

Lessons from Bible Women 2 – Rahab

Reading: Joshua 2:11b “...for the Lord your God, He is God in heaven above and on earth below ¹.”

Introduction:

This lesson is a continuation of the series where we are looking at various women recorded in the scriptures, with the aim of learning some biblical lessons from their lives.

God created us with the ability to reason things through (**Isaiah 1:18a**). That is, He gave us the ability to come to logical conclusions based upon credible evidence that is put before us. This is the way that our legal system works in the courts. Lawyers, representing both sides of a case, present evidence to support their position, and the jury is required and expected to “weigh up” that evidence and come to rational verdict. In fact, we use this same type of “reasoning” every day of the week where we weigh up evidence before us and come to a specific conclusion. For example, if we are walking down the street and see a huge object completely blocking the path, the evidence suggests that we are not going to be able to proceed in that direction. Therefore, we come to the conclusion that we are going to have to find an alternate route.

Today, we are going to look at a woman who, after considering the evidence before her about God, came to the conclusion that He truly is the Lord God of heaven and earth, and that she should act on that belief. That woman was Rahab.

LESSON

1) Background.

Rahab lived around 1400BC. The Hebrews had just finished the 40 years of wandering in the wilderness after coming out of Egypt (**Joshua 5:6**)². The territories of the Amorites and Bashan on the eastern side of the Jordan had been conquered and given to the tribes of Reuben, Gad and half of Manasseh as an inheritance (**Numbers 32:33**). The Hebrews were now poised to cross the Jordan and conquer the lands on the western side of the river, starting with Jericho.

At first glance, Rahab was not the type of woman from whom you would expect us to learn something about faithfulness to God. Living in Jericho, she was a citizen of one of those sinful nations that God was going to drive out of Palestine (**Genesis 15:16; Deuteronomy 31:3**). And she was a harlot (**Joshua 2:1**).

Prior to attacking Jericho, Joshua sent two men to spy out the land, particularly the city of Jericho (**Joshua 2:1**). When they came to and entered the city, they lodged at Rahab’s house. But their arrival had not gone un-noticed, and it was soon reported to the king of Jericho. The king sent word to Rahab to “hand them over” (**Joshua 2:2-3**). However, Rahab hid the men under the flax³ that she had laid out on her roof. (Apart being a harlot, it appears that she was also involved in

¹ All biblical quotes are from the New King James Version Bible.

² The reason they wandered for 40 years was because of their lack of faith in God to help them conquer Canaan (**Numbers 13:1 - 14:35**).

³ Flax is a plant that grows to about 1 meter in height. When ripe, it is pulled out and dried, and is eventually used to make linen.
ref - Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopaedia of the Bible, Volume 2 D-G, page 545-546.

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the manufacture of linen.) In order to further protect the spies, she told the king's messengers that the men had already left town (**Joshua 2:4-7**)⁴.

Once the king's messengers had left, Rahab spoke with the two spies. It is during this conversation that we can see that she (and everybody else) knew what God had done, and was going to do, for the Hebrews, *i.e.*;

- how the Lord had dried up the Red Sea to allow the people to leave Egypt,
- how the two kings of the Amorites (Sihon and Og) on the other side of the Jordan had been utterly destroyed, and,
- how God was going to give the land to the Hebrews (**Joshua 2:9-10**).

All the people in the land who had heard about these things were gripped with fear (**Joshua 2:9b, 11a**). But for Rahab, at least, the evidence of these things had convinced her about the power and nature of the true God (**Joshua 2:11b**).

2) Rahab's belief (faith) in the true God motivated her to act

a) Rahab took steps to save her family

Rahab demonstrated her belief in the true God through her actions. Although the people of the city were in fear of what was coming, they probably put their only hope in the strength of the city walls (consider **Joshua 6:1**). But Rahab believed that the city of Jericho was doomed. Recent history was enough evidence for her to believe that you cannot win if you are fighting against the power of the true God.

Therefore, she sought a pledge from the spies that they spare her father's household because of the kindness she had shown to the spies (**Joshua 2:12-13**). It is interesting to note here that she was not living with her family. She had her own house, possibly because of her occupation as a harlot (**Joshua 2:1, 18**). Now we don't know what feelings the rest of Rahab's family had towards her because of her lifestyle, but we can clearly see from the text that she was concerned for their welfare – she wanted her father, her mother, her sisters and her brothers to be saved as well.

And so, after telling the spies to head (west) to the mountains and wait for three days before going back to their camp, and having received a pledge from the spies that they would not harm anyone who was in her house at the time of the battle, she let them down outside the city wall (**Joshua 2:14-21**).

b) Rahab was saved because she did what she was required to do

For Rahab and her family to be spared during the battle, she was required to do her part. Firstly, she was required to tie the scarlet cord in the window of her house so that the Hebrew army knew which house was hers (**Joshua 2:18a**). This she did (verse **21**). Then, on the day of the battle, she had to ensure that the members of her family were in her house, and stayed there (**Joshua 2:18b-19**). This she did also, probably on each of the seven days

⁴ Rahab told a lie to the king's messengers regarding the two spies. The fact that this lie is recorded in the Bible and helped God's people does not mean that lying is sometimes justified – see **Proverbs 6:16-17**. Sometimes, God allows the sins of people to be used to achieve His purposes – e.g. He allowed the sins of those involved in crucifying Jesus to be used to enable us to now have forgiveness of sins through Jesus (e.g. **Acts 3:13-19**).

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that the Hebrews marched around the city, for from her perspective, each of those days could have been the day of battle. Because of her obedience to the instructions from the spies, she and her family were spared (**Joshua 6:22, 23, 25**). The rest of the city was totally destroyed (**Joshua 6:21, 24**).

