**RAHAB**

(Excerpts from Bible Gateway.com)

The Woman God Took From the Dunghill

*Scripture References*—[Joshua 2:1, 3; 6:17-25; Matthew 1:5; Hebrews 11:31; James 2:25](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Josh%202:1,%20Josh%202:3,%20Josh%206:17-Josh%206:25,%20Matt%201:5,%20Heb%2011:31,%20Jas%202:25)

*Name Meaning*—The first part of Rahab—“Ra,” was the name of an Egyptian god. As an Amorite, Rahab belonged to an idolatrous people, and had a name meaning “insolence,” “fierceness,” or “broad,” “spaciousness.”

*Family Connections*—While Rahab’s parents, brothers and sisters were alive at the time of her association with the spies Joshua sent out, we are not given any of their names ([Joshua 2:13](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Josh%202:13)). Some of the ancient Jewish fathers who held her in high reputation reckoned that she was the wife of Joshua himself, but in the royal genealogy of Jesus, Rahab is referred to as being the wife of Salmon, one of the two spies she sheltered. In turn, she became the mother of Boaz, who married Ruth from whose son, Obed, Jesse the father of David came, through whose line Jesus was born ([Matthew 1:5](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matt%201:5), where the asv reads, “Salmon begat Boaz of Rahab”—not Rachab). Salmon was a prince of the house of Judah, and thus, Rahab, the one time heathen harlot, married into one of the leading families of Israel and became an ancestress of our Lord, the other foreign ancestresses being Tamar, Ruth and Bathsheba. The gratitude Salmon felt for Rahab ripened into love, and when grace erased her former life of shame he made her his wife. Jerome’s comment of the inclusion of the four foreign women in Matthew’s genealogy is suggestive—

In it none of the holy women are included, only those whom the Scriptures blame, in order that He who came in behalf of sinners, Himself being born of sinners, might destroy the sins of all.

Both Jewish and Christian writers have tried to prove that Rahab was a different woman from the one whom the Bible always speaks of as a “harlot.” To them it was abhorrent that such a disreputable person should be included in our Lord’s genealogy and by Paul, as a woman of faith, and so her story has been distorted in order to further a scheme of salvation based upon human goodness. Although man’s sense of refinement may be shocked, the fact remains that Rahab, Tamar and Bathsheba were sinful women who were purged by God, and had their share in the royal line from which Jesus sprang.

It has been suggested that the word “harlot” can be translated “innkeeper,” thus making Rahab the landlady of a wayside tavern. Guesses have been made that she had been a concubine, such as Hagar and Zilpah had been, but that in Jericho she was a reputable woman identified with a respectable business. The Bible, however, makes no attempt to smooth over the unpleasant fact that Rahab had been a harlot. Endeavoring to understand her character, we have—

Her Sin

Three times over Rahab is referred to as “the harlot,” and the Hebrew term *zoonah* and the Greek word *porne* have at no time meant anything else but “harlot”—a woman who yields herself indiscriminately to every man approaching her. Rahab indulged in venal wantonness as traveling merchants came her way and were housed in her illfamed abode. Evidently Rahab had her own house and lived apart from her parents and family. Although she never lost her concern for her dear ones, perhaps she was treated as a moral leper. We are told that prostitution was not regarded with the same horror then, as now, but the Bible with one voice speaks of harlotry with moral revulsion and social ostracism.

Rahab’s house was built against the town wall with the roof almost level with the ramparts, and with a stairway leading up to a flat roof that appears to be a continuation of the wall. Thus, the people of Jericho knew all about the men who entered and left such a disreputable house. While her name came to be sanctified and ennobled, both Paul and James affix the label to her name, *Rahab the harlot*. She still carried the evil, distinguishing name, thus declaring the peculiar grace of the transforming power of God. How Rahab came to forsake her evil career we are not told!

Her Scheme

It was from some of the travelers Rahab entertained and sinned with, that she came to learn the facts of the Exodus of Israel, the miracle of the Red Sea, and the overthrow of Sihon and Og. So, when the two spies from Joshua sought cover in her house, she knew that sooner or later the king of Jericho would get to know of the accommodation she gave them. Here were two men, different from other men who came seeking her favors. These were men of God, not idolaters, bent on one mission, namely, the overthrow of the enemies of His people, and brilliantly she planned their protection and escape. The flax that she spread on her roof and the scarlet cord she used as a sign indicated that Rahab manufactured linen and also dyed it.

Rahab’s skillful scheme succeeded. The two Jewish spies were in desperate straits, seeing the Amorite pursuers were hot on their trail, but Rahab, although her safety and patriotism as an Amorite would be assured if she informed against the spies, decided to hide and preserve them. Seeing their hunted and dreaded look, Rahab assuredly said, “Fear not, I will not betray you nor your leader. Follow me,” and taking them up to the flat roof of her house, bade the men cover themselves completely with a pile of flax lying there to dry. Shortly after, when the pursuers had tracked the two spies to Rahab’s house, she met them with a plausible excuse that they were there but had left by way of the Eastern Gate. If they doubted her word, they could come in and search her house. But off the pursuers went to catch up with their prey, not knowing that the spies were being befriended by Rahab. As soon as the way was clear, under cover of night, she let the spies down from the window in the wall and, knowing the country, guided the spies in the best way to escape capture.

