;
- the old serpent – referring to his craftiness and cunning;

- the angel of light – meaning he can pose as anything other than a dragon or a serpent or a lion.

The references to the schemes of the devil throughout the Bible, are many – he tempts, he sows tares, he persecutes, he lures, he flatters. Where are the attack points in your life? How well do you know the enemy?

Many believers stand and say, “I have the sword of the Spirit, the breastplate of righteousness, the helmet of salvation, the shoes of peace, and I *will* conquer!”

However, they run right into the door of Jericho and hurt their noses in the process.

What is the problem? A large part of the problem is that we, as believers, do not really know the enemy or much about Jericho. We either assume that God will just give us victory, since we are Christians, or we are really not prepared to fight.

Satan does watch. I remember coming across a story, a couple of years ago, about a family that was vacationing in the San Isabel National Forest in Colorado. They had spent all afternoon vacationing there. They had spread their blanket under a beautiful tree and the scene was just terrific. They had a picnic and laughed and played there. Just before they left, they decided to take a picture. So the family grouped together and the dad set the camera up and turned on the timer. Dad ran and joined the group and they smiled and posed under the shade of that beautiful tree. Then, they got in their car and went home.

When the photographs were developed, they saw something that made their blood run cold. They could make out, through the leaves of the tree, a mountain lion resting on a limb, watching them.

I think in our own lives, ladies and gentlemen, we think we are on the way to heaven and that no one is really watching or caring. When we experience trials or defeats, we are surprised. We do not know the enemy.

Do we really know what the Jericho is in our lives? What is your Jericho? What is the point in your life that always stops you from fully entering the land? Make sure you understand the way the enemy works.

So the spies enter Jericho. Look again at Joshua 2:1b,

. . . So they went and came into the house of a harlot whose name was Rahab, and lodged there.

We know, from later verses, that they slept on the roof. I think we are a little relieved to read that.

These men are unaware that they have already been spotted as spies. The network is there and the king sent his own spies. They must have watched the men swim the Jordan River. They must have watched them enter. They must have followed them directly to Rahab's brothel on the city wall and then, left to report it to the king. They knew exactly where these spies were.

Frankly, I think the fact that the men went to Rahab's was not a question of their moral behavior, but was a stroke of genius. I cannot think of another place in the city where two men who are foreigners could go and remain anonymous. I cannot imagine another place that they could go and not have to answer a lot of questions. So perhaps, that is the reason these two spies strategically designed that they would find their way to a place everyone in town knew, but yet, a place where they could remain anonymous – Rahab's house on the wall.

This leads to the third principle, which because you know the end of the story, I will say at this point.

3. Number three, God has a unique way of working through ordinary and unlikely people.

There have been some commentators, which I have read this week, that have tried to soften the story by suggesting that Rahab was not a harlot. Others have suggested that she was a sacred prostitute involved in the Canaanite rituals of religious prostitution, which were prolific in this day. However, the Hebrew word "qadeshah," which is used for a religious prostitute, is not the word used to describe Rahab. Some have suggested that she was an innkeeper. While there were a lot of people going in and out of her place, I do not think she was an innkeeper. Others have suggested that because there was flax on the roof and she had a scarlet cord, she was a seamstress. I think that may have been her "front".

The Hebrew word used to describe Rahab is "zanah," which means "common prostitute". In the two passages in the New Testament that refer to Rahab, the Greek word "porne" is used. We get our word "fornicator" or "fornication" from this word, or literally, transliterated, "pornography".

However, this shady lady will become, in effect, one of the most sparkling diamonds in the chest of God's grace. What an unlikely candidate for God to save. In an entire city that was rebelling against Him, guess who would believe – Rahab!

Rahab is an illustration of ordinary people who, because of their faith in God, become used in an extraordinary way.

4. Principle number four, I will give and then read Joshua 2:4-5 again. The principle is that as interpreters of the Bible, we must be careful to distinguish between what the Bible reports and what the Bible recommends.

Look at Joshua 2:4-5.

But the woman had taken the two men and hidden them, and she said, "Yes, the men came to me, but I did not know where they were from. It came about when it was time to shut the gate at dark, that the men went out; I do not know where the men went. . . ."

There are about three or four lies in these verses. Rahab even gives details to her lie.

A lot of people have snagged their pants on these lies. They think, "Oh, how could God ever do that?" or "How could Rahab ever be called a person of faith when she bold-faced lied to the spies?"

