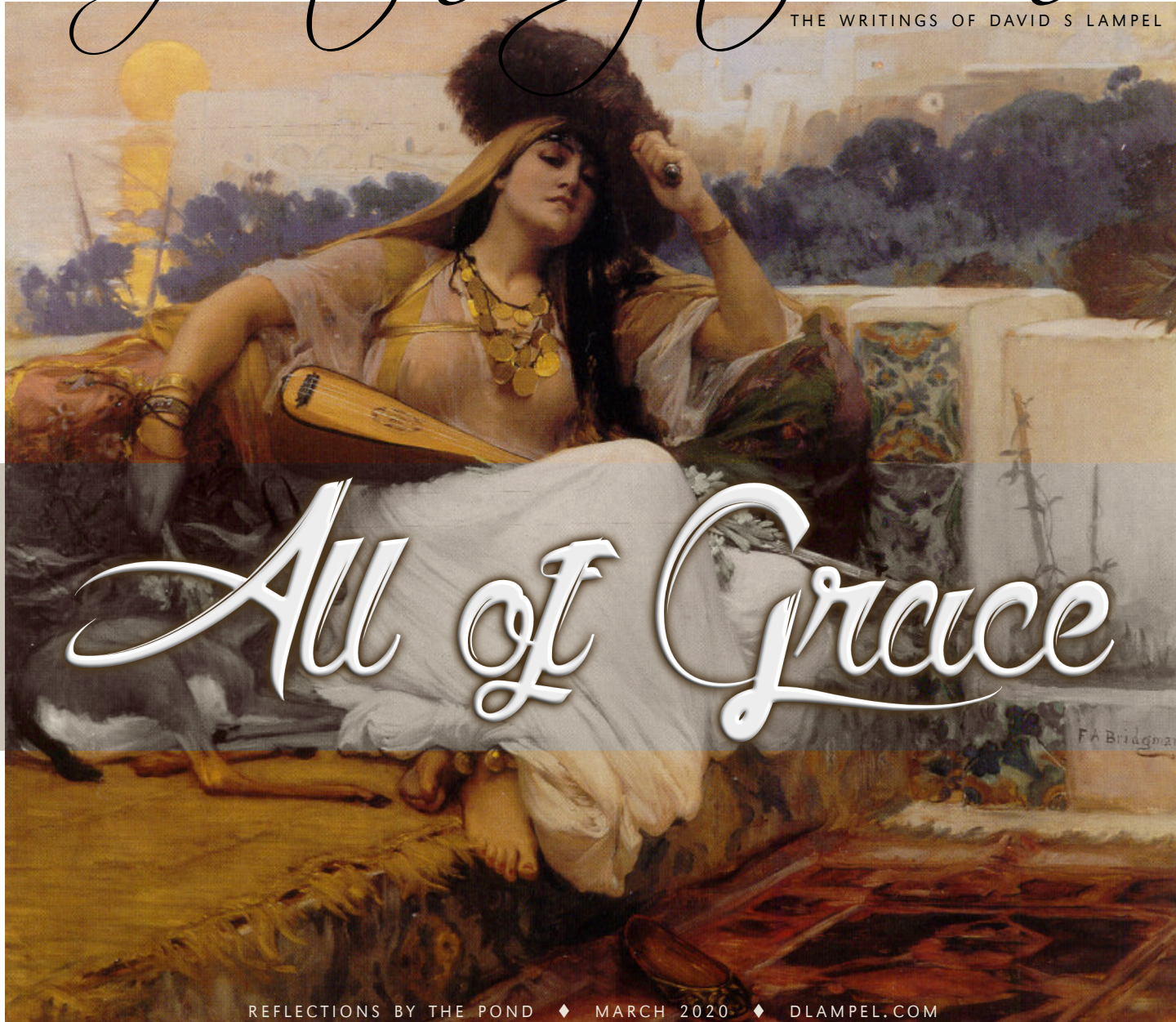


Reflections by the Pond

THE WRITINGS OF DAVID S LAMPEL



All of Grace



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Chosen by God

FAR TOO MANY PEOPLE have a diminished concept of grace. Especially those of us born and bred in the church, its customs and nomenclature inculcated from our first breath. There is extraordinary, indeed priceless benefit from growing up in the church, parented and surrounded by believers. But there is also a tendency in such Christians to be so accustomed to the vernacular that it loses its meaning, its strength, its supernatural source and qualities.

Then too there is the corrosive effect of the society in which such individuals dwell. What is the second national anthem of the United States? What hymn is automatically plugged in whenever a movie maker or television director needs a song for some scene of soggy religiosity? What hymn's first verse and tune does every citizen of the US know by heart? "Amazing Grace," of course. This powerful hymn, was penned by a former slave ship sailor and captain—a reprehensible, undisciplined, unapologetic cur in his early life—turned Anglican minister devoted to ending the slave trade.

