



▶ *Amazing Grace* ◀

GOD USED RAHAB, AN IMPERFECT PERSON,
TO ACCOMPLISH HIS PLANS.

JOSHUA 2:4-21

The Bible demonstrates how God often uses flawed, unlikely people to do His will. For example, Abraham and Sarah both laughed in unbelief when God told them they would have a son in their old age. God made David the greatest king of Israel and established an eternal covenant with him even though David came from humble beginnings and committed egregious sins. Paul had been a persecutor of believers before his conversion. Rahab, the Canaanite prostitute, is another unlikely person God used to accomplish His plans.

 **Why does God so often use unlikely, imperfect people to accomplish His purposes?**

UNDERSTAND **THE CONTEXT**

JOSHUA 2:1-24

In Deuteronomy 9:1, Moses told the nation, “Listen, Israel: Today you are about to cross the Jordan to enter and drive out nations greater and stronger than you, with large cities fortified to the heavens.” Jericho was the first of these large, fortified cities the Israelites faced as they entered the promised land. Joshua sent two spies to scout the area so they could bring him a report on what his troops should expect when they went up against it.

Archaeologists believe Jericho is one of the oldest cities in the world. It is located in the well-watered lower Jordan Valley. Its location was important because several routes that led west into the central hill country of Canaan emanated from the city. Therefore, it was a key junction for those traveling east across the Jordan into Moab and beyond.

Ancient Jericho must have been an incredible and alarming site to the spies when they saw it for the first time. It was built to defend the people who took refuge within it. Located on high ground, the city was surrounded by an immense stone wall at its base. Higher up at the crest stood another wall that towered about forty-six feet high. There was no way the Israelites had the means to conquer this massive, fortified city on their own. Archaeologists estimate there were thousands of people within the city when the Israelites approached it.

Rahab and her family were citizens of Jericho. Joshua 2:15 indicates her house was part of the outer fortifications located on the city wall. Archaeologists have discovered that at the north end of ancient Jericho’s ruins there is a small portion of the wall that was left standing and there were houses built against it. This area is only a short distance from the Judean wilderness where the two spies Rahab saved hid for three days before returning to Joshua. Some suggest this is possibly the area where Rahab lived.



Read Joshua 2:4-21. List the reasons Rahab was an unlikely candidate to serve the Lord.

EXPLORE **THE TEXT**

A BOLD ACT (JOSH. 2:4-7)

⁴ But the woman had taken the two men and hidden them. So she said, “Yes, the men did come to me, but I didn’t know where they were from. ⁵ At nightfall, when the city gate was about to close, the men went out, and I don’t know where they were going. Chase after them quickly, and you can catch up with them!” ⁶ But she had taken them up to the roof and hidden them among the stalks of flax that she had arranged on the roof. ⁷ The men pursued them along the road to the fords of the Jordan, and as soon as they left to pursue them, the city gate was shut.

VERSES 4-5

Verses 1-3 indicate Joshua sent two spies to go and scout out the land before them, “especially Jericho.” Accordingly, the spies went as they were directed and ended up at the house of a prostitute named Rahab. Rahab’s house was a logical place for the spies to end up. It was likely an inn, tavern, or combination of the two. There is no indication the spies had immoral intentions in choosing to stay there. With people coming and going at night, such a venue in Jericho—which was a hub for travelers from various regions—should have allowed the spies to blend in without being noticed.

However, it is for the same reasons that the king of Jericho had his own spies there as well. Whether the informant was a spy or not, verses 2-3 indicate someone spotted and identified the Israelite spies and immediately reported their presence and location to Jericho’s king. The king sent men to Rahab demanding she turn in the men who “came to investigate the entire land” (v. 3). The king apparently knew why the spies had come, and Rahab’s refusal to cooperate would have been understood as an act of treason.

Rahab apparently expected the king’s men to come, understood the spies’ mission, and was sympathetic to their cause. Although she confirmed to the king’s men that the spies had been there, she communicated that she knew nothing about them. In fact, she said the men exited the city when it turned dark, she didn’t know where they were going, and the king’s men had better give chase quickly if they were to have any chance of catching up with them. In anticipation of the arrival of the king’s men, Rahab had hidden the spies from the king’s men.

