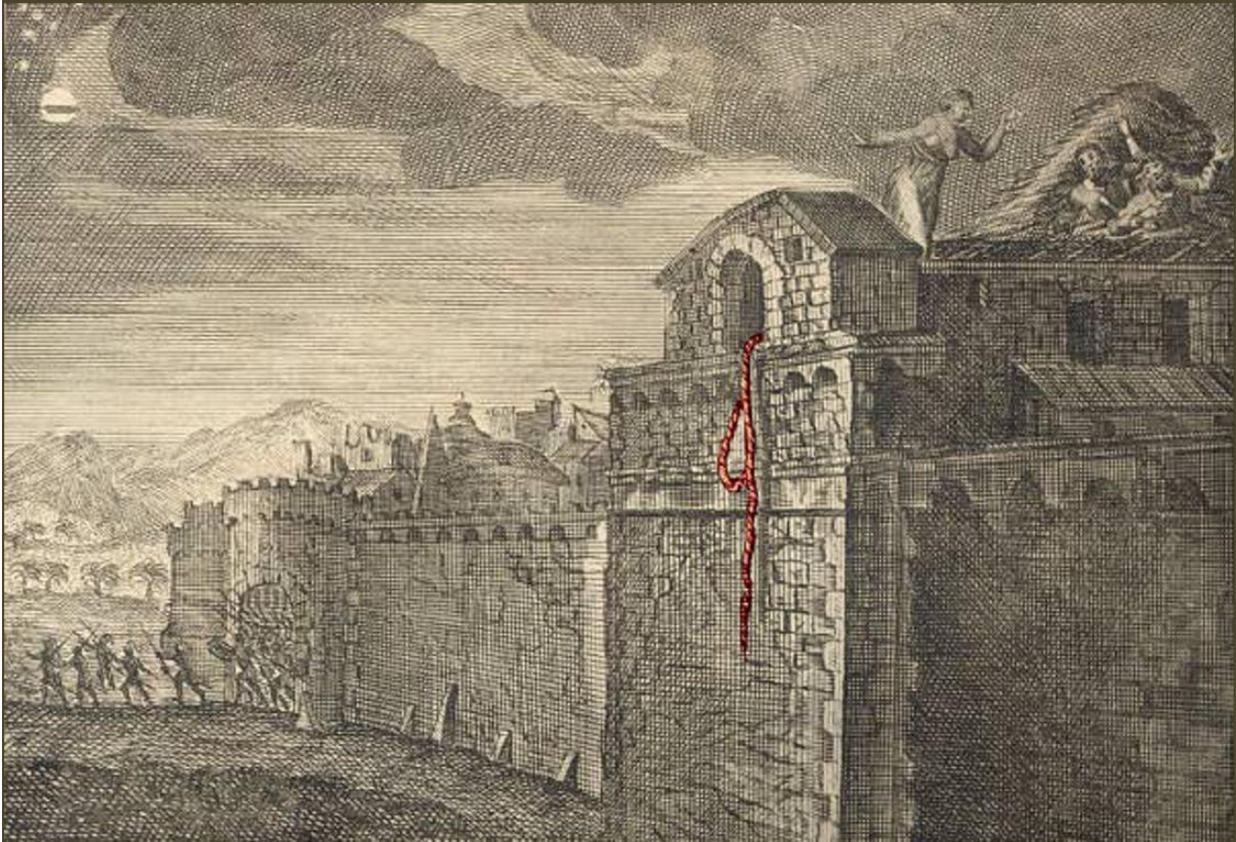


# THE STORY OF RAHAB

Faith in Unlikeliest Places



Stephen Gunawan

Joshua 2 is a very difficult chapter to discuss, because it a lot of very strange occurrences:

