

Joshua 2:12-21 | Sunday July 26, 2026

As Israel is on the edge of entering the Promised Land, Joshua has done everything he can to make sure another Kadesh Barnea does not happen. Instead of 12 spies being sent publicly, only 2 spies were sent secretly, apparently with a plan of blending in by going to a prostitute's house. Even with Joshua's great strategy, the most important thing is that God providentially protected and guided these 2 spies. What Joshua and the spies had no idea about was that God had been preparing Rahab the prostitute's heart. Rahab had heard about the God of Israel and what He had done to Egypt and other kings in the area. Rahab responded in faith and trusted that God's Word of giving Israel the Promised Land would actually happen. **No amount of planning or strategy can accomplish what God working in someone's heart can.** The spies are immediately recognized as they enter Jericho, and their exact location is known. Yet, God had been working in Rahab, and God providentially directed the spies and Rahab together. She was able to hide the spies in flax that God providentially arranged to be up on the roof, and she sent the soldiers in the wrong direction. **The providence of God is His hand inside the glove of human events.** God is actively at work in these circumstances. After saving the spies lives, Rahab shares with them how God had been preparing her heart for this exact moment.

Joshua 2:8-13 Legacy Standard Bible

- (8) Now before they lay down, she came up to them on the roof
(9) and said to the men, **"I know that Yahweh 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.
(10) "For we have heard how Yahweh 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.
(11) "Indeed we heard it, and **our hearts melted,** and a courageous spirit no longer rose up in any man because of you; **for Yahweh your God, He is God in heaven above and on earth beneath.**
(12) "So now, **please swear to me by Yahweh,** since I have shown lovingkindness to you, that you also will show lovingkindness to my father's household and give me a pledge of truth,
(13) and preserve my father and my mother and my brothers and my sisters alive, with all who belong to them, and deliver our lives from death."

Rahab knows that the God of Israel is the one true God. There is none other like Him anywhere in heaven or on earth. Notice that Rahab asks the spies to swear to her by Yahweh, by the God of Israel. **She does not want them to swear by Baal or Asherah, because at this point she believes that the God of Israel is the true God.** We are not told how Rahab heard about the events of the Exodus or the other battles, only that she has.

Romans 10:14 ESV

- (14) How then will they call on Him in whom they have not believed? **And how are they to believe in Him of whom they have never heard?** And how are they to hear without someone preaching?

Paul says that we cannot believe in something that we have never heard of. I am constantly amazed at what God uses to share His truth. At some point, Rahab heard about the God of Israel.

As far as we know, God did not send someone like Jonah or a prophet. Yet, **God brought His truth to Rahab and worked on her heart as she responded to Him.** She heard the truth about God and responded in faith. She is placing her life and the lives of all her family members into the hands of the God of Israel.

Joshua 2:12-14 LSB

(12) “So now, please swear to me by Yahweh, since I have shown **lovingkindness** to you, that you also will show **lovingkindness** to my father’s household **and give me a pledge of truth,**

(13) and preserve my father and my mother and my brothers and my sisters alive, with all who belong to them, and deliver our lives from death.”

(14) So the men said to her, “Our life for yours if you do not tell this business of ours; and it will be **when Yahweh gives us the land that we will show lovingkindness and truth to you.**”

Rahab has shown lovingkindness to the spies, **and she is asking for it in response.** The spies promise that as long as she continues to protect them, then they will show her lovingkindness. What is amazing is that Rahab uses the word **Hesed**, which conveys a covenant loyalty. **It is not just love or kindness but a dependable, committed love that is based on a promise.** She is not requesting this based on the people of Israel and their military might but is trusting in their God. She believes that Israel, through God’s strength, will destroy Jericho, and she is acting in response to her belief. Rahab and the spies have entered into a covenant. They are trusting each other for safety.

Joshua 2:15-16 ESV

(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.”

Rahab is faithful to her promise by helping the spies get out of town safely, and she instructs them on how to avoid the pursuers. Now the spies will need to be faithful to their promise. Helping the spies flee to safety is a huge moment for Rahab’s faith.

To understand why sending the spies away safely is so important in Rahab’s life, first we need to see that Hebrews emphasized Rahab’s warm welcome of the spies as a result of her faith.

Hebrews 11:31 ESV

(31) By faith **Rahab the prostitute** did not perish with those who were disobedient, **because she had given a friendly welcome to the spies.**

Rahab believed God and received the spies based on her belief. **She welcomed the spies into her house because of their God.** Her faith did not stop at this warm reception. James points out that Rahab helping the spies flee to safety was a pivotal moment in her growth. **Her faith led to action.**

James 2:14-17 NKJV

(14) What does it profit, **my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him?**

- (15) If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food,
(16) and one of you says to them, "Depart in peace, be warmed and filled," but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, **what does it profit?**
(17) Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.

This passage can be easily misunderstood if we are not careful to realize that James uses terms like "save" and "justified" in a very different way than other parts of scripture, especially Paul. **James is not referring to heaven or hell salvation when he asks, "Can faith save?"** We can be saved from many things, including cold, hunger, or, like Rahab, being saved out of Jericho. **James is focused on the practical benefits of our faith.** How does our faith practically help the cold, hungry beggar if we do not provide for them coats and food? Faith without works is dead, meaning it is not active or doing anything.

