

EVERY WOMAN IN THE BIBLE

RAHAB: The woman of faith who aided Joshua's army.

ACHSAH, CALEB'S DAUGHTER

Scripture References: Joshua 2:1-24; 6:17-25, Matthew 1:5, Hebrews 11:31, James 2:25.

Date: About 1406 B.C.

Name: Rahab [RAY-hab; "broad"]

Main Contribution: Rahab trusted Israel's God and not only found personal deliverance when Jericho fell, but married an Israelite and produced a son who was in the line of David and Jesus Christ.

RAHAB'S ROLE IN SCRIPTURE:

When the Israelites under Joshua crossed the Jordan River into Canaan, their access to the heart of the country was blocked by the fortified city of Jericho. Built over the gap between the two walls of Jericho was the house of a woman identified in both the Old and the New Testament as Rahab, the harlot. This ancient "City of Psalms", as it was known, was surrounded by two walls. According to recent archaeological findings, there was a space of twelve to fifteen feet between them. Houses of sun-dried brick were built over the gap between the two walls and supported by timbers laid from one wall to the other, or by small cross walls of brick. Rahab's house was in one of these strategic points, and her window looked on the outer wall. The massive fortifications made the city invulnerable to storming, and Israel was unprepared for a long siege, which would have given the Canaanites time to unite and send an overpowering force against them. Joshua sent two spies to look over the city, because of its advantageous location her house attracted the attention of the two spies from Shittim. They represented the Israelite army of Joshua, who had succeeded Moses as the leader of Israel on its long journey from Egypt to Canaan. Joshua had made plans to advance on Jericho because it was the entrance into Palestine from the east. They were discovered, the city gates were closed, and the city guard set out on a house-to-house search to arrest them.

Eager to avoid notice, they mixed with the crowds outside the wall, secretly keeping their gaze on the massive walls protecting Jericho, key city to the rich Jordan Valley. Those walls represented the city's greatest strength, and not until they were breached or destroyed could the army of Israel move inside the city. The house of Rahab the "harlot" stood upon those walls, so the two men hurried there. The two men knew they had been noticed, and were trying to avoid being arrested. Probably city authorities frequently saw unfamiliar characters going in and out of the house of this woman, and they would not question two strangers. The character of the woman was, of course, of no consequence to spies on a secret mission.

The texts call Rahab a "harlot" or prostitute. Two kinds of prostitution were mentioned in the Old Testament. One type is ritual prostitution, in which sex acts are engaged in as an element in the worship of pagan fertility gods. The other type of prostitution had commercial but no religious significance; it was simply the transfer of sexual favors for payment. Archaeological discoveries have made it clear that commercial prostitution was common in drinking establishments and inns. Some have even argued that in identifying Rahab as harlot, the author of the biblical text is simply saying that she was an innkeeper. The professions were so closely linked that to call one an innkeeper suggested that sex was one of the services ordinarily provided.

Whether Rahab was a prostitute when the spies entered Jericho is, however, quite irrelevant to the story. The frequent reference to her as harlot reminds us that God offers His salvation to sinners, not simply to those whom society classifies as "good."

Rahab's Choice: (Josh. 2)

When the spies appeared at Rahab's door she was faced with a choice. She could turn them in or hide them. Rahab chose to hide them, but only after making a bargain with them. Rahab's dialog with the spies reveals clearly that the people of Canaan knew what God had done for His people, and were terrified at the appearance of the Israelites on their borders.

"I know that the LORD has given this land to you and that a great fear of you has fallen on us, so that all who live in this country are melting in fear because of you. 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 Sihon and Og, the two kings of the Amorites east of the Jordan, who you completely destroyed. When we heard of it, our hearts melted and everyone's courage failed because of you, for the LORD your God is God in heaven above and on the earth below." (Joshua 2:9-11).

What is surprising is that while all the Canaanites apparently had this information about God, Rahab was unique in her response. Rather than resist Him, Rahab was determined to commit herself into His care. And so she bargained. Rahab would protect the spies, but, when Israel took Jericho, the Israelites promised to spare Rahab and her immediate family. The spies made this commitment, and Rahab made sure that they safely escaped.

God did display the power that the Canaanites feared. Jericho's walls fell. When they did, Rahab and her family survived, because Joshua sent the two spies back in to get Rahab and her family and all who belonged to her, out.

Interpreters differ as to the real character of Rahab. One source brings up the point that Rahab and her household were escorted to safety outside the camp of Israel (Josh 6:23). This "outside" has special significance, for the camp of Israel was "holy" and no "unclean" person was allowed to enter. This would seem to indicate that Rahab was indeed a harlot.

Rahab and her family, however, finally were received into Israel, apparently by marriage. Jewish tradition makes her the wife of Joshua. Another tradition has it that she became the wife of Prince Salmon, who could have been one of the spies who appealed to her for aid. If so, she became the mother of Boaz, who married Ruth, and their son Obed bore Jesse, the father of King David, through whose line is traced the Christ.

