A Study in Joshua 2:14–24

The Scarlet Thread — The Household — When Jehovah Shall Give Us the Land

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We are reading Joshua chapter 2, beginning at verse 14.

> *"And the men said unto her, Our life for yours, if ye utter not this our business. And it shall be, when the LORD giveth us the land, that we will deal kindly and truly with thee."*
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> *"Then she let them down by a cord through the window: for her house was upon the town wall, and she dwelt upon the wall. And she said unto them, Get you to the mountain, lest the pursuers meet you; and hide yourselves there three days, until the pursuers be returned: and afterward may ye go your way."*
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> *"And the men said unto her, We will be blameless of this thine oath which thou hast made us swear. Behold, when we come into the land, thou shalt bind this line of scarlet thread in the window through which thou didst let us down: and thou shalt bring thy father, and thy mother, and thy brethren, and all thy father's household, home unto thee. And it shall be, that whosoever shall go out of the doors of thy house into the street, his blood shall be upon his head, and we will be guiltless: and whosoever shall be with thee in the house, his blood shall be on our head, if any hand be upon him. And if thou utter this our business, then we will be quit of thine oath which thou hast made us to swear."*
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> *"And she said, According unto your words, so be it. And she sent them away, and they departed: and she bound the scarlet line in the window... And the two men returned, and descended from the mountain, and passed over, and came to Joshua the son of Nun, and told him all things that befell them. And they said unto Joshua, Truly the LORD hath delivered into our hands all the land; for even all the inhabitants of the country do faint because of us."*

Rahab's Faith Despite Her Failings

Before entering on verse 14, it is worth noting what was remarked on in the previous reading: Rahab's lying to the king's men was certainly not a good or commendable thing, and the Lord is never going to put His people in circumstances where sin is necessary for His word to be accomplished. His purposes did not depend on Rahab's lie. He could have brought about the same result by other means. But

Scripture does not whitewash the failings of those it commends. Abraham's faith is commended, and so are his failings. Rahab's faith is commended in Hebrews 11, and so is her imperfect way of acting upon it recorded here. The Lord works with and honors the faith that is present, even where the manner of expressing it falls short. That should encourage every one of us who knows failure in his own life and yet trusts that the Lord can work anyway and honor the faith that is there.

Our Lives for Yours — The Token — When Jehovah Shall Give Us the Land

The men say in verse 14: Our life for yours, if ye utter not this our business. They were willing for their lives to be forfeited if they did not keep their word to Rahab. In itself this is a remarkable pledge. But set against the work of the Lord Jesus, it is a shadow: He did not merely hazard His life — He gave it. He shed His blood so that we might be saved. The token that Rahab asked for is God's word itself. These messengers were sent to her with a message, just as the gospel was sent to us. What she asked for was something by which she could know that this was true. And the answer, for us, is the word of God — confirmed by the Holy Spirit to those who receive it.

What strikes us also in the men's reply is their confidence: not if Jehovah shall give us the land, but when. These were men of faith after the pattern of Joshua and Caleb — the only two from the original generation who had believed that God could give them the land. They did not take a wait-and-see attitude with God's promise. They spoke from assurance. That is what faith does: it lays hold of what God has said and treats it as already given. 2 Corinthians 1:20 states this as the Christian's full foundation: all the promises of God in Christ are yea, and in Him amen, to the glory of God by us. The conditional character of the men's promise to Rahab — it depended on her not revealing their business — is itself instructive. God's promises to us are unconditional. They do not depend on our performance. They rest on what He has already done through the death of His Son.

The Scarlet Thread — Death Required for the Color

She sent them down through a cord through the window, and she bound the scarlet line in the window. The scarlet thread is a detail that deserves attention. In those days, the crimson or scarlet color was not produced chemically, as paint can be mixed today. It was obtained by crushing a small insect that exuded that dye when it died. Death was required to produce the scarlet color. All of that speaks loudly of the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. Just as the blood of the Passover lamb was spread around the doorway in Egypt to protect those within from judgment, so here it is the scarlet thread — obtained through death — that marks the window of the one who is to be saved.

And the window faced outward from the city. Her house was upon the wall, and the window looked out beyond Jericho into the open country. Symbolically, her hope was already looking beyond that corrupt

city toward the God of Israel. She did not send the spies back out through the door — which would have meant returning through the city and risking the king's soldiers. She sent them through the window that already faced toward where they had come from and where they were going. The spies, for their part, appear never to have truly seen the city. They came in, went to Rahab's house, and went back out through the window. They did not need to see it: when Joshua came to Jericho, the Lord simply made the walls fall flat. It was entirely His work.