There are one or two features associated with this clever plan of Rahab which are worthy of notice. First of all, idolater though she had been, with a phase of immorality associated with her idolatrous life, she witnessed to a remarkable understanding of the sovereignty of the true God for she said to the spies—

I know that the Lord hath given you the land, and that your terror is fallen upon us.... The Lord, your God he is God in heaven above, and in earth beneath ([Joshua 2:9-11](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Josh%202:9-Josh%202:11)).

Harlot though Rahab had been, intuition from above had been given her that the spies were men of God, the forerunners of His people who were to execute His will, and that to take sides with them was to take sides with God Himself.

Further, there was in Rahab’s mind, no matter how faintly understood, a distinct call from God, that she was being singled out from her own idolatrous people to aid the God she had a growing conception of. Her faith of this God who worked great wonders was altogether marvelous and singular. It was such a call that made her willing to sacrifice her own nation—an act which would have been otherwise treasonable. The declaration of faith given by this Canaanite woman places her in a unique position among the women of the Bible.

Her Sacrifice

When Rahab hid the spies, put those who sought them on a false trail and helped the spies to escape and melt away into the shadows of night, and lay concealed until they could reach Joshua with their report, she took her life in her own hands. We cannot but admire her courage and willingness to risk her own neck. Had those spies been discovered hiding in her house, she would have died at the hands of the king of Jericho. Yet with a calm demeanor, and without the slightest trace of inner agitation, she met the searchers and succeeded in setting them out on a false trail. By her act Rahab was actually betraying her own country, and for such treason certain death would have been hers had she been found out. To hide spies was a crime punishable with death. Seeing the faces of the spies filled with fear, Rahab assured their hearts that she was on their side, and in spite of the sacrifice involved said, “I will not betray you. Follow me

Her Sign

As Rahab offered to shelter the spies and aid them in their escape, she received from them the promise that when they returned to her country, along with Joshua and his army, that she and her family would be spared alive.

Much has been said of Rahab’s deceit when confronted by the king of Jericho. She told a lie and Scripture forbids a lie or any “evil doing, that good may come of it” ([Romans 3:7, 8](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Rom%203:7,%20Rom%203:8)). But under the rules of war, Rahab is not to be blamed for her protection of those righteous forces set against the forces of evil. What the Bible commends is not her deception, but the faith which was the mainspring of her conduct. The characteristic feature of the scarlet rope was that it had to be placed outside the window for Joshua and his men to see. Those inside did not see the token of security. As that scarlet line, because of its color and sign of safety, speaks of the sacrificial work of Christ ([Hebrews 9:19, 22](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Heb%209:19,%20Heb%209:22)), the ground of our assurance of salvation is not experience or feelings within, but the token without. Like the Israelites, Rahab and her relatives might not have felt safe within the house, but the same promise prevailed, “When I see the blood, I will pass over you” ([Exodus 12:13](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Exod%2012:13)).

Her Salvation

Jericho was the worst of the cities of the Amorites, thus God commanded Joshua to destroy both the city and the inhabitants. By divine decree, it was to be given over to a perpetual desolation. When Joshua entered the city he set about the execution of the divine command, but respected the promise made to Rahab by the spies. Under the protection of the scarlet line, Rahab and all her kindred were brought out of the house. The spies came to her house, not to indulge in sin with Rahab, but to prepare the way for Joshua to take Jericho. She saved the spies not out of human pity, or because of expediency, but because she knew that they were servants of the Lord. In turn, she was saved. The spies she had hid brought her, and her father, her mother, her brothers, and all that she had out of her doomed house, and made them secure without the camp of Israel ([Joshua 6:17-25](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Josh%206:17-Josh%206:25)).

Her Status

The threefold reference to Rahab in the New Testament reveals how she became a faithful follower of the Lord. She had been taken from the dunghill and placed among the saints in the genealogy of the Saviour ([Matthew 1:5](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matt%201:5) where Rachab [kjv] and Rahab [asv], are to be identified as the same person). Her remarkable faith was a sanctifying faith leading her to a pure life and honorable career. As the result of her marriage to Salmon, one of the two spies whom she had saved, who “paid back the life he owed her by a love that was honourable and true,” Rahab became an ancestress in the royal line from which Jesus came as the Saviour of lost souls. “Poor Rahab, the muddy, the defiled, became the fountainhead of the River of the Water of Life which floweth out of the throne of God and of the Lamb.” Her name became sanctified and ennobled, and is worthy of inclusion among many saints.

Paul highly commends Rahab for her energetic faith and gives her a place on the illustrious roll of the Old Testament of those who triumphed by faith. “By faith the harlot Rahab perished not with them that believed not, when she received the spies with peace” ([Hebrews 11:31](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Heb%2011:31)). In fact, Rahab is the only woman besides Sarah who is designated as an example of faith in the great cloud of witnesses. What a manifestation of divine grace it is to find the one-time harlot ranked along with saints like Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Joseph, Moses and David!