

Joshua 2:1-24

Rahab Hides the Spies

Joshua 2:1 - "And Joshua the son of Nun sent out of Shittim two men to spy secretly, saying, Go view the land, even Jericho. And they went, and came into an harlot's house, named Rahab, and lodged there."

"secretly" = *cheresh* - to be silent, also a word for "smiths" or craftsmen, and also for persons deaf and dumb, coming from the same root. Also used in a bad sense for devising magic.

Rashi - "secretly": He said to them: Disguise yourselves as deaf-mutes (חרשים) so that they will not conceal their affairs from you. Another explanation is: חרש [with a "shin"] is like חרש [with a "sin" or "samech," namely pottery.] Load yourselves with pots so that you appear as potters.

Wouldn't sending spies exhibit a lack of faith on Joshua's part? We asked the same thing about Moses sending spies in **Numbers 13 & 14**. Moses sent spies another time to scout out Jaazer, an Amorite city (**Numbers 21:32**). The rabbis wrestled with the question, but there doesn't seem to be anything inherently wrong with this.

They were not sent to spy the land, as the spies in the times of Moses, to see what sort of land it was, and what sort of people dwelt in it; but to reconnoitre it, to know where it was best to lead the people at first, and encamp; and particularly to observe the passes and roads leading to Jericho.

Rahab - the Targums always refer to her as an "innkeeper," not a harlot. But the Hebrew *zanah* clearly means harlot or whore. The Septuagint and the New Testament references (**Hebrews 11:31**, **James 2:25**) translate this as harlot. She could very well have also been an innkeeper.

Origen, in his third homily on Joshua, remarks that, "As the first Jesus sent his spies before him and they were received into the harlot's house, so the second Jesus sent His forerunners, whom the publicans and harlots gladly received." He saw Rahab (whose name means "wide, spacious, breadth") as representing the Church which extends throughout the world, and receives sinners.

"What is breadth, therefore, if not this Church of Christ, which is gathered together from sinners as if from prostitution?" (Orig. Hom. Jos. 3.5).

Like Mary Magdalene, (**Luke 7:37**) under the Gospel, Rahab was "a woman that was a sinner," yet, because of her faith, not only was she pardoned, but exalted to the highest honor, entering the genealogy of Jesus.

Jewish tradition says Rahab was among the four most beautiful women the world has ever known: Sarah, Rahab, Abigail and Esther. Anyone who mentioned her name,

saying, "Rahab, Rahab," immediately lusted after her. R. Nahman responded to this: "But I say 'Rahab, Rahab,' and nothing happens to me!", and he was answered: "This refers to one who knows her and is intimate with her" (Babylonian Talmud, Megillah 15a).

Since there was no prince or mighty one who did not visit Rahab the harlot, she was well acquainted with people's thoughts. When she reported to the spies who came to her house: "no man had any more spirit left because of you" (**Joshua 2:11**), she alluded to her professional knowledge of the dimensions of the people's fears, because their apprehension affected their vitality when with her (Babylonian Talmud, Zevahim 116a–b).

The Jewish tradition is that she was ten years of age when Israel came out of Egypt; that she played the harlot during the 40 years they were in the wilderness, became the wife of Joshua, who had daughters by her, from whom came eight prophets: Jeremiah, Hilkiyah, Maasia, Hanameel, Shallum, Baruch, the son of Neriah, Ezekiel, the son of Buzi, and some say Huldah the prophetess; but scripture records that she married Salmon, a prince of the tribe of Judah (**Matthew 1:5**).

It was God's providence that led the spies to Rahab, who was already disposed to befriend them.

It's likely that they met with Rahab outside of Jericho (compare **Genesis 38:14**), and ascertained where in the city she dwelt, and that they might entrust themselves to her care.

When Rahab heard of the miracles that God had performed for Israel when He parted the Red Sea for them, she wanted to cleave to Israel, as portrayed in Jer. 16:19: "O Lord, my strength and my stronghold, my refuge in a day of trouble, to You nations shall come from the ends of the earth." When the Lord performs miracles for Israel, the non-Jewish nations shall come to adhere to Him (Ex. Rabbah 27:4).

"Lodged there" - they lay down to rest, but never got to.

Joshua 2:2 - "And it was told the king of Jericho, saying, Behold, there came men in here tonight of the children of Israel to search out the country."

