

Rahab – The Harlot and Heroine

A Summary by Richard Reinsvold, M.D.

Rahab's story begins in the book of Joshua, chapter 2. She is a Canaanite woman living in Jericho as an innkeeper (based on the Aramaic Targum) and is described as a harlot or prostitute (Hebrew: *ishah zonah*). Rahab acts as the head of this household. The Inn was both her and her family's dwelling and it was an important social unit for her community, Jericho. Visitors and travelers frequently came by at all times of the day and night. In the book of Joshua, she saves two spies and then her family. Rahab's decision to help the Israelites ultimately led her to become part of the genetic lineage behind Jesus Christ.

The book of Joshua begins after the death of Moses in the 1300s B.C. God orders Joshua to cross the Jordan River with His people to enter the land chosen for them and that He promised to their ancestors. He notified his officers to get ready to cross the Jordan River to take the land east of the river.

Joshua sent two spies across the river to perform reconnaissance. Joshua especially wanted information on Jericho. Upon crossing the river the two spies came upon Rahab's Inn. This Inn was a good place for information because of the many visitors. It was also a good place to hide. While there, the King of Jericho sent a message to Rahab and ordered her to bring out the two men. Rahab lied and said they already left. She encouraged the messengers to leave quickly to catch up with the two spies. In truth, they were hiding under flax on the Inn's roof.

That evening Rahab told the spies she believed the land was promised to them by God. She believed God was on their side and this created a great fear amongst her and her people. Rahab asks them that she and her family be spared from death when they return to take the promised land. She let the spies out of her house through a window and gave them specific instructions on how to avoid capture. The spies give her a red (crimson/scarlet) scarf/cord to hang in her window and said that all will be safe who are in her house if they remain inside during the attack. The spies warned that this protection will only last if Rahab maintains her silence. Rahab showed that her heart was open to God and that she picked God's side over her people's side. She did not look at these men as potential military opponents, she viewed them as being from a people who were uniquely chosen by God and who were executing God's will. She believed the Israelites would be victorious in their conquest of the land. She chose to help them at great personal risk from her people and the King of Jericho.

The spies safely returned to Joshua and said the people in the city were fearful. This statement is likely a reflection of Rahab's sentiment that she believed God was on the side of the Israelites. With the divine help of God, the Israelites were able to overtake Jericho and capture the promised land. Rahab and her family were spared while all other living things (men, women, children, cattle, sheep, and donkeys) were destroyed. At the end of the battle Joshua sent the two spies to find Rahab. They returned with Rahab and all her family. Joshua burned the city and

everything in it. He swore an oath to prevent the rebuilding of Jericho. Following the destruction of Jericho, Rahab and her family began a new life with the Israelites. She eventually married Salmon and they had a son named Boaz (Matthew 1:4-5 and see also the book of Ruth).

In the story of Rahab, we learn that a sinful prostitute, a harlot, was able to recognize God's power and His will. She made an intentional decision to help the spies at great risk to herself and her family. Her life and her family were spared while the others in Jericho were killed. Rahab was faithful and obedient to God more than to her own people and the King of Jericho. God honored her faith and commitment to Him. She eventually entered the genetic lineage of Jesus Christ through her marriage to Salmon and the birth of their son Boaz. God was not honoring her for being sinless. She was a prostitute who had committed much sin in her profession. Rahab entered God's grace through her present decisions and not her past actions. Rahab is a bold reminder that we should come before and serve God as we are. The decisions we make today and in our future are what makes a difference with God. He forgives and will provide opportunities to those who accept Him.