

GOD PORTRAYS WOMEN

by

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CHAPTER SEVEN

RAHAB

Joshua 2-6

RAHAB WAS the Old Testament “**woman that was a sinner**” who found mercy, pardon and blessing because she believed God. Not only was she blessed but she was the instrument God used to bring many others into blessing. She is mentioned three times in the New Testament. Hebrews gives her as one of the examples of those justified by faith, James as one justified by works, and in Matthew we find her in the lineage of our Lord.

Moses had died. Who was to succeed such a man? Would his sons? Most fathers are ambitious to have their sons carry on the work which they have begun, but the boys are rarely so inclined or qualified. But God is not shut up to a family and He always has His man ready. The man whom God chose was qualified by his service. Joshua was called “**Moses’ minister.**”

Moses loved to have this young man along. He even took him up with him into the holy mount and left Aaron and Hur behind. David tells us “**God made known his ways unto Moses.**” Joshua learned from Moses of the ways of God. He realized, when commissioned by God, the full comfort of those words, “**As I was with Moses, so I will be with thee**” (Joshua 1:5). That was all Joshua needed to overcome his hesitancy in accepting so responsible a post.

The consciousness of “**God with us**” impels us to accept tasks before which nature would shrink and quail. It was a tremendous undertaking to invade a country whose hostile people would dispute every foot they advanced, and to settle over a million people in that land. God took the trouble to tell us that He patiently waited four hundred years for those nations to repent. But like Sodom their sins reached to Heaven, “**their iniquity was full,**” and they corrupted the earth and merited destruction.

Joshua and his vast hosts were encamped across the river from Jericho. General Joshua called two trusty soldiers to him and sent them on a secret mission to make a reconnaissance of Jericho and its environs. They arrived safely within the city and found a lodging near the gate to insure themselves an easy exit. The inn where they stayed was situated on the city wall and was run by a clever woman who had a doubtful reputation. Rahab evidently manufactured linen, as her roof was covered with flax stalks drying in the sun, and perhaps was skilled too in the art of dyeing, for which the Phoenicians were famous. She had a stock of scarlet or crimson line in her house.

Many of the heathen religious rites were associated with the sacrifice of virtue by a woman, which perhaps accounts for her immorality. But she was not without conscience or religious convictions. There seems to have been a real **“feeling after God”** and a longing in her soul for Him and for what was right and good. She was likely better informed about the movements of the Israelites than anyone else in the city, because of the strangers she entertained. Many had been the discussions under her roof of the wonders wrought by God on behalf of that traveling host during the last forty years. She believed the report she heard and was drawn to the God of Israel, though when the fear of God was first born in her soul we do not know. Her unsavory past and the fear of judgment had stimulated her desire to be right with God.

It was shortly after the two spies had applied for lodgings that she was suspected of harboring enemies. The king’s messengers demanded that she reveal the men. Her desire and determination to know more of God through the spies outweighed every other emotion, and her wits quickly suggested a hiding place for them till she could talk with her guests. She denied the knowledge of their whereabouts and suggested that the king’s messengers pursue after them, and if they hurried they might overtake them.

Her ruse worked. No sooner had she sent away the officers than she went up to the roof and made her declaration of faith to the two spies. They must have stood wide-eyed at her first statement, **“I know that the Lord hath given you the land”** (Joshua 2:9). They never expected to find faith in such a place or in such a character, and no doubt this encouraged them in their mission!

They quickly learned the pulse of the people. **“Your terror is fallen upon us, and that all the inhabitants of the land faint because of you. For we have heard how the Lord dried up the water of the Red Sea for you, when ye came out of Egypt; and what ye did unto the two kings of the Amorites, that were on the other side of Jordan, Sihon and Og, whom ye utterly destroyed. And as soon as we heard these things, our hearts did melt, neither did there remain any more courage in any man, because of you; for the Lord your God, he is God in heaven above, and in earth beneath”** (Joshua 2:9-11).

On the other side of Jordan, Israel had already taken sixty walled cities and a great many unwalled villages, which was no small military feat. This report was truly a contrast to the one brought back to Moses years before by the ten spies when they said, **“The people be strong that dwell in the land, and the cities are walled, and very great; and moreover we saw the children of Anak [the giants] there”** (Numbers 13:28); and all the people are men of great stature, and **“we were in our own sight as grasshoppers, and so we were in their sight”** (Numbers 13:33). Now the giants of the land seem to have the grasshopper view of themselves, and all their courage had vanished.

This quick-witted woman believed in making friends with the adversary while in the way with him. **“Now therefore, I pray you, swear unto me by the Lord [the word and nature of the Lord were authority enough for her], since I have showed you kindness [which demonstrated her sincerity], that ye will also show kindness unto my father’s house, and give me a true token. And that ye will save alive my father and my mother and my brethren, and my sisters, and all that they have, and deliver [“save and keep”] our lives from death”** (Joshua 2:12-13).

