

Transcript 177

Shea Houdmann

Welcome to the Got Questions podcast. And today we're going to be featuring a new Bible study that's going to coming out really soon. The author of this Bible study is Shadia Hrichi and the Bible study is Rahab, Rediscovering the God Who Saves Me. So Shadia, welcome to the podcast today.

Shadia Hrichi

Ohh man, thank you for having me. This is an absolute honor for me. I've I've just I'm, I love the show.

Shea Houdmann

And also joining me today is Gwen. Gwen is the administrator for compellingtruth.org, one of our sites and also our volunteer services coordinator. And so Gwen, thanks for joining me today for the interview.

Gwen Sellers

Thanks for letting me be here.

Shea Houdmann

Yeah, so Shadia tell our audience a little bit about you and what led you to write this whole series of Bible studies.

Shadia Hrichi

Oh, well, thank you. You know, it's, I always just remark how God has kind of has, you know, his sense of humor. I'll start with the second part and go back to the first. The the, what led me to write these studies is I'm very attracted to kind of the messy stories in the Bible. People who are kind of overlooked or who suffered or experienced some difficult circumstances, or just just the kind of stories that you just don't hear on an average Sunday morning at the pulpit. They're just, they're just kind of hard, messy stories. And I think I'm attracted to them because a little bit of who I am is, I've got a lot of mess in my past. I didn't grow up in the church. I didn't grow up believing in God. I made all the mistakes. I suffered a lot of heartache. Made a lot of bad choices. And you know, throughout those experiences, after I became a Christian as an adult, God has been using those to draw others to himself through through realizing you know that God can use anyone to glorify himself because of the redemption in our stories once he steps in.

Gwen Sellers

That was one thing I really enjoyed in looking through your study is you really did just ground it in the the whole redemptive narrative arc. So I guess kind of two questions for you is 1, why is it so important to do that when we're when you're studying someone like Rahab or one of these other characters to understand them in that entire arc? And then also how did you use that to show how Rahab story really is our story also?

Shadia Hrichi

Fantastic questions. So yeah, one of the things that that readers will find in in all of my Bible studies, regardless of which character we're talking about, is that I begin with with some aspect of of drawing out the bigger picture first. You know, what is what is God's aim? You know, his his aim is is to is salvation. His aim is for to glorify his name. And so, you know, every story in the Bible, those characters that I talk about has to fit in that narrative in some form. And it's very important that that we do that because it's otherwise we can misunderstand what God is trying to teach us through their story if we look at it in isolation. And so we want to begin with kind of an overarching understanding of this, this grand redemptive story of of who God is and what his, you know what his, what, his plan is. And and then as we do that we begin to see these stories in in a new light, in a fresh light, because ultimately they are going to point to some aspect of who God is. Some aspect of his character is going to is going to come out in one of those stories that we might not have just dwelled on in the past. And forgive me, what was the second part of your question?

Gwen Sellers

Well, I think then you know highlight how that happens with Rahab. So like in her, where do we how do we see that happen. What does she show us about God, but yeah.

Shadia Hrichi

I love that. Yeah. I mean, you know, Rahab, her story is pretty significant because, I mean, they all are because again, once God steps in, we learn something about him. So there's something beautiful in all these stories. But Rahab's story, specifically the the elements that are drawn out in her story are these are focused on salvation. That's where that subtitle comes in. Rediscovering the God Who Saves Me. And but we're entwined with that is grace and faith. They all work together. And so faith is a very key theme in this Bible study because Rahab ultimately, she was a real person, experienced being real things, but at the same time, she represents the the the church as a whole. She is a picture of the church as a whole. She is she's far from God. She's facing, you know, destruction, wrath from God. The city's going to be annihilated. She hears about the one true God, all of the people, in fact hear about the one true God, but she's the one that turns towards him instead of away from him. And so that's where that kind of that thing comes, no one has an excuse. They they all know who God is. It's it's actually said in her story. But she turns towards God. And so there's this aspect of, you know the church turning towards God. The church is the the the prostitute that becomes the bride, is is a really big illustrative element of this story that points to our story as Christ as the bride. Without him, we are facing destruction. Without him, we are we have no we have no purpose. But with him we become, you know, the the bride of Christ. There could be nothing more glorious than that. And so and she is also, we could talk about this a little bit more, but she is also commended in the New Testament in several very significantly important faith passages. Her, she is called out by name more than once. And so there's there's a very, very strong element of her faith being honored and acknowledged in by the New Testament writers as well.