- This story sits in between Joshua 1, which tells of how Joshua became the leader of Israel after Moses, and Joshua 3, which was Joshua finally taking command to cross Jordan. Joshua 2 seems somehow redundant.
  - For one, the spies seemed unnecessary given how God had already granted them victory
  - But the stranger thing is that the story brings into light an unlikely character, Rahab.
- Rahab is a very unlikely character to bring out, for a few reasons:
  - **A woman's story in a patriarchal culture.** The Jews' culture was patriarchal, and seldom rarely brings out women as part of the main characters. But as we shall understand in the New Testament, Rahab was not a mere side story. She is a very important part of the story. We shall come back to this later.
  - **A gentile woman.** Rahab was a Canaanite; therefore a Gentile with whom the Israelites were asked not to associate.
  - **A sinful woman.** Rahab is depicted as a prostitute. Now this is strange in every way. If I were the writer of the Book of Joshua, this is surely a detail I would omit. It just creates too much confusion. The spies went into Canaan and hid in a prostitute's house? Now what kind of rumor would that create? And a prostitute now taking a central figure in the story couldn't be all that important, or could it?
  - **A questionable action.** What did Rahab do to save the spies? She lied! It was what many of us nowadays call a *white lie*. So this is troublesome. Rahab becomes the bigger argument on whether or not white lies are acceptable, and whether it is sinful. Okay, just a tease. If white lies are acceptable just because God was using it to save the spies, would that make prostitution acceptable too, because it was in the same package that we opened? No, no, don't get me wrong here. I am not arguing for lies (much less for prostitution!) But I am saying that we should make stronger arguments rooted in biblical principles and not make petty arguments. Polygamy is not alright just because King David did it. Lying is not alright just because Abraham did it. Going to prostitutes is not alright just because Judah (thought that he) did it. The Bible is an honest book that tells the story as it happened. Stories of a great God using fallible people again and again. It is not supposed to make us compromise with sin, or taken to the other extreme, be self-righteous about sin.
  - **An unlikely faith.** But the strangest thing that eclipses all the above (and should eclipse all of the above) is the fact that Rahab displays faith in God from the most unlikely circumstance. See, as a woman in that time she would most probably be uneducated. As a gentile she had never seen God's signs and wonders personally. As a prostitute by profession, she would need to harden her heart and close herself to moral standards and to God if she were to have any remaining dignity to live on as a human being. But she shows the greatest of faith; one we will all have to learn from today. And this is all, to say the least, bizarre.

What do we say to the story of Rahab? How do we interpret her story in the light of (especially) the New Covenant world we are living under? Well, let us look at the New Testament and see how she is brought up again; and again in the most unlikely places.

Rahab made it to the New Testament. Yes! This unlikely and insignificant woman was deemed important enough to be mentioned in the New Testament. And not only mentioned as a cameo, but mentioned in two of the greatest and most honorable lists of the New Testament!

- **The Genealogy of Jesus Christ.** The very first list that Rahab made it into was the very genealogy of Jesus Christ found in **Matthew 1**. Yes, it was that same Rahab. A Canaanite. Now Matthew 1 was a genealogy that proves the royal lineage of Jesus Christ. “*A record of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham*” (**Mat 1:1**). Matthew picked up two names to be the most important ancestor of Christ, and unlike Luke who took it all the way to Adam, stopped only at Abraham. Why David and Abraham? Simply put, to prove the royal lineage of Jesus Christ. God’s promise to Abraham was that He would make Abraham into nations, and that kings will come out of him (**Gen 17:4-8**). A little note here, that God now says *nations*, in plural; when in **Gen 12:2** it was “*a great nation*,” in singular. God’s promise of salvation was never meant to exclusively stay within the Jewish boundaries. And the second name was David; the greatest king Israel ever had, and one to whom God promised a lasting kingdom (**2 Sam 7:8-16**, especially verse 16). There is one Seed that is to come from David, that will establish this eternal Kingdom that God promised David, and Matthew proves that Jesus Christ is that Seed.

Well, that was great. Abraham, David. These are enormous figures in the Jewish faith. But the genealogy in Matthew 1 included some funny names; especially the names of 5 women who should never come up in a patriarchal genealogy. And these women were not likely names we would normally include.

- **Tamar.** I would have liked to have simply introduce her as the wife of Judah, but the story was not so simple. But the confusion with Tamar would be this: she pretended to be a prostitute and slept with Judah and bore him a son. Is that something we want to put as a legacy? And the story of Judah and Tamar also seems strangely misplaced in **Genesis 38**, and even an abrupt interruption to the stories of Joseph in Gen 37 and 39. But Judah’s comment in **Gen 38:26** gives us hint that the story of Tamar was more than meets the eye. Judah said, “*she is more righteous than I, since I wouldn’t give my son Shelah*,” this inferring that what she did was what ought to have been done, and that it was done for a righteous intent (though perhaps not a righteous modus).

