

# Surprised With Mercy



## SABBATH—OCTOBER 4

**READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON:** Joshua 2:1; Joshua 2:2–11; James 2:25; Joshua 2:12–21; Joshua 9:1–20.

**MEMORY VERSE:** “Rahab was a woman who used her body wrongly for sex to get money. But she believed in God, so she did not die with the people who did not believe in God. This was when the men came to spy out her country. She took them into her house in peace” (Hebrews 11:31, WE).

**DO YOU SOMETIMES ASK YOURSELF,** “Why did I do **that** again?” Most of us say these words at some time in our lives. For sure, we all make mistakes. So, who doesn't wish for a second chance to make things right?

Israel gets a second chance to enter the Promised Land. Joshua wants Israel to succeed. So, Joshua sends two spies to bring him valuable information about the land. Joshua wants to know how much water the Canaanites have. Are the Canaanites ready for battle? How strong are their city walls? Are they afraid to go to war with Israel?

Some people may think the Israelites didn't need to do anything to get the land. God promised to give it to them, right? But do God's promises mean that He expects us to do nothing? Of course not! Now Israel stands at the border of Canaan for a second time. The last time the Israelites were at the border, they didn't get to enter the Promised Land.

This week, we will look at two of the most interesting stories in the book of Joshua. We will learn how these stories can make our faith strong today.



**Joshua sends two spies to bring him valuable information about the land.**

**SECOND CHANCE (Joshua 2:1)**

**Why does Joshua send out spies? Read Joshua 2:1, along with Numbers 13:1, 2, 25–28, 33; and Numbers 14:1–12 for the answer.**

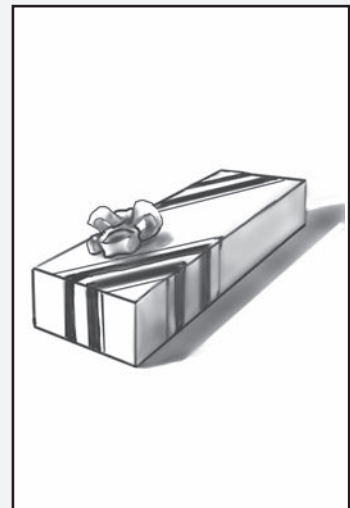
Joshua sent two spies from a place named Acacia Grove (Joshua 2:1, NKJV). Another name for Acacia Grove in the Hebrew language is “Shittim.” Acacia Grove helps us remember two bad experiences that happened to Israel at Shittim in the past.

The first bad experience is another spy story (read Numbers 13). The first story about the ten spies and the second story about the two spies are a lot alike. In both stories, the spies are sent to do special work. In both stories, the spies go into enemy territory. The spies in both stories come back. The spies in both stories report on what they find. In both stories, the Israelites decide what to do because of the information in the report.

The second bad experience at Shittim is one of the worst stories in Israel’s history. Israel broke their agreement with God. The Israelite men had sex with Moabite women and worshiped their gods (Numbers 25:1–3; Numbers 31:16). So, the name “Shittim” helps Israel remember the awful mistakes of the past. Now the Israelites are at Shittim again on the border of the Promised Land. Will the Israelites make the same mistakes they made in the past? Or will they do the right thing so that God can keep His promise to them?

**Read John 18:16–18, 25–27 and John 21:15–19. These verses talk about how Jesus gave Peter a second chance. Compare the story about Peter’s second chance with the second chance God gave to Israel. How are the two stories the same?**

God is the God of second chances (and much more!). The Bible has another name for the second chance: “mercy.” Mercy is getting a gift that we didn’t do anything to earn. The Bible is full of this teaching about mercy. (Compare Romans 5:2; Ephesians 2:8; and Romans 11:6.) God gives everyone the offer of a fresh start (Titus 2:11–14). Peter himself knew God’s mercy. Peter asked the church to grow in God’s mercy (2 Peter 3:18). The news gets better: we, too, get much more than a second chance, don’t we?



**Mercy is getting a gift  
that we didn’t do anything  
to earn.**

**VALUE IN UNEXPECTED PLACES (Joshua 2:2–11)**

**Read Joshua 2:2–11; Hebrews 11:31; and James 2:25. What do these verses tell us about Rahab?**



**Rahab told the spies on her rooftop, “‘The Lord your God is God in heaven above and on earth below’ ” (Joshua 2:11, NLV).**

Rahab tells a lie to protect the Israelite spies. If we want to understand Rahab’s story, we must remember that she lived among very evil people. That’s why God finally decided to judge them (Genesis 15:16; Deuteronomy 9:5; Leviticus 18:25–28). Yes, the New Testament praises Rahab’s faith. At the same time, the Bible doesn’t praise everything about Rahab. The Bible never praises her lie.

