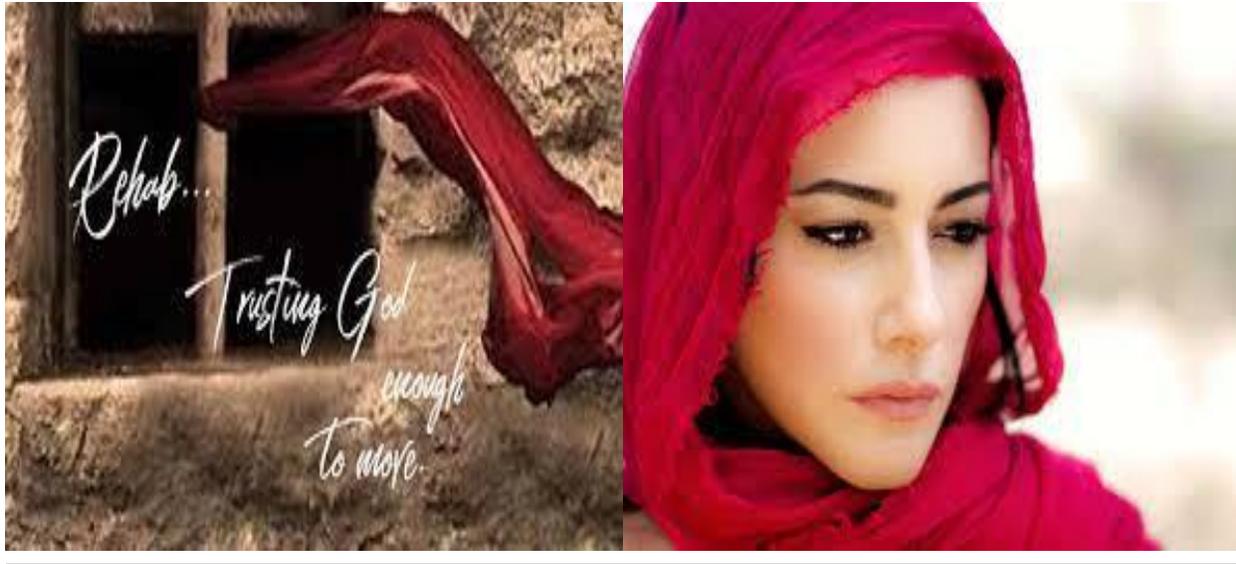


RAHAB – WOMEN OF THE BIBLE



Throughout the Bible, there are many stories of strong and heroic women. In this series, we explore a story of faithful biblical woman each month. With their strong faith, the women of the Bible continue to teach us how to live authentic, faith-filled lives. No matter what our circumstances are, we can find ourselves in their stories.

The book of Joshua introduces one of the most unusual and thought-provoking heroines of the Old Testament. Rahab, a prostitute of the Canaanite city of Jericho, is known for helping the Israelites defeat the pagan city of Jericho and for her place in the lineage of Jesus Christ. Rahab's story begins during the invasion of the city of Jericho by the Israelites.

Jericho was a large Canaanite fortress city, and it was directly in the path of the Israelites, God's chosen people, who had just crossed the Jordan River. Before proceeding into battle, Joshua sent two spies into Jericho. The king of Jericho heard two Israelite spies were in the city and sent troops to search for them.

Although Jericho was a fortress, the less-fortunate people lived outside of the walls of Jericho. Rahab and her family were poor and ran a tavern right outside of Jericho's walls. Rahab was known to be a prostitute, and many men visited the tavern. One evening, two strangers came into her establishment. She was a smart woman and realized that these men were spies. She knew there would probably be an attack on Jericho and would have to take action to survive. She told the spies how the citizens of Jericho had been fearful of the Israelites ever since the Egyptians were defeated during the Red Sea saga. She agreed to help the spies escape, if she and her family were spared in the upcoming battle.

Rahab hid the two men on the flat roof of her house, under large bundles of flax. When the soldiers arrived to look for the spies, Rahab told them that they were not there.

