

## **RAHAB**

We are starting a new series entitled "Heroes of the Bible."

To start the series I have chosen Rahab, and if you know anything about her story you may well think that I have taken leave of my senses. After all, wasn't she a prostitute? And didn't she take advantage of the situation that Jericho was facing in order to bargain with the enemy in order to save her skin while the rest of the city she lived in was destroyed? Wasn't she a turncoat in times of war? Was her attitude "I'm all right Jack!?" Was she a heroine or a scoundrel? Just what can we learn from her story?

A closer look at her story may reveal a more complete picture. Her story is found in the book of Joshua in chapters 2 and 6. The Israelites had just started their invasion of Canaan. God had promised this land to the Israelites so that they may have a home of their own. One of the conditions for their continued welfare was that they were to clear out the inhabitants of the land. This was not wanton ethnic cleansing. These peoples were under the judgement of God because of their depravity and utterly evil ways, even to the extent of sacrificing children to their god Molech (Lev. 20:1-7). God knew that any of the original peoples left in the land would be a thorn in their side. It is easier to be dragged down than to lift up and knowing that God gave them instructions so that this could be avoided. The Israelites were less than obedient. As a result, this very thing happened, and they were indeed dragged down to the level of the original inhabitants of Canaan indulging in their sins and idolatry. This is readily seen from a reading of the historical books of the Bible.

The Israelites had just crossed over the river Jordan and Jericho was an important city in the way of their conquest of the land of Canaan. It had to be taken because it was in a strategically important position. It would certainly have been a thorn in their side causing them trouble later if they had merely by-passed it and moved on to softer targets.

Joshua was a talented military commander. He understood the value of good intelligence and in order to gain this he sent two spies into Jericho itself in order to gather information that would help the Israelites to achieve their goal.

The spies dutifully set about their task but unfortunately things did not go entirely to plan. Somehow the spies were recognised for what they were and the King of Jericho himself is made aware. It was even known that they had lodged at the house of a prostitute called Rahab. Men were sent to Rahab to arrest the spies but she had taken them up to the flat roof of the house and hid them under some flax that had been laid out for drying. She told the pursuers that the spies had been there but she lied to them telling them that she had no idea where they had gone. The pursuers rode off towards the fords where the Israelites had previously crossed the river Jordan and the gates of Jericho were locked.

Rahab then advised the spies to hide in the nearby mountains for three days until the pursuit was over and then to make their way back to the Israelite camp. Before they left she extracted a promise from them that she and her household would be spared when the Israelites destroyed the city. Rahab's house formed part of the wall of the city so she allowed them to escape by rope through the window which was set into the city wall. The spies promised that a red cord hanging from this window would be a sign to the Israelites. Everyone in that house would be spared as long as the red cord was hanging from that window. And so, it was.

So why is she remembered as a biblical heroine? What she did was not just recorded as a matter of history with no further significance attached to it. She was remembered in the Bible and what is more she was remembered in a positive way. Rahab finds a place in the hall of fame of the great people of faith. This hall of fame is found in the book of Hebrews. Chapter 11 mentions many men and women of faith and in verses 30 and 31 we find these words: 'By faith the walls of Jericho fell down after they were encircled for seven days. By faith **the harlot Rahab** did not perish with those who did not believe, when she had received the spies with peace'. In a similar vein James says: 'Likewise, was not **Rahab the harlot** also justified by works when she received the messengers and sent *them* out another way?' (*James 2:25*) Clearly, she holds a place of honour in biblical history.

Here are some points which I think point to why this is so.

- **She faced danger.** When Rahab hid the spies and helped them on her way, she placed herself in considerable danger. The easiest and safest course of action for her would have been to reveal everything to the authorities when the spies were hiding under the flax. She could even have said that she hid them under the flax as a ruse to enable their easy capture and perhaps even received a reward from the king for aiding their capture. As it was she was in danger of being found out as a traitor. I have no doubt that if it were found out that she aided the spies the consequences for her and also possibly for her friends and family would have been dire. She showed remarkable bravery.
- **She had faith.** She actually believed that the God of Israel was the God of heaven and earth. Unlike the leaders in Jerusalem in the time of Jesus she actually understood the signs of the times and made a decision for God. Listen to what she said " 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, that the terror of you has fallen on us, and that all the inhabitants of the land are fainthearted because of you. For 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 the two kings of the Amorites who *were* on the other side of the Jordan, Sihon and Og, whom you utterly destroyed. And as soon as we heard *these things*, our hearts melted; neither did there remain any more courage in anyone because of you, for the

