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JOSHUA 2:1 Joshua the son of Nun secretly sent two men out of Shittim as spies, saying, "Go, view the land, including Jericho." They went and came into the house of a prostitute whose name was Rahab, and slept there.

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Joshua sends out two spies to examine the state of the inhabitants of the land, particularly those of Jericho, who are entertained at the house of Rahab, Jos 2:1. The king of Jericho is informed of their being in the town, and sends to Rahab, commanding her to deliver them up, Jos 2:2, Jos 2:3. She hides the spies, and tells the messengers that the men were departed and gone towards the mountain, Jos 2:4, Jos 2:5. When the officers of the king of Jericho were departed, she took the spies to the house-top, and covered them with flax, Jos 2:6, Jos 2:7. She relates to them that the fear of the Israelites had fallen on all the inhabitants of the country on hearing of their victories over the Amorites; that she knew none could resist the God of Israel, and therefore desired them to give her an oath that, when they took Jericho, they would preserve the lives of her and her family, Jos 2:8-13. The spies swear to her, Jos 2:14. She lets them down by a cord from the house-top, and gives them directions how to proceed, in order to avoid the pursuers, Jos 2:15, Jos 2:16. She is to tie a scarlet line to the window, through which she had let them down, which should be the sign to the Israelites to spare that house and its inhabitants, Jos 2:17-19. Having bound her to secrecy, they depart, Jos 2:20, Jos 2:21. After three days' stay in the mountain, they return to Joshua, and make a favorable report, Jos 2:22-24.

#### Verse 1

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Joshua - sent - two men to spy secretly - It is very likely that these spies had been sent out soon after the death of Moses, and therefore our marginal reading, had sent, is to be preferred. Secretly - It is very probable also that these were confidential persons, and that the transaction was between them and him alone. As they were to pass over the Jordan opposite to Jericho, it was necessary that they should have possession of this city, that in case of any reverses they might have no enemies in their rear. He sent the men, therefore, to see the state of the city, avenues of approach, fortifications, etc., that he might the better concert his mode of attack.

A harlot's house - Harlots and inn-keepers seem to have been called by the same name, as no doubt many who followed this mode of life, from their exposed situation, were not the most correct in their morals. Among the ancients women generally kept houses of entertainment, and among the Egyptians and Greeks this was common. I shall subjoin a few proofs.

Herodotus, speaking concerning the many differences between Egypt and other countries, and the peculiarity of their laws and customs, expressly says: *Ἐν τοῖσι αἱ μὲν γυναῖκες ἀγοραζοῦσι καὶ καπηλευοῦσι· οἱ δὲ ἄνδρες, κατ' οἴκους εὐντοῦσι, ὑφαίνουσι.* "Among the Egyptians the women carry on all commercial concerns, and keep taverns, while the men continue at home and weave." Herod. in Euterp., c. xxxv. Diodorus Siculus, lib. i., s. 8, and c. xxvii., asserts that "the men were the slaves of the women in Egypt, and that it is stipulated in the marriage contract that the woman shall be the ruler of her husband, and that he shall obey her in all things." The same historian supposes that women had these high privileges among the Egyptians, to perpetuate the memory of the beneficent administration of Isis, who was afterwards deified among them. Nymphodorus, quoted by the ancient scholiast on the Oedipus Coloneus of Sophocles, accounts for these customs: he says that

"Sesostris, finding the population of Egypt rapidly increasing, fearing that he should not be able to govern the people or keep them united under one head, obliged the men to assume the occupations of women, in order that they might be rendered effeminate." Sophocles confirms the account given by Herodotus; speaking of Egypt he says: - Εκει γαρ οι μεν αρσενες κατα στεγας Θακουσιν ιστουργουντες αι δε ξυννομοι Τα' ξω βιου τροφεια προσυνους' αι

Oedip. Col. v. 352. "There the men stay in their houses weaving cloth, while the women transact all business out of doors, provide food for the family," etc. It is on this passage that the scholiast cites Nymphodorus for the information given above, and which he says is found in the 13th chapter of his work "On the Customs of Barbarous Nations." That the same custom prevailed among the Greeks we have the following proof from Apuleius: Ego vero quod primate ingressui stabulum conspicatus sum, accessi, et de Quadam Anu Caupona illico percontor. - Aletam. lib. i., p. 18, Edit. Bip. "Having entered into the first inn I met with, and there seeing a certain Old Woman, the Inn-Keeper, I inquired of her."