Gwen Sellers

I do so love her faith the way that, yeah, I mean, when the Israelites come, it's just like, oh, we've heard about your God and really the kind of the boldness in even asking would you save me? Would you rescue me? And yeah, and I love what you're drawing out of, how that points us to, to who God is. And then the relationship that he invites us into with him.

Shadia Hrichi

Yeah, absolutely. I mean it it, it's an incredible picture. You know, I love. I love how you had picked up on she, she had courage. She had boldness, almost presumptuous, you know, like, like he's going to save me. Because she is turning to him and she's not, she's she's recognizing who he is. But she turns to him in a courageous faith, but also a humble faith. You know her words are, you know, he is the he is the God in the heavens and the God of the earth below. Like she recognizes his sovereignty and this is coming from a Canaanite who had, you know, grown up surrounded by all the Pagan gods, all of the the, you know, demonic forces because ultimately that's what Pagan gods are. And to be able to have her see this woman's eyes open to the one true God, it's it's a powerful picture. Especially considering her profession as well. So you've got this kind of yeah, someone that seems otherwise from a Christian perspective like ohh no, that one can't get saved. It's like yeah, and God uses her. It's beautiful.

Gwen Sellers

So that was another thing I really appreciated in looking through your study was that you used Rahab's story to draw out just other biblical themes like you mentioned, you know, highlighting how it highlights the understanding of God's sovereignty. But you also brought up things like covenants or well, various cultural contexts. But then just also things that we see throughout the rest of the Bible. So I guess the question there is what beauty do you see in the interconnectedness of the Bible?

Shadia Hrichi

Ohh, you are, you're you're getting on my that they're touching my heart there because that is something that I think, and I might part of it might have been the fact that, you know, I didn't get saved until I was an adult. I didn't have any church background. And I have Bible background. You know, I went to seminary and I was like, I know nothing, you know, and it's just. And but but even now, you know, years later, I am still in awe of the beauty of God's word. The beauty of God first. But his word and how it just like you said, it's all interconnects.

Shadia Hrichi

For Rahab's story, there's several things, and one of the things that I really found interesting was, you know, you have, you know, right before her story, you know, you got the, the Israelites. They're they're they're they're promised the the promised land by God. Joshua is leading the people. Moses has died at this point. And the Israelites are camped on the other side of the Jordan. So Jericho's on the one side. They're on the other side, and the Jordan is, you know, a raging river at this point and there's no way to cross it unless God intervenes. Of course he does. But before this, you know they're camped out there and and when we read in the book of Numbers again, that interconnectedness we find out that the Israelites are turning to the Pagan gods like they're on the edge of the promised land. You know, it's like what? And then at the same time, and that's what's so beautiful about God's word. And you got this contrast where this woman in the in the wicked city of Jericho is turning to God. And and it's just, it's just a powerful, you know, picture of, you know, how God is just working. And of course he he protects his people. There was a there was a plague and some died and so forth. But you know, go into that more in the study. But it is all interconnected and and and the the the for example the beauty. Of Rahab's faith becomes even more beautiful when we when we see it in contrast to what's happening to God's

own people called by his name at that time in history. And and and so it's just, it's just a it's a powerful thing.

