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THE NIV
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broke her left wrist. Despite the cumbersome cast from wrist to elbow, she decided to go anyway and carefully planned the long trip.

About the fourth day out, she felt so tired that she pulled off the road for a short nap, then drove to a restaurant for coffee and a few phone calls to friends who lived nearby. As she stepped outside the restaurant, things got interesting. A man approached and asked if she was driving a Ford Explorer with Michigan plates, and whether she had pulled off the road somewhere earlier. The woman was understandably apprehensive about being questioned by a stranger, but he assured her that he meant no harm. Once she answered his questions, he asked her to wait while he made a phone call and then promised to explain.

When he returned, he told her that truck drivers had been following her since Indiana. One of them had noticed this little white-haired lady, with a cast on her left arm, driving a stick-shift across the country. They had taken it upon themselves to watch over her. Unbeknownst to her, they carefully tracked her to the motels she stayed each evening. Each morning another trucker would pick up her trail and shadow her progress. If a trucker had to exit, he would radio another rig-driver to take his place. When she pulled off for that nap, they had lost track of her and were about to alert the State Police. They were still seriously searching for her when one of them spotted her car at the restaurant. The woman had no idea that somebody cared enough about her to initiate such a protection plan. Until that moment, she had been totally unaware that, across all the miles, someone was looking after her day and night.

The presence of Jesus with us is no less watchful and faithful. Armed with his simple assurance ("I am with you"), we Christian soldiers can daily march into war. The spiritual battlefield may be our own homes, neighborhoods, job sites—perhaps even our own souls. Our lives seek to mirror the model of our Lord—or, at least, that is our dream. Like him, we bring good news to a broken, hurting, lost world. And we do so with fear offset, if not banished, by the wonderful reality that, come what may, we are "never alone." As recent writers put it,

The truly good news is that God is not a distant God, a God to be feared and avoided, a God of revenge, but a God who is moved by our pains and participates in the fullness of the human struggle. The miraculous cures in the Gospels are hopeful and joyful reminders of this good news, which is our true consolation and comfort.⁷²

72. H. J. M. Nouwen, D. P. McNeill, and D. A. Morrison, *Compassion* (New York: Image, 1982), 18.

Joshua 2:1–24



THEN JOSHUA SON of Nun secretly sent two spies from Shittim. "Go, look over the land," he said, "especially Jericho." So they went and entered the house of a prostitute named Rahab and stayed there.

²The king of Jericho was told, "Look! Some of the Israelites have come here tonight to spy out the land." ³So the king of Jericho sent this message to Rahab: "Bring out the men who came to you and entered your house, because they have come to spy out the whole land."

⁴But the woman had taken the two men and hidden them. She said, "Yes, the men came to me, but I did not know where they had come from." ⁵At dusk, when it was time to close the city gate, the men left. I don't know which way they went. Go after them quickly. You may catch up with them." ⁶(But she had taken them up to the roof and hidden them under the stalks of flax she had laid out on the roof.) ⁷So the men set out in pursuit of the spies on the road that leads to the fords of the Jordan, and as soon as the pursuers had gone out, the gate was shut.

⁸Before the spies lay down for the night, she went up on the roof ⁹and said to them, "I know that the LORD has given this land to you and that a great fear of you has fallen on us, so that all who live in this country are melting in fear because of you. ¹⁰We have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red Sea for you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to Sihon and Og, the two kings of the Amorites east of the Jordan, whom you completely destroyed. ¹¹When we heard of it, our hearts melted and everyone's courage failed because of you, for the LORD your God is God in heaven above and on the earth below. ¹²Now then, 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 ¹³that 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."

¹⁴"Our lives for your lives!" the men assured her. "If you don't tell what we are doing, we will treat you kindly and faithfully when the LORD gives us the land."

¹⁵So she let them down by a rope through the window, for the house she lived in was part of the city wall. ¹⁶Now she had said to them, "Go to the hills so the pursuers will not find you. Hide yourselves there three days until they return, and then go on your way."

¹⁷The men said to her, "This oath you made us swear will not be binding on us ¹⁸unless, when we enter the land, you have tied this scarlet cord in the window through which you let us down, and unless you have brought your father and mother, your brothers and all your family into your house. ¹⁹If anyone goes outside your house into the street, his blood will be on his own head; we will not be responsible. As for anyone who is in the house with you, his blood will be on our head if a hand is laid on him. ²⁰But if you tell what we are doing, we will be released from the oath you made us swear."

²¹"Agreed," she replied. "Let it be as you say." So she sent them away and they departed. And she tied the scarlet cord in the window.

²²When they left, they went into the hills and stayed there three days, until the pursuers had searched all along the road and returned without finding them. ²³Then the two men started back. They went down out of the hills, forded the river and came to Joshua son of Nun and told him everything that had happened to them. ²⁴They said to Joshua, "The LORD has surely given the whole land into our hands; all the people are melting in fear because of us."



THIS IS ONE OF the Bible's best-known stories, the report of a secret reconnaissance mission to Jericho by a pair of young Israelites. Their task is to ascertain the terrain and conditions Israel

may expect when they cross into Canaan. The story also introduces one of the Bible's more colorful characters, the prostitute Rahab, and marks the second step in Joshua's preparation of Israel for entrance into Canaan.

