

10. The writer drew his next example of faith (11:31) from the same episode, namely the fall of Jericho. But this example is unique in that it involves a person outside of the Abrahamic covenant family. The same can be said of Abel, Enoch, and Noah (11:4-7), but they lived before Abraham was born. Abel died without offspring, but Enoch and Noah were in the line of descent that led to Abraham. And so, while technically they weren't part of the Abrahamic *covenant* household that originated with Abraham himself, they were part of his family as progenitors. Rahab, on the other hand, had no familial connection with Abraham; she was a *Canaanite*. This makes her unique in the Hebrews writer's catalog – not just because of her lineage, but also her crucial contribution to the concept of faith and the role it plays in God's intent for the human race.

First of all, the writer's inclusion of Rahab shows that he regarded her faith as being of the same nature and quality as the other individuals in his catalog. There is only one sort of faith that is *truly* faith, and this faith isn't in any way associated with ethnicity, heritage or life circumstance; it is purely a matter of one's *essential* relationship with the God who created all human beings in His own image and likeness. Rahab possessed the same *kind* of faith as Joshua and the Israelites, but her faith also had the same *content*: she, too, believed that the God of Israel was going to deliver her city into His people's hands; He would surely fulfill His promise to give them Canaan as their inheritance.

- a. Consistent with all of his examples, the writer gave only a brief summary of Rahab's faith. He took the same approach he used to describe the faith of her Israelite counterparts, which was to affirm her faith by pointing to its outcome: "*By faith Rahab did not perish along with those who were disobedient, after she had welcomed the spies in peace.*" He was referring to Rahab's deliverance when Jericho was sacked, but as it was the outcome of a previous circumstance. That circumstance was Rahab's interaction with Israelite spies.

The second chapter of Joshua recounts this episode, and Rahab enters the story when the two men sent by Joshua to spy out the city took lodging in her home (2:1). Rahab was a prostitute, and she likely plied her trade out of her residence, which has led some to question the spies' scruples. But the text indicates that they sought lodging with her as cover, not for her services. They were strangers in Jericho, and the city's residents were especially vigilant with the Israelites camped just across the Jordan in Shittim. Taking up lodging with one of Jericho's prostitutes was the best way for the spies to not draw attention to themselves. For countless merchants and travelers passed through Jericho, and many undoubtedly sought the diversion of female company during their stay.

Staying with Rahab was a shrewd decision, but someone evidently recognized the two men as Israelites and reported them to the king as spies sent to assess the city and determine its weaknesses. The king immediately sent soldiers to Rahab's home to arrest them, but she explained that she didn't know who the men were or where they were from, but they'd only just left in order to exit the city before the gates were shut for the night. She encouraged the king's men that they should be able to overtake them on the road if they went after them right away (2:2-5).

But Rahab had actually hidden the men under bundles of flax laid out to dry on the roof of her home. After the soldiers left, she went back to the spies and explained that she could get them out of the city by letting them down on a rope dropped from her window, which was in the outer wall. But before doing so, she pled with the men to save her and her family when the fateful day came and the city fell. Rahab was fully convinced of that outcome, and not because she feared the strength and skill of the Israelite army; indeed, she knew as well as anyone that Jericho was nearly invincible. Forces more impressive than Israel had failed to breach the wall, and the city was well prepared for a prolonged siege. No, Rahab's confidence in Israel's victory was her confidence in Israel's *God*. The word of His astonishing triumph over the Egyptians had spread far and wide, as had the news of Israel's victory over other kings and armies as they made their way toward Canaan. Even more, the talk was that Israel's God had granted these victories as part of His determination to give His people the entire land of Canaan, which included the great city of Jericho. Rahab was sure that Yahweh, the Israelite God, would prevail and the city would fall, but she also hoped that, through His servants, He would show mercy to her and her family (2:8-13).