The milk of human kindness had not died in her, nor family love and loyalty. She was concerned not only for her own safety but for all she could gather in. Perhaps those lines in the song of Israel's triumph rang in her ears—

All the inhabitants of Canaan shall melt away,
Fear and dread shall fall upon them,
By the greatness of thine arm they shall be still as
a stone.—Exodus 15:15-16

She believed not only in the judgment of the Lord for sin, but she believed in His mercy and compassion. She sought salvation for herself and her family and was not reproved nor sent away empty. She puts to shame all who are only concerned for their own safety. The people of Jericho were as well informed as Rahab about what the Lord had done for Israel. Rahab though utterly unworthy in herself, took sides with God and allowed her convictions to work repentance in her.

Instead of now working mischief toward men, her faith in God wrought in her goodness toward others. The king and the people perished, not through ignorance but because they resisted God. As Hebrews 11:31 tells us, **“she perished not with them that believed not, when she had received the spies.”**

And the men answered her, **“Our life for yours, if ye utter not this our business”** (Joshua 2:14).

“And it shall be, when the Lord hath given us the land, that we will deal kindly and truly with thee. Then she let them down by a cord through the window; for her house was upon the town wall, and she dwelt upon the wall” (Joshua 2:14-15).

“Behold when we come into the land, thou shalt bind this line of scarlet thread in the window which thou didst let us down by: and thou shalt bring thy father, and thy mother, and thy brethren, and all thy father's house-hold home unto thee. And it shall be, that whosoever shall go out of the doors of thy house into the street, his blood shall be upon his head, and we will be guiltless; and whosoever shall be with thee in the house, his blood shall be on our head, if any hand be upon him. And if thou utter this our business, we will be quit of thine oath which thou hast made us to swear. And she said, According to your words, so be it. And she sent them away, and they departed: and she bound the scarlet line in the window” (Joshua 2:18-21).

From excavations in Jericho made as recently as 1939, the house on the wall, that had not collapsed with the walls, faced the mountains. The only city gate faced the river and plains. Had the men gone out by the gate they would have been easily seen, but she advised them to flee to the mountains and hide for three days before returning to Joshua. The side of the mountain was perforated with caves that provided a good lookout over the entire valley so they could observe their pursuers while safe themselves.

Their report to Joshua heartened his faith, for he, almost in her words, exclaimed,

“Truly the Lord hath delivered into our hands all the land; for even all the inhabitants of the country do faint because of us” (Joshua 2:24).

Everything depended on the success of taking the key city of Palestine.

Rahab lost no time giving the evidence of her faith by fixing the scarlet line in the window. The scarlet line was not placed there for her to see. It was for Joshua and the hosts to see. Similarly at the time of the first passover, when the lamb was slain, the blood was put on the outer door posts and the lintel for the destroying angel to see, for had not God said, **“When I see the blood, I will pass over you and the plague shall not be upon you to destroy you, when I smite the land of Egypt”** (Exodus 12:13).

The days that followed were exciting days in Jericho. The city was straitly shut up, none went out, none came in. The king and his people argued that their city could stand a long siege. It was harvest time and the city was well stocked with food, so they were determined to put up a stubborn resistance. The troops in the high towers kept constant vigilance over the enemy movements.

How did Rahab occupy her days? She went from house to house of her relatives and pleaded with them to come to the only place of safety in the city. Some perhaps would scoff at her earnestness and say, “Do you think you are better than the rest of us that you should be saved? Look at your own life.” Yes, she acknowledged her sin and that she was not worthy, but she pleaded the Word of God as the pledge given her and urged them to come and remain behind her door, under the shelter of the scarlet line. Her door was open to those in Jericho. Her house was the center of blessing to all who would cross her portal. Oh, that all Christian homes had the open door to all who would come in and find it a place of refuge!

But her window, her outlook, was away from the city. It was evident to all who came that her life had been changed since the day she believed God. She seemed almost like the New Testament woman of Samaria who went to those with whom she had sinned, urging them to come to Christ too. **“Come see a man that told me all things that ever I did. Is not this the Christ?”** The transformation in her life convinced them and **“many of the Samaritans of that city believed on him for the saying of the woman.”**

Every few hours reports of the movements of Israel would be circulated through the city. “They are all lined up on the other side of the river. But that host can never get across! The river has overflowed all its banks and it lasts all the time of harvest. There is no bridge or boat. They have little chance just now of getting across.”

But when God purposes, who can stay His hand?

The priests bearing the ark were to precede the host by about two thousand cubits, and everyone’s eyes were to be on the ark and to follow. Thus it would not take them long to cross the river bed.

“The waters which came down from above stood and rose up upon an heap very far from the city Adam, that is beside Zaretan: and those that came down toward the sea of the plain, even the salt sea, failed, and were cut off: and the people passed over right against Jericho” (Joshua 3:16).