**Lord your God, He is God in heaven above and on earth beneath.” (Jos 2:8-11)**

- **She had concern for others.** She was concerned not only for her own salvation but also for the salvation of others. “Now therefore, I beg you, swear to me by the Lord, since I have shown you kindness, that you also will show kindness to my father’s house, and give me a true token, and spare my father, my mother, my brothers, my sisters, and all that they have, and deliver our lives from death.” (Jos 12-13)

In short she trusted God for her salvation, had a concern for the salvation of others and courageously put her faith into action.

But what about her immoral past? How did she find acceptance with God as recorded by James and the writer of Hebrews?

Here is a question; Do we feel worthless, or that we are not accepted by God who cannot use us because of our sinful past or present shortcomings?

I cannot bring to mind any biblical character used by God who was without faults. Rahab was one, another example would be King David, a list of all would be too long to attempt here. God does not need perfect people to perform his works, he seems to manage quite well enough with the material he has to hand, in fact it displays his power. If men were left unaided to work for God failure would be certain. Faith in God is the important issue. If we are on the right path God will help us along the way even when we stumble and fall. But we are indeed blessed because we do know the way; Jesus has revealed to us that He is the way, the truth and the life.

To say that no one is perfect and that we have had our sins removed by Jesus is not to say that sin is in any way acceptable. God told the Israelites to be holy just as He is holy (*Lev 11:45*) And when Jesus healed and forgave people he did not just leave it at that. He did not tell people that they were healed or forgiven and that they could just carry on as before. Far from it. When he forgave the woman caught in adultery his parting words were ‘Go and sin no more.’ (*Jn 8:11*) And when he healed the man at the pool of Bethesda his parting words were, “Now you are well; don’t sin as you did before, or something even worse may happen to you.” (*Jn 5:14*)

It remains necessary to repent, that is to turn around and face towards God and seek him. If we are facing away from God we are on the wrong road and will only journey away from him. If we are facing the right way he will draw us on.

A word of caution: We must always bear in mind that we can have a tendency to judge others unfairly. Jesus warns us not to judge by appearances but to judge justly (*Jn 7:24*) and Paul reminds us that we have all sinned. (*Rom 3:23*) None of us can escape from this. In addition to this we all have a daily struggle with sin. Paul talks about his own struggle in Romans chapter 7. He laments that he continues to do what he knows

to be wrong and fails to do what is right. Many of us will understand what Paul was talking about. God understands our struggle. When the disciples were unable to keep watch with Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane and fell asleep Jesus understood remarking that the spirit was willing but the flesh is weak. He understands and will help us along the right path.

Some sins are clearly seen, as in the case of Rahab who was a harlot. Other sins are not so obvious and can even become socially acceptable. The religious leaders of Jesus' day were the pillars of society, they were considered to be salt and light in society. Jesus, however, saw things differently and told his disciples that from then on **they** would be that salt and light. These leaders were outwardly righteous, being fastidious about observing every article of the law, yet they lacked judgement, mercy and faith, even to the extent of engineering the judicial murder of Jesus himself. This is what he said to them in Matthew 23:27: "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness."

Jesus is not fooled by a pretence of righteousness which is hiding a hard and selfish heart. He can see straight through hypocrisy and frequently expressed his intense dislike of it.

Repentance and faith towards God is what brings us to forgiveness and acceptance by Him.

Just a word about acceptance to finish with.

Do we sometimes feel that we are unworthy because of our mistakes past and present or our unworthiness?

If we look at the genealogy of Jesus in Matthew 1:5,6 we find this: Salmon was the father of Boaz (Rahab was his mother); Boaz was the father of Obed (Ruth was his mother); Obed was the father of Jesse; Jesse was the father of King David. David was the father of Solomon (his mother was the widow of Uriah)(*TLB*)

These words are found in Matthew's genealogy of Jesus.

Rahab an ancestor of Jesus! If that is not acceptance I don't know what is!