In the genealogy of Christ (Matt. 1:5) we find the name of Rechab (Rahab), along with names of three other women, Ruth, Tamar (Tamar), and Bath-sheba. There is some question as to whether this was Rahab, the harlot, but most scholars identify Rachab and Rahab as one and the same person.

Exploring Rahab's Relationships:

Rahab's relationship with God: Rahab had heard about God. Unlike others in Jericho, she chose to acknowledge and trust Him.

Rahab's relationship with the Israelite spies: Through Rahab's conversation with the two spies, we discover how familiar the pagan nations of the Promised Land were with the story of the Israelites and the miracles performed on their behalf by the Lord their God. Further, we realize that their history was believed to be entirely true, and that the citizens of the powerful city of Jericho were terrified when they learned that the Israelites were camped outside their city. It seems curious that this woman of ill repute was the only resident of Jericho whose heart was not hardened. Instead, she opened not only her home to the spies, but she opened her heart to the God they served and who she in turn learned to serve.

Rahab: A Close-Up

From outward appearance, Rahab the harlot would seem the least likely person to be assimilated by God's chosen people. Yet we can infer much about her character as we examine this story closely. Rahab was a woman of strong courage as evidenced by her willingness to commit treason and help the enemy. When her king asked her to bring out the spies who had been seen entering her inn, she said, "Yes, the men came to me, but I did not know where they were from. And it happened as the gate was being shut, when it was dark, that the men went out. Where the men went I do not know; pursue them quickly for you might overtake them." (Josh, 2:4-5).

She was also a woman devoted to her family. When she struck the deal to protect the spies, she asked for protection not just for herself but for her family as well. She apparently had some influence in her family; when she told them to come to her place, they showed up there. They trusted her judgment and put their lives in her hands. It seems obvious that Rahab was intelligent and quick-thinking. She used her savvy to protect herself and her family. Her leadership skills were evidenced by the way her family responded to her.

Rahab: An Example For Today

Rahab demonstrates that we don't have to be perfect for God to use us in significant ways. We do need to deal with Him in faith and with integrity. If we do, He will, as He did for Rahab, melt away the impurities of our character and mold us into the kind of women and men He would have us be.

God is free to use who He will. We pass judgment on what we see, but we can only see the outward appearance. God also passes judgment on what He sees. But He sees inside and out – yesterday, today, and tomorrow.

Rahab reminds believers not to be judgmental. All have sinned, and but for God's grace, all would be doomed. God extends us grace and we must extend grace to others.

ACHSAH; CALEB'S DAUGHTER

Scripture reference: Joshua 15:13-19, Numbers 13.

Date: About 144 B.C.

Name: Achsah;

Main Contribution: Unknown.

Achsah's Role in Scripture

Achsah was the daughter of Caleb, one of the two spies who forty years earlier had urged the Israelites to trust God and invade Canaan (Num.13). Only Caleb and his companion Joshua survived the thirty-eight years of wandering in the wilderness. Caleb, as filled with faith in his old age as he had been four decades before, attacked the Canaanite strong holds on the lands that were to be his portion after the conquest. Eager to have son's-in-law as courageous and faith-filled as himself, Caleb promised his daughter to the man who would attack and take Kirjath Sepher.

Othniel, Caleb's nephew, accepted the challenge and won Achsah's hand. While Achsah had no legal right to hold land in her own name, her influence with her husband and father was critical in providing for her family.

Exploring Achsah's Relationships

Achsah's Relationship with her Father

Caleb must have thought that his daughter Achsah was special, since he offered her to the man who would conquer Kirjath Sepher. It is doubtful that a man would go to battle to win the hand of a woman if he did not think she was special also. With two good men from different generations thinking Achsah was so remarkable, she probably was.

Achsah must have felt especially close to her father also. She felt comfortable enough to tell her husband to ask for land from her father, and after he had given them land, she felt secure enough to pay a call on him and ask to be blessed with some land with springs as well. If this father and daughter didn't have a good rapport and trust, she probably would not have felt free to make these requests.

Achsah: A Close-Up

Achsah was an assertive young woman with some definite ideas about what she wanted. How important it is when we read about women of the Old Testament to remember an important reality. Whatever position society may assign an individual, that person's personality will have a tremendous impact on his or her future. Achsah was clearly able to persuade her husband and to appeal effectively to her father and gain what she wanted.

Who we are and how we behave within our circumstances will likely have a greater impact on our experience than the limits society seeks to impose on us.

Achsah: An example For Today

Achsah reminds us of the time James said "You do not have because you do not ask [God] (Jas.4:2). Achsah told her husband to ask her father for land. Then she personally asked for springs of water, and Caleb gave her what she wanted. Sometimes communicating with God or even other people is the most direct way of getting our needs met, yet often we are unwilling to ask.