The soldiers searched the tavern, but Rahab had hidden the spies well. The spies agreed to protect her and her family but explained that she must hang a scarlet rope out of the window so the Israelites would know which home to spare.

The Israelites crossed the Jordan into Canaan and attacked the city of Jericho. The city was destroyed with only Rahab and her family spared. Ultimately, Rahab married Salmon, an Israelite from the tribe of Judah. Her son was Boaz, the husband of Ruth. Joseph, the adoptive father of Jesus, is her direct descendant.

Rahab was not a likely candidate for a hero of the faith. She was a prostitute in a corrupt, pagan city that was under God's condemnation. Spiritually, Rahab was not in an ideal circumstance to come to faith in God. However, Rahab had heard that Israelites were God's chosen people. Her actions to save the spies and align with God's people saved her and her family.

Like Rahab, once we become Christians our pasts are forgiven, the slate is wiped clean. Rahab was no longer viewed as an unclean prostitute, but as one worthy through God's grace to be part of the lineage Jesus. The life of Rahab is an inspiring story for all sinners who have been saved by grace.



Who was Rahab?

1 Rahab the prostitute hid three Hebrew spies sent by Joshua to see how strong the walls of Jericho were. (Joshua 2:1-7) In doing so, she saved their lives.

2 She then helped them escape. (Joshua 2:15-24) In return, they promised that when the city was attacked, Rahab and her family would be spared.

3 Jericho was captured, the walls 'came tumbling down', and there was wholesale slaughter. (Joshua 6:12-25) But Rahab and her family were spared.

Rahab has special significance for Christians: she is among the four women listed in Matthew's gospel as ancestors of Jesus of Nazareth. The others are Ruth, Tamar and Bathsheba.

Rahab saves spies-Joshua 2:1-7-The Hebrew tribes led by Joshua came into Canaanite territory, where they encountered city states who did not welcome the intruders.

Why should they welcome them? **These shabby tribesmen were clearly looking for somewhere to settle, and the Canaanites were naturally reluctant to surrender.**

The path taken by the two spies sent by Joshua from Shittim to Jericho Luckily for the Hebrews, the Canaanite city states were at a low ebb. **Jericho's glory days were over: the walls had fallen into disrepair** and most of the houses were in need of repair. The city itself was surrounded by

an inner and an outer wall, as most cities were at the time – see a picture of a reconstruction, below.

Why two walls?-The **outer wall** surrounded the whole city, protecting it from foreign intruders **the inner wall** enclosed a central administrative compound for palace, temples, and large-scale food storage well-do-do people lived in the central compound **poor and disreputable people (like Rahab) lived in the outer compound, between the two walls.**



Where did Rahab live?- *Interior of a tavern cut into a rock wall* **Somewhere in this outer compound lived a woman called Rahab**, with her extended family. They made their living by running a tavern: more down-market than up. It was a rowdy place, frequented by unscrupulous and idle men. Rahab ‘comforted’ her customers from time to time. In short, she was no better than she should be.

Rahab and the strangers-One night two strangers came into her tavern. She was a business-woman who did not ask too many questions – but she noticed that the two men did. **Before long she began to suspect they were spies from the Hebrew encampment**, gathering information. She knew there were large groups of Hebrew tribesmen nearby, and guessed this was where the two men came from. **Rahab was clever. She knew there would probably be an attack on Jericho, and she looked for ways to help her family survive.**



Bundles of dried flax

During the night there was a banging on the door of her inn. When she answered, two soldiers stood there. **They were looking for Hebrew spies. But Rahab had already made her choice, siding with the two strangers.** Earlier in the night she had hidden the two men on the flat roof of her house, under large bundles of flax that had been laid out to dry. She hid them well. **The soldiers saw the sheaves but did not look under them** – it was dark up on the roof. Rahab urged the soldiers to pursue the two Hebrew men, whom she said had disappeared into the darkness after they left her inn.

