

The Gospel Unashamed

"From the cowardice that shrinks from new truth, from the laziness that is content with half-truths, from the arrogance that thinks it knows all truth, O, God of Truth, deliver us."

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~ All articles written by Terry Carter unless otherwise stated ~

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A Lie to Save Lives



On September 4, 2024, there was a school shooting at a Georgia high school. Jennifer Carter had taught Spanish there for over twenty years. After the incident, she posted that she had told her students to hide behind some couches. She said she lied to them by telling them that the quieter they were, the faster the drill would end. This was a lie because it was not a drill, and she knew it was not a drill.

Her students followed her directions, and even when they realized that it was not a drill, she says that they still trusted her and did exactly what she asked. She likely saved their lives by keeping them calm in a moment when panic could have easily taken over. She lied to save innocent lives. Who would condemn her for her actions?

This incident makes me think about Rahab. In the second chapter of Joshua, we read about her hiding the Israelite spies and sending their pursuers away. She claimed that she did not know where the spies were from or where they had gone, but she encouraged the pursuers to hurry and chase after them in hopes of catching them.

"So the king of Jericho sent to Rahab, saying, "Bring out the men who have come to you, who have entered your house, for **they have come to search out all the country.**" 4 Then **the woman took the two men and hid them.** So **she said, "Yes, the men came to me, but I did not know where they were from.** 5 "And it happened as the gate was being shut, when it was dark, that the men went out. **Where the men went I do not know; pursue them quickly, for you may overtake them.**" 6 (But she had brought them up to the roof and hidden them with the stalks of flax, which she had laid in order on the roof.)" **Joshua 2:3-6 (NKJV)**

In the book of James, this is called an act of faith on her part for which she was justified.

"Likewise, was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out another way?" James 2:25 (NKJV)

Some people struggle with this since she lied to the men pursuing the Israelite spies, and, yet, she is said to be justified by that very act of deception. Some understand that lying is sinful, but struggle to reconcile that fact with this account of Rahab. Others mistakenly see this as a license to lie whenever they choose.

The thoughts below may not explain this apparent paradox to everyone's satisfaction, but hopefully there are some who will find them helpful.

1. Without question, it was a lie.

The men pursuing the spies had told her that they were there to spy on the land. She intentionally hid them after she had this knowledge. She knew full well that what she told their pursuers was not true. There is no way to

describe this as anything but saying what she knew to be untrue for the purpose of deceiving. That is a lie by any definition.

2. Lying is clearly condemned in Scripture.

Lying is named twice in a list of seven things that God hates.

“16 These **six things the LORD hates, Yes, seven are an abomination to Him:** 17 A proud look, **A lying tongue,** Hands that shed innocent blood, 18 A heart that devises wicked plans, Feet that are swift in running to evil, 19 **A false witness who speaks lies,** And one who sows discord among brethren.” **Proverbs 6:16-19 (NKJV)**

Lying makes us the children of the devil who is the father of lies.

“You are of your father **the devil,** and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. **When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it.**” **John 8:44 (NKJV)**

Ananias and his wife, Sapphira, were struck dead for lying.

“3 But Peter said, “Ananias, **why has Satan filled your heart to lie to**

the Holy Spirit and keep back part of the price of the land for yourself? 4 “While it remained, was it not your own? And after it was sold, was it not in your own control? Why have you conceived this thing in your heart? **You have not lied to men but to God.**” 5 Then **Ananias, hearing these words, fell down and breathed his last.** So great fear came upon all those who heard these things.” **Acts 5:3-5 (NKJV)**

Liars are condemned to the lake of fire.

“But the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and **all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.**” **Revelation 21:8 (NKJV)**

Liars will not enter the heavenly city.

“But **there shall by no means enter it anything that defiles, or causes an abomination or a lie,** but only those who are written in the Lamb's Book of Life.” **Revelation 21:27 (NKJV)**

“**But outside are** dogs and sorcerers and sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters, and **whoever loves and practices a lie.**” **Revelation 22:15 (NKJV)**

If God hates a lying tongue, Satan is the father of lies, Ananias was struck dead for lying, liars will have their place in the lake of fire, and no one who practices a lie can enter the heavenly city, how can Rahab be justified by her lie? Evidently there was something very different about Rahab's lie and the lie of Ananias or even lies in general. Something more must be involved here than a “normal” lie.

3. One clue is found in the James passage itself.

What Rahab did was an act of faith. After she sent the pursuers away, she tells the spies how they knew about the Red Sea and the defeat of Sihon and Og. She confesses to them that their God is God in heaven and on earth. She begs them to spare her and her family when they destroy Jericho.