It is very likely that women kept the places of public entertainment among the Philistines; and that it was with such a one, and not with a harlot, that Samson lodged; (see Jdg 16:1, etc.); for as this custom certainly did prevail among the Egyptians, of which we have the fullest proof above, we may naturally expect it to have prevailed also among the Canaanites and Philistines, as we find from Apuleius that it did afterwards among the Greeks. Besides there is more than presumptive proof that this custom obtained among the Israelites themselves, even in the most polished period of their history; for it is much more reasonable to suppose that the two women, who came to Solomon for judgment, relative to the dead child, (1Kgs 3:16, etc), were inn-keepers, than that they were harlots. It is well known that common prostitutes, from their abandoned course of life, scarcely ever have children; and the laws were so strict against such in Israel, (Deu 23:18), that if these had been of that class it is not at all likely they would have dared to appear before Solomon. All these circumstances considered, I am fully satisfied that the term זונה zonah in the text, which we translate harlot, should be rendered tavern or inn-keeper, or hostess. The spies who were sent out on this occasion were undoubtedly the most confidential persons that Joshua had in his host; they went on an errand of the most weighty importance, and which involved the greatest consequences. The risk they ran of losing their lives in this enterprise was extreme. Is it therefore likely that persons who could not escape apprehension and death, without the miraculous interference of God, should in despite of that law which at this time must have been so well known unto them, go into a place where they might expect, not the blessing, but the curse, of God? Is it not therefore more likely that they went rather to an inn to lodge than to a brothel? But what completes in my judgment the evidence on this point is, that this very Rahab, whom we call a harlot, was actually married to Salmon, a Jewish prince, see Mat 1:5. And is it probable that a prince of Judah would have taken to wife such a person as our text represents Rahab to be?

It is granted that the Septuagint, who are followed by Heb 11:31, and Jam 2:25, translate the Hebrew זונה zonah by πορνη, which generally signifies a prostitute; but it is not absolutely evident that the Septuagint used the word in this sense. Every scholar knows that the Greek word πορνη comes from πρηνω, to sell, as this does from περνω, to pass from one to another; transire facio a me ad alterum; Damm. But may not this be spoken as well of the woman's goods as of her person? In this sense the Chaldee Targum understood the term, and has therefore translated it אַתְּתָא פּוֹדֵקִיתָא ittetha pundekitha, a woman, a Tavern-Keeper. That this is the true sense many eminent men are of opinion; and the preceding arguments render it at least very probable. To all this may be added, that as our blessed Lord came through the line of this woman, it cannot be a matter of little consequence to know what moral character she sustained; as an inn-keeper she might be

respectable, if not honorable; as a public prostitute she could be neither; and it is not very likely that the providence of God would have suffered a person of such a notoriously bad character to enter into the sacred line of his genealogy. It is true that the cases of Tamar and Bathsheba may be thought sufficient to destroy this argument; but whoever considers these two cases maturely will see that they differ totally from that of Rahab, if we allow the word harlot to be legitimate. As to the objection that her husband is nowhere mentioned in the account here given; it appears to me to have little weight. She might have been either a single woman or a widow; and in either of these cases there could have been no mention of a husband; or if she even had a husband it is not likely he would have been mentioned on this occasion, as the secret seems to have been kept religiously between her and the spies. If she were a married woman her husband might be included in the general terms, all that she had, and all her kindred, Jos 6:23. But it is most likely that she was a single woman or a widow, who got her bread honestly by keeping a house of entertainment for strangers. See below.

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JOSHUA 2:2 The king of Jericho was told, "Behold, men of the children of Israel came in here tonight to spy out the land."

JOSHUA 2:3 The king of Jericho sent to Rahab, saying, "Bring out the men who have come to you, who have entered into your house; for they have come to spy out all the land."

