

Introduction

How do we come into a relationship with God? The answer to this question is personally and eternally significant. If you miss the answer to this question, you seal your eternal future condemned by God. The answer to this question is also significant in our daily conversations. Sharing the gospel is more than a presentation of a 4-step process to eternal life. Sharing the gospel is knowing the truth about Jesus and salvation and talking to people about your Jesus and your faith in Him. Joshua 2 teaches that **A person comes into a relationship with God by faith that is shown by works.**

Background

Canonical and theological Background: The book of Joshua describes **God's fulfillment of His promise** to give the land of Canaan to Israel. Israel has waited for generations (since Abraham) for God's unfulfilled promise. This book shows that **God is indeed faithful** to His promises.

Rahab: Joshua 2 introduces us to Rahab. Rahab is not a minor character in the Bible. Rahab is mentioned in the NT because of her faith and her place in God's redemptive plan (Matt 1:5; Heb 11:31; James 2:25). Jewish tradition considered Rahab as a prototypical proselyte and her faith as a rebuke against Israel (see *Pesiqta Rabbati*, 9th-century).

Theological Significance

Joshua 2 teaches a couple of significant theological truths related to salvation. First, **a person does not come into a relationship with God through birth**. Second, **a profession of faith without resulting works is not saving faith**. Joshua 2 contrasts the belief of those in Jericho that did not lead to salvation with Rahab's faith that saved her.

Rahab's works

First, **Rahab showed her faith by her works.**

Rahab, the prostitute

Joshua 2:1 “1 And Joshua the son of Nun sent two men secretly from Shittim as spies, saying, “Go, view the land, especially Jericho.” And they went and came into the house of a prostitute whose name was Rahab and lodged there.”

What was Rahab's occupation (2:1)? Rahab was a prostitute. This is significant because it helps us see God's grace. Rahab was not saved because she was a good person. One of the greatest services we can do for ourselves when we read Joshua 2 is to recognize that **Rahab was a terrible person** (an idolator and a prostitute) and that we are **exactly** like her. If I read Joshua 2 and I'm amazed that God would save someone like Rahab, I have missed the point. When I read Joshua 2, I am amazed that God would save someone like **me**. I am not less an idolator and no less immoral than Rahab. I need just as much grace as Rahab. Thanks be to God He is rich in grace. Ephesians 1:7–8 “7 In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, **according to the riches of his grace**, 8 which he lavished upon us ...”

Why did the spies stay at the house of a prostitute? Josephus, a first-century Jewish historian, writes that Rahab's house was an inn, not just a place of prostitution (*Jewish Antiquities*, 5.6-15, 28-30). So, it is probably unfair to assume the spies were acting inappropriately.

Hiding the Spies

Joshua 2:2–7 “2 And it was told to the king of Jericho, “Behold, men of Israel have come here tonight to search out the land.” 3 Then the king of Jericho sent to Rahab, saying, “Bring out the men who have come to you, who

entered your house, for they have come to search out all the land.” 4 But the woman had taken the two men and hidden them. And she said, “True, the men came to me, but I did not know where they were from. 5 And when the gate was about to be closed at dark, the men went out. I do not know where the men went. Pursue them quickly, for you will overtake them.” 6 But she had brought them up to the roof and hid them with the stalks of flax that she had laid in order on the roof. 7 So the men pursued after them on the way to the Jordan as far as the fords. And the gate was shut as soon as the pursuers had gone out.”

