

Rahab!

Joshua 2:1-21, Hebrews 11:30-33, James 2:25

Think of all the women in Biblical history that you have met so far ... in the morality category, most have had a mixed track record – not that the men have done any better.

- First, there was **Eve** who ate the forbidden fruit, with Adam standing right there and joining in. Their first born son became the first murderer in history.
- Then there was barren **Sarah** who in hopes of gaining an heir, offered her Egyptian handmaid **Hagar** as a baby-making surrogate. Of course Abraham, in trying to rush God's promise along agreed thus getting both **Ishmael**, an un-promised heir, along with launching the first ever recorded family feud which is still having repercussions to this day.
- Next was **Rebecca** who helped her favorite son Jacob steal the family blessing from his twin brother and rightful heir Esau. Launching the second family feud which had repercussions all the way up to the Diaspora.
- Then there were **Rachel** and **Leah** who held a baby making contest to win their husband's affection thus birthing the largest dysfunctional family in Biblical history.
- And let's not forget the widow **Tamar**, who seduced her father-in-law Judah into giving her the heir that the family owed her.

My point being that up until now the nation of Israel who was specifically chosen to bring us God's son has not yet shown any examples of healthy family dynamics and these were supposedly the Godly people ... helps us feel a bit better doesn't it?



But today things are about to change. Today we meet **Rahab** the harlot, perhaps up to this point one of the most sinful persons in the Bible, who with a change of heart towards God ends up not only living happily thereafter, but also gets Biblical honors as one of the great women of faith. However, before we get to into

her story, let's set the stage.

As the Book of Joshua opens, a half million Hebrews with an army of over 200,000 fighting men are camped on the banks of the Jordan river, with the

ancient, prosperous and well-fortified city of Jericho sitting on the country's primary north/south trade route, just seven miles away. We will learn a lot more about Jericho in a couple of weeks, but for today what you need to know is that the city was very aware of Israel's approach and quickly preparing for war.

Before launching the invasion, Joshua orders a second undercover reconnaissance operation, sending out just two spies to determine Jericho's defenses. This is a much different operation from the first time, when Joshua had been one of 12 spies sent into Canaan. These two spies were only to report back to Joshua. They weren't going to report to the nation so the people could hold a vote and decide whether or not they should invade. Joshua wasn't going to make that mistake again. Joshua was only concerned about God's will – not popular opinion.



As the spies enter Jericho they are met by Rahab, a tavern keeper who was always on the lookout for foreign travelers to offer them convenient accommodations close by the city gate, along with additional services for a price. Even while probably knowing of her side business – such establishments usually clearly advertised their offerings – the spies must have thought this would make good cover and so accepted. But too many eyes were watching for just such strangers coming into town, so news of their arrival at her door quickly got out.

Now let's consider Rahab. Some historic commentators, not wanting the Messiah to be descended from such a shady family tree, have tried to gloss over her reputation, since the Hebrew word for "harlot" and "innkeeper" were the same. But in the New Testament she was clearly labeled as the prostitute that she was. Even as such, Rahab apparently was considered a respectable business woman of some status in the town because when the king's guard came to her door, they took her word at face value rather than searching the house.

Reading between the lines you get the sense that Rahab knew a lot more about current affairs than one would suspect from a woman (my apologies ladies); but then again, a woman in her profession would need to be both well informed and able, with a moment's notice, to spin a good cover story. So, when the king's guard came knocking, demanding she turn the spies over, Rahab made a choice that changed the rest of her life.



Hiding the spies up on her roof under sheaves of flax which she probably used for bedding, Rahab spins a tale that sends the guards running out the gate after spies who were supposedly headed east back to the river. Then she comes upstairs to cut a deal; which is where today's scripture lesson picked up the story.

Rahab informs the spies that the entire countryside is very much aware of Israel's success in previous battles and very much afraid of their approach ... *our hearts fail and there is no courage left in us.* Which is exactly what God told Moses He would do.

This day I will begin to put the dread and fear of you upon the peoples everywhere under heaven; when they hear report of you, they will tremble and be in anguish because of you.' Deuteronomy 2:25

Then revealing that she has thought this through very carefully, Rahab confesses to the spies that ***the Lord your God is indeed God in heaven above and on earth below;*** which is a clear and simple faith statement. Rahab had taken a hard look at her culture and their gods in comparison to Israel's culture and God and decided even at great risk to herself, where to place her faith. Letting the spies escape would probably doom her city, at best ruin her business and possibly even cost her life.



Still, in exchange for helping them escape, she simply asks that when the invasion comes, Israel deal kindly with her family. Then with the spies assurances, using a rope she conveniently had at hand – which had probably been used this way before – to let them down outside the city walls with the instructions to go west and hide in the hills for three days until the soldiers stop looking for them.



