

Joshua 2:1-21**SERIES PREFACE**

I have said before, and it is fitting that I repeat it here: I love history, and especially biographies. Because the lives of important people teach—if even in the negative. They teach us about character, perseverance, morality, industry and, sometimes, faith.

By design this brief series will not examine every last word of every last verse; it will not attempt to cover everything we know about an individual and the days of his or her life. The purpose of this series is to discover what lessons we can learn from these remarkable individuals for our edification.

In this series we will look at three biographies within one family. Not by accident are these three individuals from the family of Jesus the Christ: one a family shepherd and the runt of the litter, one from a heathen and hated land sprung from the incestuous union of Lot and his first-born daughter, and one a prostitute. All three play key roles in the family line that culminated in the birth of Jesus the Nazarene.

We will look at these in chronological order, so we begin with the earliest: Rahab the Jericho harlot.

PREFACE

One of the more fascinating aspects of our God is how He unapologetically works His will through small people, unlovely people, pagans and “sinners,” those who are base. This is no accident; He has His reasons.

Read Matthew 11:25-26.

Jesus' first disciples were not religious scholars; they were not from the aristocracy. Those in whom Jesus entrusted the broadcasting of His gospel included fishermen, a tax collector for Rome, a rebellious freedom-fighter, and even a traitor to the cause. Most (but not all) were country bumpkins, unlearned, rough around the edges. And this pattern would continue beyond the twelve. Here is how Paul described Christ's followers in his letter to the Corinthians.

Read 1 Corinthians 1:26-29.

There's the bottom line: Why did God choose to work through the base things of this world? “That no man may boast before God.” And one cannot get much more “base” than a prostitute from the very ancient and pagan city of Jericho.

RAHAB

Most of what we know about Rahab's life comes from the book of Joshua. The most fascinating details come from brief snippets found elsewhere, but let's begin in Joshua.

Read Joshua 2:1.

When Moses died at Mt. Nebo, Joshua was placed in charge of Israel. After Moses died, Joshua moved Israel to (Biblical) Shittim (shi-teem')—*Abel Shittim*—in preparation for crossing the Jordan; this location was almost straight across from Jericho, NW of Mt. Nebo.

Joshua was, first and foremost, a military man, and it made perfect sense that before Israel crossed the Jordan into the Promised Land he would send out spies to scope out the most immediate city.

Rahab was a harlot, a prostitute. Timid scholars throughout the centuries have tried to soften their embarrassment by referring to her as an innkeeper, tavern keeper, or hostess. Although the same word can be translated “woman” or “wife” in Hebrew, there is no getting around it in this context: the Hebrew text, as well as commentary by biblical writers such as the writer of Hebrews, and James (2:25)—*who would have more reason than most to soften her biography*—confirm this interpretation of Rahab.

Read Hebrews 11:30-31.

The NT Greek is explicit:

harlot = *porne* = feminine of <G4205> (pornos); **a strumpet**; figurative an idolater :- **harlot, whore**.

Her name in Hebrew is *Rachab* (raw-khawb').

BRAVERY

One of the first qualities we learn of Rahab is her **bravery**. We here in America have little experience with kings—much less the unlimited, unquestioned power of ancient kings. But believe me, in her time and place it took a special kind of bravery for someone to lie to her king. If found out, she would be immediately put to death.

It was a logical conclusion of the authorities that any spies in the neighborhood would hole up with a prostitute, who were often involved in intrigue—and especially one whose house abutted the city wall (v15). So when word got to the king that Israeli spies had entered the city, he had Rahab interrogated.

Read Joshua 2:3-5.

The most applicable law at the time, the ancient law code of Hammurabi, states, “If felons are banded together in an ale-wife’s [prostitute’s or innkeeper’s] house and she has not haled [them] to the palace, that ale-wife shall be put to death.” In her answer to the king Rahab was not just a liar; she was committing treason.

Rahab did not just deny that the men were in her establishment; she sent the king’s men on a wild goose chase outside the city! Lacking any other evidence, we might conjecture that Rahab’s motives were simply self-protective. After all, she admitted to the Jews hiding on her roof that their reputation preceded them.

Read Joshua 2:8-10.

Everyone in Jericho, from the king on down, were fearful of the horde marching their way. So we could understand if Rahab was just choosing the side that would probably win. But the narrative tells us that she had a higher motive—which brings us to her second quality: **faith**.

Read v11.

FAITH

Now this is extraordinary—and fascinating. Israel had not yet crossed the Jordan into Canaan. This was a pagan land that did not know the God of Israel. Yet Rahab not only knew the correct name for Israel's God—*yahweh* (*yhw*=Jehovah)—but she quoted Moses almost verbatim.

Read Deuteronomy 4:39.

This woman was not simply being shrewd, siding with the anticipated victors; she was a convert. Rahab is *already* a believer—and has done her homework. She did not place her trust in Yahweh because His people saved her when they took Jericho; she believed *before they even showed up*.