The problem is that the Bible really ignores the lies. It does not recommend that we do it, but in fact, does not deal with it. The Bible just passes over it; ignores it. I think the principle is that there are many things that God chooses to record that He does not say, "Now I want you to do likewise."

Look at Rahab's statement in Joshua 2:9a again. We get so caught up in her lie that we forget her truth.

and said to the [Israelite] men, "I know that the Lord has given you the land . . ."

This leads me to the next principle of application.

5. Number five, the powerful acts of God move some hearts to faith, while at the same time, move others to greater rebellion.

Look at Joshua 2:3.

And the king of Jericho sent word 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 land."

While Rahab will believe, the king, an Amorite pagan, will dig in and be ready to fight. The same sun

that melts the wax, hardens the clay. They had both heard the stories, although we are not sure how, yet the king continued in his rebellion against God.

Some have suggested, and I believe it may be true, that the reason the cities were walled in the land of Canaan was because the people knew of the Abrahamic Covenant promise. They knew of this from the time of Genesis because they were the descendants of the patriarchs. They knew that God had promised the land to the Israelite nation and they were ready to fight.

So they built their cities with walls – two walls, in effect, supported or spanned by wooden beams. They were ready to dig in, thinking, “We will not give in to this Hebrew God. We would rather fight.”

They heard the news of the Israelite spies and some were moved to faith and others toward greater rebellion.

I think of Julian the Apostate who was preceded on the throne by Constantine. You may remember that Constantine supposedly made the known world Christian – which only means that he forced people to either get baptized or die, so everyone got baptized. When Constantine died, his sons were weak converts. As a result, it was easy for his nephew Julian to wrestle the throne from their grasp.

Julian was an immoral and ungodly man, who, in fact, hated Christianity. He is known historically as Julian the Apostate because he apostatized from what Constantine was supposed to have accomplished.

Julian the Apostate so hated Jesus Christ that he would never say His name. He would always refer to Christ, or Jesus, as “that Galilean”. He would also refer to Christians as “those Galileans,” or, “unlearned Galileans”.

Julian the Apostate only served for two years. He fought against the Persians on one occasion, and it was that battle that would be his last. He was mortally wounded on the battlefield and history records his last words. As he dipped his hand in his own blood, he clenched his fist, raised it toward heaven, and said with great cynicism, “Thou hast finally conquered, O Galilean.”

Some hear the reports of God and it moves them to faith, while others hear and it moves them to greater rebellion. The king in Jericho, was, in effect, raising his fists to God. At the same time, the heart of a prostitute was being melted toward heaven.

This leads to the next principle of application.

6. Principle number six, there is no way to fully discern what the word of God is doing on the inside of a person.

Think of the Canaanites themselves. Look at Joshua 2:9 again.

... the terror of you has fallen on us ...

In other words, the reports of God’s power that they had heard had, forty years before, started their knees shaking and knocking.

You may remember when the twelve Israelite spies came back to Moses and ten of them said, “Oh, they are giants and we are but grasshoppers.” (Numbers 13)

What were the Canaanites saying? They were saying, “Oh, they are giants and we are grasshoppers.”

For forty years, the Canaanites had lived in fear of the Israelites coming. The Israelites did not know this, however – that was the matter of faith.

Rahab had heard. What an unlikely candidate! Look at Joshua 2:10-11 again.

For we have heard how the Lord dried up the water of the Red Sea before you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to the two kings of the Amorites who were beyond the Jordan, to Sihon and Og [a giant], whom you utterly destroyed. When we heard it, our hearts melted and no courage remained in any man any longer because of you; for the Lord your God, He is God in heaven above and on earth beneath.

Now how could Rahab the harlot have heard all of these stories in such detail? Do you think the stories had infiltrated the entire city? Perhaps, but I happen to believe that her brothel was quite a place of tale telling. Perhaps she had heard some traveler who had just come from Egypt say, “Hey, have you heard what the God of the Hebrews did? He sent those ten plagues with such power that He even took the life of the firstborn.”

Another says, “Have you heard about the Red Sea? The breath of their God split the waters and the people walked across on dry ground! Now they’re on the other side of Jordan, ready to come after us.”

How did Rahab hear? We do not know. But this prostitute, who is perhaps, cold, callous, and crusty on the outside, has, on the inside, a heart melting in faith.