*How did Rahab prevent the king from finding the spies (2:4, 6)? Rahab hid the spies in stalks of flax on her roof. Twice the NT commends Rahab for how she treated the spies. Hebrews 11:31 “31 By faith Rahab the prostitute did not perish with those who were disobedient, because she had given a friendly welcome to the spies.” First, **Rahab had faith**. This is implied in Joshua 2, but Hebrews 11:31 says it explicitly. Second, **Rahab was saved** (“did not perish”) because of her faith. Third, Rahab welcoming the spies was an **act of obedience**.*

James 2:25 “25 And in the same way was not also Rahab the prostitute justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way?” This is a complicated verse. Hebrews 11:31 commends Rahab for her faith; James 2:25 commends her for her works. Martin Luther questioned whether James was truly Scripture because of James 2:14-26, which discusses being justified by works. James 2:24 “24 You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone.” **Martin Luther misunderstood the meaning of “justified” and misunderstood James’ context.** First, justify does not mean “to make (declare + impute) righteous” as Luther believed. Justify means “**to be shown to be right**.” Second, James 2:14-26 does not address righteousness like Romans 4:1-8. In Romans 4:1-8 Paul claims that a person is shown to be (justified) righteous through faith alone. **James 2:14-26 addresses profession of faith.** James 2:14 “14 What good is it, my brothers, if someone **says** he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him?” James argues that a person’s profession of faith (not his righteousness) is justified by his works. **Faith alone saves, but faith produces works.**

Was it right for Rahab to lie to the king? This is something that Christians in Nazi Germany wrestled with. Many Christians hid Jews from the Nazis and lied when their houses were searched. Pragmatically, we may not always know the right way to respond to ethical dilemmas. Therefore, we are thankful that God’s grace covers all sin. However, it is important that we recognize that **sin is never justifiable**. I doubt anyone would question whether Jesus would lie in Joshua 2 or in Nazi Germany.

In Joshua 2, we see the evidence of Rahab’s faith, **she showed her faith by her works.**

Jericho’s rebellion

Second, **Jericho believed without repenting faith.**

God’s Deeds

Joshua 2:8–10 “8 Before the men lay down, she came up to them on the roof 9 and said to the 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. 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 the two kings of the Amorites who were beyond the Jordan, to Sihon and Og, whom you devoted to destruction.”

*What did the people of Jericho know about Israel’s battles (2:10)? They knew about the crossing of the Red Sea (Exod 14:21-31). They know about the defeat of the Amorites, Sihon and Og (Num 21). Israel left no survivors in the battle at Edrei (Num 21:35). Notice that **the people of Jericho know that this was the work of God** (Josh 2:10).*

How did their knowledge of these events affect their confidence (2:9)? The people of Jericho feared Israel because God was with them.

God's authority

Joshua 2:11 “11 And as soon as we heard it, our hearts melted, and there was no spirit left in any man because of you, for the Lord your God, he is God in the heavens above and on the earth beneath.”

What did the people of Jericho understand about the Lord (2:11)? They understood that “He is God in the heavens above and on the earth beneath.” This is quite a confession for a **polytheistic city**. In this time period, gods were considered local deities, meaning they were gods of certain regions. But the Lord overcame the Egyptians (and their gods) and the Amorites (and their gods). He was not a local deity; He was God of heaven and earth.

However, it is important to note that **the people of Jericho did not repent**. They knew the works of God and they knew the sovereign authority of God. He was not just the God of Israel; He was the God of Jericho. Yet, they refused to repent and follow Him. There is an important distinction between Rahab and Jericho. They had the same knowledge and the same belief about God. Rahab repented and trusted God. Jericho continued in rebellion against Him.

One of the most dangerous beliefs in the modern church is that believing truth about God and the gospel, professing faith in Jesus, and continuing in an unchanged life saves us. Belief and rebellion do not reconcile us to God. James 2:19 “19 You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder!” Belief and repentance reconcile us to God. We contribute **nothing** to our salvation. But **saving faith is belief that produces love, repentance, and devotion**.

So, **Rahab showed her faith by her works. But Jericho believed without saving faith.**

Rahab's Faith

Third, **Rahab trusted God's salvation from judgment.**

Pact with the Spies

Joshua 2:12–14 “12 Now then, please swear to me by the Lord that, as I have dealt kindly with you, you also will deal kindly with my father's house, and give me a sure sign 13 that you will save alive my father and mother, my brothers and sisters, and all who belong to them, and deliver our lives from death.” 14 And the men said to her, “Our life for yours even to death! If you do not tell this business of ours, then when the Lord gives us the land we will deal kindly and faithfully with you.””