Why did she risk her life? -Joshua 2:8-14

As soon as the soldiers had gone, Rahab went up to the roof area to bargain with the men. She acknowledged that the Hebrews were a real threat to her city, and that Joshua had done an excellent PR job, putting terror into all the local inhabitants by recounting stories about the extraordinary power of his God. But, she pointed out, she had saved their lives and they owed her a debt for this. Moreover, she had not merely risked her own life, but the lives of her whole family. **She extracted a promise from them: when the time came, they and their army would not molest or harm her family in any way. They would give her safe passage, even if they slaughtered everyone else in Jericho.**

The spies escape -Joshua 2:15-24

Meanwhile **the two men were still in mortal danger**, trapped in a hostile city. The resourceful Rahab took care of that too. Her house had small rooms, enough to house a family, built into the otherwise solid mass of the city wall.

One of these rooms had a window large enough for a man to pass through, and **she (with presumably some help from her family) let the two men down on a rope through this window to the ground below.** She told them to escape into the hills and stay there for three days, by which time the coast would be clear.



Strong red cord/rope

Before they left, the two men told her to leave a red cord hanging down from the window through which they had escaped. This way, they and all the Hebrew soldiers would know which house/family should be spared the slaughter that the other inhabitants of Jericho would face.

Rahab agreed. She hung the red cord from her window, and the soldiers escaped.

After a few days they returned to Joshua and told him about their narrow escape, and about their agreement with Rahab. **Joshua agreed to her terms.**

Jericho is captured-Joshua 6:12-25-Joshua seems to have been waiting for the spies' information. He sprang into action, giving the command to attack Jericho. The story of what happened next is **After the trumpets sounded, the people shouted, the walls fell down, and the terrible slaughter began.**

No-one, human or animal, was spared – except Rahab and her family. Joshua had given specific orders regarding her. She and all her family were to be saved: *'But Rahab the harlot, and her father's household, and all who belonged to her, Joshua saved alive; and she dwelt in Israel to this day, because she hid the messengers whom Joshua sent to spy out Jericho.'*



Reconstruction of ancient Jericho, with outer and inner walls, walls in bad repair, and houses/rooms built into the outer wall itself; the collapsed walls made it much easier for Joshua and the Israelites to gain access to the city.

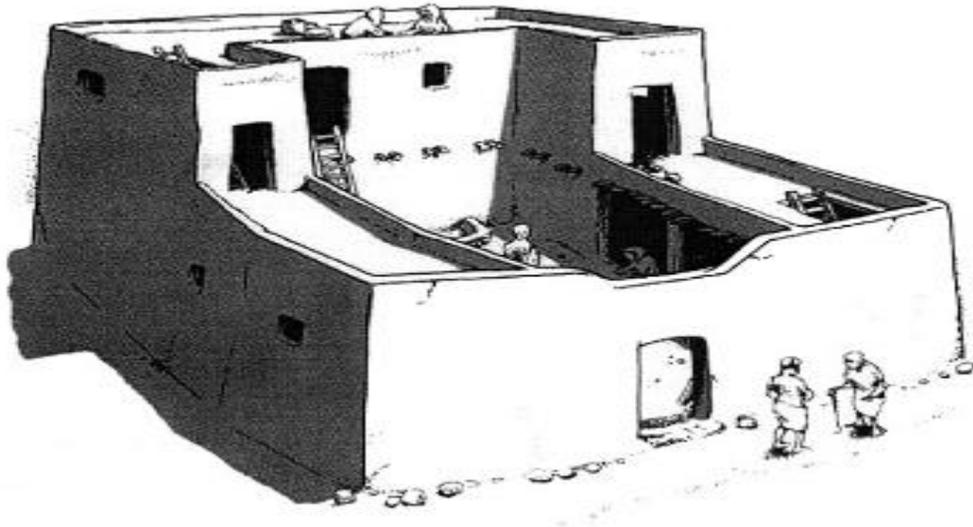
Names in Rahab's story-Rahab means 'open wide'. This was a not-very-subtle way of saying she was a prostitute, or perhaps that she had many children. Joshua means 'Yahweh/God is my salvation'

Main lessons in Rahab's story-Trust in God, but keep your wits about you too.

Rahab does not stand still and let things happen to her. She makes them happen.

