

Joshua 2 and James 2:25 - Was Rahab's Lie a Sin?

[E-mail Correspondence]

ORIGINAL QUESTION:

In Joshua, Chap. 2, we're told that the spies sent by Joshua were hidden by Rahab the prostitute. When men from Jericho came searching for them, Rahab, in order to protect the spies, informed those searching that the Israelite men had already left the city. In reality, the spies were still hidden on her roof. Since Rahab made a statement which she knew was untrue, did she commit the sin of lying by protecting the lives of the spies? (An act for which she is commended in James 2:25)

My Reply (#1):

- >Since Rahab made a statement which she knew was untrue, did
- >she commit the sin of lying by protecting the lives of the spies?
- >(An act for which she is commended in James 2:25)

She committed the sin of lying by lying, not by protecting the lives of the spies. NOBODY is 100.0% sinless in all his actions, and she wasn't, either. Besides, she had just become a new convert, and hadn't had any chance to grow in the faith! Had she been a "mature, spiritual warrior" like Elisha, she could have just prayed something like, "Close these men's eyes," (2 Kings 6:18) and that would have been sufficient! [I'm not to the point that Elisha was, either! ;-)]

Her act of protecting the spies was an act of faith (faith put into action, according to James). It was this for which she was praised... not the lying.

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If you're interested, I've got some comments somewhere on this computer that further explore the topic of lying (discussion on the passage in 1 Samuel 16, which some people use to defend lying). If you want, I will hunt them down & mail them to you.

Dennis

His Reply:

Dennis:

Thanks for taking the time to reply to my inquiry. I would appreciate any information you wish to send.

Since you are the only person I've asked, who was willing to give me a definitive Yes or No to the question, allow me to present a different scenario and see if you still agree the sin of lying is being committed.

Scenario: A mother is at home with her two small children. She spies an armed intruder attempting to break into the house. She immediately hides her two children in a closet in order to protect them. The intruder gains entry to the home and confronts the helpless mother with a loaded gun. She recognizes the intruder as the one currently being sought by police for robbing homes in the city and killing the occupants of those homes. She is certain that if this intruder finds her children they will be killed. The intruder demands to know if anyone else is in the house. The mother, a Christian, replies: "No, I am here alone." In making that statement to protect her children did she commit the sin of lying?

- > Her act of protecting the spies was an act of faith (faith put into action,
- > according to James). It was this for which she was praised... not the lying.

The passage in James commends Rahab for two actions: protecting the spies, and "sending them out another way." (i.e. a way different from the course indicated in her deceptive statement to the soldiers searching for them.) It might appear to some that her "sending them out" in a "different" direction is a continuation of the deception begun with her statement to the soldiers. In any case, James indicates she was "justified" or "righteous" (from the verb dikaioo) in both of these acts.

Any additional comments you have are welcome.

Thanks.

My Response (#2):

Hi! Thanks for your response & additional comments. I'm sending you a copy of the "dialogue" that I was involved in, over the significance of 1 Samuel 16 and lying. [separate letter]

- >allow me to present a different scenario and
- >see if you still agree the sin of lying is being committed.
- >
- >Scenario: A mother is at home with her two small children. ...
- >...[description of scenario and her statement - quoted below] ...

>In making that statement to protect her children did she commit
>the sin of lying?

I would say "yes." You may ask what I would do if I was in such a situation... In "real life," I can't predict it, because nothing ever seems to work the way I "theorize" it will. But, at least in principle, I wouldn't say ANYTHING at all.

I could also raise the question: Do you think her answer would prevent the criminal from looking, anyway? I would think that the guy would EXPECT her to lie. Besides, if she weren't already well-practiced in lying, I'd expect her expressions and mannerisms to give-away the fact that she was lying.

In such "preplanned scenarios," the person is supposed to lie, and then lives are spared, etc. This is supposed to "prove" that lying is good - at least in some circumstances.

