

Rahab's Faith in Action

It is easy to think that all the people in the Bible are either really holy, or great leaders, but Rahab does not seem to fit either category. In fact, she is referred to as 'the harlot Rahab'. However, she appears in the New Testament with this accolade:

By faith the harlot Rahab did not perish with those who did not believe, when she had received the spies with peace (Hebrews 11:31).

The lesson of Rahab is this: it is not what we are, but what we may become, that is all-important.

An Imminent Attack

We take up the story in Joshua chapter 2. The people of Israel were about to enter the Promised Land, having crossed the river Jordan. The first city they were to attack was Jericho, with its encircling wall to keep out invaders. Forty years previously, Joshua had been one of two spies who had encouraged Israel to take the land of Canaan. Now he sent out two men to spy out the defences of the city of Jericho.

How was Joshua to go about taking the land? The people of Jericho would surely be expecting spies, or even an immediate attack. As soon as they set foot in the city they would be recognised. So, what could they do? Maybe having walked the ten miles to Jericho from Shittim, they met Rahab outside the city and went with her through the city gates to her home on the city wall.

Excavations have discovered that the wall of Jericho actually consisted of two thick walls, with further walls at

right angles to these, making houses within, or upon the wall, and Rahab's seems to have been one of these.

Making a Clear Choice

The people of Jericho would have been on full alert: they knew that Israel was outside their border. Rahab had already made up her mind whose side she was on. When we look at how the word 'harlot' is used in the Bible, it seems clear that it means just that: a prostitute. Yet Rahab is included in the people of God: she married into the chief family of the chief tribe, in the ancestry of Jesus (see Matthew 1:5). This is why we say that it is not what we are, but what we do and what we may become, that is all-important.

Rahab was risking everything to help Israel. The spies needed to go to a house where they would attract the least attention, and Rahab's, being on the wall, would be ideal. She hid the spies before the king's messengers reached her house. How long were they in Rahab's house? Was she already under suspicion? Was she being watched? Either way, it would be a very frightening time for her, but she had made her choice. Once Rahab hid the men, the die was cast: there was no going back. She had made her choice. If Israel failed, or the spies deserted her, then she was dead – probably all her family as well!

Maybe someone saw something suspicious, and informed on her. Messengers came to Rahab's house, telling her to bring the spies out and face the music. Instead, Rahab hid the men on the flat roof of her house,

Modern-day Jericho



amongst the one-metre-tall stalks of flax which were laid out on the roof to dry in the sun. She told the king's men that the spies had gone and she didn't know where. The soldiers went off in a fruitless pursuit.

Faith Based on Evidence

When the soldiers had gone, Rahab explained the reasons for her allegiance to the spies from Israel:

We have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red Sea for you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to the two kings of the Amorites... whom you utterly destroyed (Joshua 2:10).

The drying up of the Red Sea was 40 years previously, and the destruction of the two kings of the Amorites was under Moses, a long time ago. But still Rahab chose to believe the evidence

of what she had heard, and confessed her faith in the God of Israel and of Joshua.

She asked the spies to show her the same kindness that she had shown them, in not giving them away to the king's messengers. The spies agreed to save everyone who was sheltering in Rahab's house when the attack on Jericho came. Then Rahab lowered the spies down the wall on the outside of the city. The spies said that if she tied a scarlet cord in her window when Israel attacked Jericho, then she and everyone in her house would be saved.

Saved By Her Faith

The spies went and hid in the mountains for three days, before returning to Joshua. When Jericho was attacked, the walls famously fell down flat, and the Israelites could run straight into the city. Only Rahab's household survived, and the spies ran to rescue her and her family.

Rahab became part of Israel, and is an ancestor of the Lord Jesus Christ. The New Testament explains that she was justified by what she did, in hiding the spies.

Was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out another way? (James 2:25).

Her actions were counted as faith, as belief in God. So we must show our faith by the things that we do, and the lesson from the life of Rahab remains the same: it is not what we are, but what we may become, that is all-important.

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