John Newton knew the other-worldly power of God's grace; the first, autobiographical verse of his hymn employs no sophistry, no hyperbole when Newton refers to himself as a "wretch like me." He truly was, in every sense of the word, a de-

spicable wretch whom God reached down and saved, and put to work in His kingdom. Yet in our culture this venerable hymn has become effectively denuded of its holy meaning as it is used as sappy background music for pagan Hollywood's concept of cheap, painless, universal and amorphous "grace."



Far too few people in this world have taken the time to discover what God and His grace are all about. They have ingested spurious, sometimes hostile secondhand information and accepted it as truth. Many consider His printed word at best a dead letter, something that was pertinent at one time in the distant past, but without relevance today.

These are individuals who say such things as, "Well, you know what the Bible says, 'God helps those who help themselves,'" ignorant of the fact that not only does the Bible not include this aphorism, but that God's word says quite the opposite: God "helps" those who come before Him in submission, emptied of all their self-worth and pride. The Bible, from beginning to end, is filled to overflowing with God's grace, extended to those who do not deserve it, and could never earn it.

Those ignorant of God's word—including far too many Christians—may see the characters that people its pages as pious, plastic saints, somehow dwelling above the challenges and temptations, the weaknesses of the flesh suffered by all the rest of us. But, again, the opposite is true. Something truly remarkable about God's holy and eternal word is how it portrays its leading characterswarts and all. It shows Abraham to be at times a liar and a coward; Jacob, the father of the twelve tribes of Israel, stole the blessing that was rightfully for his brother Esau; the apostle Paul could be short-tempered and hold a grudge; and King David, about whom God said, "I have found David the son of Jesse, a man after My heart, who will do all My will," was an adulterer and murderer.

Meanwhile the Bible, and especially the New Testament, has a reputation among people who never read it for being anti-woman. The apostle Paul regularly comes under attack for teaching this position. Except that he is innocent of the charge. Far from being anti-woman, God's word is replete with examples of strong, vibrant women of faith. And, like their male counterparts, they were, for the most part, far from perfect. They did not sport halos, nor did they glow in the dark with holy unction. They were just regular people who found their hope in the Lord God of heaven. Why? Because just as with the Hebrew patriarchs and Christian forefathers, the Lord *chose* them to serve in His name.

And an unlikely, unexpected woman chosen by God was Rahab, a prostitute from Jericho. This obscure woman would be chosen by God not just to give aid to Israel, but for inclusion in the royal line that would culminate in the birth of the Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth.



There was a spiritual Israel scattered throughout the heathen world, that never received the circumcision of the flesh, but the unseen circumcision of the heart by the hand of that Spirit which bloweth where it listeth, and is not bound to any human laws and to ordinary means. The Old Testament furnishes several examples of true piety outside of the visible communion with the Jewish church, in the persons of Melchisedec, the friend of Abraham, the royal priest, the type of Christ; Jethro, the priest of Midian; Rahab, the Canaanite woman and hostess to the Israelite spies; Ruth, the Moabite and ancestress of our Saviour; King Hiram, the friend of David; the queen of Sheba, who came to admire the wisdom of Solomon; Naaman the Syrian; and especially Job, the sublime sufferer, who rejoiced in the hope of his Redeemer.

Philip Schaff, History of the Christian Church.

A Remarkable Woman

ONE OF THE MORE FASCINATING ASPECTS of our perfect, holy God is how He unapologetically works His will through small people, unlovely people, pagans and “sinners,” those who are what we might term “base.” This is no accident; He has His reasons.

At that time Jesus said, “I praise You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and intelligent and have revealed them to infants. Yes, Father, for this way was well-pleasing in Your sight.”

Matthew 11:25-26

Jesus’ first disciples were not religious scholars, nor were they 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.



For consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble; but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong, and the base things of the world and the despised God has chosen, the things that are not, so that He may nullify the things that are, so that no man may boast before God.

1 Corinthians 1:26-29

There’s the bottom line: Why did God choose to work through the base and despised 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 was a harlot, a prostitute. Ever since the writing of the book of Joshua, timid theologians have tried to soften their own embarrassment—and their assumed embarrassment of God—by referring to her as an innkeeper, tavern keeper, or

hostess. Although it is true that 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 in the New Testament confirm this interpretation.

By faith the walls of Jericho fell down after they had been encircled for seven days. By faith Rahab the harlot did not perish along with those who were disobedient, after she had welcomed the spies in peace.

Hebrews 11:30-31

James, the blood brother of Jesus and in the same family line, would have more reasons than most to soften the image of an ancestor of questionable character. But he did not.