- **Even an ordinary person can further God's plan.** Rahab was definitely from the wrong side of the tracks, but God used her to help His people.
- **Look at things in the long term.** Rahab had to abandon the citizens of Jericho to save herself and her family. The Bible doesn't mention this harsh reality but sometimes, as a last resort, you have to be ruthless with yourself or with others.

The Bible text-Joshua 2, 6:12-25



Houses had flat roofs, often shaded with a thick woven cloth; women used this space as a work and storage area

1 And Joshua the son of Nun sent two men secretly from Shittim as spies, saying, “Go, view the land, especially Jericho.”-**And they went, and came into the house of a harlot whose name was Rahab, and lodged there.** 2 And it was told the king of Jericho, “Behold, certain men of Israel have come here tonight to search out the land.” **Rahab questioned**-3 Then the king of Jericho sent to Rahab, saying, “Bring forth the men that have come to you, who entered your house; for they have come to search out all the land.”



Flax drying in the open air

4 But the woman had taken the two men and hidden them; and she said, “True, men came to me, but I did not know where they came from; 5 and when the gate was to be closed, at dark, the men went out; where the men went I do not know; pursue them quickly, for you will overtake them.” **But she had brought them up to the roof, and hid them with the stalks of flax which she had laid in order on the roof.** 7 So the men pursued after them on the way to the Jordan as far as the fords; and as soon as the pursuers had gone out, the gate was shut.

Rahab hides the spies-8 Before they lay down, she came up to them on the roof, 9 and said to the men, “I know that the LORD has given you the land, and that the fear of you has fallen upon us, and that all the inhabitants of the land melt away before you.

10 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 that were beyond the Jordan, to Sihon and Og, whom you utterly destroyed. 11 And as soon as we heard it, our hearts melted, and there was no courage left in any man, because of you; **for the LORD your God is he who is God in heaven above and on earth beneath.**

Rahab makes a pact with the spies-12 Now then, swear to me by the LORD that as I have dealt kindly with you, you also will deal kindly with my father’s house, and give me a sure sign, 13 and **save alive my father and mother, my brothers and sisters, and all who belong to them, and deliver our lives from death.”-**

14 And the men said to her, “Our life for yours! If you do not tell this business of ours, then we will deal kindly and faithfully with you when the LORD gives us the land.”-15 Then she let them down by a rope through the window, for her house was built into the city wall, so that she dwelt in the wall.



Rahab left a red cord at her window to save herself and her family. There are echoes here of the red blood on the doorways of the Hebrew slaves in Egypt, when the Angel of Death passed over their house so that the family within was safe.

16 And she said to them, "Go into the hills, lest the pursuers meet you; and hide yourselves there three days, until the pursuers have returned; then afterward you may go your way."

The scarlet cord-17 The men said to her, "We will be guiltless with respect to this oath of yours which you have made us swear. 18 Behold, when we come into the land, you shall **bind this scarlet cord in the window through which you let us down**; and you shall gather into your house your father and mother, your brothers, and all your father's household. 19 If any one goes out of the doors of your house into the street, his blood shall be upon his head, and we shall be guiltless; but if a hand is laid upon any one who is with you in the house, his blood shall be on our head. 20 But if you tell this business of ours, then we shall be guiltless with respect to your oath which you have made us swear." 21 And she said, "According to your words, so be it." **Then she sent them away, and they departed; and she bound the scarlet cord in the window.**

The spies leave Jericho-22 They departed, and went into the hills, and remained there three days, until the pursuers returned; for the pursuers had made search all along the way and found nothing.-23 Then the two men came down again from the hills, and passed over and came to Joshua the son of Nun; and they told him all that had befallen them. 24 And they said to Joshua, "Truly the LORD has given all the land into our hands; and moreover all the inhabitants of the land are fainthearted because of us."



Man with shofar, photograph by Roie Galitz

Joshua marches around Jericho-12 Then Joshua rose early in the morning, and the priests took up the ark of the LORD. 13 And the seven priests bearing the seven trumpets of rams' horns before the ark of the LORD passed on, blowing the trumpets continually; and the armed men went before them, and the rear guard came after the ark of the LORD, while the trumpets blew continually.-14 And the second day they marched around the city once, and returned into the camp. So they did for six days.