VERSES 6-7

The flat roofs on houses in ancient Canaan enabled people to expose things to the sun—like fruit that needed to ripen and wet grain and laundry that needed drying. The making of linen from flax was a common activity in households. Part of this process required soaking the three to four feet stalks to loosen the fibers. After soaking them, people spread the stalks out on their roofs to dry. These drying stalks of flax provided a perfect place under which Rahab could hide the spies because of the size of the stalks and because the king’s agents would have been accustomed to seeing them on rooftops. The Scriptures do not justify Rahab’s lying any more than it does her life as a prostitute. Furthermore, the Lord in His omnipotence could have saved the spies any way He chose. What is commended in Scripture is Rahab’s faith in God; she put her life in danger to help the spies (Heb. 11:31). Rahab is also part of the lineage of Jesus (Matt. 1:5).

The king’s men believed Rahab and quickly left in pursuit. Once they exited the city, its gate was shut. These agents went as far as *the fords of the Jordan* River to find and capture the spies while Rahab still hid them in her home.



What is the relationship between boldness and faith?

KEY DOCTRINE: *Man*

Only the grace of God can bring man into His holy fellowship and enable man to fulfill the creative purpose of God. (See 1 Corinthians 1:26-31; Titus 2:11-14.)

A KIND ACTION (JOSH. 2:8-13)

⁸ Before the men fell asleep, she went up on the roof ⁹ and said to them, “I know that the LORD has given you this land and that the terror of you has fallen on us, and everyone who lives in the land is panicking because of you. ¹⁰ 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 Sihon and Og, the two Amorite kings you completely destroyed across the Jordan.

¹¹ When we heard this, we lost heart, and everyone's courage failed because of you, for the LORD your God is God in heaven above and on earth below. ¹² Now please swear to me by the LORD that you will also show kindness to my father's family, because I showed kindness to you. Give me a sure sign ¹³ that you will spare the lives of my father, mother, brothers, sisters, and all who belong to them, and save us from death."

VERSES 8-9

Before the spies settled down for the night on the roof of Rahab's house, she went up to them to explain why she covered for them. Rahab began by sharing her knowledge of Israel's God, declaring, ***I know that the LORD has given you this land.*** She used the Lord's personal, covenant name, revealing that she had an understanding of who He is. What's more, Rahab used the past tense, *given*, not "is giving" or "will give." Her faith in the Lord was such that she believed whatever He said was as good as already done. As a result, Rahab and everyone else in that region were terrified and panicking because of the Israelites.

God uses what He does for and through His people to reveal who He is to unbelievers.

VERSES 10-11

Before the Israelites took a step to cross the Jordan, God had instilled a fear within Israel's enemies because of the many victories He already had given them. Rahab mentioned two events her people had heard of. First, they had heard of how God parted the ***Red Sea*** and saved His people out of Egyptian bondage. Second, news had reached the citizens of Jericho of Israel's victories over the great conqueror •***Sihon***, king of the Amorites, and king •***Og***, who ruled over sixty fortified cities of the Amorites (Num. 21:21-26; Deut. 3:3-7). The psalmist refers to them as mighty kings whom the Lord "slaughtered" (Ps. 135:10-12).

After revealing her knowledge of what the Lord had done for Israel at the Red Sea and against their formidable enemies, Rahab described again the impact those events had on her and her people. They ***lost heart*** and ***everyone's courage failed***. Rahab's description of their reaction to the approaching Israelites reveals that the Lord was fulfilling the prophetic words Israel sang in praise to Him

after crossing the Red Sea (Ex. 15:14-16). We can learn three important truths here: (1) God uses what He does for and through His people to reveal who He is to unbelievers, (2) He keeps His promises, and (3) unbelievers have reason to fear the Lord's judgment.

Rahab declared her faith in God, asserting that ***the LORD your God is God***. Rahab's proclamation, He is God ***in heaven above and on earth below***, indicates not only that she believed the Lord has dominion over all creation, but that He is the only God and there is no other.

VERSES 12-13

The Hebrew word translated ***kindness*** is *hesed*. It appears some 250 times in the Old Testament and almost always denotes solidarity between people. It is the word most often used in the Old Testament to denote the Lord's faithful, loving kindness toward His people. Rahab used this word twice to emphasize her commitment to God and His people. When people place their faith in the Lord, they commit themselves to His people. Rahab demonstrated this when she showed kindness to the spies. Her request was that they reciprocate by showing kindness to her and her family by sparing their lives when the Israelites conquered Jericho.