In the same way, was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way?

James 2:25

The Greek word chosen by James and the writer to the Hebrews, translated “harlot,” removes any question as to what they mean: *porne*.



When Moses died at Mt. Nebo, Joshua was left in charge of Israel. Joshua then moved Israel to (biblical) Shittim—Abel Shit-

tim—in preparation for crossing the Jordan; this location was almost straight across the Jordan River from Jericho.

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. And it also made perfect sense that the men would end up at a tavern or inn just inside the city walls. Here they could quietly gather information helpful to Israel before the invasion.



IT WAS A LOGICAL CONCLUSION of the authorities that any spies in the neighborhood would hole up with a prostitute, a profession often involved in intrigue; after all, if one was willing to sell one’s body, selling state secrets would be a small thing. Further placing her under suspicion, Rahab’s house abutted the city wall. So when the king received word that Israeli spies had entered the city, he had Rahab interrogated.

Those of us who were born and live in the United States have little experience living under kings—much less the unlimited, unquestioned power of ancient kings. But in Rahab’s 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.

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 lying; she was committing treason.



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.

Joshua 2:2-6

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 Ra-

hab’s motives were simply self-protective. After all, she admitted to the Jews hiding on her roof that their reputation preceded them.

Now before they lay down, she came up to them on the roof, and said to the men, “I know that the Lord has given you the land, and that the terror of you has fallen on us, and that all the inhabitants of the land have melted away before you. For we have heard how the Lord dried up the water of the Red Sea before you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to the two kings of the Amorites who were beyond the Jordan, to Sihon and Og, whom you utterly destroyed.”

Joshua 2:8-10

Everyone in Jericho, from the king on down, was fearful of the horde marching their way. So we could understand the wisdom of Rahab 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 after bravery.

Faith

“When we heard it, our hearts melted and no courage remained in any man any longer because of you; for the Lord your God, He is God in heaven above and on earth beneath.”

Joshua 2:11

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—but she quoted Moses almost verbatim.

“Know therefore today, and take it to your heart, that the LORD, He is God in heaven above and on the earth below; there is no other.”

Deuteronomy 4:39

This woman was not simply being shrewd, siding with the anticipated victor; 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.

But in fact 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—and we can know with certainty that a Jericho prostitute would not have had a copy of that memoir.

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!

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. Clearly the Holy Spirit was at work 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.

So the young men who were spies went in and brought out Rahab and her father and her mother and her brothers and all she had; they also brought out all her relatives and placed them outside the camp of Israel.

Joshua 6:23

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

However, Rahab the harlot and her father's household and all she had, Joshua spared; and she has lived in the midst of Israel to this day, for she hid the messengers whom Joshua sent to spy out Jericho.

Joshua 6:25

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.

Grace

THE STORY OF RAHAB IS FILLED WITH GRACE—but not necessarily hers. This is a quality of the Lord she now worshiped.

As far as we know from the record, before she risked death to save the Israelite spies Rahab had done nothing to merit God's spiritual and physical rescue. 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 the others brutally slaughtered.

Just as He has done with every believer, God chose Rahab and touched her life by His Spirit before she did anything for His people. His grace was not a reward—it never is. His grace comes seemingly out of nowhere, showered upon undeserving individuals. Rahab's actions were the result, not the cause of His grace.

We may not know why God chose her over others, but we certainly know that for which God chose Rahab.



Abraham was the father of Isaac, Isaac the father of Jacob, and Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers. Judah was the father of Perez and Zerah by Tamar, Perez was the father of Hezron, and Hezron the father of Ram. Ram was the father of Amminadab, Amminadab the father of Nahshon, and Nahshon the father of Salmon. Salmon was the father of Boaz by Rahab, Boaz was the father of Obed by Ruth, and Obed the father of Jesse. Jesse was the father of David the king.

Matthew 1:2-6a

Bethlehem. The Moabitess Ruth gave Boaz a son named Obed, who became the father of Jesse, who became the father of King David.

Eliud was the father of Eleazar, Eleazar the father of Matthan, and Matthan the father of Jacob. Jacob was the father of Joseph the husband of Mary, by whom Jesus was born, who is called the Messiah.

Matthew 1:15-16

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 Aphrathah. Boaz later married a widow from Moab, whose first husband (Mahlon) was a son of

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

All of grace. ♦

“I hear someone murmur, “God will not give grace to men who do not repent.”
God gives men grace to repent, and no man ever repents till grace first is given him to lead him to repentance.
“But God will not give his grace to those who won’t believe,” says another.
I reply, God gives grace to men by which they are moved to believe. It is through the grace of God that they are brought to faith in Christ.”

Charles Haddon Spurgeon