Hebrews 11:31 honors Rahab for helping the spies. The Bible also honors Rahab for rejecting an evil way of life. James 2:25 honors Rahab for giving lodging to the two Israelite spies. Rahab also is praised for telling the spies how to get home safely. God, in His mercy, saw faith in Rahab. God used her faith to bless Israel. Rahab believed in God and chose to belong to God’s people. Rahab chose Israel’s God over her own gods. God liked Rahab’s courage and her brave faith. God used her to help save other people.

Rahab chose to be on the Lord’s side. Rahab told the spies on her rooftop, “ ‘The Lord your God is God in heaven above and on earth below’ ” (Joshua 2:11, NLV). In Rahab’s religion, people often went on their rooftops to pray to the gods who they thought controlled the skies. So, Rahab’s announcement and where she says it are important. Rahab is announcing that Yahweh is the only God.

Rahab’s words about God’s control are used in other parts of the Bible (Exodus 20:4; Deuteronomy 4:39; Deuteronomy 5:8). All of these verses say that God is the only Person we may worship. Rahab’s words show us that she chose to worship God with her own free will. She believes that God is the only true God. Rahab understands that God is all-powerful. As Judge of the whole earth, God will punish Rahab’s people for their sins.

Rahab understands that she has two choices: She can continue to sin against God. Or she can give her life to Him. If she continues to fight against God, she will be destroyed with her people. So, Rahab chooses to serve the God of Israel. Her choice makes her a shining example to the people in Jericho. The people could have been saved if they followed her example and accepted God’s mercy.

## NEW LOYALTY (Joshua 2:12–21)

**Read Joshua 2:12–21. Now read Exodus 12:13, 22, 23. How do the verses in Exodus help you understand the agreement between the spies and Rahab?**

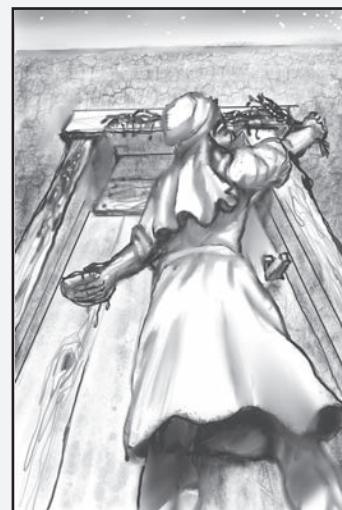
Rahab's deal with the spies is plain and simple. She wants to exchange life for life and favor for favor. Rahab will save and help the spies. So, she expects them to save and help her family. The word written as "kind" in Joshua 2:12 (ERV) comes from the word "chësed" in the Hebrew language. "Chësed" has a rich meaning that is hard to translate with just one word in other languages. "Chësed" often is used to talk about someone's loyalty to a promise. But "chësed" also can mean "faith," "mercy," "kind-hearted," and "loving."

Rahab's words help us remember Deuteronomy 7:12. In this verse, the Lord promises to keep giving His "chësed" or love to Israel: " 'Pay attention to these laws. Obey them carefully. Then the Lord your God will keep his agreement and show his love to you. He promised your ancestors he would' " (Deuteronomy 7:12, ICB).

In Deuteronomy 7, God also commands Israel to destroy the Canaanites completely. What's surprising is that Rahab is a Canaanite. She belongs to the people that God commands Israel to destroy. But Rahab believes in the promises that God gave to the Israelites. So, God saves her.

Rahab's conversation with the spies helps us remember the Passover during the Exodus. The Exodus was the time when God helped the Israelites escape from slavery in Egypt. During the Passover, Moses commanded the Israelites to mark the top and sides of their doors with the blood of a lamb. Then the people must stay inside their houses. The blood protected the people from the destroying angel when he passed over their houses (read Exodus 12:13; also read Exodus 12:22, 23).

"The people showed their faith with their obedience. We also must show our faith in the blood of Jesus. We must understand that we have something to do, too, if we want to be saved. Only Jesus can save us. At the same time, we must stop sinning. We must obey. God will save us with His mercy when we believe in Him. Our good behavior doesn't save us. At the same time, our good behavior shows our faith. Our obedience shows that we believe that Jesus saves us."—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, page 279, adapted.