In return, the spies give her a crimson cord to tie in her window signaling that this was a safe house, so that during the attack the Israelis would spare everyone who had been hidden there. After the defeat of Jericho, the spies kept their word, bringing Rahab and all her gathered family safely out of the city before killing and burning to the ground everyone and everything else, even the recently harvested grain that had been

stored in the town. The only other thing, besides Rahab's family, that they took out of Jericho, was any precious metals to include in Israel's treasury

The book of Joshua's last remark on Rahab, was that she and her people had lived safely among the Israelis thereafter. Only from other portions of the Bible can you learn that Rahab had a larger impact on the future history of Israel than just living among them. Her name first reappears – along with a two other questionable women – Tamar and Bathsheba – in Matthew's genealogy of Jesus. There we find that **Rahab** married a Hebrew named **Salmon**, who became the father of **Boaz** who then married **Ruth** (another foreign woman). Though being the son of a former Canaanite harlot, Boaz is presented as an honorable and kindly man who was respected in his village; all this being a good testimony with regard to his upbringing. And since his mother had also been a foreigner in Israel, this was probably why Boaz realized and quickly acted righteously in both protecting and then marrying Ruth thus giving her and her Hebrew mother in law Naomi a safe future along with a son named **Jesse** who grew up to become the father of **King David** and eventually down the line of **Jesus**. They say if you look far enough down your family tree, you will eventually find someone – like Rahab – hanging from it. But, I am sure that Jesus didn't mind having a former prostitute in His lineage just as He had no problem associating with tax-collectors and sinners. Since by His own declaration it is not the well, but the sick who needed His special kind of doctoring.

Surprisingly, Rahab also appears in the great faith chapter of Hebrews, there sharing space with only Sarah, who by faith birthed a child at the age of 99 and the unnamed parents of Moses who by faith kept him hid for three months before sending him downstream in a basket. Here, it was Rahab's welcome and protection of the spies that displayed her great faith (11:31).

Then even more surprisingly, in his letter, James the brother of Jesus places Rahab right beside Abraham as the two prime examples of people who demonstrated their faith by their actions. Think of that comparison for just a moment: the honored father of Israel and a foreign harlot presented side-by-side as heroes of faith in action.

Yes, in protecting the spies, Rahab did put her life where her new faith had landed, because had the king found out that she had hidden the spies, she certainly would have died for this treasonous act against her own people. She

also had to keep her secret bargain perhaps for a month or more until Israel's invasion. For had she done otherwise, her agreement with the spies would have been negated. I am sure that Rahab patiently waited for Israel to start marching around the city and all of Jericho safely locked inside, unable to see or question its meaning, before tying that crimson cord in her window.

So what can we learn from Rahab's story?

First that it is remarkable, how God in His grace can change and use those people we might think could never become His servants. The Biblical examples are many: Jacob, Rahab, Samson, the prodigal son, Paul the Apostle, Simon the Sorcerer and many more. The lesson for us – as we especially think of Rahab or Jesus' story of the prodigal son -- is that we can never wander too far away from God's grace to be rescued. God loves you, even those you consider unlovable, so much that He is willing to meet any one of us wherever we may be in life. As especially exemplified by Rahab, God also loves us too much to leave us where He found us. Who would have thought that a former pagan prostitute could become a respectable mother in Israel in the lineage of God's Messiah. So if you think you are too bad a sinner for God to forgive, just join with Rahab in her confession: ***The Lord God is indeed God in heaven above and on earth below.***

But before we leave Rahab, let's also consider the three responses that proved her newfound faith.

As the theologian D. Martin Lloyd Jones pointed out, *true faith shows itself in the whole personality*; not just in the mind, or the emotions, or the will, but all three together. The mind is instructed, the emotions are stirred, and the will then acts in obedience to God (Wiersbe, OT Commentary. Pg 387).

- Rahab recognized the God of Israel, as the one true God and she "repented," she changed her mind about where to place her faith.
- Realizing the destruction yet to come, her emotions were stirred; fearing for her family she made a decisive and very risky choice.
- In hiding, then lying about the spies and keeping their secret, she acted at great risk to her own life.

Yes indeed, Rahab proved her newfound faith by her actions, which earned her that place of honor, both in Jesus' family tree and also right there beside Abraham in the great faith chapter of Hebrews.

The only thing I still wonder about, is how the spies upon returning home, explained to their wives that they were saved by a prostitute!

This then is your take-home for today. **No matter what sins may checker your past; Christ can wash them all away and use You to glorify God in Heaven!!** So, depending on which side of faith you are currently living, either thank God once again for His amazing grace in your life, or ask God for His grace. Let's pray about this.