No doubt he knew about the large army of Israelites who had defeated Sihon and Og and were camped on his border, probably only seven miles away. His own intelligence service had noticed the two spies with Rahab.

A Test of Faith

Joshua 2:3 - "And the king of Jericho sent unto Rahab, saying, Bring forth the men that are come to thee, which are entered into thine house: for they be come to search out all the country."

This is the moment when faith is tested, loyalty shows itself and a true courage is displayed. A hundred stories and films contain a type of this moment. When confronted with the full power and resources of the enemy, can we resist and maintain our allegiance to God? Persecution throughout history has counted on faith breaking, and fear winning. Rahab barely knows Yahweh, and has only heard of His miracles.

Her actions are justly described as a great and generous act of faith:

- **Hebrews 11:31** - "By faith the harlot Rahab perished not with them that believed not, when she had received the spies with peace."

Rahab was probably near the lowest rung on the social ladder - perhaps seen as a worn out and discarded prostitute. Disillusioned with her life and culture, God had prepared her to believe.

Joshua 2:4 - "And the woman took the two men, and hid them, and said thus, There came men unto me, but I wist not whence they were:"

Rashi - "and had hidden them": [lit. "and had hidden him." *va-tizpeno*—in the singular] Some Scriptural passages treat the plural as singular. [In this case,] because she hastened to hide them, and [she hid them] in a narrow place as though they were one man.

Phinehas and Caleb

There's a curious rabbinical tradition about this incident.
See <https://www.aish.com/tp/i/moha/48916542.html>

Although the spies were probably young men, tradition says they were Phinehas and Caleb.

When they came to seek them, what did Rahab do? She took them away to hide them. Phinehas said to her: 'I am a priest and priests are compared to angels' as it says, For the priest's lips should keep knowledge, and they should seek the law at his mouth; for he is the angel of the Lord hosts, and an angel, if he wishes, can be visible, and if he wishes he can be invisible.

"How can we infer that prophets are compared to angels?"

"From the fact that it says in reference to Moses, 'And sent an angel, and brought us forth out of Egypt' (Numbers 20:16). Was it not Moses who brought them out? Certainly, but you can infer from this that prophets are compared to angels. Similarly it says, And the angel of the Lord came up from Gilgal to Bochim. And he said:... I made you go up out of Egypt (Judges 2:1). But was it not Phinehas who said this? Yes, but you can infer from it that the prophets are called angels. Phinehas, then, said to Rahab: 'I am a priest and do not need to be hidden. Hide Caleb, my companion. I will stand before them and they will not see me.'" (Midrash Rabbah - Numbers 26:1)

Moses, too, was angelic in his subsisting without food or drink, when he behaved as the angels during the duration of his stay on Mount Sinai.

Rabbi Tanhuma in Rabbi Eleazar's name and Rabbi Abun in Rabbi Meir's name said: "The proverb runs, when you enter a town, follow its customs (When in Rome, do as Rome does.) Above [in the celestial sphere] there is no eating and drinking; hence when Moses ascended on high he appeared like them [the angels], as it says, 'Then I abode in the mount forty days and forty nights; I did neither eat bread nor drink water' (Deut. 9:9). (Midrash Rabbah - Genesis 48:14)

Joshua 2:5 - "And it came to pass about the time of shutting of the gate, when it was dark, that the men went out: whither the men went I wot not: pursue after them quickly; for ye shall overtake them."

How is it that "all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone" (**Revelation 21:8**), and yet Rahab is commended twice by New Testament writers?

- **James 2:25** - "Was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out another way?"

Rahab is in the company of Jael, the woman who killed Sisera, Judith who deceived and killed Holofernes, and the Hebrew midwives who lied to Pharaoh to save the Jewish babies (**Exodus 1:19**).

Jesus, the only person who has never sinned, absolved and justified not only her lie but all other sins on the cross. Her "works" was the outworking of her faith in Yahweh displayed in her actions toward the spies.

Joshua 2:6 -7 - "But she had brought them up to the roof of the house, and hid them with the stalks of flax, which she had laid in order upon the roof. And the men pursued after them the way to Jordan to the fords: and as soon as they which pursued after them were gone out, they shut the gate."

Flax and barley are both early crops and it was the time of the barley harvest. Flax stalks would be laid out on the roof to dry.