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#### Verse 3

The king of Jericho sent unto Rahab - This appears to be a proof of the preceding opinion: had she been a prostitute or a person of ill fame he could at once have sent officers to have seized the persons lodged with her as vagabonds; but if she kept a house of entertainment, the persons under her roof were sacred, according to the universal custom of the Asiatics, and could not be molested on any trifling grounds. A guest or a friend is sacred in whatever house he may be received, in every part of the east to the present day.

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JOSHUA 2:4 The woman took the two men and hid them. Then she said, "Yes, the men came to me, but I didn't know where they came from."

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#### Verse 4

And hid them - Probably she secreted them for the time being in some private corner, till she had the opportunity of concealing them on the house-top in the manner mentioned Jos 2:6.

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JOSHUA 2:5 About the time of the shutting of the gate, when it was dark, the men went out. Where the men went, I don't know. Pursue them quickly; for you will overtake them."

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#### Verse 5

When it was dark - So it appears that it was after night that the king of Jericho sent to Rahab, ordering her to produce the persons who lodged with her. The season itself was friendly to the whole plot: had these transactions taken place in daylight, it is scarcely possible that the spies could have escaped. But this is no excuse for the woman's prevarication, for God could have saved his messengers independently of her falsity. God never says to any, Do evil that good may come of it. See at the end of the chapter, Jos 2:24 (note).

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JOSHUA 2:6 But she had brought them up to the roof, and hid them with the stalks of flax, which she had laid in order on the roof.

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#### Verse 6

Hid then with the stalks of flax - It is a matter of little consequence whether we translate פִּסְתֵי הַעֵיץ pistey haets stalks of flax, or stalks of hemp: the word עֵץ ets, which signifies wood, serves to show that whether it was hemp or flax, it was in its rough, unmanufactured state; and as this was about the season, viz., the end of March or the beginning of April, in which the flax is ripe in that country, consequently Rahab's flax might have been recently pulled, and was now drying on the roof of her house. The reader may find some useful remarks upon this subject in Harmer's Observations, vol. iv., p. 97, etc.

Upon the roof - We have already seen that all the houses in the east were made flat-roofed; for which a law is given Deu 22:8. On these flat roofs the Asiatics to this day walk, converse, and oftentimes even sleep and pass the night. It is probable that this hiding was after that referred to in the fourth verse.

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JOSHUA 2:7 The men pursued them the way to the Jordan to the fords: and as soon as those who pursued them had gone out, they shut the gate.

JOSHUA 2:8 Before they had laid down, she came up to them on the roof;

JOSHUA 2:9 and she said to the men, "I know that the LORD has given you the land, and that the fear of you has fallen on us, and that all the inhabitants of the land melt away before you.

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#### Verse 9

I know that the Lord hath given you the land - It is likely she had this only from conjecture, having heard of their successes against the Amorites, their prodigious numbers, and seeing the state of terror and dismay to which the inhabitants of her own land were reduced.

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JOSHUA 2:10 For we have heard how the LORD 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, who were beyond the Jordan, to Sihon and to Og, whom you utterly destroyed.

JOSHUA 2:11 As soon as we had heard it, our hearts melted, neither did there remain any more spirit in any man, because of you: for the LORD your God, he is God in heaven above, and on earth beneath.

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Verse 11

He is God in heaven above, and to earth beneath - This confession of the true God is amazingly full, and argues considerable light and information. As if she had said, "I know your God to be omnipotent and omnipresent:" and in consequence of this faith she hid the spies, and risked her own life in doing it. But how had she this clear knowledge of the Divine nature?

1. Possibly the knowledge of the true God was general in the earth at this time, though connected with much superstition and idolatry; the people believing that there was a god for every district, and for every people; for the mountains and for the valleys; see 1Kgs 20:23.
  2. Or she received this instruction from the spies, with whom she appears to have had a good deal of conversation; or,
  3. She had it from a supernatural influence of God upon her own soul. She probably made a better use of the light she had received than the rest of her countrymen, and God increased that light.
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JOSHUA 2:12 Now therefore, please swear to me by the LORD, since I have dealt kindly with you, that you also will deal kindly with my father's house, and give me a true token;

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Verse 12

Swear unto me by the Lord - This is a farther proof that this woman had received considerable instruction in the Jewish faith; she acknowledged the true God by his essential character Jehovah; and knew that an oath in his name was the deepest and most solemn obligation under which a Jew could possibly come. Does not this also refer to the command of God, Thou shalt fear the Lord, and shalt swear by his name? See the note on Deu 6:13.