15 On the seventh day they rose early at the dawn of day, and marched around the city in the same manner seven times: it was only on that day that they marched around the city seven times.-16 And at the seventh time, when the priests had blown the trumpets, Joshua said to the people, "Shout; for the LORD has given you the city. 17 And the city and all that is within it shall be devoted to the LORD for destruction; only Rahab the harlot and all who are with her in her house shall live, because she hid the messengers that we sent.

Jericho's treasure saved for the Lord-18 But you, keep yourselves from the things devoted to destruction, lest when you have devoted them you take any of the devoted things and make the camp of Israel a thing for destruction, and bring trouble upon it. 19 But **all silver and gold, and vessels of bronze and iron, are sacred to the LORD; they shall go into the treasury of the LORD.**" 20 So the people shouted, and the trumpets were blown. -As soon as the people heard the sound of the trumpet, **the people raised a great shout, and the wall fell down flat, so that the people went up into the city, every man straight before him, and they took the city.**

21 Then they utterly destroyed all in the city, both men and women, young and old, oxen, sheep, and asses, with the edge of the sword. **22** And Joshua said to the two men who had spied out the land, “Go into the harlot’s house, and bring out from it the woman, and all who belong to her, as you swore to her.”

Rahab and her family saved-23 So the young men who had been spies went in, and brought out Rahab, and her father and mother and brothers and all who belonged to her; and they brought all her kindred, and set them outside the camp of Israel.

24 And they burned the city with fire, and all within it; only the silver and gold, and the vessels of bronze and of iron, they put into the treasury of the house of the LORD.

25 But Rahab the harlot, and her father’s household, and all who belonged to her, Joshua saved alive; and she dwelt in Israel to this day, because she hid the messengers whom Joshua sent to spy out Jericho.

Rahab lowers the two spies down the wall of Jericho

Question: "Who was Rahab in the Bible?"

Answer: In the book of Joshua, we are introduced to one of the most thought-provoking and astonishing heroines of the Old Testament. Rahab, the prostitute of the Canaanite city of Jericho, ultimately is noteworthy for her great faith and for her place in the lineage of Jesus Christ. But a closer examination of the life of this remarkable Gentile woman can lead to deeper insights into God’s plan for His church and His dealing with individual believers in grace and mercy.

Rahab’s story is found in [Joshua 2–6](#). This passage describes the conquest of the fortified city of Jericho by the Israelites. In its day, Jericho was the most important Canaanite fortress city in the Jordan Valley. It was a stronghold directly in the path of the advancing Israelites, who had just crossed the Jordan River ([Joshua 3:1-17](#)). Before entering the land west of the Jordan, Joshua sent two spies to look over the land. The king of Jericho heard that two Israelite spies were within his city and ordered them to be brought out to him. Rahab, the woman with whom the spies were staying, protected them by hiding them on her roof. She told them how the citizens of Jericho had been fearful of the Israelites ever since they defeated the Egyptians via the Red Sea miracle (some 40 years prior). She agreed to help them escape, provided that she and her family were spared in the upcoming battle.

The spies agreed to her request, giving her three conditions to be met: 1) she must distinguish her house from the others by hanging a scarlet rope out of the window so the Israelites would know which home to spare; 2) her family must be inside the house during the battle; and 3) she must not later turn on the spies.

Safely escaping the city, the two spies returned to Joshua and reported that the "whole land was melting with fear." The Israelites crossed the Jordan into Canaan where they laid siege to the city of Jericho. The city was completely destroyed, and every man, woman, and child in it was killed. Only Rahab and her family were spared. Ultimately, Rahab married Salmon, an Israelite from the tribe of Judah. Her son was Boaz, the husband of Ruth. Joseph, the legal father of Jesus, is her direct descendant.