I say she had done her homework—but actually there was no homework for her to do! Remember the timeline: Israel is still on its trek out of Egypt. The only recorded word for the nation was put down by Moses while on that trek.

The writer to the Hebrews tells us that

faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.
(Hebrews 11:1)

And Rahab is the poster child for that. We can only conclude that she had not pored over the ancient Hebrew Scriptures and rationally concluded, from the evidence at hand, that Yahweh was the one true God. The only Hebrew Scriptures at the time were contained in only one copy, and in the possession of the Levitical priests! (Deuteronomy 31:25-26)

The only evidence she had were the reports coming into the city of Israel's victories and inevitable crossing of the Jordan. In everyone else this news produced uncontrollable fear; in Rahab it produced faith. I see the work of the Holy Spirit in this. God reached down into that pagan city and plucked out a soul for Himself: a prostitute named Rahab. In God's remarkable economy, His plan for offering salvation to the entire world through His Son, included a lowly prostitute from Jericho.

True faith is demonstrated in our actions, and once the spies laid down the three conditions she must meet for them to spare Rahab and her family from the assault on the city—among which was the hanging of a scarlet cord out her window to identify her house to the invaders—she obeyed.

Obedience is not faith, but true faith will demonstrate obedience. As Jesus said to His disciples,

"If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our abode with him." (John 14:23)

Because of her faith *and* obedience to the terms, Rahab and all her household were saved when Israel overwhelmed the city.

Read Joshua 6:23.

Rahab was a believer in Yahweh, yes, but because she and her household remained *ceremonially* unclean, they were first housed outside the camp of Israel. But this was not permanent.

Read Joshua 6:25. (NASB)

Here is God's grace. For the rest of her lifetime Rahab did not just live *with* Israel; the Hebrew text tells us that she lived *within*, in the midst of Israel (*the Hebrew qereb means "the nearest part, the center"*).

LESSONS LEARNED

We have considered Rahab's **bravery**, which cannot be divorced from her **faith** in Yahweh. In that place and time it took considerable bravery to adopt a new religious faith—no less than the faith of an invading nation intent on destroying your people's city and way of life.

Rahab was brave about adopting a new faith; can we be brave about our old faith? Rahab was surrounded by people opposed to her new faith; we are surrounded by people opposed to our old faith. Can we be as brave as she?

We are not living under an earthly king who has absolute rule over our lives. We are not faced with losing everything we have in this world. Instead, we face criticism, loss of friends, awkward scenes around family members.

When faced with opposition and trials dramatically less injurious than what Rahab faced, can we muster at least some of her bravery, and stand boldly, unwaveringly for Christ?

Grace

But perhaps there is a more important lesson for us in the life of this Jericho prostitute—and this time less a quality of hers than the Lord she now follows. What **grace** we have seen in her story! In fact, we will see that **God's grace** will be a continuous, unbroken thread through all three lives in this series.

As far as we know from the record, what did Rahab do to merit God's spiritual and physical rescue? Nothing. As far as we know, before Yahweh touched her life she had few redeeming qualities. She was, to put it directly, a common pagan whore. But He *did* choose to touch her life—and in this we see as well God's sovereign right to select whomever He wishes. No doubt there were other men and women in that city, everyday workers and shopkeepers, mothers and wives who were probably, in a human sense, morally superior to Rahab. But God chose *her*—and had them brutally slaughtered.

We may not know why God chose her over others, but we certainly know what God chose Rahab for. [Turn please to Matthew 1.](#)

Sidebar: Before we read the passage in Matthew, there is something important we need to keep in mind when reading genealogical lists in the NT. D. A. Carson points out that “the Greek verb translated ‘was the father of’ (*gennaō*) does not require immediate relationship but often means something like ‘was the ancestor of’ or ‘became the progenitor of.’ This means there will very often (but not always) be names missing.

Matthew 1:1-17 proves the Judaic/Davidic/Messianic genealogical line of Jesus of Nazareth. And, as such, it contains all three individuals in our study:

- one an ordinary shepherd and the runt of the litter,
- one from a heathen and hated land sprung from the incestuous union of Lot with his first-born daughter, and
- one a pagan prostitute.

Read Matthew 1:2-6a.

In our study today we have identified the pagan prostitute.

Question: Who is it came from a nation created from the incestuous union of Lot with his eldest daughter? [Ruth]

Question: Who was a shepherd and the runt of the litter? [David]

After she joined Israel, Rahab married Salmon, a prince of the tribe of Judah, and she gave birth to Boaz, who became a wealthy resident of Bethlehem Ephrathah. Boaz later married a widow from Moab, whose first husband (Mahlon) was a son of Bethlehem. The Moabitess Ruth gave Boaz a son named Obed, who became the father of Jesse, the father of King David.

Now skip down to v15.

Read Matthew 1:15-16.

Here is Jesus’ kingly, Davidic line, from the tribe of Judah—a line that includes a pagan prostitute and treasonous liar from Jericho.