



RAHAB THE HARLOT

TEACHER'S
GUIDE



WOMEN OF THE BIBLE

LESSON 4

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INTRODUCTION

Rahab is the first person we meet who lives in the Promised Land of Canaan. She dwelt in the fortified city of Jericho, and she grew up in a very wicked society who worshipped many gods. Because Rahab chose a very immoral profession to engage in, most of us would not associate with her or give her a second glance. However, God saw in her— what others could not see. . . . thus the story of Rahab the Harlot. . . . forever preserved in the pages of God’s Holy Word in the O.T. book of Judges.

BACKGROUND

1. The first part of her name “Ra” was one of the names of an Egyptian god. Ra was the god of the sun and was the most important god in Ancient Egypt. Rahab was an Amorite. She lived among an idolatrous people and her name means insolence, broad fierceness or spaciousness. The Amorites were corrupt and very immoral people. God condemned the Amorites because of their wickedness, and Israel was commanded to wipe them off the face of the earth [Deut. 20:16-17].
 - A. Amorites worshipped many gods — sun, water, storm, fertility, etc. They were pagans who lived their lives in direct opposition to God [Josh 24:15].
 - B. They appeased their gods through child sacrificing, sexual rituals and cutting of their flesh [Lev. 20:2].
 - C. They were people without morals and they lived deviant lifestyles. They had male and female prostitutes in their temple worship.
 - D. They were known for their extreme cruelty. The Amorites were so evil that God marked them for destruction.
2. Scriptures clearly states that she was a harlot — prostitute. Five times Rahab is referred to as “a harlot” [see Scriptures listed above]. Because some Christian and Jewish writers cannot reconcile that a harlot could be in the lineage of Jesus Christ, some suggest the word “harlot” can be translated as “innkeeper” This would make Rahab a landlady of a tavern of ill repute. However, the Hebrew word for harlot is “*zoonah*” and the Greek word for harlot is “*porne*” [like in our English language for pornography.] Neither of these words at any time mean anything else but for a woman who sells herself to random men seeking her services. In her business of prostitution, it was essential that she kept her dealings strictly confidential.
3. Rahab’s house was most likely situated on the north side of the city. The position of her house would be a perfect spot for the spies. Her location on the wall offered a close up look of the walls which was the city’s chief line of defense, and it also afforded the spies a quick escape for it was a short distance for them to flee to the hills of the Judean

wilderness. Both Rahab and her business were well known because of her location. Because she lived in such a wicked society, her profession may not have been scorned as it is in other cultures. If she was doing it for the service of Ashteroth, the goddess of sexual love, she may have even been respected in such a wicked culture.

4. Rahab lived in Jericho which was the strongest of all the fortified cities in Canaan. Jericho was surrounded and protected by two walls about fifteen feet apart. She probably lived on the embankment between the upper and lower walls in which the back of the lower wall was the back of her house. Jericho was located in a very strategic location and offered a very important foothold into the Promised Land. The area where Jericho was built was a well-watered area because of the Jordan River. Jericho was in a lush green valley surrounded by palm trees. This city was known for its commercial achievements and for its abundant fruits and crops. It was definitely a land flowing with milk and honey [Exodus 3:17].

RAHAB'S DIVINE ENCOUNTER

5. Joshua sent two spies on a reconnaissance mission to spy out the heavily, fortified city of Jericho. These two men were to bring strategic information back to Joshua so he could prepare a plan to overtake the city. Although Scripture is silent in how they got into the city, they probably mingled among the other people as they entered the gate of Jericho. No doubt, it didn't take them long to hear about Rahab's house of ill repute and lodged there [Josh.2:1]. There they would avoid identity and have at least some measure of safety because strangers were often seen in her home. These godly spies were not there to indulge in sin or take advantage of her. She, no doubt, saw they were different from all the other men that visited her. She realized they were Israelites.
6. It didn't take long for the king of Jericho to hear about the two spies [Josh. 1:2-3]. Rahab knew the danger of hiding these two men; yet she was willing and courageous to put her life in jeopardy to protect these men. Instead of turning the spies over to the king, she decided to hide them under the flax upon her roof [Josh. 1:4, 6]. She realized that to protect these men were to side with Israel's God. She brilliantly planned their protection as well as their successful escape.
7. Rahab told a lie to protect the life of the spies [Josh 2:4b-7]. She told the king's men that the two men left at dark before the shutting of the gate, and if they would hurry, they would be able to overtake the spies and capture them. She was not only a liar but she was willing to betray her own nation — a crime punishable by death. Is a lie or deception ever justified? Two thoughts on lying:
 - A. It is never right to lie or deceive [Prov. 12:22; Prov. 6:16-17; Acts 5: 3; 8-9]. God cannot condone or sanction lying at any time or under any circumstances. God can still protect no matter what the circumstances [Dan. 3:16-18; 6:20-21, 27].
 - B. Some believe that lying is justified in times of war or to save a life [Exodus 1:17,20-21; Judges 4:18-19; 1 Sam. 21:12-13]. God blessed the midwives because they feared

God. Rahab was praised for her faith [Heb. 11:31] and Jael was praised for her bravery [Judges 5:24-26] but Scripture never praised them for their lies and deception.

