



Rahab, the Harlot *Joshua 1-6*

An Improbable Ancestor

How could a prostitute end up as an ancestor of Jesus Christ? From our perspective, it might make no sense that a person known for their sin would not only find God's life-changing forgiveness but be named as a direct descendant of the King of Kings. Rahab's story reads like a spy thriller, full of dangerous intrigue, but with a life-affirming ending.

Let's set the scene. The Israelites had wandered for forty years in the desert. Their leader, Moses, had died, and Joshua was about to lead them across the Jordan River to conquer the inhabitants of the Promised Land. But before they could occupy the land, they first had to conquer Jericho, the mighty fortress city/state that guarded the entrance to the land.

A Risky Act of Faith

To prepare for the battle, Joshua sent two men into Jericho as spies to gather information. The king heard there were men staying at Rahab's inn asking questions. So he sent a message to Rahab telling her to turn over the spies. But Rahab protected the men by hiding them on her roof and telling the soldiers that the spies had already left. (Joshua 2)

Before the men left, she told them she knew about the miracles the Lord had done for the Israelites and that her people lived in fear of them. Then she asked them to save her and her family from the upcoming attack. The men promised to do so if she hung a scarlet cord out her window and made sure her whole family was in the house during the attack.

The Israelites destroyed Jericho and killed all its inhabitants. As promised, only Rahab and her family were spared. Rahab lived with the Israelites and married a man from the tribe of Judah named Salmon. Their son, Boaz, married Ruth and was the great-grandfather of King David. Rahab and her new family are named in the lineage of Jesus Christ in Matthew 1:5-6.

An Unlikely Faith Heroine

Rahab was an unlikely candidate to be a hero of faith in the one true God. She was a young Canaanite prostitute and innkeeper who lived in the center of one of the most evil and vile idol worship cultures the world has known. She had never benefited from Godly teaching, Moses's leadership, or the worship habits the Israelites followed.

But Rahab had an advantage – many travelers had told her stories about the Israelites, such as the Red Sea crossing, and the miracles of God. As she listened, she began to believe in God. And she confessed her new faith to the spies and said, “I know the Lord has given you this land...For the Lord your God is God in heaven and on earth below.” (Joshua 2:9,11)

Rahab acted on her faith by putting herself at risk for the benefit of God’s people. She also trusted that God and the Israelites would protect her during the attack by placing the scarlet cord in her window. Her place in history was cemented by her faith, and Israel became Rahab’s spiritual address as well as her physical address.

A Witness to Us

Rahab’s story speaks to any of us who have ever felt unworthy or disqualified, or who believe we have strayed too far from God for His grace to reach us. The scarlet cord that Rahab hung in her window foreshadows the blood of Christ that he shed for our sins. Just as the cord marked Rahab’s house for salvation, the blood of Jesus marks believers for eternal life.

Here are some other thoughts to help guide your faith journey:

- **Faith is for the willing, not the perfect.** Rahab’s immoral profession did not disqualify her from God’s mercy. In fact, like a diamond sparkling on black velvet, her faith shines all the brighter against the backdrop of her past. God delights in redeeming our broken pasts.
- **Courage often means choosing** God over comfort. Rahab risked her life to follow God and help God’s people. True faith sometimes requires us to be obedient and to stand firm against the flow of our culture, relationships, and our own fears.
- **God’s grace transforms outsiders into family.** Rahab went from being a foreigner living in a godless society to becoming part of the lineage of Christ. This tells me that no one is beyond the reach of God’s love. We need to believe that truth for ourselves and practice it with others.



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