

JOSHUA (9) – Joshua 2 and Rahab’s “lie”

Covenant Fellowship Church

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“Disciples of Christ inhabit a story of divine love within a world at war.”

Exodus 20:16 / Deuteronomy 5:20: “You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.”

Joshua 2:1–7, especially vv. 4–5:

“But the woman had taken the two men and hidden them. And she said, ‘True, the men came to me, but I did not know where they were from. And when the gate was about to be closed at dark, the men went out. I do not know where the men went. Pursue them quickly, for you will overtake them.’”

Observation: Rahab doesn’t just omit the truth; she constructs an elaborate “misdirection” (a lie?) to protect the spies. BUT: receiving the spies in peace (Heb. 11:31) AND hiding the spies AND misdirecting the authorities are ALL ONE ACTION. IF misdirecting the authorities was wrong, so was receiving and hiding the spies; if receiving and hiding them were right, so was misdirecting the authorities.

Kinds of lies: lies vary according to their *what*, their *why*, and their *result*.

The malicious lie: declaring an untruth with the intent to mislead another, resulting in the other’s injury.

The jocular lie: declaring an untruth with the intent to amuse or entertain another, resulting in no injury.
BUT: Proverbs 26:18–19!

The polite lie: declaring an untruth with the intent to honor etiquette and politeness (something different from refined insincerity). BUT: Proverbs 26:28 and Psalm 12:2–3

The lie of secrecy and concealment: the means of this lying involves EITHER declaring an untruth OR using a misleading formulation (partial truth; e.g., “Are you taking your meds?” “Not as regularly as I should”) OR using silence, but all of them with the intent to conceal the truth.

The lie of necessity: declaring an untruth or concealing the truth with the intent to protect life.

Exodus 1:15–21

Joshua 2:4–6

Hebrews 11:31

James 2:25

Both Hebrews and James make clear that Rahab’s concealing the truth from the authorities who would have misused the truth was part of her “good works” and therefore was not a violation of the Ninth Commandment. Concealing the truth need not be lying. (God’s Word defines when the Ninth Commandment is violated, just as with the Sixth Commandment [“You shall not kill”].)

(over, please)

3. Evaluations: Various evaluations throughout the centuries:

Interpretation	The Core Argument	The “Verdict” on the Lie
Total Truth (Augustine)	Lying is always a sin, regardless of the motive.	She sinned by lying, but God showed grace because of her faith.
Hierarchical Ethics (Norman Geisler)	When two moral laws conflict (telling truth vs. saving life), we must obey the “higher” law.	The lie was not a sin because protecting life is a higher duty.
Warfare Ethics	In a state of war, an enemy is not “owed” the truth.	The lie was a legitimate military tactic of deception.
The “Faith through Works” View	Rahab’s lie was the outward expression of her internal shift in loyalty to Yahweh.	Her lie is praised (indirectly) as an act of courageous faith.
“Right to the truth” view: Phillip Kayser	Compliance is not an option when innocent life is at stake.	Rahab defied and deceived the authorities in order to save the lives of the Hebrew spies (Joshua 2) and was praised by God for it (Heb. 11:31; James 2:25).

Lies for personal survival: Gen. 12:11–20; 20:2–19; 26:7–11

Military deception: Josh. 8:2; 2 Sam. 5:22–25

The limit to confidentiality: doctors, church leaders, teachers, social workers

Loyalty vs. honesty: If a friend tells you he is struggling with self-harm but asks you to “promise not to tell,” is breaking that promise a “lie” or an act of life-saving love?

Professional concealment vs. lying: today’s practice by professionals of concealing truth from people who have a right to know the truth (parents, patients) must be evaluated in terms of the right to know, the concern for consequences, and the duty of authority.

Breaking the Ninth Commandment by speaking the truth: gossip, slander, and libel can declare something that is factually correct, BUT which occurs “against your neighbor.”

Heidelberg Catechism, Lord’s Day 43 (p. 893):

112. What is God’s will for you in the ninth commandment?

That I never give false testimony against anyone, twist no one’s words, not gossip or slander, nor join in condemning anyone rashly or without a hearing (Ps. 15; Prov. 19:5; Matt. 7:1; Luke 6:37; Rom. 1:28–32).

Rather, I should avoid, under penalty of God’s wrath (Lev. 19:1–12; Prov. 12:22; 13:5; John 8:44; Rev. 21:8a), every kind of lying and deceit as the very works of the devil; and in court and everywhere else, I should love the truth, speak it candidly, and openly acknowledge it (1 Cor. 13:6; Eph. 4:25).

And I should do what I can to defend and advance my neighbor’s honor and reputation (1 Pet. 3:8–9; 4:8).