If the inhabitants of Jericho were terrorized before, what must their panic have been as they witnessed the advance of such a host right toward their city? **“And the people hasted and passed over”** (Joshua 4:10). **“And it came to pass . . . that the waters of Jordan returned unto their place, and flowed over all his banks, as they did before”** (Joshua 4:18).

When the Canaanites saw that the Lord dried up Jordan until Israel passed over, their hearts melted, neither was there spirit in them anymore because of the children of Israel.

Then Jericho was indeed in a state of nerves, wondering what would happen next.

Israel quietly encamped at Gilgal while they performed the rite of circumcision and kept the passover on the fourteenth day. During those days Joshua made a personal reconnaissance of the city. I wonder if he gave Rahab any sign to strengthen her faith when he saw her red line in the window. As Joshua looked at those formidable walls and thought of his lack of weapons and of his undisciplined host, did his heart fail? He evidently needed some encouragement, because the Lord appeared to him as a man with a drawn sword. But Joshua went right up to him with a challenge, **“Art thou for us, or for our adversaries?”** (Joshua 5:13).

That’s the kind of man God can use. The Lord assured him He Himself would be the Captain and wield the sword. Joshua immediately yielded to His command and awaited His orders. **“What saith my Lord unto his servant?”** (Joshua 5:14). **“And the Lord said unto Joshua, See I have given into thine hand Jericho, and the king thereof, and the mighty men of valor.”**

Then he gave explicit instructions for the taking of the city.

The method used in taking Jericho was never repeated. So with us: we have no stereotyped way of meeting our enemies, but each occasion casts us afresh upon God to show us how we are to vanquish the sins that beset us. Before Jericho could be taken, Israel had to learn self-discipline. They were to compass the city for seven days in absolute silence, **“neither shall any word proceed out of your mouth”** (Joshua 6:10).

As they heard the threats, the jeers, the insults from the top of the walls, they were to be dumb. They were to quietly march on. They were to be armed yet not use their arms for the first six days. It takes a strong character to have within one’s power to crush an opponent and yet refrain, remaining calm when one might excite tumult. These are natural instincts that need restraining. As one has well said, “Life without discipline is life without dignity.” Progress is kept back by boisterous, shouting men. Silence in a great crisis is simply invaluable.

The city and all that was therein were to be destroyed and burned with fire; only Rahab and her household were to be saved.

All the silver, gold, brass, and iron were to be devoted to the treasury of the Lord. It was not usual in taking a city to burn the food, and Jericho was full of grain at this harvest time. The excavations of the Jericho of Joshua's day reveal the ashes of burned grain in storehouses and in king's barns, and in the earthen pots. But conspicuously in this strata there is a complete absence of metal, showing how well the Israelites obeyed. It was a severe discipline to those soldiers to see plenty all around them yet behave like honest men. They were greater soldiers in their self-control than in their successful assault.

How formidable those walls looked to the encompassing host!

The outer wall was fifteen feet above them; inside this was a deep ditch, like a moat, fifteen feet deep, above which towered the inner wall sixty feet high. Yet Scripture says that **“the wall fell down flat [or under it], so that the people went up into the city, every man straight before him, and they took the city”** (Joshua 6:20).

One quake and the outer wall fell inward and the inner wall fell outward filling the wide moat so that every man went straight before him. This is the excavators' explanation, but they do not account for the fact that they beheld the one section of Rahab's house that still stood and is apparent in their findings. The only house left standing was that marked by the scarlet line.

After the city was destroyed, Joshua's first thought was for the salvation of the woman who believed God. There were many more respectable people in Jericho, yet their respectability did not save them. As she came boldly to the throne of grace, she found mercy for the past and grace to help for the present. Joshua sent the two spies to bring out Rahab and her family and all that she had, and leave them without the camp of Israel. Some have thought that Salmon, who later married her, was one of the spies. Perhaps some objected to such a character being brought into the camp of Israel, so she was left outside (Joshua 6:23); but God is no respecter of persons and does not plan to leave the repentant sinner in the outside place, but brings him into the family of God to share equally all the privileges and blessings of God's people. Perhaps Salmon was like Barnabas, a son of consolation, who spoke a good word for her and brought her in. Three times the Lord had to teach Peter that what God had cleansed he was not to call common and unclean. **“Of a truth, I perceive that God is no respecter of persons; but in every nation he that feareth him and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him”** (Acts 10:34-35). If accepted of God, why not with us? **“And she dwelleth in Israel unto this day.”** Surely we see in Rahab the promise fulfilled, **“Them that honor me, I will honor”** (I Samuel 2:30), for we find her in the genealogy as the great-grandmother of David and the ancestress of our Lord.

Let us despair of none, for we never know where there is concern of heart and a feeling after God even in the most reprobate, despite all appearances to the contrary. But let us be diligent to be ready and meet for the Master's use and prepared to every good work.

~ end of chapter 7 ~

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