

Rahab the Harlot

Welcome to week three in our series: *Bad Girls of the Bible and what we can learn from them*. On Mother's Day, Dawn Waltman talked to us about Eve, the very first mother and the first Bad Girl of the Bible. Last week Melissa Hess shared how she could identify with the Samaritan woman who met Jesus at the well. This week we go back to the Old Testament to look at what we can learn from the story of Rahab. Rahab the Harlot, Rahab the Prostitute

Rahab is not a popular name for baby girls in the 21st century. It ranks right up there with Jezebel with the connotation of a bad woman.

In fact, according to sheknows.com, Rahab is boy's name meaning proud or quarrelsome. On Babynames.com – Rahab was not even given as an option.

Rahab the Harlot, a woman defined by and remembered by her profession. But, she is also a woman remembered for her bravery and wit, and her faith.

She is mentioned in Matthew's gospel as the great-great-grandmother of King David, and as such is an ancestor of Jesus Christ.

She is commended by James, the brother of Jesus, for her behavior giving evidence of her faith. She is only one of two women recognized by the writer of Hebrews as an example of outstanding faith, the other woman being Abraham's wife Sarah,

So who is this Bad Woman, a woman of ill repute who is also given as an example of faith?

For the answer, turn with me to her story in the Old Testament, Joshua chapter 2. But before I read, let me set the stage for you and put this story in context.

The Israelite nation, a half a million strong, has arrived on the east side of the Jordan River, not far from the city of Jericho. They have spent the last forty years traveling thru the desert of the Sinai Peninsula headed for Canaan, the land promised by God to their ancestors, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

God had rescued Israel from many years of slavery by devastating the Egyptians with the ten plagues. They were led out of Egypt by Moses in the great Exodus. God had miraculously parted the waters of the Red Sea and saved them from Pharaoh's armies that were pursuing them. During their wanderings in the desert, He provided water and sustained them with manna from heaven.

On the final portion of their journey, as they moved north on the east side of the Dead Sea, they conquered and completely destroyed the Amorite Kingdoms of Sihon and Og. As they were poised to enter their long-awaited destination, Jericho stood right in their path.

Jericho is believed to be the oldest occupied city in the world. Today it has a population of more than 20,000 people and is under Palestinian rule in the West Bank of Israel. The remains of the ancient city are a popular tourist destination. A number of years ago Phoebe and I had the privilege of visiting Jericho and touring the impressive ruins.

The Jericho of 3500 years ago, also known as the City of Palm trees, has been described as “a bustling, fortified city strategically situated in the fertile plains of the Jordan Valley.” It was the most important of the Canaanite cities and was surrounded by a double wall for protection. It was the center for pagan idol worship of the goddess Ashtaroth, the goddess of the moon. According to one source, Jericho represented “all that was the vilest and most degrading in the religion of the Canaanites.”

This was the home of Rahab. This is where our story begins

Follow as I read Joshua chapter 2, either in your Bible, your electronic device, or on the screen.

Joshua 2:1 **“Then Joshua son of Num**

The Israelite nation with its army is amassed on the east side of the Jordan River
But Jericho guards the passage way into the Promised Land

Joshua sends two spies, no names are given, to scout out the land, and especially Jericho.
So they cross the Jordan River and end up at the house of Rahab the prostitute and “stayed there”

Hmmm! What are two good Jewish boys doing in a house of a Canaanite Prostitute?
Why her house? Maybe Tom Bodett forgot to let the light on at the local Motel 6.
The Bible does not say why or how they choose her place, but they did.
Neither does it indicate how long they stayed, a couple of hours? A day or two?

So what do we know about this woman Rahab?
We know that she was a prostitute by occupation
She may have been a temple prostitute at one of the religious shrines in Jericho
Or she may have been a hooker, plying her trade on the streets
Another possibility is that she was an innkeeper where guests could stay, with benefits
Interestingly, there is no word translated innkeeper in the NIV translation
The Hebrew word “zona” used to describe her is used elsewhere in the OT
and clearly refers to prostitution or adultery
In the New Testament, the descriptive term is unmistakably that of a harlot or prostitute
So if she was a hostess of an inn, it was clearly a place of ill repute
And if she was not a prostitute,
the writer makes no effort to clear her name or remove the stigma associated with prostitution.

