

Was Rahab Rewarded for Lying?

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In the second chapter of Joshua, we are given the story of two Israelite men who secretly spied on Jericho in preparation to overtake that city.

“And they (the two Israelites spies) went (to Jericho) and came into an harlot’s house, named Rahab, and lodged there.

“And it was told the king of Jericho, saying, Behold there came men in hither tonight of the children of Israel to search out the country.

“And the king of Jericho sent unto Rahab, saying, Bring forth the men that are come to thee, which are entered into thine house: for they be come to search out all the country.

“And the woman took the two men, and hid them, and said thus, There came men unto me, but I do not know whence they were.

“And it came to pass about the time of shutting of the gate, when it was dark, that the men went out: whither the men went I know not; pursue after them quickly;’ for you shall overtake them.

“And she brought them up to the roof of the house, and hid them with the stalks of flax, which she had laid in order upon the roof.

“And the men pursued after them the way to Jordan unto the fords; and as soon as they which pursued after them were gone out, they shut the gate...

Then Rahab asked for the Israelites, when they conquered Jericho, to save her and her family as a reward for her faithfulness in hiding the spies.

“Now therefore, I pray you, swear unto me by the Lord, since I have shown you kindness, that ye will also show kindness unto my father’s house, and give me a true token;

“And that you will save alive my father, and my mother, and my brothers, and my sisters, and all that they have, and deliver our lives from death.

And Rahab let them down by a cord through the window: for her house was upon the town wall, and she dwelt upon the wall.
Joshua 2:1-24

The Israelite spies promised to save Rahab and her family, and indeed, when they overtook Jericho, they did what they had promised.

Eventually, Rahab married the Israelite Salmon, and gave birth to Boaz, who married Ruth, who gave birth to Jesse, the father of David, who became King of Israel, and eventually the ancestor of Jesus Christ.

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Here is an excellent explanation of this issue of Rahab's lying, by Wayne Jackson of Christian Courier.

Many are confused regarding the story of Rahab who, although she lied when she hid Israel's spies, was described as being "justified" (James 2:25; Hebrews 11:31). How does one harmonize this with biblical ethics?

The narrative regarding the Canaanite, whose name was Rahab, in no way sanctions lying. There are several factors that must be taken into account in examining the Old Testament record.

First, one would not even know of this event were it not for the fact that it is revealed in the biblical documents. This is a clue as to the candidness and integrity of the sacred account. Scripture makes no effort to conceal the episode.

Second, Rahab's lie is never condoned anywhere in the Bible text. The New Testament writers certainly do not claim that she was "justified" by her misrepresentation of the facts regarding the Hebrew spies.

Third, lying is uniformly condemned throughout the Bible (see Leviticus 19:11; Proverbs 16:19; Ephesians 4:25; Revelation 21:8). The fact is, apart from divine revelation it cannot be proved that lying is wrong. Atheists certainly do not, and cannot (consistent with their philosophy) condemn lying as an evil that is universally wrong.

The case of Rahab is an example of God honoring a person due to her obedient faith – in spite of a personal character flaw. Reflect upon the following facts in connection with this incident.

Rahab was a Canaanite, an ancient body of pagans that inhabited Palestine at the time Israel entered the land in the 15th century before Christ. They were a grossly wicked people, steeped in idolatry and immorality. They even sacrificed their children on occasion as offerings to their gods. By profession, Rahab was a prostitute, and the scriptures make no attempt to hide that unsavory lifestyle. Without questions, this woman needed considerable refinement.

In spite of her sordid background, Rahab had generated in her heart a growing faith in the God of Israel. Read the narrative recorded in Joshua 2:9-11:

“... and she said unto the men (the spies), I know that Jehovah 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. For we have heard how Jehovah 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, that were beyond the Jordan, Sihon and Og, whom you utterly destroyed. And as soon as we heard it, our hearts melted, neither did there remain any more spirit in any man, because of you: for Jehovah your God, he is God in heaven above, and on the earth beneath. . .”

This woman had come to believe in the true God and his power to deliver. She was of a different temperament than her heathen neighbors. Accordingly, when the spies from Israel approached her, she was not “disobedient; as the others of Jericho who would perish in their pagan corruption. Rather, she, through faith in Jehovah, received the spies in peace (Hebrews 11:31), hid them, and sent them out another way (James 2:25). www.christiancourier.com

It was by these works of faith that she was delivered. God does not reward people **for** their sin. He rewards them for their faith, **in spite of** their sin.

Later, she was even incorporated into Christ’s genealogy:

“And Salmon begat Boaz of Rahab (the Canaanite); and Boaz begat Obed of Ruth (the Moabitess); and Obed begat Jesse; and Jesse begat David, the king: . . .” Matt 1:5,6

David’s grandmother was Ruth, a Moabitess – NOT an Israelite. His great grandmother was Rahab the former prostitute, also NOT an Israelite. She was a

Canaanite.

Jesus was of the progeny of David, therefore Jesus had two former pagans – one a former prostitute – Rahab and Ruth – in His genealogy.

Admittedly Rahab lied in the process of hiding the spies, and that was wrong. But her faith and obedience allowed her to obtain pardon from her blemished history. It is for the former that she is commended; the latter was never sanctioned.”

How far “Christianity” has fallen!

Now, here is a view of this issue of Rahab’s lying from Apostate Christianity – with “Relative Ethics” – meaning, “Everyone does what is right in his own mind” (Judges 21:25) the definition of the apostasy in Old Testament Israel.