Okay, we may need a slightly longer explanation for this, since their culture is so far removed from us. What had transpired in Gen 38 was called Levirate marriage (or in Hebrew, Yibbum), which was the marrying of a deceased brother’s childless widow, and it was a common practice in the Ancient Near East Culture, especially in cultures which were patriarchal in nature. And biblically, it was even commanded in **Deut 25:5-10**. And the reason given for it was to “*carry on the name of the great brother so that his name will not be blotted out from Israel*” (**v. 6**). Now, if seen this way, the story seems to make more sense. Er had died, and as the firstborn of Judah, the duty now fell to Onan to carry on his brother’s lineage. However, in **verse 9** we are told that Onan did not want that because the child wouldn’t be his, and God killed him for it. And when Tamar got the idea that even Judah wouldn’t give Shelah to her, she resorted to deception. But it seems to me now that there were two opposing desires here. One was of Onan and Judah. They seemed to not want the lineage to continue. Judah’s wife had died, so he would have no more offspring. And even if he had, the levirate marriage was required by law so much so that before this duty is performed with Tamar, any child of the family is lawless. But the second desire is that of Tamar’s, and arguably, that of God’s. Tamar could have done what was stated in **Deut 25** and released herself from the requirements of the law had she approached the elders at the gate. But that would mean that Judah’s line would stop right there and then. Now God’s plan would be to continue the lineage of kings through Judah, and so it was impossible for Judah to have no more descendants. This is why Tamar did what she did in righteousness probably because she did not want Judah’s name to be

blotted out of history. She might have done it the only way she knew how, in her unlikely faithfulness to the family of Judah.

- **Rahab.** Well, she is the one we are discussing, so we should finish the other women before coming back to her.
- **Ruth.** Was a Gentile of Gentiles, Moabite woman. Note that it was impossible for a Moabite to be grafted into the Israelite family (**Deut 23:3**). But it was her unlikely faithfulness to Naomi that made her declare, *“where you go, I will go, and where you stay, I will stay. Your people shall be my people and your God my God”* (**Ruth 1:16**). Ruth disregarded the definite suffering she would have if she stayed with Naomi; but Naomi apparently had been an effective witness, seeing as to how her two daughters-in-law had taken such a great liking to her. Orpah parted with her reluctantly, but Ruth insisted to stay. And what she did in spite of the risk grafted her not only to the promised people, but also to the lineage of the promised Messiah.
- **Bathsheba.** Was only mentioned as the mother of David and one who had been Uriah the Hittite’s wife. Well in her defense, Bathsheba had little choice in the matter. She could not have rejected King David, not in those times. And the fact that she mourned for Uriah when he died (**2 Sam 11:26**) may have hinted that she was not complicit of the crime. But her story may be better represented as one of genuine repentance. Though unwilling, she was part of the adultery; and God’s punishment to David applied to her as well – their son who was conceived in adultery died as a punishment. But David’s repentance gave them restoration, and their second son, Solomon, was one of great wisdom and a chosen by God to continue David’s lineage.
- **Mary.** Well, perhaps when seen in the context of the New Testament, the four women’s stories were those that would prepare Mary for what was to happen to her. She was a righteous and godly woman, but chosen by God to bear an unlikely task. And she will be misunderstood; taken as a sinner for conceiving outside of marriage. And her worshipful response to God’s call and how she regarded such painful duty as “blessed” really is a testament to what kind of woman she was.

We’re back to Rahab. She was an unlikely character in an unlikely land performing an unlikely act for an unlikely purpose. But it was indeed because of all these unlikeliness that we should be stunned at her faith. We had discussed in the session “Pharaoh and Egypt” that the 10 Plagues in Egypt was meant to show that there is no god like the Lord. Now the firsthand witnesses of these events were the Egyptians and the Israelites. But despite having witnessed firsthand the power of God, the Egyptians perished, and the Israelites are still stiff-necked (and their first generation perished in the desert, too).

But here was Rahab. A sinner, who had seen none of the signs and wonders in Egypt, and who had not been taught in the law of God. Yet her very confession was strikingly beautiful (**Jos 2:9-11**).

- **“I know that the Lord has given this land to you...” (v. 9).** She immediately took by faith what had taken the Israelites one full generation to learn, and that without being a firsthand eyewitness. We see that she was able to grasp what many in history failed, and that is, *“blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed”* (**John 20:29**).
- **“We have heard how the Lord dried up the Red Sea for you when you came out of Egypt...” (v. 10).** Here we are given the secret to her admirable faith. She heard and therefore believed. *“For faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the Word of God”* (**Rom 10:17** KJV).
- **“For the Lord your God is God in heaven above and on earth below” (v.11).** Again, she got the message that was missed by the Egyptians and the Israelites. The purposes of the signs were to

show that there is no god like the Lord our God (**Ex 8:10**) in all the earth (**Ex 9:15**) by defeating all of the Egyptian idols (**Ex 12:12**). Rahab knew this without being a firsthand witness.