She was apparently single
The Bible makes no reference to a husband, or children.
She does have family – father, mother, brothers, sisters, and their families v.13
But they do not live with her, because they had to come to her house v.18
She is a single woman of ill repute,
living in a city representing the worst of the Canaanite religious practices

and two foreigners, two Israelite spies, show up at her house – Divine providence?
Folks around town saw them, identified them as foreign spies and reported to the King

So the king sends men to Rahab's house to get them, She replies

“They left town at dusk, before the city gates were closed, but I don't know where they went
If you go quickly, perhaps you can catch them before they get to the river.”

So they left the city and the gate was shut.

Jericho was a heavily fortified city. Archeological excavations reveal that it was surrounded by a double wall. It had a main gate that was closed at night. We are told that Jericho was “tightly shut” because of the Israelites. The walls and the gate were the primary defense against invaders. So those pursuing the spies left the city, then the gate was shut

Meanwhile, back at Rahab's house,
the spies are hiding on the roof of her house and covered with flax that was drying

So Rahab goes up to talk to them

V 8 “I know that the LORD...for the LORD your God is God in heaven above and on the earth below.”

How did she know all this information?

From her clients? the daily newspaper? Or did God reveal it to her?

We are not told specifically,

But she clearly recognizes the God of the Hebrews as the one true God, Jehovah

Everyone in the land was terrified of this mass of people

In the ancient world, the supremacy of a nation's god was defined by their success in battle

They knew the God of the Israelites was more powerful than the Egyptian Pharaoh,

Had defeated the Kings of the Amorites and could even divide the Red Sea

Their hearts were melting in fear – interesting imagery

Rahab knew the God of the Israelites was the supreme God of heaven and Earth

She knows that Jericho and the surrounding land will be given to the Israelites

So she makes a deal with the spies

I saved your skin, now you save me and my family.

And the men agreed – “Our lives for your lives”

The agreement was this

Rahab was not to tell anyone what the spies were doing and put a red cord in her window

In return, her family would be treated kindly when Jericho was conquered

The spies made it clear

No red cord – the deal is off

She must bring her father, mother, siblings and their families into her house

Anyone out on the street is on their own, and we are not responsible for what happens to them

So the agreement is made and she lets them down by a rope through her window.
v 15 for the house she lived in was part of the wall

Many walled cities of the time had two walls separated by 15-20 feet
Houses would be built between these walls, and the windows would be on the outer wall
Rahab's house was one of these houses in the wall
Perhaps that is why the spies stayed there in the first place – again we are not told

She lets them out the window and tells them to hide in the hills for three days, then go back to spying

I want to look more closely at the symbolisms of the rope and the cord
verse 15... She let them down by a rope through the window
verse 21... and she tied the scarlet cord in the window
Two different Hebrew words are used in the two verses
verse 15 implies a strong rope, one heavy enough to hold a man
verse 18 and 21 indicates a measuring string or a ribbon

Was it the same rope? Did they use a scarlet rope/cord to escape from Jericho?
It isn't clear, but I'm not sure it really matters
However, the word used for cord is also the same Hebrew word that is translated hope
In not so subtle imagery, the cord in the window represented Rahab's hope of rescue and survival

It was also a scarlet cord, scarlet is a color that makes a statement - Higgs
Is this why the color scarlet is associated with prostitution and adultery?
The Scarlet Letter of the puritan time, a scarlet woman, though your sins be as scarlet
The color scarlet reeks of fallen women and red light districts

But scarlet is also red, the color of blood, the color of life
It is the color of blood that gives life from death
The lamb's blood on the door frame that protected the Jews from the Angel of Death in Egypt
It is the color of Jesus' blood that was shed on the cross to save us from death

The scarlet cord in the story of Rahab merges together the color of prostitution, adultery of sin
And the color of blood giving life from death, and produces hope
The scarlet of prostitution and the red of blood combine to give hope
For Rahab at that time— hope of being rescued when Jericho was conquered
But in a larger sense of biblical imagery
In the same way that the red blood of the sacrificial lamb saved the Jews on that first Passover,
The red cord represents Christ's blood which saves each one of us, including Rahab, from death