“In those days there was no king in Israel: every man did that which was right in his own eyes.” Judges 21:25

This “Christian” pastor endorses lying whenever it suits one’s purpose, he endorses war and killing, and, like the Pharisees of old, redefines who is one’s “neighbor,” rejecting completely the words of Jesus Christ. This pastor denies that he is promoting “Situational Ethics” but that is EXACTLY what the author, Richard Phillips, is doing!

Why, since the ninth commandment forbids giving false testimony (Ex. 20:16), was Rahab praised for lying to the soldiers of Jericho. This refers to the episode when Joshua sent spies to Jericho, who hid in the house of Rahab the prostitute. The King of Jericho learned of their presence, but when the soldiers came to her house she told them that the spies had departed the city. This was not true. In fact, she had hidden the spies and helped them to escape by climbing out her window on a rope (Jos. 2:1-15). Because of this, Rahab and her family were spared when Jericho fell to the Israelites. Reporting on this incident, Hebrews 11:31 praises Rahab for her great faith. James 2:25 specifically praises her for deceiving the soldiers who came in pursuit of the spies.

How could Rahab be rewarded and praised for lying? Does this call into question the Bible’s consistency or the validity of the Ten Commandments? The answer is No. The reason Rahab is not accused under the ninth commandment is that she did not violate it. Exodus 20:16 says, “You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.” The term “false witness” deals specifically of the law court and in like situations

when it is our duty to speak truthfully. It adds that truth is owed to “our neighbor.” There are people and situations where neither of these apply.

This means that there are times when it is our duty not to speak the truth. One example is in warfare. It is a soldier’s duty to deceive his enemy. This is the category into which Rahab’s action fits. The King of Jericho was the enemy ruler at war with God’s people; as such, it was the duty of the godly to oppose him – including the use of deceit. Another example occurs in 2 Kings 6:19, when Elisha’s prayer blinded the enemy army, after which the prophet deceived them into following him into captivity. In both these cases, God’s holy war against his enemies called for deception. Today, God’s holy war takes the form of spiritual warfare, so that Satan is the antitype of the King of Jericho, whom Rahab rightly deceived.

Another circumstance in which we are right to deceive is when people are committing a crime. This was the case when Pharaoh ordered the murder of all the Israelite baby boys. The midwives “feared God and did not do as the king of Egypt commanded them” (Ex. 1:17). When Pharaoh demanded an explanation for this, the midwives lied and said that Israelite women all had their babies too quickly for the midwives to arrive (Ex. 1:19). We are explicitly told that God blessed the midwives for this (Ex. 1:21). Why? Because a murderer does not have the right to be told the truth in pursuit of his crime. He is not a “neighbor” but a proper enemy, who is to be treated as such. In fact, to lie to such a criminal is an application of God’s command to love our neighbor.

Does this open the door to situational ethics, which says that morality all depends on the situation? The answer is No. The classic situational ethics example is that of a man who enters your home, pulls out a gun, and demands to know where your wife and children are. Is it a sin to lie? The answer is no, not because morals are relative, but because a murderer seeking your family is not a neighbor and does not deserve the truth.

Doesn’t this give us an excuse to lie when we think it is convenient? The answer is No, because the ninth commandment says that we must not lie to those who deserve from us the truth. Courts of law are owed the truth. You owe your spouse the truth. If your boss is acting sinfully, you should confront him at the risk of your job rather than to lie to him, because your relationship with him places you under a duty not to bear false witness. Moreover, when opposing villains today like abortionists and pornographers, the example of Rahab does not give Christians the right to lie to the media or to government officials, to whom we owe the truth.

It was faith that caused Rahab to lie to God's enemy, and it was faith that led the midwives to lie to Pharaoh. In both cases, it would have been easier and less risky for them to tell the truth. If we are lying for personal gain or to avoid merely unpleasant situations, we can be sure that we are sinning. Let us always love our neighbor as ourselves (Mt. 22:39), a general commandment that requires us to love and practice truth as much as possible.

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Who does Jesus say is “our neighbor”?

When an expert in Pharisaical law asked Jesus, “Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?”

Jesus responded:

“What is written in the law? How readest thou?”

And he answering said, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind: **and thy neighbour as thyself.**

And Jesus said, “Thou hast answered right: this do, and thou shalt live.”

But he, willing to justify himself, said unto Jesus, “And who is my neighbour?”

Then Jesus told the Parable of the Good Samaritan: how a man traveling on foot from Jerusalem to Jericho, fell among thieves. The thieves stripped him of his clothing, wounded him, and left, leaving him half dead.

A priest came by and ignored the injured man, crossing over on the other side to avoid him.

Then a Levite came, and too, crossed over on the other side to avoid him.

The priest and the Levite were both Israelites, and were considered to be “God-fearing” religious men, but neither would have anything to do with the wounded man.

But a Samaritan, a “half-breed” mixture of Israelite and pagan, a member of a group that the Israelites hated and looked down on, came by and took care of the wounded man, bound up his wounds, took him on his horse to an inn and paid the innkeeper to care for him.

When Jesus asked, “Which one was the neighbour unto him that fell among the thieves? – the expert in the law answered:

“He that showed mercy on him.

“Then Jesus said unto him, “Go, and do thou likewise.” Luke 10:26-37

The culture of the Israelites was so bigoted and self-righteous that they looked down on everyone who was not one of them, just as many cultures, ethnicities, and religions do today, including the Christians.

Jesus’ response was that Everyone is our neighbor.

Yet, this supposedly Christian pastor, just like the Pharisees of old – the enemies of Jesus Christ - “makes the Word of God of none effect.” Mark 7:13