- **A Faith Resulting in Action.** Remember the second list I said Rahab appeared in? Well it was in Hebrews 11, the list of the heroes of faith. Rahab made it into the few whom the writer of Hebrews chose to describe as examples of living by faith. There were many more of whom he could have written, and even the writer admitted himself (**Heb 11:32**), but Rahab was found amongst those. Well one could say that she was mentioned because of chronology, that the writer of Hebrews gave a chronological examples of people from the time of Abel to the time of Joshua. But for her to even get a mention was something that was highly unlikely, for the writer only chose representatives of each age.

The remaining mentions of Rahab were those of faith in action. In Hebrews 11, she welcomed the spies and was therefore counted amongst those who were obedient (**Heb 11:31**), and in **James 2:25** she was again mentioned, as one who was considered righteous for what she did when she gave lodging for the spies therefore completing her faith by her actions. Rahab had everything to lose. If she hadn't been utterly convinced that God would absolutely give Israel the land, she would not have done what she did. The king of Jericho himself gave a direct order for her to surrender the spies (**Jos 2:2-3**). Hiding the spies would have been seen as rebellion and conspiracy against the state. She would have lost her head had the Israelite not won. But Rahab knew that there was no way the Israelite would lose, for it was not the Israelite fighting, it was the Lord, in whom she placed total confidence.

See, true faith always inspires action, for otherwise, we are not truly convinced of what we profess to believe. In the words of Paul, Rahab was fully persuaded that God is completely able to defeat the enemy and grant her salvation (**2 Tim 1:12**). This full persuasion in God is what faith ought to be.

## Conclusion

I would like to end with the questions I began with. Joshua 2 seems filled with unlikeliness and misplaced stories. But this was what makes it so wonderful and so inspiring.

Joshua sent out the spies, not because he distrusted God, but rather because he trusted Him. He spied the land because God's guidance and assurance does not mean that we can be arrogant and haphazard. At times, God gives the "what," but not the "how," which is what is happening to Joshua. At times, He gives the "how," without telling the "why" (eg. when He asked Abram to leave his country). When God gave the instructions for the Tabernacle, He gave the "what" and also the "how" but the "why" was not fully given, hidden in shrouded mystery.

But with Rahab, the unlikeliness of her coming to faith WAS indeed the intended story. I have been told all my life that it is easier for people in my generation to come to faith in Jesus Christ because we live in a country with no war and no famine, and that if people lived close to death they would be interested in survival more than they are in religion. But **Deuteronomy 8** was a chapter dedicated to the warning that we are inclined to forget God when we are comfortable. At times, strive and suffering are what we need for us to cry out to God for mercy and aid. At other times, strive and strive and suffering do cause people to curse at God and to question Him. At times, comfort and peace are what we need to thank Him. At other times, comfort and peace causes us to forget Him and be arrogant. **Proverbs 30:8-9** details this for us, of how both poverty and riches could cause us to stray from the path of faith. This tendency is sin living in us. And this verse also explains to us why the prayer

for daily bread as taught by Christ Himself is so important, because it keeps us in check, ever reliant on the Lord our Jehovah Jireh. Rahab came to believe in God in the most unlikely circumstances, proving that those whom men think would be impossible to save is indeed possible with God (**Mat 19:26**).

But the story of Rahab is still a story of God. It is a story of Jesus Christ the Good Shepherd who lies down His life for His sheep and who looks for His sheep. **John 10:16** tells of other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. Christ was not willing that even one should be lost. God shepherded the whole nation of Israel, but He also is one who goes and look for that one lost sheep and brings it back joyfully on His shoulders (**Luk 15:4-7**). I tell you what the story might have looked like in the heavenly realm. Christ looked for Rahab in the unlikely places; yes, just one insignificant Rahab; and brought her back joyfully on His shoulders. And the angels in heaven rejoiced to see Rahab grafted into the very people of God.

The story of Rahab was the story of the Good Shepherd. Have you known this Good Shepherd? Is He calling out to you to bring you home? If so, do not harden your heart any longer to His voice today.

Soli Deo Gloria.