From one angle, the story of Rahab offers an odd, surprising follow-up to chapter 1. One would expect the Jordan crossing to follow next,

but inexplicably chapter 2 postpones that event until chapters 3–4. Also, whereas chapter 1 features Joshua at center stage in the leading role, chapter 2 stars the Canaanite Rahab while Joshua plays a minor supporting role. With Zakovitch, some readers may wonder, "Why does the Jericho prostitute get such a prominent place ... on the very opening pages ... of the Former Prophets?"¹ Further, the mercy accorded Rahab in chapter 2 clearly contradicts the expectation that all Canaanites are to be killed. These and other observations lead some scholars to view the chapter as a later addition, but Sherwood presents a persuasive interpretation of its literary and thematic role in its present context.²

Literarily, the Rahab episode comprises a spy story with the distinct feel of a cloak-and-dagger affair.³ Except for Rahab and Joshua (2:1, 2, 4, 24), anonymity prevails among the characters—the spies ("the men" [vv. 4b, 5a]), the "king of Jericho" (vv. 2, 3), and his own "men" (v. 7; cf. v. 2). It is as if the author were intentionally hiding their identities. Structurally, Joshua's commission of the spies (v. 1) and their report to him of their findings (vv. 23–24) bracket the lengthy report concerning the spy mission itself (vv. 2–22). Clearly, dialogue rather than action dominates that report: the king and king's men talk with Rahab (vv. 3–7), and Rahab talks with the spies (vv. 8–21). The latter conversation forms the chapter's literary highpoint.

Several narrative ambiguities, however, leave the reader wondering how to assess the performance of Joshua and the two spies. Joshua dispatches the spies secretly, and his orders seem vague and general (see below).⁴ Hence, one can read them either as presupposing more complete, unreported instructions or as simple poor planning. The connection between those orders and the spies' entrance into the city and dealings with Rahab likewise yield alternative readings. Do their actions faithfully execute what Joshua

1. Y. Zakovitch, "Humor and Theology or the Successful Failure of Israelite Intelligence: A Literary-Folkloric Approach to Joshua 2," in *Text and Tradition: The Hebrew Bible and Folklore*, ed. S. Niditch (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1990), 71–72.

2. A. Sherwood, "A Leader's Misleading and a Prostitute's Profession: A Re-examination of Joshua 2," *JSOT* 31/1 (2006): 43–61. Butler (*Joshua*, 27–32), by contrast, represents scholars who read the chapter as a later addition.

3. The Bible shows three other examples: the disastrous mission of the twelve spies (Num. 13–14), the clever conquest of Bethel by the tribes of Joseph (Judg. 1:22–26), and the conquest of Laish by the tribe of Dan (18:1–26). The latter two parallel Joshua 2 in that cities are the spies' targets, but of these the episode in Judges 1 may offer the closest parallel. Bethel falls because of inside information provided the spies by a local resident whose life the conquerors spare for his cooperation.

4. The LXX and Syriac versions omit "secretly" in v. 1, perhaps because the translators no longer understood this word (it only occurs here in the MT), so Boling, *Joshua*, 141.

wants, or are the spies freelancing on their own—and perhaps bungling the job? Chapter 2 marks Joshua's debut as commander-in-chief—his "first opportunity to prove himself" after succeeding Moses (see below).⁵ The narrative seems to leave open the question as to how well he comes off. But if, as some contend, Joshua's actions constitute a "false start" in the race to victory, the happy outcome is that Yahweh graciously rescues him through Rahab.⁶

The clever story is more than simply literary fun. It sounds important theological themes and advances the plot of the book of Joshua. The conversational sparring between the king and his men, Rahab, and the spies foreshadows the impending, titanic struggle for control of Canaan, the subject of Joshua 3–11. Also, as Spina notes, the Rahab/spies encounter sharply contrasts the Israelites' encounter (God's chosen "insiders" now outside the land) with Rahab, the "virtual representative" of the Canaanites (the "outsiders" in God's eyes who still occupy it).⁷ The fate of Rahab herself also anticipates the story of other outsiders, the Gibeonites (chs. 9–10), and provides a literary foil for the unexpected, contrasting fate that befalls the consummate insider, Achan (ch. 7).⁸ And if Joshua's debut marks a misstep (certainly a possibility), that motif would alert the reader to one of the book's important themes, the rise of Joshua's reputation in Israel during the Conquest.

Finally, though present behind the scenes, Yahweh's providential work through Rahab proves him to be a gracious and hands-on divine warrior. Whatever one's assessment of Joshua and the spies, Yahweh clearly follows up his commitments from chapter 1, a harbinger of many victories to come.⁹ Dramatically, the chapter ends with the spies' excited interpretation of their findings, quoting—of all people!—Rahab herself (v. 24).

5. I owe this phrase to Sherwood, *ibid.*, 46.

6. See Sherwood, *ibid.*, 60, who may be right (43, 60–61) in arguing that ch. 2 criticizes Joshua's actions.

7. F. A. Spina, *The Faith of the Outsider: Exclusion and Inclusion in the Biblical Story* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 53. As Spina notes (54), "She is as Canaanite as they get!" I am grateful to my friend and colleague, Professor R. K. Johnston, for pointing me to this source.