The Household Principle — From Noah to the New Testament

The instruction to Rahab is: thou shalt bring thy father, and thy mother, and thy brethren, and all thy father's household, home unto thee. It is not only Rahab who is to be saved — she is to gather her entire household into the place of safety. That desire resonates with every believer who has family members not yet brought to the Lord. We intercede for our families. We ask the Lord to save them. And this passage gives us something to lay hold of by faith: it is God's pattern and desire to bless households.

The household principle runs through all of Scripture. The Lord said to Noah: come thou and all thy house into the ark. That may be where it begins most explicitly. In the New Testament, Lydia's household believed, the household of Stephanas is mentioned, the Philippian jailer was told: believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved, and thy house. These are not absolute promises guaranteeing that every member of every household will be saved — Ham was in the ark and was later cursed; Lot's sons-in-law refused to come when warned. But they establish a consistent pattern of God's desire to bless households, a pattern we may lay hold of in prayer and faith.

The contrast with Lot is instructive. When the angels came to Lot in Sodom, he went to his sons-in-law and told them the city was to be destroyed, and they thought he was joking. They could not distinguish his voice from any other voice in Sodom. He had become, in their eyes, simply another man of the city. But Rahab's testimony had weight with her family. Whether it was a visible change in her life, or the Lord working faith in their hearts ahead of her coming to them, it was different. When the walls fell, her household was there — gathered into the house of the one who had the scarlet thread in the window. The Lord honored the faith that Rahab had shown, and He used that to bring her family to safety.

Those Who Go Out of the House — Faith and the Judgment Coming on the World

Verse 19: whosoever shall go out of the doors of thy house into the street, his blood shall be upon his head. Whoever leaves the house of safety and returns to Jericho is returning to the city that is under judgment. Jericho could not be rehabilitated. There was no campaign to improve it. Judgment was coming — not if, but when. The only safety was inside that house, under the sign of the scarlet thread.

This world likewise is already under judgment. It lies in the wicked one. No effort on the part of Christians to make it better will alter that sentence — it is already declared. The only safety is to be washed in the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. Those who reject that provision, those who go out the door and back into the street, bear their own blood on their own head. At the great white throne, every one who is not found written in the book of life will stand before God without excuse. Not God's fault — He made provision through the death of His Son. But some will reject that provision, and their blood is on their own head.

It is sobering that men will freely say they are not perfect, and yet that admission does not translate in their minds to needing to be forgiven. We learn what sin really is not by comparing ourselves to other men, and not even by looking into ourselves, but by standing in the presence of God. In His light, His righteousness, His nature as love and as light, we see what sin costs. The cross tells us. The sufferings of the Lord Jesus at the hands of God — bearing what we had earned — that is where we learn how serious even one sin is. God made provision for it through the death of His Son. To pass by that provision is the gravest possible response to the greatest possible love.

The Spies Return — Of a Surety Jehovah Has Given the Land

The two men returned from the mountain and came to Joshua and told him everything. And they said: of a surety Jehovah has given the whole land into our hands; for even all the inhabitants of the country do faint because of us. Their report is the opposite of the report of the ten spies forty years earlier, who came back saying: we cannot take the land, the people are too strong. These two men came back saying: the land is ours. God has given it. The people are fainting.

These were men who acted in a prudent way — they hid in the mountain for three days as Rahab advised, avoiding the king's men, not putting themselves needlessly in danger. That is important: to presume on God's protection while taking unnecessary risks is a form of pride, not faith. The Lord expects prudent behavior. When the Lord Jesus said that those who are ill need a physician, he was giving sanction to seeking the means God has provided. To refuse medicines and say my God will protect me is presumption, not faith. But while acting prudently, these spies never doubted for a moment that the land was theirs. Prudence and full confidence in God's word are not in tension — they go together.

The spies' report is also a lesson about knowing God's will as a guide for prayer and action. They had Joshua's commission. They had not been told exactly what circumstances they would encounter in Jericho, and yet they were able to act under Joshua's authority in making the pledge to Rahab because they knew his mind well enough to know that this was within it. That is much like the Christian pathway. The Scriptures do not answer every specific question, but they give us the knowledge of God

and of His ways so that we can discern His will and act in alignment with it — asking for what is according to His will, in the confidence that He hears us.

When Jehovah shall give us the land — those are the words of faith. May we speak with the same confidence of all God has promised us in Christ.