What request does Rahab make of the spies (2:13)? Rahab requested that her family would be saved from destruction. This does not necessarily mean that her family had faith, but it may imply their faith. The agreement was to save her house and everyone who was in it (Josh 2:18-19).

Rahab's trust

Joshua 2:15–21 “15 Then she let them down by a rope through the window, for her house was built into the city wall, so that she lived in the wall. 16 And she said to them, “Go into the hills, or the pursuers will encounter you, and hide there three days until the pursuers have returned. Then afterward you may go your way.” 17 The men said to her, “We will be guiltless with respect to this oath of yours that you have made us swear. 18 Behold, when we come into the land, you shall tie this scarlet cord in the window through which you let us down, and you shall gather into your house your father and mother, your brothers, and all your father's household. 19 Then if anyone goes out of the doors of your house into the street, his blood shall be on his own head, and we shall be guiltless. But if a hand is laid on anyone who is with you in the house, his blood shall be on our head. 20 But if you tell this business of ours, then we shall be guiltless with respect to your oath that you have made us swear.” 21 And she said, “According to your words, so be it.” Then she sent them away, and they departed. And she tied the scarlet cord in the window.”

How did Rahab let the spies out of the city (2:15)? Rahab let them out of her window by a rope. Her home was built into the wall of the city.

What would be the sign of the house that would be protected (2:18)? Rahab was to hang the rope out the window of the house to indicate which house would be spared. The significance of this event is in verse 21: “She tied the scarlet cord in the window.” Rahab’s faith was not mere profession and was not mere intellectual belief. Her faith was belief that produced devotion to God and trust in God. She believed that God would destroy the city and that God would spare her house.

Rahab’s Adoption

Joshua 2 shows that (1) Rahab had faith and (2) Rahab’s faith was displayed in her works. Joshua 6:25 says that Rahab continued to live with Israel. Because of her faith, Rahab was brought into the covenant people of God. She married into a Jewish family. Matt 1:5 points out that Rahab was an ancestor of David, and ultimately an ancestor of Jesus.

Rahab was not **born** into the people of God. **Rahab was adopted** into the people of God. God compares Hosea’s wife, Gomer, to those who were not His people (idolators and immoral) who would become His people (Hos 2:23). Romans explains that this shows that salvation was not for the Jews, but also the Gentiles. Romans 9:24–26 “24 even us whom he has called, not from the Jews only but also from the Gentiles? 25 As indeed he says in Hosea, ‘Those who were not my people I will call ‘my people,’ and her who was not beloved I will call ‘beloved.’” 26 “And in the very place where it was said to them, ‘You are not my people,’ there they will be called ‘sons of the living God.’” (cf. Hos 2:23; 1:10).

In the same way, **we are not born into the people of God. We are adopted into the people of God.** John 1:12–13 “12 But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, 13 who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.” Ephesians 1:4–5 “... In love 5 he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will,”

Conclusion

Joshua 2 primarily teaches about the relationship between faith and works. We do not know God through physical birth or through works. We know God through faith alone. But genuine faith *always* produces works because genuine faith leads to **new creation. A person comes into a relationship with God through faith that is shown by works.**

But Joshua 2 (and the doctrine of salvation by faith) is ultimately a picture of God’s grace. God found the most undeserving person in Jericho (a non-Jew, a prostitute) and He saved her. I suspect many people in Israel did not show her the same grace.

No aspect of our salvation should arouse pride. Your good works contribute ***nothing***. God doesn’t save you because you are a good person. You don’t have faith because you are smarter or more ethical than others. Even your faith is a gift from God.

A.W. Pink wrote, “Grace is a provision for men who are so fallen that they cannot life the axe of justice, so corrupt that they cannot change their own natures, so blind that they cannot see their own misery, and so dead that they cannot seek life.”