

Women of the Church Study

Rahab

The story of Rahab can be found in Joshua 2: 1-24. Rahab was a Canaanite woman who lived in Jericho; she is often referred to as a harlot, but there is some question if this is true or surmised. At this time, Joshua, successor of Moses, was leading the Israelites into the Promised Land; they were about to enter Jericho, a well-fortified city. Joshua sent two spies to scout out the city. Rahab, an innkeeper, provided housing for the spies. When Rahab is questioned by the king as to whether she knows the location of the spies, she “feigns ignorance”. She tells the king that the spies have left, when actually she had them hidden between bundles of flax in her roof. When it is safe for the spies to leave, Rahab confesses her belief in the God of Israel and asks the spies that she and her family be spared when Israel attacks the city. This is agreed upon and Rahab is directed to mark her house with a scarlet cord so that she and her family will be saved.

Rahab’s “courage, forthrightness and faith win Rahab and her household protection” (Hens-Piazza). Joshua abided by his promise. Later in Joshua 6:2-25, Rahab and her family were escorted to safety by the spies. This Gentile woman who had been called a harlot became a godly wife and mother in Israel. Rahab married Salmon (an Israeli leader who supported Moses) and became the mother of Boaz (who later married Ruth) and the great grandmother of David. She is “one of the five women listed in the genealogy of Jesus found in Matthew 1” (Mitch 2002). In addition to being listed in the genealogy of Jesus, Rahab is also mentioned in Hebrews 11:31; the writer pays tribute to Rahab’s faith in protecting Joshua’s spies.

“Rahab works within the confines of her domestic sphere to bring about salvation for a people that are not even her own...Her bravery and political savvy advance salvation of the Israelite people” (Hens-Piazza)... “Whatever Rahab was before Israel crossed into the land of the Canaanites she became someone new in the Promised Lane...she not only believed in God but she also acted” (Milton). This woman, even with a questionable reputation, was truly used by God in salvation history.

References:

Courageous Women by Stacy Mitch

The Scarlet Cord: Rahab’s Bible Story and Our Story by Michael Milton

www.crosswalk.com

Catholic Dictionary-Rahab www.catholicculture.org

A Woman’s Place is in the Bible by Gina Hens-Piazza www.uscatholic.org

Reflections

-Rahab was likely not the “model citizen” prior to her conversion to the God and faith of the Israelites. Yet God placed her in a position where she was able to effect salvation history—and she came through! With Rahab’s help, the Israelites were able to conquer Jericho and enter the Promised Land. Rahab’s story shows us the incredible way God can use any person to help fulfill his work and will.

--How has God possibly used me in his work on this earth? Any specific examples?

--How can I be attentive to the ways God may be trying to use me—what situations do I find myself in that may be a way to participate in God’s will, especially for others?

-Although we do not know for sure what Rahab’s thoughts, feelings and beliefs were prior to the time she was visited by the spies, it appears her mind and heart must have already been open to God and to the faith of the Israelites; she “confesses” her faith to the spies. Upon meeting them, she readily said “yes” to them—to helping to save the people of Israel. Rahab defied the king and protected the spies. Rahab both believed and courageously acted upon her belief, even in potentially dangerous and uncertain circumstances.

--Am I finding myself open to God’s will—ready to say “yes”?
If not, what are some ways I can work toward this?

--What are some ways I can courageously act on my faith?

-Rahab asked the spies for an assurance that she and her entire family be protected and spared in the battle that was to occur when the Israelites invaded her city (Jericho). She asked for a reliable sign from the spies that her whole family would be allowed to live. The spies promised her they would be faithful to her requests as long as she did not betray their mission. They directed her to hang the scarlet cord in her window as a mark/sign that her household not be attacked or seized. Rahab and her family were not harmed in the battle and were later rescued by the spies.

--What visible signs can I show that indicate my trust in God?

--How might I potentially protect my loved ones through my faith?

Devotions and Prayers

“Though the world knew her (Rahab) as a sinner... God’s Spirit had come upon her, turning her into a prophet of God. While these words (of Rahab) could seem to be ordinary words of warning...hidden in them was a great spiritual truth, showing how Rahab was able to smuggle in grace through the appearance of a life of sin.