There may be some cynical person at your job that you share the word with periodically, while they just spit back at you. My friend, you really do not know what the word of God is doing. Their anger can be nothing more than the expression of fear, knowing that God's word is really the truth.

There may be a teenager in your home who is abandoning God. You may be wondering, "Will they ever listen to the truth? The things I say *never* seem to get through."

Perhaps you have an unsaved husband or wife and you go to church without them. You are wondering, "Is there something that I can say?" Yet, when you speak, it does not seem to work.

My friend, you have no idea what is really happening on the inside of that person. Faith comes by hearing in the lives of some, and hearing by the word of God.

I think it is a tremendous thought that the Israelites had seen the power of God, while Rahab had only heard and yet, she believed.

Now, the spies gave Rahab a promise, as you may remember, and also some conditions.

- The first condition was that Rahab was supposed to tie a scarlet cord in the window.

Notice again that the spies said to Rahab, in Joshua 2:18,

... when we come into the land, you tie this cord of scarlet thread in the window ...

Rahab was supposed to tie the cord when they came into the land, but immediately, when they leave, she ties the scarlet cord to her window. She was not taking any chances – she was going to get that thing out there!

- The second condition was that she was to keep the plan an absolute secret, except from her family and all those who would believe this crazy story (Joshua 2:17-20).

I happen to believe that Rahab's family was not in the practice of believing her stories. Now she is saying, "The Israelites are coming and if you'll come into this brothel, you'll be saved."

It is almost as silly as Noah saying, "If you'll come into this boat, you'll be saved from the rain and the water."

"Where?"

It is amazing the way God works out salvation and faith, but anyone who would come into that shady house at that time, would, ultimately, be saved.

Look again at Joshua 2:21.

She said, "According to your words, so be it." So she sent them away, and they departed; and she tied the scarlet cord in the window.

This verse gives us the next principle of application.

7. Number seven, faith is pledging yourself to God – without having all of the answers.

The spies said, "Rahab, you just tie a scarlet cord in your window and you'll be saved."

How many of you would like more information than that – especially when the walls begin to shake; especially when the Israelites are walking around the city?

Rahab says, "Let's see, is the scarlet cord out there?"

"Yes, it's there, but is that really going to save us?"

An entire city was headed for destruction. On top of the city wall was one lonely house with a red piece of cord waving in the breeze. That cord was an outward sign of the inner work of grace that God was bringing to pass in Rahab's life.

However, I can imagine Rahab thinking, "This can't be enough. There's got to be more."

I also think of the spies who, all of the sudden, did not have the answers either. They return and report, "Hey, that house on top of the wall – that's the one we're going to save."

Then Joshua says, "Oh, by the way, God's plan is for the wall to come tumbling down."

Now we have a problem, unless we believe another miracle took place, which I can easily believe. If I can believe that God caused the wall to tumble, then I can believe that He allowed one section to remain standing. It would be the section that supported the brothel.

Perhaps, for most of us, faith creates problems because we do not have all of the answers. Rahab, however, hung the cord and waited.

8. Number eight, past failure does not forfeit the potential for future success.

There is a different response when the spies come back this time. Look at Joshua 2:23-24.

Then the two men returned and came down from the hill country and crossed over and came to Joshua the son of Nun, and they related to him all that had happened to them. They said to Joshua, “Surely the Lord has given all the land into our hands; moreover, all the inhabitants of the land have melted away before us.”

Have they changed? No. What has changed? The hearts of the spies; the people of Israel. The last time, they went into the land to check out whether they should attack. This time, they are not checking out whether they should attack, but when and how.

The Israelites have every logical reason to fail. They have a forty year old memory of failure in the wilderness. The land is inhabited. The city is walled. The Amorites are fierce, warring people. They are specifically mentioned in Genesis 15:16 as a sinful nation. They are particularly known for their child sacrifice, which would let you in on the fact that they are incredibly cruel people. It is the Israelite against the world.

However, turn to Joshua 6:22-23. When we come to the end of the story, after the walls have fallen, except for the one section, we read,

Joshua said to the two men who had spied out the land, “Go into the harlot’s house and bring the woman and all she has out of there, as you have sworn to her.” So the young men who were spies went in and brought out Rahab and her father and her mother and her brothers and all she had . . .

