

THE STOOPED, GRAY-HAIRED WOMAN moved gingerly through the doorway of her house. With one hand she gripped tightly the smooth knob at the top of her walking stick, with the other she steadied herself against the roughly hewed door frame. Carefully she stepped down into the dirt street and made her way to the well-worn stone block that afforded her the best vantage point from which to survey the neighborhood.

Rahab peered steadily down the street toward the group of children playing between the haphazardly arranged rows of stone and mud plaster dwellings. The children were almost obscured by the clouds of dust that billowed up from their feet as they played “keep away” with the wad of old rags. The woman, however, was still able to spy the one special child, the delight of her heart.

Where had the years gone? Here, dwell-

ing in the comfortable warmth of her son’s family, Rahab had found peace from the nagging past. Here in this old land freshly inhabited by new people she had, at last, made a home.

Little Obed came rushing up to his grandmother. “Did you see me? Did you see me, Gram?”

“Of course, my love.” Rahab wrapped the child into her arms.

“The bigger boys said I was too young, but I showed ’em I could play.”

“And so you did. I saw how you dodged around Micah—he’s so much bigger than you.”

“But I’m fast, Gram. They can’t catch me.” he said, puffing out his chest.

Rahab’s smiling face quickly turned serious. “Whatever it takes, Obed. You do whatever it takes.”

God forgive her survival instinct. Was she wrong to teach her grandchild to look

out for himself? to be strong and self-sufficient? She had always had a difficult time sorting out God’s grace from her own efforts; where did one end and the other begin? Rahab was certainly not alone in her efforts to instill in the child a sense of personal responsibility, since the “grandmother” on his mother’s side had, herself, a history of extraordinary, personal determination. Naomi’s return to Bethlehem after a succession of family tragedies in Moab demonstrated her own survival instinct.

“I’m trying, Gram. I’m trying to be just like you,” Obed said.

“Oh, *no* dear,” Rahab said, alarmed. “That’s not what I mean.”

“But you’ve always been so strong—and good. Don’t you *want* me to be like you?”

“I don’t want you to follow after *any* person,” Rahab said, taking the boy by the shoulders. “Learn from us, obey your parents, grow from the collected wisdom of

your family, but never try to be like us—especially me.”

“But Grandma Rahab—”

“Oh, child,” Rahab said, “don’t be fooled by this pleasant moment. Life carries with it many twists and turns, and what you see today may not be what was there the day before.” Obed said nothing, but his quizzical expression told her that he was confused. “Obed, your grandmother was not always what she is now. Today I am an old woman surrounded by the comfort of family in a peaceable land, but once I was young and beautiful—and there was no peace in my land. Today I walk with Jehovah God, but there was a time when I didn’t even know He existed and, dear child, there was a time when my life would have only brought shame upon this house...”

Before the Fall

THEIR REPUTATION HAD PRECEDED THEM.

While, on the surface, the daily business of living continued as usual in Jericho, a palpable fear hung over the city like a black rain cloud. Everyone had heard—not only in Jericho, but in all the surrounding city/states of the area—of a vast moving sea of people who enjoyed the favor of a powerful God—one who supplied their physical needs but, worse, also protected them in battle. And now word had come that these Israelites were approaching Jericho, and were camped just beyond the Jordan in Shittim. Their city was a fortress, but the inhabitants of Jericho were filled with terror over the prospect of facing this people and their all-powerful God.

Jericho had heard how the waters of the Red Sea had dried up before the Israelites, giving them a safe and dry escape from the pursuing Egyptians. It had heard how the Lord God had given them success against Sihon, king of the Amorites, and Og, king of Bashan. And every day these conquering tribes drew closer to the Jordan, and to the massive walls of the city.

Then Joshua the son of Nun sent two men as spies secretly from Shittim, saying, “Go, view the land, especially Jericho.” So they went and came into the house of a harlot whose name was Rahab, and lodged there.

Joshua 2:1

She wasn’t particularly proud of her occupation, but without husband or any other means Rahab was forced to do whatever was necessary to stay alive. Above everything else, she was a survivor, and even within the restrictive confines of her unseemly profession, Rahab had made herself a success. Beginning in the streets and back alleys, she now had a home on one of the main streets, and the back wall of her house was the outside wall of Jericho itself.

It wasn’t uncommon for strangers to come knocking at her door, since her house was also an inn for wayfarers, but even she had been taken aback when she opened it to the two Israelites. They had made an attempt to disguise themselves, but were so uneasy, standing there fidgeting in the street, that she was immediately suspicious. Then, too, because of her dual professions of innkeeper and harlot, she was familiar with people from many different tribes and nationalities, and she knew them to be from that group of former slaves of Egypt.

“Get in here, quickly!” She ordered. “Why have you come here? Don’t you realize how dangerous it is for you to be in this city?”

“W—what are you talking about?” One of them said. The other added, “We’re just passing through, on our way from Moab.”

“Don’t insult me. You’re both from the nation of Israel—and my guess is you haven’t risked your necks just to share my bed.”

The two men grew noticeably uneasy, and unsure of how far they could trust this common prostitute with their real reason for being in Jericho. Within moments of their passing through the city gate they had both felt the unmistakable impression that every citizen knew who they were—which meant that it would be only a short time before the authorities had routed them out. So they had ducked into the nearest inn, seeking anonymous refuge. But now even that plan had failed.

Scowling, Rahab said, “If you’re not honest with me I can’t help you. Now *why* are you here?”

At last one of the men sighed and answered, “We’ve been sent to determine the strength of your city.”

“So you can destroy us.”


“This land has been given to us by the

Lord. What He will do to your city only He knows.”

“With the river flooding this time of year, we thought we’d be safe for awhile,” she said.

“But we made it across.”

“Obviously. Well you won’t be safe here. Come with me,” she ordered.

Checking first for the authorities, she led them back out into the street, and up a narrow flight of steps to the roof of her inn. Since it was harvest time for flax, Rahab’s roof was covered with drying stalks of the plant. She directed the two men to lie down on the roof, then she heaped layers of the flax atop them. 

It was told the king of Jericho, saying, “Behold, men from the sons of Israel have come here tonight to search out the land.” And the king of Jericho sent word to Rahab, saying, “Bring out the men who have come to you, who have entered your house, for they have come to search out all the land.” But the woman had taken the two men and hidden them, and she said, “Yes, the men came to me, but I did not know where they were from. It came about when it was time to shut the gate at dark, that the men went out; I do not know where the men went. Pursue them quickly, for you will overtake them.” But she had brought them up to the roof and hidden them in the stalks of flax which she had laid in order on the roof. So the men pursued them on the road to the Jordan to the fords; and as soon as those who were pursuing them had gone out, they shut the gate.

Joshua 2:2-7

(to be continued...)