Let us look to Rahab and honor her as we take her into ourselves. She is a true prophet of God, representing the goodness which sin cannot destroy... We must heed her. She has authority from God which we must not deny...” Henry Karlson

<https://www.patheos.com/blogs/henrykarlson/2017/04/on-rahab-the-prophetess-of-god/3/>

“Rahab is a central figure to both Jews and Christians, and invites both faiths to symbolic and allegorical readings of her decision which altered the course of salvation history.

The rabbis in the period before Christianity already reflected on the significance of Rahab... They recognized in her the transformative power of conversion. Rahab moves from Gentile sinner to converted Jew with stunning fervor and conviction. She embodies both the call to do good works...and the clarity of prophecy through which she can see God’s chosen relationship with the people he has called his own...

In the early Christian period, Rahab was also highly symbolized. In his letter to the Hebrews, St. Paul seems to tie her actions to justification through faith: “By faith Rahab the harlot did not perish with those who were disobedient, because she had given friendly welcome to the spies” (Heb 11:31). St. James, often emphasizing aspects of the human life which are quite distinct from Pauline ones, asks, “Was not also Rahab the harlot justified by her works when she received the messengers and sent them out another way?” (James 2:25). The evangelist Matthew includes her as one of only four women, all of whom are significant figures, in his genealogy of Jesus’ ancestors (Mt 1:5).

Jean Daniélou demonstrated that patristic commentators...picked up this notion of Rahab as representative of the universal momentum toward conversion... The scarlet cord brings to mind not only the streak of blood marking the doors during the original Passover in Egypt, but also the blood of the cross by which Christians would recognize their salvation in the paschal mystery. Even her name, Rahab, literally means “breadth,” and the claim that “within her house, all will be saved” led early Christians to identify this former harlot’s house with the ever-expanding mission of the church.

Regardless of how one frames her contribution, Rahab stands as an intriguing and significant figure in the history of our shared faith, a woman whose “breadth” of influence continues to extend into our own day”. Michael M. Canaris

<https://catholicstarherald.org/a-fallen-womans-conversion-and-survival/>

If you have a past you're not proud of, don't despair. God's grace is sufficient to transform a bad reputation into a sterling one. All that is required is faith—faith in the One, Jesus Christ, who came through the lineage of a harlot. And when someone reminds you of your past, courageously stand and declare: "What I once was, I am not now. I am a new person, for the One who died once for me has given me a new name—daughter of the Messiah." (See Romans 6:10; 2 Corinthians 5:17; Revelation 2:17.)

Derrick Jeter

<https://www.insight.org/resources/article-library/individual/rahab-demonstrating-courageous-faith>

God opened Rahab's heart so that she could see the invisible. Do we have that kind of faith? Are we open to what God says through his Word and his Spirit, so that we can follow his leading?

Prayer: Father, we pray that the eyes of our hearts may be opened to see you and your plan for our world. We, your servants, ask that your will may be done. In Jesus, Amen.

<https://today.reframemedia.com/devotions/the-faith-of-rahab>

Practical Applications

--Find a way to increase your openness to God and your trust in him, just as we see with Rahab. Begin by praying about this; pray with other women if you can. Spend some time alone/in solitude "listening" to what God may be saying to you. When a stressful or anxiety producing situation arises, let your first thought be to focus on and trust God. Try to let go of fear and insecurity! Re-read Rahab's word of faith and say these yourself. Follow this sequence a number of times and write about it in your journal. Record the ways in which you feel more open and trusting giving specific examples.

--Reflect upon something about yourself which you view or have viewed negatively (only briefly!). This can be something past or present. Think about how God has turned or may be turning this for good—really! Just as God changed and used Rahab, he can change and use you. Make it a point to recognize this, whether small or large.

Write about this in your journal and give praise for the way God is changing and using you!

--Make a list of ways that you, through faith, may be able to help "save" family members or others you know, just as Rahab did. What concrete actions can you take to courageously step out in faith, and thereby possibly have an impact on others? This may be by your example or by direct interactions or actions. Ask God for strength, Jesus for grace and the Holy Spirit for wisdom as you attempt this.

After you try some of the things on your list, jot down any impact you notice, with yourself or others.