It seems to me, however, that these scenarios don't represent what one could expect in "real life." Let me describe what I would expect would be more likely to happen... I begin by quoting your scenario:

Scenario: A mother is at home with her two small children. She spies an armed intruder attempting to break into the house. She immediately hides her two children in a closet in order to protect them. The intruder gains entry to the home and confronts the helpless mother with a loaded gun. She recognizes the intruder as the one currently being sought by police for robbing homes in the city and killing the occupants of those homes. She is certain that if this intruder finds her children they will be killed. The intruder demands to know if anyone else is in the house. The mother, a Christian, replies: "No, I am here alone."

At this point, the intruder says, "I don't believe you." He forces her to lie down, and then ties her up and puts a gag in her mouth. He then begins looking and eventually finds the children. They are too terrified to scream, and are quickly overcome and then bound and gagged.

The intruder returns to the woman. He says, "So you lied to me, huh? I don't like liars. Here, let me show you what I do with liars..." [At this point, I'll leave you to your imagination. But whatever he did, he would most likely begin with the children, to "enhance" the woman's suffering.]

Of course, if he discovers that she is a Christian, he would most likely add some humiliating comments such as... "And you claim you're a Christian? Don't you know that Christians aren't supposed to lie?"

So, did this woman accomplish anything good because of her lying? Could she have predicted before-hand what the effects of her lying to the intruder would be? [Those who defend lying normally present a "positive" outcome that is described as though NO OTHER thing could possibly happen.]

How can I respond to all this? In real life, NOBODY knows the ultimate outcome. In my opinion, the BEST alternative is to commit myself to my faithful Creator and continue to do what is good. [This last sentence is patterned after 1 Peter 4:19.]

- >The passage in James commends Rahab for two actions: protecting the
- >spies, and "sending them out another way." (i.e. a way different from
- >the course indicated in her deceptive statement to the soldiers
- >searching for them.) It might appear to some that her "sending them
- >out" in a "different" direction is a continuation of the deception
- >begun with her statement to the soldiers. In any case, James
- >indicates she was "justified" or "righteous" (from the verb dikaioo)
- >in both of these acts.

I forgot the second part, since I was commenting from memory... thanks for pointing it out!

It might appear that way to some, but I don't interpret it that way. And I don't think it is necessary. If Scripture contains NO genuine "black & white" endorsement of such conduct, why should I interpolate it in such a way that I would claim "implies" it? Old and New Testament alike contain direct statements that prohibit lying - whether "external" and obvious to everyone, or "internal" and secret (or even done in a self-deceiving manner). There is NO direct statement that makes an endorsement of lying in any situation.

The verses that I have heard people use to endorse lying are never from the sections of Scripture that contain the "theological teaching" and ethical principles. (Such people tend to ignore or downplay such teachings.) Rather, the verses they use come from the descriptions of historical events. (Maybe a misinterpreted proverb, also.) And in order to build their case from these instances, they have to weave a string of "human arguments" to get us to their conclusions.

When examining historical accounts, they are to be interpreted by the commands and moral principles that are explicitly laid-down in the Word. "Truth" is supposed to determine the significance (rightness or wrongness, etc.) of people's actions. It's not the other way around.

One additional comment: When the word "no" is used, its application is "universal." Its use does NOT allow for "exceptions" unless they are specifically stated. Example: The command, "You are to have NO gods except for me," does NOT allow the presence of ANY OTHER GOD - not one at all, regardless of "circumstances." If the Word says I am to NOT covet my neighbor's wife (and it DOES say that), then I am sinning even if I do it "just a little bit" - even if distorted thinking would lead me to the conclusion that doing so would somehow be "beneficial."

I hope these comments are helpful and provide additional things to think about. If only sin hadn't entered the world! Then we wouldn't have to worry about all this!!!

I've enjoyed the opportunity to think on this issue. Thanks!

Bye for now, Dennis.