

# Rahab

I know what people think of me. I can hear them whisper as I pass them in the street “that’s Rahab, the Harlot”. It seems I will never outlive that name. It’s justified though ... the stories you’ve heard ... they’re true. There was a time in my life ... before Salmon, and little Boaz ... Well ... I wasn’t a very nice person. You see, I used to run an inn near the city gates of Jericho, but it seemed as time went the money from the inn got to be less and less and I tried dying fabric, red was my specialty, but the travelers who came my way always seemed to want more. I didn’t mean to have that kind of life ... it just sort of ... happened. It’s not hard to imagine really. Jericho was a very wicked place.

**The inhabitants of Jericho were immoral. The priestesses were temple prostitutes and Sodomites were male temple prostitutes. The temples of Baal, Ashtoreth, and other Canaanites were centers of vice. The worship of these gods consisted of gross and extravagant sexual parties held in the center of their temples. Immoral indulgence was a means of worship for the pagan Canaanites, and they murdered their first-born children as a sacrifice to the same gods. One archaeological find revealed a number of jars containing the remains of children and new born babies believed to have been sacrificed to Baal.**

Travelers would come and go passing through my home and I would listen to all of their stories about their gods, but one night two men came to my door with a different request. They wanted to stay! Many men came to my house, but few ever actually stayed! I still remember exactly how they looked. Poorly dressed ... wanderers ... maybe. Maybe worse. I accepted their request but because I was unsure of them, I took them to the roof. Before long the city guards came to my door. They demanded that I give them the two men who had come to my house. They claimed they were spies of Israel. Israelites! So that’s who they were. They weren’t wanderers, they were spies! My mind was spinning. Do I give them up?! Should I protect them?! What if all of the things I had heard were true. That these people knew a God who would part seas for them, so they could cross on dry land. They knew a God so powerful that none of the gods of other nations

could stand before Him. Sihon and Og, both strong Amorite kings had been quickly defeated. What of these peoples' God? Every nation has a God. I knew that. But no one's God had ever caused water to stand up, so they could cross on dry land. For forty years I had heard of their stories of how their God had fed them food from the heavens and of how He led them by a pillar of fire. Some people said the Israelites' God was going to give them the whole land of Canaan ... including Jericho. These men had not come for my services ... they had come for their Promised Land! They were on the roof, not in my bed. I knew in my heart these stories were true. Jericho was only 6 miles from the Jordan River and from my rooftop you could see that pillar of fire in the distance at night. The rooftop. It was at that moment that I made my decision.

**Rahab didn't give them over to the guards. She acknowledged that the men had been there, but she told the guards instead that they had already left just before the city gates closed for the night. In an instant, the guards were gone. She went back to the rooftop where they hid underneath the flax she had laid there to dry in the sun. Before the spies had gone to sleep Rahab secured a promise from them.**

Please swear to me by the Lord that you will show kindness to my family, because I have shown kindness to you. Give me a sure sign that you will spare the lives of my father and mother, my brothers and sisters, and all who belong to them, and that you will save us from death.

**That had been her plea. And to Rahab's surprise the spies agreed. Our lives for your lives, they assured her. It was settled then. Rahab's destiny had forever changed in the course of an evening and now all she had to do was wait ...**

And hope the guards didn't come back. I waited until late into the night and then I let them down from my window. I used one of the scarlet cords from my bedroom. They told me to leave it there, so they would know which house to save. I watched as they ran into the hills. My heart was pounding. If the guards found out I would be mutilated. They would gouge out my eyes, and cut off my tongue and my hands, then they would drag me through the streets to the center of town where everyone would stone me to death. Then they would kill my family. And all I could do was wait, and hope. It seemed like forever.

**With every wisp of wind, the cord scraped against the concrete sill of Rahab's window. It dangled down the outer wall of Jericho, stopping short of the ground. To and fro it gently swayed, making its faint sound and marking the days, constantly reminding her that it was either the sign of salvation and safety, or the mark of a traitor. The spies of Israel had used the cord to escape from her home, known more for men clamoring to get inside than outside. Rahab had been a harlot, but as the days went by she began to change. Something was different about her now. Her heart was less and less burdened with fear, her countenance unstrained. Yes, the city folk still whispered when she walked by, but now she could think of the cord, think of what it meant, and crease a small smile. She knew the cord swaying in her window, scarlet in color, was a once saving her life and marking her rebirth. Perhaps this is how Rahab's life unfolded in the few days after her encounter with two Israelite spies who she protected from her king's men and then directed to safety. Chapters two and six of the book of Joshua detail the story of this Canaanite woman of ill repute. She aided and abetted in espionage against her own city, struck a deal for the safety of herself and her family, and committed gross treason against her people all because of one fact: she came to the conclusion of who God really is. Rahab had committed her soul to the Lord.**

But that didn't make the waiting easy. I knew what I had done. Every move I made was full of risks. I had to convince my family ... all of them ... to come into my home and stay there. They laughed at me. They even mocked me. But we all knew the army of Israel was coming. Already word had come into our city that they had crossed the Jordan River and that the waters had parted once again so they could cross on dry land. They were camped just outside our city. No one could come or go. It was weeks before they finally came and all the while I had to keep my family inside and just wait. You can't imagine how many times I had to share my belief with my family. I would get so frustrated with their questions and their mocking. But I knew for my family it was a matter of life or death and I was not going to stop believing. I was not going to pull that cord from my window and run away. I was going to wait.

**And finally, they army came but not with bows and arrows or swords and spears. They just came and marched once around the city each day for six days with the priests leading the army, as trumpets sounded. Each day Rahab waited**

**not knowing what would really happen next. What would happen if they kept their promise and saved her family? Would their people really accept her, a prostitute, as one of their own? What if they took her prisoner? What if ... what if life outside of Jericho didn't end up any better than life inside. But the time of waiting was over. On the seventh day the army came and marched seven times. The trumpets blasted, and the people shouted, and the walls came tumbling down. Too bad for Rahab. Her house was right up there built upon beams stretched over those two walls. Two very thick walls. 6 and 12 feet thick. But God kept his work to Rahab and because that cord was still hanging from her window, her house wasn't touched.**

Now you can imagine how that looked. Those mighty walls of Jericho laying in a pile, and my house, not much more than a shabby, empty shell, still standing tall above all of that destruction. My life had been like that house. Shabby and empty, a simple shell of a person. The Israelite army destroyed my entire city and, yet I rejoiced because my heart was now full of awe and love for their God ... my God. The two men came and took my family and I from that home and led us to a place outside their camp. I had to shear my hair and stay there for a while so the sores on my body could heal. But then Salmon came, and took me as his wife and my family and I joined the nation of Israel. And now I have little Boaz. And while people still snicker as I walk through the streets, I don't mind so much anymore.

**Today people still snicker and balk at the mention of Rahab's name. Imagine what it was like for her to live her entire life with that kind of past forever in front of her. Sure, probably no one here is a prostitute like Rahab was, but the Bible tells us that all of us have prostituted our heart to begins and things besides God. The Bible tells us that we've allowed these hearts of ours to be conquered and taken captive by God. And in order to come to God we're going to have to take risks. And we're going to have to face times when all we can do is wait. We're going to have to be open and honest and real with ourselves, with God and with each other, and sometimes that's going to hurt. We're going to have to surrender sinful practices and desires; in fact, we're going to have to surrender our very selves to God, and sometimes we're going to wonder what the outcome of all that will be. And like Rahab, we will have to simply continue to commit ourselves to the mercy of God.**