3) Lessons for us

There are two applications that I wish to make from this historical account of Rahab.

a) The most unlikely people can turn to God

Rahab was a harlot, a prostitute, a profession that was forbidden in Israel under the Law (**Leviticus 19:29**), and the type of activity (*i.e.* fornication) condemned in the New Testament (**1 Corinthians 6:9, 18**). Yet it was she who was convinced that the God of the Hebrews was truly God indeed, and out of all the citizens of Jericho, it was only her and her family who were saved (**Joshua 6:25**).

When we look at the life of Jesus, we can see there were many occasions when He took the time to be with those who were considered the lowest in society.

- He went to the home of tax collectors and ate with them (**Mark 2:14-16; Luke 15:1-2; 19:1-9**). One of the tax collectors, Matthew/Levi, became an apostle (**Matthew 10:3**), another, Zacchaeus, became an example for us of someone showing true repentance (**Luke 19:8**).
- He spent time in the company of women who were sinners (**Luke 7:37-50**). One of them honoured Him by washing His feet with her tears and drying them with her hair (**Luke 7:37-38**).
- He took the time to discuss spiritual matters with the woman who had been married 5 times, and was currently living in fornication (**John 4:7-26**). Many people in her home town came and believed in Jesus because she spoke to them about Him (**John 4:39-41**).

In **1 Corinthians 1:26** we read;

“For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble are called.”

Why is that? Why is it that sometimes it is those who we may consider the least likely to obey the gospel (because of their sinful lifestyle) are the ones that are more ready to obey than those whom we may expect? Perhaps the answer lies in what Jesus said to Simon the Pharisee when the Simon wondered why Jesus let a sinful woman touch Him;

⁴¹*There was a certain creditor who had two debtors. One owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty.*

⁴²*And when they had nothing with which to repay, he freely forgave them both. Tell Me, therefore, which of them will love him more?*

⁴³Simon answered and said, *“I suppose the one whom he forgave more.”* And He said to him, *“You have rightly judged.”*”

Luke 7:41-43

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In other words, sometimes it is those who have led a more sinful lifestyle than our selves who have a better appreciation of what God has done for us.

The lesson for us is this: We should never “rule anybody out” when it comes to spreading the gospel. God doesn’t. He wants all to come to repentance (**Acts 17:30; 2 Peter 3:9**). We are to sow the seed wherever we can, and not rule anybody out.

Of all the people in Jericho, it was a harlot called Rahab who considered the evidence and was convinced that the Lord was God indeed.

b) Faith must be enacted upon to be effective

It wasn’t sufficient for Rahab to simply believe in God. She had to put that faith into action if she was to survive the coming battle. When the Hebrew spies turned up at Jericho and came to her door, she put her own life in danger by protecting them (**Joshua 2:6, 15-16**). At the time of the battle, she did what she was told to do, trusting that the Hebrews would keep their promise about not harming whoever was in her house (**Joshua 2:14, 17-20**). Because she acted in accordance with her faith, Rahab is listed among those other great characters of the Bible, such as Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Moses in **Hebrews 11:31**.

In **James 2:26b** we are told;

“.... *so faith without works is dead*”

We can believe everything we read in the scriptures, but if that belief does not lead to a tangible change in our lives, then that belief will count as nothing. We often talk about the “*faith and works*” principle when we are teaching people about obeying the gospel. And while that is necessary, we also need to remember that faith and works is something that we need to continue to do for the rest of our lives. For example;

- we believe that we need to walk in the Spirit (**Galatians 5:16**), so are we growing in the fruit of the Spirit – *i.e.* are we growing in areas such as patience, kindness, longsuffering, self-control (**Galatians 5:22-23**)?
- we believe that we are to be like our Father in heaven, loving not just those who love us, but also our “enemies” (**Matthew 5:48**), so are we growing more tolerant towards those who have different opinions to ourselves? Are we more ready to help people we don’t particularly like (**Matthew 5:44-45**)?
- we believe that God doesn’t want us to show partiality towards those who are different from ourselves (**James 2:3-4**). So in our dealings with people, do we look past physical appearances, social or political differences, and see people as precious souls, no matter who they are?
- we believe that we must seek first the kingdom of God (**Matthew 6:33**), but do we sometimes find it more “convenient” to forget what God says when we want to hold onto attitudes or do things that we know aren’t in accordance with God’s Word (**Colossians 3:17**)?

We acknowledge that we cannot work or earn our way to salvation – it (salvation) is a gift from God (**Ephesians 2:8-9**). But having been saved, God then expects us to work in His kingdom (**Ephesians 2:10**);

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- to work on ourselves in order to change to be like Him (**Romans 12:2**)
- to work in serving others, using whatever gifts and talents we have, to reach out to the lost, and to build one another up (**Romans 12:4-16; Ephesians 4:15-16**)

Rahab considered the evidence before her. She considered the things that she had heard about the God of the Hebrews. She concluded that the God of the Hebrews was the one true Lord God indeed. Based on that belief, she put her faith into action, did what was required, and saved herself and her family.

In **Hebrews 11:6** we read;

“But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for He who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him.”

God wants all people to come to Him in repentance so that they can be saved (**2 Peter 3:9**). It doesn't matter what type of lifestyle you had in the past, whether you were a harlot like Rahab, or a god-fearing person like Cornelius (**Acts 10:1-2**), God will accept you if you obey the gospel and live faithfully to Him (**Acts 10:34-35**).

ANNEX A

If the Rahab of **Joshua 2** and **6** is the same Rahab referred to in **Matthew 1:5**, then she was an ancestor in the Messianic line of Jesus.

