

Rahab

Undoubtedly one of the most interesting women in the Old Testament is Rahab. She was a harlot by profession who not only came to faith in God but is listed along with 4 other women in Matthew's genealogy of Jesus. Matthew tells us she was the mother of Boaz who was the grandfather of David and therefore the great, great, great etc. grandmother of Jesus. In Hebrews 11 we have what is called the "Hall of Fame of Faith." In that list there are only 2 women. One is Sarah the wife of Abraham and the other is Rahab. Then to add to her accolades the fact that she is mentioned in James 2:21-26 as an example of real faith.

Rahab first appears in Joshua 2 where we read that Joshua sent 2 spies into the Promised Land to look it over and report back as much information as possible. Jericho was to be spied out since it was the first city the Israelites would face when they crossed over the Jordan river into the land that 40 years earlier the Israelites had refused out of fear to enter. *Read Joshua 2:1*

Immediately the eyes of Christians are raised a little as we wonder why the spies would go to such a place. But remember, these spies were obviously foreigners and probably not welcome in most homes especially if they were recognized as Jews. They would certainly be welcomed there. Actually, without downplaying her role as a prostitute, her home was probably closer to a bed and breakfast with benefits than merely a place one went for a couple of hours. The location was great. They could see and evaluate the wall and from that height they could see much of the city. Of course, most prostitutes knew a lot more about a lot more than most. It is safe to assume that among her customers were those in positions of leadership within the community and in the process of seeking to impress her they would undoubtedly share secrets of the community. Those secrets contained the information that the spies needed. What better place to get needed information? They went for information, not for her services.

We can read this account as simply the history of God's people. But it is far more than just history. Remember, history is His story and at the center of His story is His love for us and His desire to redeem those who are lost. Rahab was certainly lost. Ask yourself a simple question. Of all the homes of women like Rahab, some of which had to have been on the wall also, what led them to her house? God did. He was, is and always will be sovereign. God knew her heart. *Read Joshua 2:2-3*

Rahab the prostitute then committed treason and lied. *Read Joshua 2:4-7*. Rahab said that the men had already gone when in truth she had hidden them under bales of flax on her roof. Then she urges the men who had come to arrest the spies to leave quickly and try to catch them.

That is the background to a woman who was to become an ancestor of Jesus. She was a prostitute, a traitor, and a liar. Not an ideal woman for an ancestor but God is in the business of saving sinners, which we all are. Jesus came not for the healthy but the sick. He came from a line where each ancestor was a sinner. Isn't it great to know that God can work in us and through us despite who we are and maybe even what we have done? In the New Testament she is not commended for her life or ethics but for her faith.

Note a couple of verses from the New Testament that help us better understand the events that are recorded in Joshua. *Read Hebrews 11:31 and James 2:25.* Those two verses tell us two important truths about Rahab. **First**, she became a woman of faith. **Second**, she acted on that faith. Those two are always supposed to go together. Rahab became a woman of faith. Joshua shared the testimony Rahab gave when she told the spies why she was hiding them. *Read Joshua 2:8-11.* She said she had heard the reports of how the God of Israel had done great things for them. She recalled the stories she had heard of the crossing of the Red Sea, of God's provision in the wilderness and the way the God of Israel gave them victories over a couple of the nations on the other side of the Jordan river.

Verse 10 is important. It reads, "**We** have heard." Everyone in Jericho heard what she heard. They all knew as much as she knew. Rahab was the only one to believe it sufficiently to act on it. Lots of people know something about the Bible. They at least know the Christmas and Easter stories. But knowing about God and having faith in Him is different. There was no doubt in her mind that the God of Israel was a powerful God who could do what He wanted. She was sufficiently convinced of His power that she was willing to risk all for Him.

One of the most powerful witnessing tools we have is the testimony of all that God has done for us, of the changes we have experienced in our lives and of answers to prayer that we all have experienced. The world is always interested when we share the reality of a living God. Our testimony combined with God's Word is a powerful tool that God can use to open the hearts and minds of those who might otherwise want nothing to do with Him.

Rahab, in a very limited way but in the best way possible, trusted the God of Israel and since it only takes faith the size of a mustard seed, that was enough. God saw her faith and not only saved her but allowed her to become an ancestor of Jesus. Before the spies left, she pleaded with them to spare her and they agreed. *Read Joshua 2:12-21.* Note especially verses 17-19 that says if she hung a scarlet cord from the window of her house she would be spared. Note that it was a scarlet cord that she was to hang. Perhaps these spies were thinking of the Angel of Death sent to Egypt and the promise of God that whoever placed the red blood of a sacrifice on the doorposts would be spared or passed over. It would be the scarlet blood of her future heir, Jesus, that would save men from sin. Verse 19 says that if anyone is not in the house identified by that cord they will not be spared. Jesus said that whosoever believes is saved while anyone who does not is condemned already. *Read John 3:16, 17.*

Rahab acted on her faith and lowered the men down and they escaped. Again, she risked everything because of her faith. Can you imagine what the consequences would have been had she been caught doing that? Jesus said in a parable that a pearl of great price is worth risking all for it. Even with her limited faith she knew it was worth the risk.

Skip ahead a little over about two weeks. The spies had returned and reported to Joshua and Joshua led the people of Israel across the Jordan. They then renew their covenant with God and

celebrated the Passover. Then they were told to take the city by marching around it 7 days. We read that Rahab hung that cord from her window as instructed. There was obedience here that is essential to see. Normally a siege of a city like Jericho would take 2-3 years. It would have tempting to wait before putting the cord down rather than take a chance someone would see it. But Rahab put that cord in the window immediately, so she was ready. As we know God performed a miracle and the city was given to Israel in just one week. There are real dangers in waiting to act on faith.

Read Joshua 6:16, 17, and then verses 23-25. In time Rahab became the mother of Boaz and through that line an ancestor of the Savior not of her alone but of the whole world.

What a testimony Rahab is to the grace and love of God! Who would have ever thought that a prostitute would have come to faith, or that because of her faith and obedience she would be spared when nothing else in Jericho was spared or that Jesus would count her among His ancestors? But that is what happened. Consider this. We are not ancestors of Jesus but even more exciting we are His heirs. Read Galatians 4:5-7. What a difference faith makes, faith not in a scarlet cord but faith in the shed red blood of our Savior.

Rahab! Who would have picked her, a prostitute, traitor and liar, to be a great, great plus grandmother of Jesus? Only a forgiving God who can use any of us. Who would have picked any of us to be heirs? Only a God who loved us even while we were yet sinners!

In Joshua 6:25, we read that Rahab was still living in Israel many years later. Think about the changes that took place in her life. She was no longer a citizen of sinful Jericho but instead a citizen of God's nation. She no longer lived as she did in Jericho. Her life and loyalties were radically changed because of her faith. That is the way it should be for all whose citizenship/life has been changed.