The Targum renders it "bundles of flax"

Flax is used to make linen, which not only clothed priests but served as festival garments as well as death shrouds. In type the spies were covered in Linen. Not only the spies but Rahab's household were shrouded - accepting their death, while waiting for salvation through the "scarlet cord" that points to Jesus' blood shed on the cross - first lowered to save the spies, and then used to save Rahab and her household.

Joshua 2:8-11 - "And before they were laid down, she came up unto them upon the roof; And she said unto the men, I know that the LORD hath given you the land, and that 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 Jordan, Sihon and Og, whom ye utterly destroyed. And as soon as we had 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."

This was a fulfillment of God's promise:

- **Deuteronomy 2:25** - "This day will I begin to put the dread of thee and the fear of thee upon the nations that are under the whole heaven, who shall hear report of thee, and shall tremble, and be in anguish because of thee." (Also **Exodus 15:15-16**, **Deuteronomy 11:25**)

When Rahab reported to the spies who came to her house: "no man had any more spirit left because of you" (**Joshua 2:11**), she alluded to her professional knowledge of the dimensions of the people's fears, because their apprehension affected their vitality when with her (Babylonian Talmud, Zevahim 116a–b). Rashi explains, "there did not remain anymore spirit, even to lie with a woman."

Rahab is mentioned alongside Jethro and Naaman as positive examples of the converts who joined Israel. It is claimed that there was not a single idolatry in all the world that Jethro did not worship, and therefore when he converted, he spoke from experience when he said (Ex. 18:11): "Now I know that the Lord is greater than all gods." Naaman made an even greater admission when he proclaimed (II Kings 5:15): "Now I know that there is no God in the whole world except in Israel!"; and Rahab exceeded him, when she declared (Josh. 2:11): "for the Lord your God is the only God in heaven above and on earth below" (Mekhilta de-Rabbi Ishmael loc. cit.).

The Vow of the Spies

Joshua 2:12 - "Now therefore, I pray you, swear unto me by the LORD, since I have shewed you kindness, that ye will also shew kindness unto my father's house, and give me a true token:"

<https://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/rahab-midrash-and-aggadah>

Joshua 2:13 - "And that ye will save alive my father, and my mother, and my brethren, and my sisters, and all that they have, and deliver our lives from death."

Like Noah, who "moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house" (**Hebrews 11:7**).

As a harlot, perhaps she had no husband or children.

This also recalls the salvation of the jailer of Paul and Silas:

- **Acts 16:30-31** - "Sirs, what must I do to be saved? And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house."

Joshua 2:14 - "And the men answered her, Our life for yours, if ye utter not this our business. And it shall be, when the LORD hath given us the land, that we will deal kindly and truly with thee."

"Our life for yours" = i.e. we promise to die in your room and in your stead rather than you if this promise is broken.

Joshua 2:15 - "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."

Reminiscent of Paul's escape from Damascus in a basket (**Acts 9:25**).

Rashi - By this very rope and window the sinners would ascend to her. She said: "O Lord of the universe! With these I have sinned. With these forgive me."

She said: "Master of the Universe! I have sinned with three things [with my eye, my thigh, and my stomach]. By the merit of three things pardon me: the rope, the window, and the wall [pardon me for engaging in harlotry because I endangered myself when I lowered the rope for the spies from the window in the wall]" (Mekhilta de-Rabbi Ishmael, Masekhta de-Amalek, Yitro 1). Another tradition has her saying: "Pardon me by merit of the rope, the window, and the flaxen [the stalks of flax under which she concealed the spies]" (Babylonian Talmud, Zevahim loc. cit.).

In the midrashic account, the merit of Rahab's deeds saved the prophet Jeremiah from death. When Jeremiah had been cast into the pit, Ebed-melech the Ethiopian was sent to bring him up (as is related in Jeremiah 38:11–13). In the midrashic expansion, Jeremiah tells him: "If only I had a ladder." God asks him: You want a ladder? Your grandmother Rahab used a rope, as it is written (Joshua 2:15): "She let them down by a rope through the window," and you, too, shall be saved by a rope (Jer. 38:13): "and they pulled Jeremiah up by the ropes" (Midrash Samuel [ed. Buber] 9:7). Thus, Rahab's good deeds continue to aid her offspring in later generations, as well.