RAHAB'S FAITH

8. Rahab finally gives us the reason for her actions. Her declaration of faith is found in Joshua 2:9-11. She probably learned from the travelers that stopped by her place of the God of Israel — the miracles of the Exodus, the Red Sea and the overthrow of two Amorite kings. Rahab had a remarkable understanding of the sovereignty of the true God for she acknowledges that “the LORD your God, he is God in heaven above, and in earth beneath.”
9. Rahab's requests to the spies were straightforward for she believed in God's power and recognized that her people were under His condemnation. She believed in Jehovah's ultimate triumph over her people. Since she showed kindness to the spies, she wanted them to show her the same kindness. She asked for two things:
 - A. Save her and her family [Josh. 2:12-13]— Rahab loved her family and wanted to protect them from the coming judgment of Jericho. She wanted the spies to save her parents, brothers and sisters from destruction and death. No doubt, she wanted her family to come to know the God of Israel like her.
 - B. Give her a token — Rahab wanted the spies to give her something visible to show that they would keep their promise to her. She wanted to have something tangible to hold onto when Joshua and the people of Israel came into their land to destroy her city and occupy the land.
10. The spies agreed to Rahab's requests with one condition — do not tell our business and we will deal kindly with you [Josh. 2:14]. If you fail to do that, then our oath with you will be void [Josh 2:17, 20]. The spies also gave her the token she asked for — the scarlet cord that she used to secure the spies' escape [Josh 2:15-16]. They also told Rahab that she needed to bind the scarlet cord in her window and all her family would be protected as long as they were under her roof [Josh.2:18-19]. Anyone found outside her home would be under God's condemnation. It sounds a lot like what happened in Exodus 12:13.
11. When the day came and the walls of Jericho fell down, Rahab and her family were saved just like the spies promised. The Jericho wall crumbled to the ground except for the portion of the wall where Rahab lived and where the scarlet cord hung in her window [Josh. 6:17; 22-25]. Rahab and her family lived among the Israelites. God cursed Jericho and that area is still desolate today because of the wickedness of the Amorites. [Josh. 6:26].

RAHAB'S DESTINY

12. Rahab's love and loyalty to God changed the direction of her life forever. Grace erased her former life and her faith led her to live a pure life [2 Cor. 5:17]. She remained faithful to God all the days of her life. Because Rahab trusted in the God of Israel, He took a prostitute who lived a vile life and transformed her into a godly woman of honor and respected.
- A. Rahab married into one of the leading families of Israel [Matt. 1:5a]. Her courage and loyalty to God blossomed into love between her and Salmon who was one of the spies she sheltered. Salmon was a leader in the house of Judah.
 - B. Her name is mentioned in the royal genealogy of Jesus Christ [Matt. 1:1-17]. It is very unusual for women to appear in Hebrew genealogies. Yet, her name appears among four other women — Tamar, Ruth, Bethsheba and Jesus' mother, Mary. Rahab was the mother of Boaz who married Ruth. Ruth had Obed and Obed had Jesse, and Jesse had David. Therefore, she was the great, great grandmother of king David and a direct descendant of Jesus Christ through the line of Joseph [Matt. 1:5-6, 17].
 - C. Rahab is mentioned with the great heroes of faith in Hebrews chapter 11:31. Scriptures says that Rahab perished not because of her faith in receiving the spies. Sarah is the only other woman listed in this chapter as an example of faith because she judged God faithful to His promises [Heb. 11:11].
 - D. The name of Rahab is also mention in James 2:25. James says Rahab's faith was living, for it was proved by her works. She put her life in danger to hide the spies. Her convictions were rooted in faith, and she chose to stand with God, even if it meant death.

CONCLUSION:

Rahab the Harlot, steeped in wickedness and sexual perversion placed her faith in God, and He redeemed her from a life of sin. There is no one beyond God's reach that He cannot save. God honored her by putting her in the ancestry line of His Son, Jesus Christ. She is also a wonderful example of her deep concern for others. She wanted her family to be saved not only from the destruction of Jericho but from their own life of sin. Rahab went from the dunghill of depravity to being a daughter of the King. Even today, her life is still an outstanding example to us of God's transforming power through His amazing grace.