**Rahab's conversation with the spies helps us remember the Passover during the Exodus.**



## HARD CHOICES (Joshua 9:1–20)

**Read about the Gibeonites in Joshua 9:1–20. Compare this story with the story about Rahab. How are the two stories the same? How are they different?**

Joshua 9 and 10 tell us that the Canaanite kings decide to join together against Israel. During this time, the people who live in Gibeon decide to make a peace agreement with Israel.

The Gibeonites want to trick Israel into making the agreement with them. So, the Gibeonites pretend to be leaders from a foreign country. God told Israel to kill everyone who lived in the Promised Land. But God commanded Israel to show mercy first to people who lived outside the Promised Land.

The Gibeonites say many of the same things Rahab said. Both Rahab and the Gibeonites say that Israel's God is very powerful. Both Rahab and the Gibeonites understand that Israel's success comes from God, not from human strength. The Gibeonites are different from other Canaanites. The Gibeonites don't fight against God's plan to give their land to the Israelites. The Gibeonites also believe that the Lord is pushing the Canaanites out of the Promised Land for Israel. Both Rahab and the Gibeonites hear the news about how God saved the Israelites from Egypt. Rahab and the Gibeonites also hear about how God helps the Israelites win the fights against Sihon and Og. So, both Rahab and the Gibeonites want to be friends with Israel. But the Gibeonites refuse to serve the God of Israel. Rahab does not. Rahab wishes to serve Him and be saved. But the Gibeonites trick the Israelites into protecting them.

Moses taught that God's people must ask Him what He wanted them to do before they did anything (Numbers 27:16–21). Joshua should have asked the Lord what He wanted him to do. Then God would have kept Joshua from being tricked.

The first job of Christian leaders is to ask God what He wants them to do (1 Chronicles 28:9; 2 Chronicles 15:2; 2 Chronicles 18:4; 2 Chronicles 20:4). The Israelites got trapped in the promise they made to the Gibeonites. If the Israelites let the Gibeonites live, they disobeyed God's command about letting their enemies live. Or if they killed the Gibeonites, the Israelites broke their promise. Any choice they made caused them to break their promise to God.



**Moses taught that God's people must ask Him what He wanted them to do before they did anything (Numbers 27:16–21).**

**SURPRISING MERCY (Joshua 9:21–27)**

**How did Joshua show that he was both fair and filled with mercy? Read Joshua 9:21–27 for the answer.**

What would happen if the Israelites attacked the Gibeonites? The Israelites couldn't do that, even if they wanted to. The leaders of Israel made a promise to protect the Gibeonites. Yes, the Gibeonites tricked the leaders into making it. But as long as the Israelites' promise didn't break God's law (Judges 11:29–40), they must keep their promise.

In the Old Testament, holy people kept their promises. They also made wise decisions. They didn't make promises they couldn't keep (Psalm 15:4; Psalm 24:4; Ecclesiastes 5:2, 6). Israel's leaders made their promise to the Gibeonites in the name of the Lord, the God of Israel. So, the leaders couldn't change their promise.

Now, because of this promise, the Israelites and the Gibeonites were connected forever. The Gibeonites worked as the woodcutters and water carriers for God's house (Joshua 9:23). So, the Gibeonites became part of Israel's worship community. The leaders of Israel announce that the Gibeonites will be Israel's servants (Joshua 9:21). But Joshua's words change this curse into a blessing for the Gibeonites.

Bible history shows us that the Gibeonites were loyal to God's people. God showed them His loving favor. The Israelites kept their promise to the Gibeonites for hundreds of years. So, when the Israelites came back from Babylon, the Gibeonites helped them rebuild Jerusalem (Nehemiah 7:25).

What if the Gibeonites didn't trick Israel and asked for God's mercy, just as Rahab did? Would God save them? We don't know the answer. We do know God's plan is to save sinners. He doesn't want to punish them. He wants them to stop sinning and accept His mercy (compare with Ezekiel 18:23 and Ezekiel 33:11). For sure, the Gibeonites' trick was wrong. But we must believe that the Gibeonites really wanted God to show them mercy. The other Canaanites refused to stop sinning or honor God's plan. So, God destroyed them (Genesis 15:16). But God honored the Gibeonites because they believed He was all-powerful. The Gibeonites also wanted to be at peace with Israel. So, they chose to stop worshiping false gods and to worship only the Lord.