“9 and said to the men: “**I know that the LORD has given you the land, that the terror of you has fallen on us,** and that all the inhabitants of the land are fainthearted because of you. 10 “**For we have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red Sea for you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to the two kings of the Amorites who were on the other side of the Jordan, Sihon and Og, whom you utterly**

destroyed. 11 "And as soon as we heard these things, our hearts melted; neither did there remain any more courage in anyone because of you, **for the LORD your God, He is God in heaven above and on earth beneath.** 12 "Now therefore, **I beg you, swear to me by the LORD,** since I have shown you kindness, that you also will show kindness to my father's house, and give me a true token, 13 "and **spare my father, my mother, my brothers, my sisters, and all that they have, and deliver our lives from death."** **Joshua 2:9-13 (NKJV)**

This was more than just a desire for their lives to be spared. It was a commitment to be part of God's people for the remainder of their lives. It was an act of faith in that it was prompted by her conviction that the God of Israel was the true God and that He would deliver Jericho into the hands of the Israelites. She was making a choice to stand with God's people rather than siding with their enemies.

"And **Joshua spared Rahab the harlot, her father's household, and all that she had. So she dwells in Israel to this day,** because she hid the messengers whom Joshua sent to spy out Jericho." **Joshua 6:25 (NKJV)**

4. Rahab's deception is a wartime event.

Deception and misdirection are always part of any war. That is even true when God's man is directing the battle. We can see an example of this very thing right in the book of Joshua.

After initially being defeated at Ai, Joshua attacks again, and deception is part of the battle plan. He set men in ambush the night before the attack. The following day, the attacking force fled before the men of Ai to lead them away from the city. The idea was to pretend defeat so that they would be pursued by the enemy allowing the other group to ambush the city and burn it. This is the kind of deception that is commonplace in war. In fact, this plan is even referred to as the "commandment of the Lord".

"3 So Joshua arose, and all the people of war, to go up against Ai; and Joshua chose thirty thousand mighty men of valor and sent them away by night. 4 And he commanded them, saying: "**Behold, you shall lie in ambush against the city, behind the city.** Do not go very far from the city, but all of you be ready. 5 "Then I and all the people who are with me will approach the city; and it will come about, **when**

they come out against us as at the first, that we shall flee before them. 6 "For they will come out after us till we have drawn them from the city, for they will say, 'They are fleeing before us as at the first.' Therefore we will flee before them. 7 "**Then you shall rise from the ambush and seize the city, for the LORD your God will deliver it into your hand. 8 "And it will be, when you have taken the city, that you shall set the city on fire. According to the commandment of the LORD you shall do.** See, I have commanded you." **Joshua 8:3-8 (NKJV)**

We see a similar thing when Absalom rebelled against David. A woman hid two men in a well. When Absalom's men came looking for them, she told them that they had gone over the water brook. This was a lie, but the men were spared and were able to warn David of the plan against him.

"17 Now Jonathan and Ahimaaz stayed at En Rogel, for they dared not be seen coming into the city; so a female servant would come and tell them, and they would go and tell King David. 18 Nevertheless a lad saw them, and told Absalom. But both of them went away quickly and **came to**

a man's house in Bahurim, who had a well in his court; and they went down into it. 19 Then the woman took and spread a covering over the well's mouth, and spread ground grain on it; and the thing was not known. 20 And when Absalom's servants came to the woman at the house, they said, "Where are Ahimaaz and Jonathan?" So the woman said to them, "They have gone over the water brook." And when they had searched and could not find them, they returned to Jerusalem. 21 Now it came to pass, after they had departed, that they came up out of the well and went and told King David, and said to David, "Arise and cross over the water quickly. For thus has Ahithophel advised against you." 22 So David and all the people who were with him arose and crossed over the Jordan. By morning light not one of them was left who had not gone over the Jordan." **II Samuel 17:17-22 (NKJV)**

This was deception, but it was the deception of war. The woman's lie not only spared the lives of the men she hid, but it also enabled David to flee with the people and thwart the plans against him.

When we consider war itself, we realize that it

involves killing. However, we all understand that this is not the same as murder. God condemns murder, but He has often commanded war. This is not situation ethics. It is a recognition of the inherent difference of killing in war and murder.

Imagine that your home was under attack by a hostile army, and you had hidden your family under the floor. The enemy bursts through the door and finds you there alone. They ask you if anyone else is in the house. Do you tell them about your family hidden under the floor or do you tell them that you are alone?

The answer is obvious. You say what you must to save the lives of your family. Yes, that is a lie, but it is justified because it was told to preserve innocent lives.