How should our beliefs about God impact the way we treat others?

A DARING ESCAPE (JOSH. 2:14-16)

¹⁴ The men answered her, “We will give our lives for yours. If you don’t report our mission, we will show kindness and faithfulness to you when the LORD gives us the land.” ¹⁵ Then she let them down by a rope through the window, since she lived in a house that was built into the wall of the city. ¹⁶ “Go to the hill country so that the men pursuing you won’t find you,” she said to them. “Hide there for three days until they return; afterward, go on your way.”

VERSE 14

The spies promised Rahab they would give their lives for her life as long as she did not betray them to her people.

Additionally, they promised to show Rahab **kindness and faithfulness** when it was time for the Lord to give Israel Jericho and the surrounding area. These spies saw the formidable fortifications of Jericho yet were confident the Lord would give them the victory.

VERSES 15-16

The wall of the city was also a wall of Rahab's house. It was not unusual for large, populated, walled cities to utilize every inch of space within them in this way. Acting in good faith, Rahab lowered a rope out her window, allowing the two spies to escape. As she did, she gave them instructions to keep themselves safely hidden from the king's agents who were searching for them. She directed them to go to the Judean hill country in the opposite direction of the Jordan River where the king's men expected them to flee since Israel was camped on the other side of it. She instructed them to stay hidden in those hills for three days until the king's men gave up their search.



Why does faith in God require obedient action?

A FIRM ASSURANCE (JOSH. 2:17-21)

¹⁷ The men said to her, “We will be free from this oath you made us swear, ¹⁸ unless, when we enter the land, you tie this scarlet cord to the window through which you let us down. Bring your father, mother, brothers, and all your father’s family into your house. ¹⁹ If anyone goes out the doors of your house, his death will be his own fault, and we will be innocent. But if anyone with you in the house should be harmed, his death will be our fault. ²⁰ And if you report our mission, we are free from the oath you made us swear.” ²¹ “Let it be as you say,” she replied, and she sent them away. After they had gone, she tied the scarlet cord to the window.

VERSES 17-21

As they were exiting the window, the spies gave Rahab some vital instructions. If she did not follow these instructions, then they would no longer be obligated to the oath they had sworn to her. First, they told her to tie a scarlet cord to the window through

which they were escaping. Its purpose was to show the Israelites what household's inhabitants they were to spare in their assault. It is reminiscent of the blood that was placed on the doorframes of the Israelites and the spared lives of the Israelite firstborn in Egypt during the tenth plague. As the Israelites trusted the Lord to spare their lives, Rahab had to trust God that His people would spare her.

Second, Rahab needed to bring her family into the house and make sure they stayed there. If any of her family members failed to stay within, then the spies would not be responsible for their deaths. However, if any of her family members were to be killed within the house, then the spies would bear responsibility for them.

Third, if Rahab should betray the spies by reporting their mission to the authorities in Jericho, they would be released from the oath they made.

Rahab communicated her faith in the Lord and His people again, saying she understood and would do as they had instructed her. As soon as the spies departed, she tied the scarlet cord to the window. Her obedience was yet another demonstration of her faith in God as she put her life and the lives of her family in His hands.



What are some signs that remind us of God's grace in our lives?



BIBLE SKILL: *Focus on a key word to gain a better understanding of a biblical text.*

Look up the word “kindness” (Hebrew *hesed*) in a Bible dictionary (Josh. 2:12). What special significance does this term have in the Old Testament? Read Exodus 15:13 and 2 Samuel 16:17 where the term is used. How did Rahab show loyalty to the spies? How did the spies demonstrate loyalty to her?

APPLY THE TEXT

- + Following God often requires leaving one's comfort zone and stepping out in faith.
- + We can be encouraged that God's acts will always demonstrate His character.
- + Relying on God's grace leads to security, even in difficult situations.
- + We can be assured of God's work in our lives by regularly reflecting on what He has done in the past.



In your group, what are ways you can encourage one another to rely on God's grace even in difficult times? How does relying on God's grace lead to security during difficult times?



What has God done in your life in the past to assure you that He is at work in your life? How do God's acts in your life demonstrate His character?

Memorize Hebrews 11:31.



Prayer Needs