James 2:18-20 ESV

- (18) But someone will say, "You have faith and I have works." Show me your faith apart from your works, and **I will show you my faith by my works.**
(19) **You believe that God is one;** you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder!
(20) Do you want to be shown, you foolish person, that faith apart from works is **useless?**

Faith cannot be seen **by the human eye** without works. James wants to show his faith through his actions. The demons know that there is one God, just as any Jew does and just as every Muslim knows. This verse is too often mistaken to be about heaven and hell salvation when **James is careful to define what specific belief He is referencing. Believing in one God.** Yet this belief in one God does not amount to much. Faith apart from works is **useless, idle, lazy, unproductive, and worthless.**

To prove his point of how **practically useless and unproductive faith without work is,** James will use two examples from the Old Testament.

James 2:21-24 ESV

- (21) Was not Abraham our father **justified by works when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar?**
(22) You see that faith was active along with his works, **and faith was completed by his works;**
(23) and the Scripture was fulfilled that says, "Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness"—**and he was called a friend of God.**
(24) You see that a person **is justified by works and not by faith alone.**

If we lose sight of James argument, then this passage seems to directly contradict Romans 4.

Romans 4:2-5 ESV

- (2) For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God.
(3) For what does the Scripture say? **"Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness."**
(4) Now to the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift but as his due.
(5) And **to the one who does not work but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness,**

Paul is focused on the initial moment of belief for Abraham. He is describing the heaven or hell moment of salvation when Abraham believed in God and was declared righteous. **This was not accomplished through works.** James, on the other hand, is referring to an entirely different moment in Abraham's life, years later, when he was willing to offer Isaac on the altar in obedience to God. This was the moment that Abraham's faith was **completed, fulfilled, perfected, and brought to maturity.** Abraham's faith grew, and he was shown to be righteous when he was willing to walk in obedience to God. **James uses the term justified in the sense that something is shown to be righteous.** This is the same way it is used in Luke.

Luke 7:29 NAS95

(29) When all the people and the tax collectors heard this, **they acknowledged God's justice**, having been baptized with the baptism of John.

This is the same word justified. Paul uses it to describe being declared righteous in the heaven and hell sense. **James and Luke use it in the sense of showing something to be righteous.** Abraham's works showed on the outside what was true on the inside, and these works had tremendous practical benefits. This is easier to see with James' second example.

James 2:25-26 ESV

(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?**

(26) For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works **is dead.**

James is not referring to Rahab's heaven or hell moment of conversion. Rahab believed the God of Israel. Yet, if **Rahab did not act on this belief, then physically she could have died in the battle of Jericho.** Her faith would have been useless and unproductive. **Rahab was shown to be righteous when she was willing to send the spies out another way.** Her belief grew and matured as she was willing to act based on her faith. This was not mere words to Rahab; her belief was reflected in her actions. James's entire point is how important it is for us as believers to have works that reflect our faith. He is not contradicting Paul and teaching a different gospel but is showing how important it is for us to act on the truth we believe.

Titus 3:4-8 ESV

(4) But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared,

(5) **He saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness,** but according to His own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit,

(6) whom He poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior,

(7) so that **being justified by His grace** we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

(8) The saying is trustworthy, and I want you **to insist on these things, so that those who have believed in God may be careful to devote themselves to good works.**

These things **are excellent and profitable for people.**

We are not saved from hell and the punishment for our sins because of works done by us in our own righteousness. God saved us through the mercy and grace shown through Jesus. **We are declared righteous by His grace.** Understanding that we are not saved by our works is the freedom that helps us learn to work. **We are to insist on God's grace to believers so that we will devote ourselves to good works.** Devote means **to think of, be intent on, or be carefully concerned with.** It is excellent and profitable for believers to pursue good works and

grow in the freedom that grace provides.

Both Rahab and Abraham grew in their faith through their works. They had to learn how to trust God more and to let that trust show through their actions. They were not motivated by earning salvation. They were not motivated out of a fear of losing their salvation. **Understanding what the blood of Jesus has done for us gives us the freedom to grow and to let our faith become completed, fulfilled in our works.**

As Rahab grew in her young faith, she was shown to be righteous through her works. Her faith **practically** saved not only herself but her entire family.

Joshua 2:15-21 ESV

(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.**

The spies give Rahab practical instructions on how she will be saved from the destruction of Jericho. Her house is built into the walls of Jericho and needs to be marked out so the whole army of Israel knows not to attack her. Rahab is told to tie a scarlet cord or thick red thread in her window to mark it. Any of her family that wish to survive the attack must be in her house. **The spies cannot offer any safety outside the house marked by the scarlet cord.**

The scarlet cord is not only in Rahab's house but is woven throughout the entire Bible.

From the blood of the first sacrifice that God gave in the garden on behalf of Adam and Eve, when He made skins for them (Gen 3:21). To the blood smeared on the doorpost of the Israelites houses at the Passover (Ex 12:22-23). Scripture has always pointed us to the safety and deliverance that is found when we are covered by and hidden in the blood of Jesus. Rahab was delivered when she remained in the house marked out by the scarlet cord. She couldn't go out and fight but had to trust that being marked by the scarlet cord would provide safety. Likewise, our salvation is secured by the shed blood of Jesus.

Hebrews 9:14 ESV

(14) how much more **will the blood of Christ**, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, **purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God.**