

Rahab: The Woman Who Was Better Than Her Job

We're not primarily put on this earth to see through one another, but to see one another through.

~Peter de Vries

*Doubt sees the obstacles. Faith sees the way.
Doubt sees the darkest night. Faith sees the day.
Doubt dreads to take a step. Faith soars on high.
Doubt questions, "Who believes?" Faith answers, "I." (7)*

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| Her names | Her name means "storm", "arrogance", "broad", or "spacious" (1) The first part of Rahab - "Ra", was the name of an Egyptian god. As an Amorite, Rahab belonged to an idolatrous people, and had a name meaning "insolence," "fierceness," or "broad," "spacious". |
| Key Scriptures | Joshua 2:1-21; 6:17-25; Matthew 1:5; Hebrews 11:31; James 2:25 |
| Promises In Scripture | Isaiah 40:29-31, Acts 4:13, 2 Corinthians 12:10 |

Her Background, Life and Times

The story so far: The land of Canaan was the land that Joshua must claim for Israel. He had God's sacred promise of victory, but as a military leader he must plan wisely. He chose Jericho as the starting point of his campaign. His strategy may have involved separating the Kings of the North from the Kings of the South. Joshua sent two young men as spies to the "City of Fragrance". It was easy to imagine them, alert, discreet, their robes clinging about their strong limbs, as they pressed on with quick steps the few miles to the key city of the plain. Eager to avoid identity, they mixed but briefly with the crowds outside the city. Just long enough, perhaps, to hear that the house situated so strategically on the walls belonged to a harlot, named Rahab. Here they found at least a measure of safety, for city authorities had likely often seen strangers enter her home. (3)

Jericho and its walls: Jericho may be the world's oldest city, Established nearly six thousand years before Miriam and Moses completed their desert wanderings, its ancient ruins can be found just seventeen miles northeast of Jerusalem. Jericho is probably best known today for its enormous walls. A wall around a city was its chief distinguishing mark. Anything without a wall was merely a village. Homes, businesses, watchtowers, arch positions - all could be built on top of or within walls that were as much as twenty to thirty feet thick. The stronger the system of walls around a city (some cities had both an inner and an outer wall), the more defensible the city was against invaders who came across the plains. Most walls of major cities were built of huge stones and mortar. (1)

Prostitution: We are told that prostitution was not regarded with the same horror then, as now, but the Bible with one voice speaks of harlotry with moral revulsion and social ostracism. Frequently women like Rahab are more often sinned against than sinners. Man's lust for the unlawful is responsible for harlotry. (2)

Harlot: There were two kinds of prostitutes in her day - the religious ones who worked in the Canaanite temple and the run-of-the-mill harlots who worked for cash. Rahab was the second kind. (6)

Spies: By military law the spies were liable to instant death because of the threat of war, and Rahab, willing to do all in her power to protect her nation's enemies, faced a like terrible death. (2)

Family Connections: While Rahab's parents, brothers and sisters were alive at the time of her association with the spies Joshua sent out, we are not given any of their names (2:13). Some of the ancient Jewish fathers who held her in high reputation reckoned that she was the wife of Joshua himself, but in the royal genealogy of Jesus, Rahab is referred to as being the wife of Salmon, one of the two spies she sheltered. In turn, she became the mother of Boaz, who married Ruth from whose son, Obed, Jesse the father David came, through whose line Jesus was born (Matt. 1:5, where the ASV reads, "Salmon begat Boaz of Rahab" - not Rachab). Salmon was a prince of the house of Judah, and thus, Rahab, the one time heathen harlot, married into one of the leading families of Israel and became an ancestress of our Lord, the other foreign ancestresses being Tamar, Ruth and Bathsheba. The gratitude Salmon felt for Rahab ripened into love, and when grace erased her former life of shame he made her his wife. Although man's sense of refinement may be shocked, the fact remains that Rahab, Tamar and Bathsheba were sinful women who were purged by God, and had their share in the royal line from which Jesus sprang. (2)

Jericho: Rahab lived in Jericho, the strongest of the fortified cities in Canaan. This ancient "City of Palms", as it was known, was surrounded and protected by two walls about fifteen feet apart. The walls, though not high, were wide and sturdy and houses made of sun dried bricks, supported by timbers, were built over the gap. Rahab's house occupied a place on the way. Jericho, with its bleached flat roof tops, was situated in a green valley, picturesque with palm trees. The well watered area of the Jordan was lush and fertile and the warm climate of the plain was well suited to the raising of luscious fruits and abundant crops. It was a land flowing with milk and honey and the people were prosperous. (3)

