

September 27, 2026

“Rahab Welcomes Spies”
Lesson 4

Joshua 2:8-13
Joshua 6:16-17

Intro

Israel wandered in the desert for 40 years before being on the verge of crossing the Jordan River into the Promised Land. Moses has now died, and Joshua is now the leader of Israel. Joshua was one of the twelve spies Moses sent to check out the land (Numbers 13:8); he now sends spies to learn more about Jericho’s fortifications and its people. Jericho, like most ancient cities, was located in a place that favored three elements: defensibility, access to water, and nearness to trade routes.

The spies Joshua sends go to the house of a woman named Rahab. She is referred to as a prostitute. The word in Hebrew has a broad range of meanings, including prostitute as well as innkeeper. In this view, it makes sense that the spies would go to her house. However, she is identified as a prostitute in both Hebrews and James. Regardless of which meaning is most accurate, she was an independent woman with financial resources.

Going to Rahab’s makes sense for at least three possible reasons. First, strangers going to her home would not be unusual. Second, her home was in the wall, making it easier to make an escape if necessary. Third, God may have led them there because she was developing a faith in the God of Israel.

We know that the spies *were* noticed, as Rahab lies to the king and misdirects the ones trying to find the spies (Josh. 2:2-7). Our study today begins with Rahab explaining her motives for hiding the Israelite spies.

Read Joshua 2:8-13

1. vs. 8: The spies are hidden on the rooftop

These houses had flat roofs, giving space to live, work, or store things
The rooftop was the most private and secluded part of an ancient house
Rahab goes up to the roof to talk to the spies she has hidden there

2. vs. 9: Here is presented Rahab’s reason for hiding the spies

First, she realizes that “The Lord” has given Canaan to the Israelites
Second, she notes that the people are in “great fear” and are “melting” because of Israel
The people have seen God working in and for these people
His great works are known, and they know that Israel is coming to Jericho
These works are described in the next verse

3. vs. 10: Rahab and the people of Jericho had heard of God drying up the Red Sea

This was part of the exodus from Egypt—not in their own back yard
But the God of Israel provided a way for His people to escape

Jericho has also heard about the Israelite victories over Sihon and Og
These were two Amorite kings who attacked Israel and were defeated
Rahab notes that these kings and their armies were “completely destroyed”
It’s important to note that these two events are about 40 years apart
This event has traveled to Jericho, and God’s power is known by the people there

4. vs. 11: Israel still hasn’t crossed the Jordan River to come into Canaan
It might look like they have stalled out
But the people of Jericho see the “handwriting on the wall”
Their hearts “have melted” and their “courage failed”
They have no confidence, zero, that they will defeat an Israel with God helping them
Rahab’s confession here is what God desires to hear from all who follow Him:
“The Lord your God is God in heaven above and on the earth below”
She sees and knows the absolute authority that God has over all creation

5. vs. 12: Rahab now asks the spies for consideration
She has shown kindness to them in hiding them from the authorities in Jericho
She asks in return that Israel show her and her family kindness
Rahab understands that lives are at stake
She asks for a “sure sign”, which is not stated here
Joshua 2:18 says the sign is a red cord hung from her window
This will signal her house from others not friendly to Israel

6. vs. 13: The request finishes with her specific request for Israel to “spare the lives” of her family
Her mother and father, her brothers and sisters, and all their family members
They are to be saved from being killed by the soldiers of Israel

Read Joshua 6:16-17

Several important things happen between 2:13 and here in 6:16-17. Rahab helps the spies escape, and they tell Joshua what they have seen. Israel then crosses the Jordan River, Passover is celebrated, and the Israelites begin living in the land and living off the produce of the land. As they near Jericho, God instructs them to march around the city once a day for six days, and then seven times on the seventh day. The following verses deal with events on the seventh circuit of the city.

7. vs. 16: What happens here is the carrying out of God’s instructions in 6:6-9
Seven priests, each carrying a horn, lead Israel and walk just in front of the ark
After the seventh time around, the priests are to blow their horns
These horn blasts always signal some upcoming action
On all the previous six days, after marching around, the people were to say nothing
The horns were to be blown, but the people were told to keep silent
On this seventh day, however, the army was told to *shout* when the horns are blown
The walls would collapse, and then the army would rush in

8. vs. 17: Joshua announces a specific outcome for the city

“The city and all that is in it are to be devoted to the Lord”

The word translated as “devoted” appears multiple times in Joshua

The idea is the complete destruction of material wealth, cities, and even people

The things set aside to be destroyed are “devoted” / dedicated to the Lord

The word “devoted” establishes a sacred process

This establishes the holiness God wants for the people and the land

The Canaanites defiled the land by idolatry, violence, and immorality

God wants the people and the land to be undefiled by sin

Therefore God calls for the destruction of a specific people in a specific time and place

Joshua commands the sparing of Rahab and all with her in her house

He honors the agreement made between Rahab and the spies

Application: Rahab’s faith and bravery serve as an example for us today. Hebrews notes her faith in receiving and protecting the spies. James calls her “righteous”. Matthew’s genealogy recognizes her as an ancestor of King David and ultimately of Jesus the Messiah.

Rahab’s story is one that turns expectations upside-down. We don’t expect a woman in Jericho to offer hospitality to Israelite spies. We don’t expect a strategy of marching, shouting, and blowing horns to bring down walls and give Israel a victory. God often works in unexpected ways. We need to be open to him working situations in our lives in ways different, even upside-down, from what we think they will be.

Prayer: Father God, You fulfill Your will through unexpected people and in ways that defy our expectations. Through Your Spirit, empower us to expect Your unexpected ways so we can be used by You to show your grace and mercy to the people You bring into our lives. In Jesus’ name, Amen.