Shadia Hrichi

And the other thing that is interesting is how it's sort of an interruption to the whole conquest story. In the book of Joshua, you know, they're they're defeating King after King, Kingdom after Kingdom. They come to the edge of the Jordan, the whole story is put on hold to tell us about Rahab and to and to work through her you know her salvation story and how she comes to faith and and and expects that God is going to save her. It it it's it's it's pretty significant because otherwise, I mean it could have just said two spies went into Jericho and came back. And and God parted the sea. You wouldn't even know Rahab existed. But God dedicates all of that passages in Scripture to give us her story, because there's more to it than just Rahab herself. It's a picture of us in need of salvation.

Shea Houdmann

In the story of Rahab, and as you're writing the study, as you were studying the scriptures, everything it says about Rahab, what's something about Rahab that you think most people who are saying the Bible aren't aware of or that maybe they miss when they read the account?

Shadia Hrichi

So I would say, you know, one of them is like I was just touching on how this this whole point of she's on the the the the Israelites on the edge of the promised land. Like this this is the big event that generations have been waiting for. You know, it's it's this is theologically hugely significant and yet, you know, we we paused to to hear all about Rahab's story, her family and the whole thing. And so it looks like an interruption, but it's actually God's divine intervention. So that's really a significant element to a story.

Shadia Hrichi

Another aspect to this study that I found very interesting were again picking up on, you know, how Gwen has pointing out all the interconnectedness. There are parallels to the Book of Revelation. So when you look at the book of Joshua and the Book of Revelation, there are more than a dozen very specific. You know these are not vague, very specific parallels and you know I don't want to give it all away, but it it again it points to the fact that it is all tied together. You know in the story of of, in the Book of Joshua, you know we have Rahab coming to face coming to salvation. In the Book of Revelation, the prostitute is the the the depiction of of of, you know, absolute wickedness which if we're willing to face it at our worst, that's what we would be become without Christ given enough time, given enough of the of history, the human race would would degenerate to that point. It's it's a it's a sobering picture. And that's just one parallel of the there's like there's, like I said, there are tons. Very interesting. It's what makes Bible studies so much fun, I think.

Gwen Sellers

Well, and that's what I would love to talk about next is you structure your study with various things, you share some personal stories, you do some teaching, you ask different questions, you equip students with like tools, you know, because you're making these connections and somebody new to the Bible

wouldn't know how to do that so thinking how do you go about structuring your studies and what's the purpose behind each of those sections?

Shadia Hrichi

Oh, I love that. That's that. That's a great question. And and you're correct, there is a purpose for those sections. So what Gwen is talking about so in the study there are weaved throughout the study I would say obviously I do share some of my own personal stories because I just want people to know I'm real and I've got struggles and I've got challenges, and I've got wounds and scars and all you know and triumphs and joys to share, and so I hope that helps readers just just connect and and to give them courage to kind of work through their own. You know what what challenges are they facing? What struggles have they experienced and so forth.

Shadia Hrichi

And then as far as the the structure of the study, I do do a lot of structural elements for the text. You know I do you know, as you shared, you know, point out parallels and things like that. But I try to write my studies in a manner where the reader is on a journey to discover them herself or himself. Well, I write it in a manner where I asked them to to do some exercises to look at the text, look for, you know, the parallel words or whatever, so that they enjoy that sense of discovery themselves rather than me just telling them. And then I will, after the exercise, I will, I will, you know weave in weave into the narrative you know what it was that they should have expected so that they have confidence that they did get out of the exercise, what they were, what they were supposed to do. So I'm there to serve as a guide, but I truly because I find so much joy in studying God's word. I want that to translate into my Bible studies. That's very important to me as a teacher. I don't want to take that joy away from the students, but I want to to provide it in a way where there's there's, you know, boundaries and safeguards as they study based on what you know, what what God has taught me and and just the just the elements of proper biblical interpretation and all the things they teach you in seminary and all the nerdy stuff, which is fine. You were just fine. I like to weave in Bible word studies and things like that.