The Neighborhood: The people who inhabited the land west of the Jordan were the powerful Canaanites. It appears that they were divided into petty kingdoms each having its own King who, when occasion demanded, could form powerful alliances (Joshua 1:1-2). They were protected by mountains, the strong flowing Jordan and the Mediterranean Sea. Their cities were well fortified. They were a cultured people. Their commercial achievements were well known, and they carried on peaceful trade with other countries. The Canaanites were an idolatrous people whose worship was sensuous and atrociously cruel. Their fertility rites and human sacrifices to Baal were shocking to the Israelites, whose rules of life were based on the law of Moses. Their cup of iniquities was full. It was among these people that Rahab lived. She was one of them. Perhaps it was in the service of Ashteroth that she became a harlot, and as such she could even have attained respect in the eyes of the Canaanites. (3)

Her Character

Faithful: She is the only woman singled out by name and commended for her faith as part of the great "cloud of witnesses" mentioned in the book of Hebrews. (1)

Faith: Her faith of this God who worked great wonders was altogether marvelous and singular. It was such a call that made her willing to sacrifice her own nation - an act which would have been otherwise treasonable. Does not her confession of God's power and purpose, and her service for the spies indicate that she knew the race of which she was part was accursed of God for its crimes and idolatry, and that she wished to be separated from such a doomed people, and identified with the people of God? The declaration of faith given by this Canaanite woman places her in a unique position among the women of the Bible. (2)

How gloriously daring was her faith, and how richly rewarded she was for her willingness to sacrifice her life in a cause she knew to be of God! (2)

Much has been said of Rahab's deceit when confronted by the king of Jericho. She told a lie and Scripture forbids a lie or any "evil doing, that good may come of it" (Rom. 3:7-8). But under the rules of war, Rahab is not to be blamed for her protection of those righteous forces set against the forces of evil. What the Bible commends is not her deception, but the faith which was the mainspring of her

conduct. (2)

Her Faith: It was faith where all others believe not. It was faith that showed itself by works, without which our faith is dead. (5)

Heroine of Faith: Rahab the harlot, the clever liar, the traitor, became a heroine of faith! She spared the spies, and was saved later herself, because she *truly believed* in God. God had been working in her heart. There is conviction in her confession, “I *know* that Jehovah hath given ... *Jehovah* dried up the water of the Red Sea ... *He is God* in heaven above and on the earth beneath...” (3)

In James, we find Rahab’s faith is placed alongside that of the eminent Abraham. James says that her faith was living, for it was proved by her works. Her convictions were sure and, even though her life was endangered by doing so, she chose God’s side. She dared to stand alone, for she knew that she was secure with the Almighty. (3)

Faith: Rahab believed. She believed that her country was destined for destruction and that God and His people would prevail. (7)

Clever and wise: Rahab was both clever and wise. She saw judgment coming and was able to devise an escape plan for herself and her family. As soon as she heard what God had done for the Israelites, she cast her lot with his people, risking her life in an act of faith. (1)

Clever: Idolater though she had been, with a phase of immorality associated with her idolatrous life, she witnessed to a remarkable understanding of the sovereignty of the true God for she to the spies: “I know that the Lord hath given you the land, and that your terror is fallen upon us ... The Lord, your God he is God in heaven above, and in earth beneath. (Josh. 2:9-11) Further, there was in Rahab’s mind, no matter how faintly understood, a distinct call from God, that she was being singled out from her own idolatrous people to aid the god she had a growing conception of. (2)

Courageous: She took her life in her own hands. We cannot but admire her courage and willingness to risk her own neck. With calm demeanor, and without the slightest trace of inner agitation, she met the searchers and succeeded in setting them out on a false trail. By her act Rahab was actually betraying her own country, and for such treason certain death would have been hers had she been found out. To hide spies was a crime punishable with death. (2)

Courageous and Wise: To those who might see subterfuge as sin, I’ll point out that if a gang of thugs appeared at my door, weapons in hand, and demanded the whereabouts of my loved ones, I would lie. A big, juicy fib. “They left the country.” Whatever. Rahab’s actions were even more courageous because these men were *not* family; they were strangers. What possessed her to protect them, to hide them under the four-foot stalks of wet flax she’d spread out to dry in neat rows on her roof? Obviously, this wise woman sensed an upheaval - spiritual and otherwise - about to sweep through Jericho. She reasoned things through and made the most important decision of her life. (6)