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JOSHUA 2:13 and that you will save alive my father, my mother, my brothers, and my sisters, and all that they have, and will deliver our lives from death."

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Verse 13

Deliver our lives from death - She had learned, either from the spies or otherwise, that all the inhabitants of the land were doomed to destruction, and therefore she obliges them to enter into a covenant with her for the preservation of herself and her household.

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JOSHUA 2:14 The men said to her, "Our life for yours, if you don't talk about this business of ours; and it shall be, when the LORD gives us the land, that we will deal kindly and truly with you."

Verse 14

Our life for yours - "May our life be destroyed if we suffer yours to be injured!" This is what was anciently called in our country pledging - staking, a man's life for that of his neighbor or friend.

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JOSHUA 2:15 Then she let them down by a cord through the window; for her house was on the side of the wall, and she lived on the wall.

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Verse 15

Then she let them down by a cord etc. - The natural place of this verse is after the first clause of Jos 2:21; for it is certain that she did not let them down in the basket till all those circumstances marked from Jos 2:16-20 inclusive had taken place.

She dwelt upon the wall - That is, either the wall of the city made a part of her house or her house was built close to the wall, so that the top or battlements of it were above the wall with a window that looked out to the country. As the city gates were now shut there was no way for the spies to escape but through this window; and in order to this she let them down through the window in a basket suspended by a cord, till they reached the ground on the outside of the wall.

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JOSHUA 2:16 She said to them, "Go to the mountain, lest the pursuers find you; and hide yourselves there three days, until the pursuers have returned. Afterward, you may go your way."

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Verse 16

Hide yourselves there three days - They were to travel by night, and hide themselves in the day-time; otherwise they might have been discovered by the pursuers who were in search of them.

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JOSHUA 2:17 The men said to her, "We will be guiltless of this your oath which you have made us to swear.

JOSHUA 2:18 Behold, when we come into the land, you shall bind this line of scarlet thread in the window which you used to let us down. You shall gather to yourself into the house your father, your mother, your brothers, and all your father's household.

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Verse 18

This line of scarlet thread - תיקות חוט השני tikvath chut hashshani. Probably this may mean, this piece of scarlet cloth, or, this cloth (made) of scarlet thread. When the Israelites took the city this piece of red cloth seems to have been hung out of the window by way of flag; and this was the sign on which she and the spies had agreed.

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JOSHUA 2:19 It shall be that whoever goes out of the doors of your house into the street, his blood will be on his head, and we will be guiltless. Whoever is with you in the house, his blood shall be on our head, if any hand is on him.

JOSHUA 2:20 But if you talk about this business of ours, then we shall be guiltless of your oath which you have made us to swear.”

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#### Verse 20

If thou utter this our business - It was prudent to make her life depend on her secrecy; had it been otherwise she might have been tempted to give information, not only concerning the spies, but concerning the designs of the Israelites. But her life being at stake, added to every other motive, she kept the secret for the sake of her own personal safety and that of all her relatives.

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JOSHUA 2:21 She said, “According to your words, so be it.” She sent them away, and they departed. She tied the scarlet line in the window.

JOSHUA 2:22 They went, and came to the mountain, and stayed there three days, until the pursuers had returned. The pursuers sought them throughout all the way, but didn't find them.

JOSHUA 2:23 Then the two men returned, descended from the mountain, passed over, and came to Joshua the son of Nun; and they told him all that had happened to them.

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#### Verse 23

So the two men returned - Having concealed themselves in the mountains that night, all the next day, and the night ensuing, on the third day they returned to Joshua.

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JOSHUA 2:24 They said to Joshua, “Truly the LORD has delivered into our hands all the land. Moreover, all the inhabitants of the land melt away before us.”