Shadia Hrichi

And then there. Uh, and then there are like for so the other elements that weaved in there are like a pause to ponder almost every day of study has I think at least one pause to ponder. And those are if you want to break it down, they would actually you would you would call those personal reflection questions. Here's an opportunity for the reader to to step out of the story, step out of the the the academic elements of the study and to just reflect on you know how God might be speaking to them through what they're learning in a personal manner. And then at the end of every day of study there's a your turn and this is what you would call an application. Those are 100% application so that they can take what they study, because what good is learning something in your head if you don't apply it into your life and and to grow from it. So that's the challenges of of that section is to to apply what they've learned. There's other stuff in there too as well.

Gwen Sellers

Well, well, and I love that. I think that your joy the word really does just shine through. And I think it does shine through to students. And the way that you you guide so that it's inviting them into, here's the

learning process. And then I think totally people learn it better when they've discovered it. But I agree that it is helpful to have a teacher saying, yes, you discovered the right thing.

Shadia Hrichi

Yes, yes.

Gwen Sellers

You know like you talked about those boundaries.

Shadia Hrichi

Yeah, we, we all need that.

Speaker 4

And I love. And I think too, that your personal stories do like you said, help people recognize, oh, she's a real person. Which then invites them in to be a real person with the study. Just like you're saying. So rather than disconnecting. Ohh my mind knows these facts. It's like, oh, this actually matters to my life and what I bring, you know, this same God who worked in Rahab's life is the one who's working in my life.

Shadia Hrichi

That's right, yes.

Gwen Sellers

And in Shadia's life, and in all of our lives.

Shadia Hrichi

Amen and Amen. That that that is my hope to see. You know, God is a personal God and he's an intimate God. And so our our stories matter to God. Yes, just as Rahab's story matters to God and my story, your story, every story matters to him. He created us for that intimate relationship. So yeah, he does care.

Shea Houdmann

I'd love a Bible study that could be both personal and practical, while at the same time really focusing on actually God's word. There's studies out there where, great thoughts from the author, but it's predominantly his or her thoughts rather than a focus on the actual text description. And you do a great job of weaving all of that together. So I applaud you for that. And we'll definitely be recommending these studies on, I'm assuming there's more coming out and in the future as well, but you can share a little bit more about that later.

Shea Houdmann

But what I wanted to do now since Got Questions is the ministry to answer questions, I wanted to ask you our two most frequently asked questions about Rahab. I'm sure that you have dealt with them over the the course of studying this, so I was giving them both to you now. One of them especially could be in

almost an entire episode, so give the condensed version It's a question number one. You said you really like doing the word studies. What did you find in terms of whether Rahab was actually a prostitute or whether she was just an innkeeper? And question two, Rahab lied to protect the spies. What can we learn from that in terms

Shadia Hrichi

OK.

Shea Houdmann

of when, if ever, is it right for us to lie? So those would be the two most common questions we get about the account of Rahab at gotquestions.org.

Shadia Hrichi

OK. So those are excellent questions and I love excellent questions because again, it's just more fun to to think and to study and to know God's word. So the the first question whether she was an innkeeper, so that teaching came from quite many, many, many years ago. Where there was an, a sincere effort to protect the perspective of who Christ was as a church in in general. So this wasn't all churches. It wasn't all scholars and so forth, but there were some scholars who, out of reverence for Christ, which is good, tried to to to find a way to acknowledge what scripture says that Rahab is in the lineage of Christ. And then where it says she's a prostitute and they they were trying to trying to reconcile those to honor Christ. And in and in due, and so the effort was was sincere. The the intentions were pure, but but ultimately we have to come down to what the the text says. And in Joshua Chapter 2, where Rahab is introduced, the Hebrew word that describes her is Zona. There is, it's not one of those Hebrew words that can mean multiple things. There are words like that but this is not one of those. It means prostitute. There are two Hebrew words for prostitute, one is zona, one is Kadesh. Kadesh means a temple prostitute of a religious type, you know cult, prostitute. But either way they're both mean prostitute. But Rahab is described as zona. And so there's no we can't work around that. That's what she was.