Joshua 2:16 - "And she said unto them, Get you to the mountain, lest the pursuers meet you; and hide yourselves there three days, until the pursuers be returned: and afterward may ye go your way."

The mountain was Quarantania, which was honeycombed with caves. This is thought to be where Jesus spent his 40 days tempted in the wilderness.

The pursuers would first go to the fords of the Jordan where the spies would have to cross, then work their way back looking for them, a process that would take about three days.

The midrash adds that the Divine Presence rested upon her until the Israelites entered Jericho, for she knew that they would return after three days (Ruth Rabbah 2:1). i.e. by a prophecy.

Joshua 2:17 - "And the men said unto her, We will be blameless of this thine oath which thou hast made us swear."

The Scarlet Cord

Joshua 2:18-20 - "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 household, 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 you utter this our business, then we will be quit of your oath which you have made us to swear."

According to the Targum, it was the border of a red garment. At any rate it had to be strong enough to let down two men.

This is similar to the instructions on the first Passover:

- **Exodus 12:7, 13, 22-23** - "And they shall take of the blood, and strike it on the two side posts and on the upper door post of the houses, wherein they shall eat it... And the blood shall be to you for a token upon the houses where ye are: and 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... none of you shall go out at the door of his house until the morning; For the LORD will pass through to smite the Egyptians; and when he seeth the blood upon the lintel, and on the two side posts, the LORD will pass over the door, and will not suffer the destroyer to come in unto your houses to smite you."

A scarlet thread was also used in cleansing from leprosy (**Leviticus 14:4-6**) and in the red heifer ceremony (**Numbers 19:6**).

The interpretation of the scarlet cord as the blood of Christ is found in Clement, Irenaeus, Justin Martyr, Origen and also Ambrose and Augustine.

The spies, who are also called "messengers" **James 2:25**; may represent the ministers of the Gospel, who brought the good news to Rahab, a picture of a Gentile sinner saved by grace who becomes repentant.

Rahab, who was not an Israelite by birth, is "joined to Israel up to this very day" (**Joshua 6:25**).

Origen: If you want to see more plainly how Rahab is bound to Israel, consider how 'the branch of the wild olive tree is implanted in the root of a good olive tree.' Then you will understand how those who have been implanted in the faith of Abraham and Isaac and

Jacob are rightly called attached and 'joined to Israel up to this very day' (Orig. Hom. Jos. 7.5)

Joshua 2:21 - "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."

i.e. later, at the time of the attack on Jericho. Or perhaps immediately, as Abarbinel thinks, and in the sight of the spies, that they might see that she conformed to their direction, and that they might take notice where she fastened it; and that she herself might, at the sight of it, be put in mind of her hope and security.

Because Rahab was not afraid of the Israelites when they came to raze Jericho, the Rabbis applied to her **Proverbs 31:21**: "She is not worried for her household because of snow, for her whole household is dressed in crimson" — she was not concerned, because of the "length of crimson cord" that would be the sign between them (Midrash Eshet Hayil 31:21).

To be "dressed in crimson" then is to be covered by the blood of Christ.

Joshua 2:22-23 - "And they went, and came to the mountain, and stayed there three days, until the pursuers were returned: and the pursuers sought them throughout all the way, but found them not. So the two men returned, and descended from the mountain, and passed over, and came to Joshua the son of Nun, and told him all things that befell them:"

Joshua 2:24 - "And they said unto Joshua, Truly the LORD hath delivered into our hands all the land; for even all the inhabitants of the country do faint because of us."

The Rabbis deduced from the story of Rahab the superiority of repentance over prayer, for Moses prayed exceedingly, but God did not accept his entreaty to enter Erez Israel, while the repentance of Rahab the harlot was accepted, and seven kings and eight prophets issued forth from her (Seder Eliyahu Zuta [ed. Friedmann (Ish-Shalom)], para. 22).

Rahab is a type of the church, called out of Babylon, the Great Whore. As a type of the Bride of Christ, Rahab was by tradition said to have married Joshua/Jesus.

Like Rahab, we too have been "joined to Israel up to this very day." But first we had to disavow the Great Whore and commit treason against our Canaanite native land and our spiritual allegiance to Babylon.

- Revelation 18:4 - "...Come out of her, my people, lest you share in her sins, and lest you receive of her plagues."

- 2 Corinthians 6:17 - "Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you."