Rahab was a young Canaanite prostitute and as such not a very likely candidate for a heroine of the faith. Jericho was one of the principal seats of idol worship, being especially devoted to Ashtaroth, the goddess of the moon. Here was centered all that was the vilest and most degrading in the religion of the Canaanites. Many Bible commentators, eager to remove the stigma of the designation "harlot" from one included in the genealogy of Christ ([Matthew 1:5](#)), have described Rahab as a hostess or tavern keeper. But scriptural usage of the Hebrew word *zanah* ([Leviticus 21:7-14](#); [Deuteronomy 23:18](#); [Judges 11:1](#); [1 Kings 3:16](#)) and the authority of the apostles ([Hebrews 11:31](#); [James 2:25](#)), establish the credibility for use of the word "harlot."

It is clear that Rahab was perceptive, intelligent and well informed. Rahab identified the spies for what they were, hid them, and had a plausible story ready with which to deceive the king's agents. Rahab didn't deny that she had entertained the men. She says that they left at dusk when it would be difficult for anyone to be sure of clearly seeing anything. The agents did not dare to risk stopping to search Rahab's house because, if they did, the spies might get away. Finally, the Canaanite prostitute gives the two Israelites excellent advice. She tells them to hide in the hills for three days before attempting to cross the Jordan.

Spiritually, Rahab was not in an ideal circumstance to come to faith in the one true God, the God of Israel. She was a citizen of a wicked city that was under God's condemnation. Rahab was part of a corrupt, depraved, pagan culture. She had not benefited from the godly leadership of Moses or Joshua. However, Rahab had one asset—she had heard from the many men she came into contact with that the Israelites were to be feared. She heard the stories of their escape from Egypt, the crossing of the Red Sea, the wanderings in the wilderness, and their recent victory over the Amorites. She learned enough to reach the correct, saving conclusion: "For the Lord your God is God in heaven above and on the earth below" ([Joshua 2:11](#)). It is this change of heart, this faith—coupled with the actions prompted by faith—that saved her and her family.

It is often said that Rahab, while being a true historical person, also serves as a symbolic foreshadowing or "type" of the church and Gentile believers. She was, in fact, the first recorded Gentile convert. There are many ways in which Rahab depicts the church. First, she was part of a pagan world system, a prostitute, who by her conversion was enabled to become a legitimate bride. In like fashion, Israel was the first chosen people of God, but they were set aside temporarily so the Gentiles could be brought into the kingdom of God, and the church is now considered the bride of Christ ([Romans 11](#); [Ephesians 5:25-27](#)). Second, Rahab, because she welcomed the spies, was saved because of her faith in "God in heaven above and on the earth below" ([Hebrews 11:31](#)). Likewise, Christians are saved through faith in Jesus Christ. "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God" ([Ephesians 2:8](#)).

Third, although Rahab and Christians are saved by an act of grace through faith, true faith requires and is exemplified by action ([James 2](#)). Rahab had to put the scarlet cord out of the window. Christians must accept Jesus Christ as their Savior and Lord and then go on to live in a manner that verifies that our faith is real. Fourth, Rahab could have indicated the location of her home in any number of ways. But the only way that she could be spared was to follow the directions given to her by the Israelite spies. The world tells us that there are many ways to God and salvation, all equally valid. But the Bible tells us, concerning Jesus Christ, that "salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved" ([Acts 4:12](#)). Fifth, Rahab's faith enabled her to turn away from her culture, her people, and her religion and to the Lord. Commitment to a true faith in God may necessitate setting priorities that are contrary to those of the world, as we are exhorted to do in [Romans 12:2](#).

Finally, once we come to Christ, our pasts no longer matter. The slate is wiped clean for all who believe and accept the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross on our behalf. Rahab was no longer viewed as an unclean prostitute, but as one worthy by grace to be part of the lineage of our Lord Jesus Christ. Just as she was grafted into the line of Christ, so we become children of God and partakers in His inheritance ([Romans 11](#)). We find in the life of Rahab the inspiring story of all sinners who have been saved by grace. In her story, we learn of the amazing grace of God that can save even the worst of sinners and bring them into an abundant life in Christ Jesus.