Shadia Hrichi

Some some have proposed well, maybe she was a prostitute and then she had retired and become an innkeeper at this point in time, when the spies came. But that's very challenging because that implies that she's a lot older and she eventually marries and has children and people. You know, there was. She eventually marries and has children. One of the Israelites later on, so she's still young enough for childbearing. But again, all that the point is, is that all of those elements are you're, you're, you're forcing the text to say something it doesn't say, and ultimately that's that does not honor God. If God says it there, we have to embrace it.

Shadia Hrichi

And even and and, and there may be points, you know, for example, like Revelation, you know, I'm not. I'm not getting off topic, but I remember one of my seminary professors said if you ever hear somebody teaching on the Book of Revelation and they claim that they have it all figured out, run. You know, like there's just some aspects that we may not understand. So if we're struggling with the fact that Rahab as a prostitute that we don't try to change it, we just have to accept, OK, I don't understand why. And then again in the New Testament she has described. And actually she's not described as a put down in

the New Testament as prostitute, that is put in there, first of all to confirm she was a prostitute, but to again what it does is it glorifies God. You know, she was once a prostitute, but now she is redeemed and restored. But there's nothing in the text to say that she had never been a prostitute or she was no longer a prostitute when the spies came to the home. And I think part of that was also an attempt to protect the spies reputation. Like, what were they doing there? But ultimately, we need to recognize God was orchestrating these events. He brought them to the one house of the one person who believed in him. That was his doing.

Gwen Sellers

Well, and I think it, I mean to me that does like you said, it just glorifies God. I mean we don't need to be there aren't sins that God can't forgive. Like that's the point. We all need to be forgiven no matter how bad it is. So I think having a prostitute, a gentile in Jesus's, you know, family line just makes everybody go wow. This savior is for me, like, God didn't forgive me.

Shadia Hrichi

Exactly, yes, actually, exactly. It's not something to conceal. This is something to celebrate. Yeah. Yeah, yeah. And then your second question was ohh about the the lying. I actually do touch on that question at both of these in the study, so. So I hope you're not gonna be disappointed in this answer, cause in a strange way I won't exactly answer it and here's why, though. In in scripture, when, when, Rahab, you know, deceives the the messengers and, you know, tells them to to go their own. You know, like you know, hey go chase the spies, they went. They went and you can go, you can go catch them. And she blatantly is lying. The passage is not. And then there there is no. And so the when when there are instructional principles in a Bible passage, it will be clear. So for example in the New Testament, if there are instructional principles on you know, you know, keeping the marriage bed pure. I mean, this is very clearly an instructional principle about marriage. It's it's, it's obvious, but we have to be careful that we want that we don't take a Bible passage where something occurs, so in this case she lies, and we want to force an instructional principle in a passage that is not intended to provide instructional teaching on lying. So it's not a way of getting out of it, but we just, that's not the passage to teach on lying is what the point is. Because the Bible is not presenting it as an instructional passage in that way. And and so that so so I hope that's a disappointing answer, but I think it's important because we could do this type of exercise with other passages and and come out with the wrong teaching, because that's not God's intent for that passage.

Shea Houdmann

I hear you saying, I've heard it said that this passage is descriptive. It describes something that happens rather than prescriptive. It's not prescribing something that should happen. So I think it's an excellent point.

Shadia Hrichi

Yeah, you had the short answer that I didn't provide. That's exactly that's exactly right. I used too many words.

Shea Houdmann

Not at all.

Gwen Sellers

Well, I guess one well, you kind of already touched on this, but just one final question on Rahab. I mean you use her to point to God and like we've talked about before, sharing our own story. So I guess I'm kind of thinking, you know, how can we look at our life stories in a way that points to God? Like I mean obviously, the biblical Canon is closed, but God is still alive and active. So how can we look at our own histories or other people's stories and see God's at work?