This lets us know that Rahab’s house remained in tact. All of her family had also believed her! That is a miracle too. I would imagine there was quite a celebration. Skip to Joshua 2:25.

However, Rahab the harlot and her father’s household and all she had, Joshua spared; and she has lived in the midst of Israel to this day, for she hid the messengers whom Joshua sent to spy out Jericho.

I think of past failures in the Israelite’s lives and I think of past failure in the life of Rahab. Perhaps she wondered, while in her home during the four days before the Israelites came and encamped against her city, “Will this God receive me? Me? Will He take me in as a proselyte Jew? My whole life is one

miserable failure – why should I ever think that I could succeed now?”

Last year, my family and I went to the circus. Not that we need more of a circus on some days in our lives, but we decided to go on this particular day! I remember walking past one area with my family where we saw huge elephants. When you get close to elephants, you see that they are *big*! They are tethered outside with just a rope around their ankle. The rope is stretched toward a piece of wood, or a stake, that is driven into the ground. When I saw that, I backed up and walked around the long way. Those elephants could snap that rope without sweating; they could pull that stake out of the ground by just simply moving their leg. They are powerful animals. Why is it that they do not?

I have read, on two occasions since that time, the reason the elephants do not do this. I think it provides a good illustration of the reason that many of us have not gone back to Jericho and started the fight all over again. When the elephants were young and small, the trainers would take them out to train them for this purpose. They would take the rope – the same size rope – and tie it around their little ankle and connect it to a stake that they impaled into the ground. The little elephant would pull and tug; it would just buck and fight and try to get away, but it was too small and did not have enough strength. After a few weeks of trying, the elephant would quit – convinced it could not pull the stake from the ground. Now, as a big elephant, it never tries. In its little mind, it remembers trying and not being strong enough – so it never tries anymore.

Now I am going to continue to walk the long way around the elephants because a mouse could change their minds! However, for those of us who have picked up the armor and walked toward the city and seen the walls with the massive gates – that is the Jericho in our lives, whatever it may be, and it is the point of constant defeat.

Now, having been prepared and going in the power of the Spirit, we approach again. Do we have any right to believe we can succeed? Absolutely. Ultimately, the preparation does not make the walls fall down and knowing the enemy does not make that city collapse – the power of God does.

However, it comes to those who pick up the armor; to those who will approach and say, “I come in the name of the Lord.” It is these people who experience victory.

9. One final principle, number nine, God often reminds us of former lifestyles that have become living trophies of God's grace and power.

In I Corinthians, Paul talks about the list of sinners. He says in I Corinthians 6:11,

Such were some of you . . .

Did they need to be reminded of their past? Evidently, they did. And evidently, there is something to the fact of remembering where God brought us from.

I think of Simon the Zealot. Do you know what the word "zealot" means? It means "Sicarii" or "a member of the band of dagger holders". These zealots were murderers. They had probably all killed, as an initiatory rite, some Roman soldier. So his name was Simon the Killer. How would you like to be tagged with that the rest of your life?

When the Bible mentions Rahab in Joshua 6:17 and 25, James 2:25, and Hebrews 11:31, it is,

. . . Rahab the harlot . . .

Is that fair? Frankly, I do not think Rahab knew her story would be told. I am sure that if in heaven now, she knew we were studying her life, and I doubt she does, she would be mortified. But God has it here for us. He lets us in on that.

He tagged these people so He could let us know that, regardless of the past; regardless of the former lifestyle, God can bring out of it, someone who mirrors His grace in an absolutely marvelous way.

Did Simon the Zealot change? Of course he did. He became one of the martyrs for the cause of Jesus Christ.

Did Rahab change? Yes, she did. In fact, I read Joshua 6, which implies she became a member of the Israelite nation.

When you turn to Matthew 1:5, you find her again – Rahab the harlot. However, this verse lets us in on the beautiful fact that she became part of the Messianic line! A prince, named Salmon, from one of the Israelite tribes would marry her and they would have a son, named Boaz. Boaz would grow up and find a wife in the same kind of unorthodox way that Salmon did – by bucking tradition. He found his wife gleaning in the fields. Her name was Ruth. So this harlot became the grandmother of Jesse, the great grandmother of King David, the maternal ancestor of

Joseph the carpenter, who, along with his unorthodox wife, would raise the Messiah, Jesus Christ.

What a trophy of God's grace Rahab is. She is a lady with a very shady past, who is now a member of the King's family.