

JOSHUA 2 AND 6:17-25

Rahab: Faith from an Unlikely Place

Lesson at a glance

Rahab is the Canaanite prostitute who hid two Israelite spies, made one of the great confessions of faith in the Old Testament, tied a scarlet cord in her window, walked out of the destruction of Jericho, and ended up the great-great-grandmother of King David and an ancestor of Jesus Christ. The lesson walks through her story in Joshua 2 and 6, and then takes the women to the three New Testament passages that interpret her: Matthew 1:5 (genealogy), Hebrews 11:31 (faith), and James 2:25 (faith with works). The thread is the wonder of how God reaches the people the religious world has written off, and the kind of faith that actually saves: a faith that obeys.

Goals for this session

First, that any woman in the room who has been quietly letting her past disqualify her would hear that Rahab is in the family tree of Jesus and that her own past is no obstacle to His grace.

Second, that the group would see the unity of Scripture's teaching on faith and obedience, with James and Paul speaking the same gospel in different words.

Third, that each woman would name one risk of faith God is calling her to take this season, and would be encouraged to take it.

Fourth, that the group would identify someone outside the house of faith and commit to pray for that person daily this week.

Preparing to lead

Read Joshua 2 and 6:17 to 25 aloud, along with Matthew 1:1 to 17 (the whole genealogy of Jesus), Hebrews 11:31, and James 2:25, earlier in the week. The lesson moves between these passages, and you will lead the bridges more naturally if they are fresh in your mind.

Pray for each woman in your group by name, asking the Lord to free anyone in the room who is still living under the weight of a past sin that He has already forgiven (1 John 1:9).

Be ready to gently and accurately handle the question of Rahab's lie. Scripture neither defends nor condemns it; Hebrews praises her faith and James praises her works, and neither explicitly endorses the deception. The lesson addresses this carefully; trust the lesson and do not try to improvise around it.

Sensitive topics in this lesson

Past sexual sin and shame (questions 1, 11). Rahab's profession is named four separate times in Scripture and never erased. The Holy Spirit thought it was important that we know what she was, so we could know what God's grace had done. Some women in the room are still hiding the same kind of past. Be gentle, and let Rahab's place in Matthew 1:5 do its work.

Family members outside the faith (question 7, the Optional Application). Rahab's faith brought her family into safety. Some women in the room are praying for husbands, children, or parents who are still outside the gospel. Make sure that Optional Application gets named, and that the group prays for those family members by name.

Faith and works (question 10, the Study Skill on James and Paul). Some women in our pews have absorbed a faith-only framework from outside the Lord's church. Lead patiently. James 2:24 is in the same Bible as Romans 3:28, and both are true. The lesson handles this with care; let the lesson and the Scriptures speak for themselves.

Suggested 60- to 75-minute schedule

Five minutes: welcome.

Five minutes: open in prayer. Read Joshua 2:8 to 14 aloud.

Five minutes: warm-up. Ask each woman to share, briefly, about the strangest place she has ever stayed overnight.

Thirty-five to forty minutes: discussion. Choose six or seven questions in advance.

Five to ten minutes: "Your response" reflection.

Five minutes: closing prayer.

Discussion priorities

Make sure these are among the questions you discuss: 4 (her confession), 6 (the scarlet cord and the Passover pattern), 9 (her place in the line of Jesus), 10 (Hebrews and James together), and 11 (the past as disqualifier).

Notes on key questions

Question 2. Rahab's lie is the most discussed part of the chapter. The lesson handles it carefully. The point to land in the group is that Scripture's commendation is precise: Hebrews 11 commends her faith, and James 2 commends her work of receiving the spies and sending them safely out. Neither passage commends the lie itself. The Bible is honest about its heroes; even Rahab's faith was real but imperfect. God honors what is honorable in us, and grows the rest.

Question 4. Rahab's confession in 2:9 to 11 is remarkable for its theology and its courage. She uses the covenant name of God (YHWH), rehearses His mighty deeds, and confesses Him as God of heaven and earth. Her neighbors had the same information and responded with terror; she responded with faith. The same gospel news still produces different responses today, for the same reason (Hebrews 4:2).

Question 6. The scarlet cord is one of the great pictures of how God saves a household when judgment falls. Compare with the Passover blood (Exodus 12), the blood at the doorposts of the wilderness sanctuary, and ultimately the blood of Christ that covers His church (Hebrews 9:22; 10:10 to 14). The pattern is consistent: a visible sign of an obedient faith, in a place God has appointed, spares those who are under it. This is also the right place to gently raise the Optional Application about family members still outside.

Question 9. Matthew chooses to include four (and arguably five) women in Jesus' genealogy: Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, the wife of Uriah (Bathsheba), and Mary. They have unusual stories. Matthew is showing us that Jesus' family is exactly the kind of family He came to save. There is no woman in the room who is too far outside.

Question 10. This is the heart of the lesson. Hebrews 11:31 says she was commended for her faith; James 2:25 says she was justified by works. Both inspired writers are right. Hebrews is answering people who think a person can be saved by sheer obedience to law; James is answering people who think a person can be saved by mental assent without obedient action. The harmony is Galatians 5:6 ("faith working through love") and Romans 1:5 ("the obedience of faith"). Rahab is the perfect illustration: she believed, and she tied the cord. Neither the belief alone nor the cord alone would have saved her; both together, by the grace of God, did. Make sure this lands clearly.

Question 11. Personal response on the past as disqualifier. Give the women time to write. Many will not want to share aloud. If even one woman is encouraged to bring her hidden past into the light, the hour is well spent. Be ready to follow up privately after the meeting with any woman who wants to talk further.

About the Study Skills in this lesson

Two Study Skills appear in Lesson 4. Following an Author's Repeated Words is a simple, powerful habit. Try it on Joshua 2 in the group hour. The second skill, Letting James and Paul Speak Together, is one of the most important interpretive habits in the New Testament. Many false ideas about salvation grow from setting James and Paul against each other. Let the women see that Scripture's voice is one voice, even when it speaks in different tones.

A suggested closing prayer

Pray your own prayer. A sample, if you would like one:

"Father, we thank You for Rahab. Thank You for finding her in the city that was about to fall, for honoring her faith with rescue, for receiving her into Your people, and for placing her in the family line

of our Lord Jesus Christ. Thank You that every name in His genealogy is a sermon: no one is too far outside for You. Free anyone in this room tonight who is living under the weight of a past You have already forgiven. Help us to tie our own scarlet cord, the obedient faith that responds to the gospel of Your Son. And give us the courage of Rahab to gather our families inside. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen."

Looking ahead to Lesson 5

Next week is Ruth, all four chapters. Encourage the women to read Ruth in one sitting before the group meets. The book is only four chapters and reads like a novel. Have them also look at Matthew 1:5 again. Ruth is the next name in the same family tree that Rahab joined this week.