Shadia Hrichi

Oh, such a beautiful question. I don't mean to depart from Rahab, but just for one moment, one of the other studies in this series I wrote is on Hagar, who suffered a lot very and not by her own fault. She was betrayed. She was abused. She was abandoned. I mean, there was she suffered in many different ways. And because of that, that particular study invites readers to look to, to walk through some of the steps of where they experience some of those hurts. And then at the end of the study, they're invited to look back through a series of very specific guided questions to see how God was working. Not if God was working, but to see how God was working. And the same is true for Rahab and each of our stories. God is always working, even before we come to know him, God is working. And so we have to begin with that premise. God is working. God is doing something. We also have to keep in mind who God is. God is good. God is loving. God is merciful, God is faithful, and so as we look back on our lives and try to see like, OK God, where were you? If we abandon these truths about who God is, we're going to come to a wrong conclusion. If we assume he wasn't working, we're going to come to a wrong conclusion. But if we lay it at his feet and say, God, I know you were working. I can't see it. Maybe you won't show me, but if you're willing to show me I trust in who you are, please show me where were you. And he will, he will answer that prayer if we come to him with with open arms, open hands and and open heart and an open mind. God is always working. And God never changes. And he and there might be times where you might not get the answer. Job didn't get answers. He never was told why he suffered the way he did. But even in that, there is a purpose. God does nothing without a purpose.

Gwen Sellers

When I love how you frame that that we first need to know who God is, and that kind of goes back to our earlier conversation about, you know, we need to study with our minds as well as our heart. So that's why you point out context and themes and what does this word really mean? And then from there it applies. So if we look at our lives to figure out who God is, that's never going to work, right. But if we look at God to figure out what our lives are about, then we've got it. And I love the way that you frame that.

Shadia Hrichi

Beautifully said. Yeah, it it all rests on knowing who God is and and in my Bible studies, that is one of my primary aims with every study I write. Is to further our understanding of of who God is in some way based on the text of course.

Shea Houdmann

So so Shadia for our listeners who are hopefully interested in learning more about Rahab and also your other studies on Tamar, Legion, and Hagar, how can they learn more? And we'll include links in the show

notes for this episode in the description when this video goes live on YouTube and also at podcast.gotquestions.org, but just go ahead and tell our listeners how can they learn more or what is the best way for them to acquire on one of your Bible studies?

Shadia Hrichi

Oh, I appreciate that. Thank you so much. My name is is hard to say, hard to spell, so to spare you that, even though my website is ShadiaHirchi.com you can get there with a shortcut by typing in RahabBiblestudy.com all one word and that'll get you right to my website. It'll actually get you to the red Rahab page where you can download a free sample. And also we are doing a book giveaway right now where I'm giving a signed free copy of Rahab every week through this podcast tour. And so I will provide, you know, we'll have a link for that in the notes where you can get on the giveaway and try to win a free copy.

Shea Houdmann

Fantastic. So again, Shadia, thank you for coming on the podcast today and just sharing your heart and encouraging people to study the Bible is one of the things that we're passionate about at Got Questions. As much as we love answering people's Bible questions, and that's that's the mission God has called us to, we also always encourage people to study God's word for themselves. And are very grateful for the many excellent Bible studies, including yours, that are out there. So keep doing what you're doing, keep plugging away and just out of curiosity on what's the next study on your To Do List.

Shadia Hrichi

I am contemplating the next study might be on Ruth.

Shea Houdmann

Fantastic. So again, if you want to learn more about Shadia and her Bible studies, we'll include the the links and all the the various places I mentioned before. So Shadia thank you for coming on. And Gwen, thank you for joining me and a wonderful conversation. And you've you've been wanted. You make me want to go back and reread the study of Rahab and I'm sure I didn't miss anything. So thank you for that.

Shadia Hrichi

Oh, this is joy, yes. Oh, I pray it blesses you. Awesome.

Shea Houdmann

Got questions? The Bible has answers and we'll help you find them.