- b. And so Rahab's *faith* was her resolute confidence in the God of Israel, whom she perceived to be the one true God (2:11). If He was determined to give His people the land of Canaan, nothing would prevent that outcome. He'd made that intent known to the Egyptians, and the word had spread throughout the region. Likely most in Jericho had heard of this God and His designs, but Rahab was unique in that she *believed* the reports. And her conviction was shown to be *faith* by the fact that she acted upon it; her actions demonstrated that she was thoroughly convinced of the things she claimed to believe (ref. James 2:14-26).

Thus her faith delivered her and her household from the slaughter and devastation, and the Joshua account records that she joined herself to the Israelite community from that day forward (6:25). Indeed, Yahweh rewarded her faith by grafting her – a Canaanite prostitute – into the line that would yield David and eventually His incarnate Son (Matthew 1:1-5). Rahab wasn't the only non-Israelite in the messianic line; Rahab's son Boaz married a Moabite woman named Ruth, who became David's great-grandmother. But Rahab was unique in that she was a pagan woman of ill-repute, an unclean woman despised by those around her. And yet God saw fit to reveal Himself to her and have her be part of the human essence of His beloved Son – the human Son who embodies all of the fullness of His own divine nature and character. Could there be a more profound glimpse into the Creator's loving and gracious restorative intent for His world?

- c. One last consideration is implied by this episode, but neither the Hebrews writer nor James addressed it directly. And that is the matter of Rahab's *lie* and its implication for her faith. Both James and the Hebrews writer associated Rahab's faith with her protection of the Israelite spies, but her lie to the king's men was fundamental to this protection (ref. again Joshua 2:1-5). This raises the question of how her lie is to be understood in the context of her faith.

Christian scholars and ethicists through the centuries have sought to resolve this difficulty in various ways. This is especially challenging where the Decalogue (which forbids false witness in its ninth commandment) is regarded as the core articulation of God's moral and ethical standard for human beings. On the one hand, then, the Scripture recognizes false witness as a fundamental sin that brings people under God's just condemnation. (In Roman Catholicism, willful lying is often included in the catalog of "mortal sins" that require absolution from an ordained priest.) On the other hand, Rahab's lie was a key component of the protective care that was her act of faith. These two considerations frame the difficulty, and any acceptable solution must uphold the truth of both of them. The easiest solution is to separate Rahab's lie from her faith.

- One way to do this is to associate her faith with her *inward motivations* and not her actions. In other words, faith moved Rahab to protect the spies, whereas circumstance pressed her to commit the sin of lying. But James disallows the separation of faith and action. And in the case of Rahab, *he defined her faith in terms of her "work" of welcoming and protecting the spies (2:25)*. That work of faith had her lie at its center.
- Another approach employs the concept of "the greater good": Yes, Rahab's lie made her guilty of sin, but she lied in order to protect someone else. She wasn't lying for her own sake, but for the well-being of the Israelite spies. Thus God judged her sin according to its context; her guilt was tempered by her motivation and goal.

But the difficulty disappears with a closer consideration of the Bible's understanding of the sin of false witness. First and most basic, the Scripture defines all sin as a violation of the obligation of *love* (Matthew 22:35-40; John 15:12-17; Romans 13:8-10). So also, the Decalogue commandment regarding lying prohibits false witness against one's neighbor: *You shall not testify against your neighbor as a false witness* (Exodus 20:16). The issue here isn't factual correctness as such, but testimony that harms another in an unwarranted way; testimony that violates the obligation of love. *Viewed from this perspective, it's clear that this commandment pertains to facts as much as untruths*. Anytime testimony works to the detriment of another, it is a violation of the ninth commandment, which also has its fullness in the "law" of love (cf. Exodus 23:1-3). This is why God condemns *flattery*, even though the flatterer is typically truthful in his commendation. He speaks what is true, but with ulterior motives; *his testimony is false because it is driven by guile; it is false because he is false*. In that way he bears false testimony contra his neighbor.

This understanding, then, places Rahab's "lie" in an entirely different light. She said things that weren't factually true, but she spoke out of love for the Israelite spies and commitment to their God. Far from being self-serving, Rahab's words jeopardized her own life to protect the lives of the spies. Her "lie" need not be separated from her faith; it was an act of love that truthfully expressed her faith.