Let's return to Rahab's story

The spies are gone and the scarlet cord is tied in the window and the Israelites are on the move,

In another demonstration of His supremacy and power, God stops up the Jordan when it is at flood stage and the Israelites cross into Canaan on dry ground

God gives Joshua the battle plan for conquering Jericho which is quite unconventional

Joshua chapter 6: 2-5 **“Then the Lord....**

And that is just what happened. Many of you remember the story

On the seventh day, the army, led by the priests carrying the Ark of the Covenant and blowing trumpets, marched around Jericho seven times, and then shouted together in unison.

As God indicated, the walls of Jericho collapsed and they burned the city and everything in it.

But, verse 25,

“But Joshua spared Rahab the prostitute, with her family and all who belonged to her, because she hid the men Joshua had sent as spies to Jericho - -and she lives among the Israelites to this day”

So Rahab kept her part of the bargain, as did Joshua and the spies she protected.

Rahab and her family were spared and they lived among the Israelites

To give you some final details,

Rahab married an Israelite named Salmon – was he one of the spies – no one knows

Rahab and Salmon had a son named Boaz, who married a Moabite woman named Ruth

Ruth and Boaz had a son named Obed, who had a son named Jesse, who had a son named David

David the son of Jesse became the King of Israel.

That makes Rahab the great-great-grandmother of King David, and an ancestor of Jesus

So now you know the rest of the story.

I ask myself the question, How can I identify with Rahab?

I am not a woman, I am not a prostitute

I have not had the opportunity to hide spies from an invading army

I don't live in a house located a wall with a window to place a scarlet cord

But I am a sinner, and on that level I can connect with Rahab.

In the same way that Rahab was saved by the grace of the God of the Hebrews

I too am saved and can have a right relationship with God by His grace

So what can we learn from Rahab?

1. Our past does not determine our future

Rahab is not remembered for her life of prostitution

Other than her given profession, we know nothing of her life before she met the spies

Her future in Israel was not determined by her past, but by her faith

She declared her faith in the God of the Israelite spies

“The LORD your God is God in heaven above and on the earth below.”

She trusted the God of the Hebrews to save her and her family from the coming destruction

She put out the scarlet cord of hope, and her faith was rewarded

One source I read indicates that Rahab was the first Gentile convert

In many ways Rahab's path is symbolic of all who come to faith in Christ

She was saved from destruction by her faith in the God of heaven and earth

She showed her faith by her actions

She hid the spies and put the scarlet cord in the window

She left her former way of life, her entire culture was left behind

And she embraced her new life with the Israelites

We too must put our faith in the God of heaven and earth

We show our faith by actions – by baptism, by living a life directed by the love of Jesus

We also leave our "culture," our life of sin as dictated by the culture around us

We walk in newness of life led by the Holy Spirit within us

Our past, does not determine our future

2. Obedience often requires public confession

Rahab told the world, especially Joshua and all the Israelites, that she was a prostitute

The scarlet cord screamed, "Here I am, that harlot! Somebody save me!"

In the same way, we may need to need to be willing to make a public confession of our past.

"Sharing your shameful past and God's glorious grace doesn't bind you to your past—if frees you from its power to hurt you any longer." Liz Higgs

3. Faith that is demonstrated is remembered

Rahab is remembered for what she did, not for what she was

James, the brother of Jesus, chose Rahab as an example of a person who walked her talk

What we think, what we believe, has little meaning if it does not affect our behavior

If you were arrested for being a follower of Jesus, would there be enough evidence to convict you?

How do you identify yourself?

Are you willing to leave your past and refuse to be identified by it?

Are you willing to leave the culture of sin and follow the Spirit in a life reflecting the love of Jesus?

In closing, I invite you to listen to this song by Mathew West. Pay special attention to the lyrics

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZuJWQzjfU3o>

Are you a child of the One True King? If not and you want to be, Please come and talk to me

Please stand with me for the benediction

I invite those on the prayer team come up front

If you would like prayer or have a special need,

Those folks would be happy to pray with you