**The Gibeonites worked as the woodcutters and water carriers for God's house (Joshua 9:23).**

**ADDITIONAL THOUGHT:** Read Ellen G. White, “Crossing the Jordan,” pages 482, 483, in *Patriarchs and Prophets*.

After we read about Rahab and the spies, the Old Testament doesn’t say anything else about her. In the New Testament, Rahab shows up in the family line of Jesus. The Bible says that Rahab became the wife of Salmon. Salmon was from the family group of Judah. Rahab was the mother of Boaz, who married Ruth. So, Rahab was Ruth’s mother-in-law (Matthew 1:5; compare with Ruth 4:13, 21). Think about Rahab’s amazing change! Rahab used to be a prostitute. As we already saw, a prostitute is someone who has sex for pay. As a citizen of Jericho, Rahab would have been destroyed. But Rahab believes in God. Because of her faith, Rahab becomes an ancestor of King David and of Jesus. See what God can do when we believe, even if our faith is as small as a mustard seed! (Read Matthew 17:20; Luke 17:6.)

“Rahab isn’t the only person who worshiped false gods and then later accepted God’s mercy. The Gibeonites gave up their false gods. They joined with Israel and shared in the blessings of God’s promise.

“God doesn’t show favor to people because of where they were born or who their family is. God made all of us. So, we are all part of God’s family. Jesus came to break every wall that separates us from God and from other people. God wants us to come to Him. He doesn’t want anything to get in our way. God’s love is so deep, big, and powerful. God’s love can reach anyone wherever they are. God’s love lifts us out of Satan’s control. God’s love helps save us from Satan’s lies. God’s love brings us to His throne. God’s rainbow is around His throne. This rainbow is a symbol of God’s promise to us. God’s promise is for everyone who believes in Jesus. His promise is for Jews and Greeks alike, for slaves and for free people.”—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, pages 369, 370, adapted.



**God’s rainbow is around His throne. This rainbow is a symbol of God’s promise to us.**

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ① What does it mean to give someone a second chance? Are there times when we shouldn’t give people second chances? If yes, what are some examples?
- ② How is Rahab an example of faith?
- ③ How can we show people mercy and also be fair?

## **“DON’T WORRY. GOD WILL HELP.”**

Inácio Manoel sold Bible books for a living in Brazil. Inácio knocked on the door of the house. A woman answered. When she learned who Inácio was, she yelled, “I hate Christians!”

Inácio was surprised. The woman’s house was the first house he visited on his first day of work as a Bible bookseller. Inácio also planned to offer Bible studies to people.

Inácio and a friend went to the next house. A big dog barked at them in the yard. Inácio’s friend was not happy that they met an angry woman at the first house and an angry dog at the second house. Inácio told his friend not to worry. “God is with us.”

A woman came out of the house and led the dog away. Then the woman invited Inácio and his friend inside. The three of them had a heart-to-heart conversation. The woman told Inácio and his friend about her troubles since her husband went to prison. The next Sabbath, the woman came to church with her three young children. Inácio was amazed. He told God that he wanted to lead people to Him for the rest of his life.

Inácio’s biggest surprise came when they visited the third house that day. The woman who lived there was named Edileuza. Edileuza agreed to Bible studies on Saturday afternoons. As they studied together week after week, they came to the Bible truth about the seventh-day Sabbath. Edileuza worked two jobs. She was a housekeeper. She also painted ladies’ fingernails for a living. She didn’t think she could take Sabbaths off.

Edileuza explained, “I make the most money on that day of the week. So, I need to work Sabbaths. What else can I do?”

Inácio said, “Don’t worry. God will help. He has something better for you.”

At the next Bible study, Edileuza said that she met a stranger on the street. The man said he needed a good housekeeper and asked her if she knew anyone who could do the job. Best of all, the housekeeping job gave her the Sabbath off.

Edileuza smiled as she shared the story with Inácio. She said, “I love my new job as housekeeper. Now my pay is three times more than I earned before in both of my old jobs.”

Edileuza was baptized. Later, the rest of her family also got baptized.

Inácio is now 68 years old. For the past 36 years, 4 to 11 people get baptized every year because of him. Everywhere he goes, he carries Bible lessons with him. Every night he prays, “Lord, put someone in my path, so I can share Your love.”

Inácio says, “I can live without everything in this life except Bible studies.” This quarter’s 13th Sabbath offering will help build a church in the area where Inácio lives. Watch a short YouTube video of Inácio at: <https://bit.ly/Inacio-Brazil>.

## *INSIDE Story*



**A big dog barked at them in the yard.**



**Inácio Manoel**