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#### Verse 24

Truly the Lord hath delivered into our hands all the land - How different was this report from that brought by the spies on a former occasion! They found that all the inhabitants of the land were panic-struck. The people had heard of the great exploits of the Israelites on the other side of Jordan; and as they had destroyed the potent kings of the Amorites, they took it for granted that nothing could stand before them. This information was necessary to Joshua to guide him in forming the plan of his campaign.

1. It may be asked, Did not Rahab lie in the account she gave to the officers of the king of Jericho, (Jos 2:4, Jos 2:5), There came men unto me, etc.? I answer, She certainly did; and the inspired writer sets down the fact merely as it stood, without making the Spirit of God responsible for the dissimulation of the woman. But was she not rewarded, etc.? Yes; for her hospitality and faith, not for her lie. But could she have saved the spies without telling a lie? Yes, she certainly might; but

what notion could a woman of her occupation, though nothing worse than an inn-keeper, have of the nicer distinctions between truth and falsehood, living among a most profligate and depraved people, where truth could scarcely be known?

2. There is a lax morality in the world that recommends a lie rather than the truth, when the purposes of religion and humanity can be served by it. But when can this be? The religion of Christ is one eternal system of truth, and can neither be served by a lie nor admit one. On this vile subject fine words have been spoken. Tasso, in his elegant episode of Sophronia and Olindo, in the *Gerusalemme Liberata*, b. ii., v. 22, represents the former as telling a lie to Saladdin, relative to the stealing of an image, for which, as he could not discover the culprit, he doomed all the Christians in his power to death. Sophronia, a pious Christian virgin, getting into the presence of the tyrant, in order to save her people, accuses herself, though perfectly innocent, of the theft. Her conduct on this occasion the poet embellishes in the following manner, for which the religion of that time, which dealt in holy frauds, would no doubt applaud him. 'Ed ella: il reo si trova al tuo cospetto;

Opra e il furto, Signor, di questa mano

Io l'immagine tolsi; lo son colei

Che tu ricerchi, e me punir tu dei.

Così al pubblico fato il capo altero

Offerse, e 'l volle in se sol racorre.

Magnanima Menzogna! or quando e il Vero

Si Bello, che si possa a te preporre?"

Then she: "Before thy sight the guilty stands;

The theft, O King, committed by these hands.

In me the thief who stole the image view!

To me the punishment decreed is due."

Thus, filled with public zeal, the generous dame

A victim for her people's ransom came.

O great deceit! O lie divinely fair!

What truth with such a falsehood can compare!

Hoole.

Thus a lie is ornamented with splendid decorations both by the Italian and English poet, and the whole formed into an anti-apostolic maxim, Let us do Evil, that Good may come of it. A purer morality was taught by one of the most ancient heathen writers than is here preached by these demi-christians: - Εχθρος γὰρ μοι κεινος, ὁμῶς αἴδωο πύλησιν, ὅς χ' ἕτερον μὲν κευθεῖ ἐνὶ φρεσίν, ἄλλο δὲ βαζει.

Iliad. I. ix., v. 312.

My soul detests him as the gates of hell,



Who knows the truth and dares a falsehood tell.

The following is the advice of a genuine Christian poet, and one of the holiest men of his time: -

Lie not; but let thy heart be true to God;

Thy tongue to it, thy actions to them both

Cowards tell lies, and those who fear the rod;

The stormy working soul spits lies and froth.

Dare To Be True! nothing can Need a lie.

The fault that needs it most grows Two thereby.

Herbert.

For other observations on this subject see the notes on Gen 12:20, at the end, and Gen 20:12.

3. Though the hand of God was evidently in every thing that concerned the Israelites, and they were taught to consider that by his might alone they were to be put in possession of the promised land; yet they were as fully convinced that if they did not use the counsel, prudence, and strength which they had received from him, they should not succeed. Hence, while they depended on the Divine direction and power, they exercised their own prudence, and put forth their own strength; and thus they were workers together with him, and did not receive the grace of God in vain. The application of this maxim is easy; and we cannot expect any success, either in things spiritual or temporal, unless we walk by the same rule and mind the same thing.