Courage: To stand up against her king and to betray her own city unto death and destruction took courage. Yet she acted boldly, choosing to save the two men who represented God’s people. (7)

Her profession: The flax that she spread on her roof and the scarlet cord she used as a sign indicated that Rahab manufactured linen and also dyed it. If only, like Lydia, she had kept to such an honorable occupation, what a different story would have been hers. (2)

Missionary: See how quickly she thought of the welfare of her family! She was already a missionary, for she wanted them to be saved also. (3)

Kindness: The two spies were in need. Rahab’s king had found out about their presence. But when he asked her to deliver the men over to him, Rahab could not sacrifice their lives. Instead, she was willing to sacrifice her own. (7)

Creativity: Thinking quickly, Rahab hid Joshua’s spies, sent their pursuers in another direction, and then secretly let the spies out of the city. (7)

| Her Sorrow |
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| War: To see her own people destroyed and her city demolished. (1) |
| Harlot: Three times over Rahab is referred to as “the harlot,” and the Hebrew term <i>zonah</i> and the Greek word <i>porne</i> have at no time meant anything else but “harlot” - a woman who yields herself indiscriminately to every man approaching her. |

| Her Joy |
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| God’s Grace: That God had given her, an idolater and prostitute, the opportunity to know him and belong to his people. (1) |
| God’s Grace: Rahab’s story is a dramatic one. It shows us that God’s grace accepts no boundaries. (1) |
| God’s Grace: What a manifestation of divine grace it is to find the one time harlot ranked along with the saints like Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Joseph, Moses and David! (2) |
| Her Salvation: Brought out of an accursed city, and from her own sins which were scarlet, Rahab is a fitting illustration of another miracle of divine grace, namely, the calling forth of His church out of a godless, Gentile world. (2) |
| To be spared: Speaking of walls, if Rahab’s house was attached to the walls of Jericho, and they all fell down, how could her house have been spared? The miraculous strikes again. It wasn’t Joshua and his army that spared her house - it was God. |
| Portrait of Transformation: From Harlot (A woman with a past that isn’t pretty!), to Heroine (Her many acts of faith made Rahab a heroine to the people of Israel.), to Hallowed Vessel (Believing in the holy mighty God of Israel transformed Rahab into a hallowed and holy vessel fit for God’s use, giving her a heart of faith and compelling her to act in faith.) (7) |

| Her Promises, Her Lessons, Her Legacy |
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| God’s Willingness To Use The Less Than Perfect: The story of Rahab reveals again God’s willingness to use the less than perfect, the outcast, what we might see as the unsuitable to accomplish his holy purposes. Throughout Scripture, with what can almost be seen as divine humor, God chooses a stutterer to speak for him (Moses), a weakling to defend him (Gideon), and infertile woman to be the mother of a nation (Sarah), a forgettable youngest son to be the most unforgettable king of his people (David), an unknown youngster to be the mother of his son (Mary), and a persecutor to take the gospel to the nations (Paul). God doesn’t wait for us to become spotlessly clean or totally mature in our faith in order to use us. Instead, he takes ordinary, willing people and accomplishes the extraordinary, both in their lives and in the lives of those around them. As he did with Rahab, he promises to use us, and through that experience to perfect us. (1) |
| Outsiders: The church can be slow to make the “outsider” an insider ... slow to learn and practice the principle of acceptance. No one of a different heritage, color, culture - no kind of sinner who has accepted Christ - may be kept out. When God saves a sinner, no matter how wretched, He takes him <i>completely</i> into His fellowship and into His Heaven. (3) |
| God’s Grace: In Matthew 1:5 we find that among the four women named in the Messianic line, one of whom is Rahab, three are adulteresses. The Lord is telling us that salvation is not dependent on human goodness but on His free grace to sinners, and that He is willing to redeem the most sinful. This example of how He elevated a sinful woman warns us that we may never look down with disdain upon others because of their sins. (3) |
| God’s Grace: To humble our pride and to teach us that we are saved by the grace of God, God took a harlot and by her teaches us the meaning of faith. (5) |
| God’s Timing: For Rahab, the mysterious process of conversion appears to have happened in the |