5. The purpose of Rahab's deception was to save innocent lives.

When the Pharisees rebuked Jesus for healing on the Sabbath, He referred to David and his men eating the showbread which was unlawful for him.

"3 But He said to them, "Have you not read what David did when he was hungry, he and those who were with him: 4 "how he entered the house of

God and ate the showbread which was not lawful for him to eat, nor for those who were with him, but only for the priests?" **Matthew 3-4 (NKJV)**

He further stated that the Pharisees did not understand what God meant when He said He desired mercy, not sacrifice.

"But if you had known what this means, 'I desire mercy and not sacrifice,' you would not have condemned the guiltless." **Matthew 12:7 (NKJV)**

Jesus goes on to point out that even they would pull their sheep out of the ditch if it fell in on the Sabbath.

"Then He said to them, "11 What man is there among you who has one sheep, and if it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will not lay hold of it and lift it out? 12 "Of how much more value then is a man than a sheep? Therefore it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath." **Matthew 12:11-12 (NKJV)**

In all three of these arguments, Jesus is making the case that the preservation of life, especially human life, is more important than the letter of the Law. Even the Pharisees understood this principle as illustrated in

their removing a sheep from the ditch on the Sabbath. This is not situation ethics, nor does it justify violating law for just any reason.

The highest purpose of law (man's or God's) is preservation of life, especially human life. When the law gets in the way of that purpose, life must be preserved despite the law.

The Jewish midwives in Egypt are another good example of this principle. When they refused to follow Pharaoh's orders to kill the male babies, the excuse they gave him was not the truth. However, God blessed them for it. They lied to save lives.

"17 But the midwives feared God, and did not do as the king of Egypt commanded them, but saved the male children alive. 18 So the king of Egypt called for the midwives and said to them, 'Why have you done this thing, and saved the male children alive?' 19 And the midwives said to Pharaoh, 'Because the Hebrew women are not like the Egyptian women; for they are lively and give birth before the midwives come to them.' 20 Therefore God dealt well with the midwives, and the people multiplied and grew very mighty. 21 And

so it was, because the midwives feared God, that He provided households for them." Exodus 1:17-21 (NKJV)

To give a more modern example, consider speed limits and traffic laws in general. They exist for the purpose of saving lives. They are supposed to make our roads safer. Generally, they do exactly that. However, if you have someone in your vehicle who is in danger of dying due to illness or injury, you might just violate some of these laws as you rush them to the hospital.

This is not justification for simply ignoring the traffic laws at any time for any reason. It is about fulfilling the purpose of those traffic laws by preserving human life.

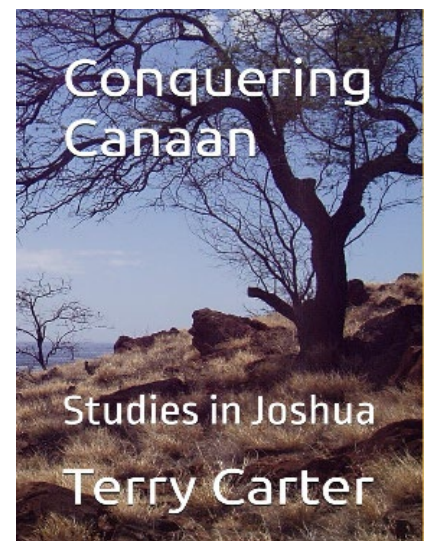
Imagine further that someone has fallen out of a boat and is drowning, but there is a sign that says, "No Swimming". Do you obey the sign and let them drown? Of course not, you dive in to rescue them.

You have violated the letter of the law but followed its spirit. You have preserved the life the law was meant to save. However, this does not justify swimming there anytime you like. It is possible to follow the letter of the law while violating the spirit of the law. It is also possible to violate the

letter of the law while following the spirit of it.

Rahab did lie, but it was justified because it was an act of faith, it was a wartime lie, and it followed the purpose of the Law in preserving human life. It does not justify lying for any reason at any time. But if you should find yourself in a situation like Rahab, you might be justified by the very lie that preserves the lives of God's people.

I am confident that Rahab did the right thing by sending the messengers out the other way. The Word of God says that she did. She was justified by that very act of faith, and she is even given as an example of faith because of that act. I will not condemn the teacher in Georgia for her lie, nor will I condemn Rahab for hers.



Note: The previous article is an excerpt from *Conquering Canaan: Studies in Joshua* by Terry Carter which is now available for purchase on Amazon. This book contains over twenty-five studies from Joshua and can be used for personal or group study.