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| <p>same way it does for each of us. According to His timing, when the moment was exactly right, the Lord placed His mighty hand upon His daughter, planted faith deep within her hurting heart, and with absolute authority and irresistible loving-kindness, called her home.(4)</p> |
| <p>Unlikely Places: the history of Rahab is, in the first place, a striking illustration of the fact that beauty of character and Christian faith may be planted of God in the most unlikely places. (5)</p> |
| <p>The Scarlet Thread: How could a waving scarlet cord save Rahab's house from the doom of Jericho? There was certainly nothing in the situation of Rahab's house which guaranteed its safety, for it stood high up on the wall, in the most dangerous place of all. How could a scarlet thread save that house? Yet it did. How can our faith in the Cross of Christ, that scarlet cord of mercy which God has flung out from the windows of heaven, save us from death and reconcile us to God and bless our lives with unending joy and happiness hereafter? Yet that is the promise of the Word of God. (5)</p> <p>Scarlet Thread: Rahab's sins were as scarlet as the thread that draped from her window, and every bit as obvious. That's why God's grace is so amazing. When we confess our sins - literally let them all hang out like Rahab's red thread - and repent, leaving the old life behind as Rahab did, we are forgiven and washed clean, without a spot or blemish left. We no longer look like scarlet sinners; we look like grateful grace bearers. On Rahab - on all of us - red is a very becoming color when it signifies a confession of our sins and our desire to trust God. Red is also the symbol of blood, of life flowing into death. Or, more accurately, death flowing into life, like the red blood of a sacrificial lamb smeared over the door post of a house so that all who lived there might be spared when the Lord passed over. (6)</p> |
| <p>The importance and the power of decision for God: In divine goodness of God, the knowledge of the true God and the way of life was presented to her by those spies who had come to her house. Rahab was not only convinced, but <i>acted</i> upon her convictions and chose the destiny of the people of God. She was not only impressed, but <i>acted</i> at once upon her impressions; disregarding the personal risk involved, she hid and protected the two spies, and then made her confession of faith and her irrevocable decision. Where a firm decision for God is made in a human life, there the foundation of all future success and strength is laid; but where there is no firm decision, no matter what earnest and deep impressions and desires there may be, the fruits of the Christian life will never make their appearance.</p> |
| <p>Salvation: First she heard the Word, then she believed. This belief led to faith, which then led to works. In the process, she was saved. (6)</p> |
| <p>Choices: In every life story, including our own, decisions are made in haste that determine the course of eternity. (6)</p> <p>Choices: Rahab had no religious background, no godly heritage, no devout husband, and no pious parents. But Rahab's <i>choices</i> qualified her to join the ranks of Sarah and Jochebed. It's been said that choices, not chance, determine human destiny. We could add that, to some extent, our choices also determine our eternal destiny. Rahab exhibited her faith by her choices, and those choices affected her human - and her eternal destiny. (7)</p> |
| <p>Happy Endings: With God, it isn't who you <i>were</i> that matters; it's who you <i>are becoming</i>. If God can turn a harlot into a holy vessel, entrusting her with the very genes that would one day produce the King of kings, surely those of us with a past can leave our shame in the rubble and walk away, fixing our eyes on the One who washes us white as snow. (6)</p> |
| <p>Trust: Her newfound faith empowered her to trust these complete strangers - and a strange, new God - to save her life. Their seasoned faith enable them to trust a harlot wearing her changed heart on her sleeve to save them from death. We're talking a God-sized miracle here. (6)</p> |
| <p>Why still a harlot?: Why did the New Testament writers still insist on calling her a prostitute? Can't she lose the old label? Yes. And no. Paul and James mentioned Rahab's past for the same reason people share their testimonies today - to demonstrate the "before and after" power of knowing the Lord. Stories of how God has changed lives aren't intended to glorify sin; they are meant to glorify God's <i>grace</i>.</p> |

(6)

Lessons from Rahab: 1. *Our past does not determine our future.* Rahab is remembered not for her harlotry but for her bravery, her trusting God. 2. *Rahab cared about her family's safety, not merely her own pretty neck.* When it came to being spared from certain death, Rahab's family was even less "deserving" than she was. 3. *Obedience often requires public confession.* When Rahab hung the scarlet cord out her window exactly as the spies commanded her, she marked herself as a prostitute, not only for the two who'd come for her, but for all the Israelites, including Joshua himself. She didn't "blend in" with her new people - she stood out. 4. *Faith that's demonstrated is remembered.* James chose Rahab as a good example of someone who walked her talk, who put feet to her spoken faith. We can go to Bible studies, sing praise songs, and warm the pews of a church six times a week, but if no one ever says of us, "You would not believe what this woman did because of her love for God!" then it's time for us to open the doors of our hearts and see what brave thing God might be asking us to do. (6)

Statement of Faith: Every woman who loves God should also have a statement of faith. She should know and be able to clearly state exactly what she believes. (7)

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