8. J. H. Stek, "Rahab of Canaan and Israel: The Meaning of Joshua 2," *CTJ* 37 (2002): 48.

9. The Rahab story probably originated in an oral tale, perhaps passed down by her descendants who continued to live in Israel (see 6:25), and reached written form during the early monarchy long before its later incorporation by the Deuteronomist into his history. For literary-critical discussion, see V. Fritz, *Das Buch Josua* (Tübingen: Mohr [Siebeck], 1994), 33–35. Slightly different scenarios are proposed by M. Ottosson, "Rahab and the Spies," in *Dumu-e, -dub-ba-a: Studies in Honor of Åke W. Sjöberg*, ed. H. Behrens et al. (Philadelphia: Samuel Noah Kramer Fund, 1989), 427; and H. M. Barstad, "The Old Testament Feminine Personal Name *rahab*. An Onomastic Note," *SEÅ* 54 (1989): 44.

The Spy Mission (2:1–21)

Joshua's commission (v. 1). Joshua secretly commissions two unnamed men as spies to (lit.) "go, see the land, Jericho" (v. 1). In so doing, Joshua continues Moses' well-known practice (cf. Num. 14:3, 31; Deut. 1:39), a step he will also take later with Ai (Josh. 7:2–3). But his approach differs from his mentor's pattern in several ways. Moses dispatched spies at Yahweh's direction (Num. 13), but here Joshua takes the initiative without divine direction.¹⁰ Unlike Moses, he sends two spies rather than twelve—and "secretly," too, to minimize risk. Further, Yahweh had specified that the spies be tribal leaders, but Joshua selects two ordinary Israelite young men (see 6:23).

Joshua's terse, general orders ("Go, look over the land" [2:1]) sharply contrast the lengthy instructions of Moses (Num. 13:17–20). The ambiguity of Joshua's words is striking, but the differences between the two missions might explain the contrasts with Moses. The latter sent the twelve spies on a broad reconnoitering of Canaan, while Joshua's young pair conducts a covert military reconnaissance. Certainly, a pair of spies—and young ones, at that—might arouse less suspicion in Jericho than would a team of twelve.¹¹ Further, one might read Joshua's initiation of the spy mission as simply indicative of a wise, trusted, conscientious commander at work, not someone whom Yahweh must micromanage.

But some readers may read Joshua's simple orders as an odd follow-up to Yahweh's more visionary command ("[you and Israel] cross the Jordan" [1:2]). Yahweh has assured Joshua of certain victory (see 1:2–5, 10–11, 15), so why send the spies at all? What else does Joshua need to know? More importantly, readers may wonder about Joshua's leadership and the depth of his faith. Despite receiving God's emphatic reassurance and promise of victory (1:3–9), he opts for a cautious rather than a bold first step forward. Has he forgotten the terror of Israel that Yahweh promised would precede them in Canaan (Deut. 11:25)? Is it wise not to consult with God (cf. Josh. 9:14)? Does the mission suggest, as Spina alleges, "at least a failure of nerve, if not of faith, on Joshua's part?"¹²

Inside Jericho (vv. 2–8). The young pair's first move is to lodge in the house of a prostitute named Rahab. As noted earlier, the reader wonders

10. His initiative here also contrasts with Josh. 1 in which Joshua carries out Yahweh's initiative.

11. Ottosson ("Rahab and the Spies," 420) suggests that the use of two may depend on the treaty later made with Rahab, perhaps giving the transaction two required witnesses (cf. Deut. 17:6, 19:15; 1 Kings 21:10).

12. Spina, *The Faith of the Outsider*, 57.

whether it violates or executes Joshua's orders—whether the spies are being cunning or bumbling.¹³ There is no explanation as to how or why they link up with Rahab. Perhaps they think her house offers them the safety of anonymity or the best spot to gather information. Clearly, Rahab, not the spies, is the star here—and the only fully human character, too. Aside from Joshua, she is the only one known by name.¹⁴

In itself, to visit a prostitute creates an unusual, if not amusing, situation.¹⁵ But some scholars suggest that the storyteller may intentionally weave in sexually suggestive language, as if playfully titillating the reader's imagination. The writer uses "enter (into)" (*boʔ*) and "stay" (*šakab*, "to lie down, lodge"), verbs that elsewhere also describe sexual intercourse, often in morally problematic circumstances.¹⁶ Borne by a prostitute, the name Rahab ("wide, broad") may aim to sound risqué, much as the modern slang word "broad" describes a woman of notoriously loose morals.¹⁷ If so, "house of the prostitute named Rahab" might mean "brothel," with Rahab its madam (cf. Isa. 57:8; Ezek. 16:24, 31).¹⁸

A reader might wonder with some amusement whether the two Israelite GIs may have combined "pleasure" with "business" by enjoying Rahab's sexual services.¹⁹ Hawk finds it strange that Israel's first act upon entering

13. Command/fulfillment forms a common pattern in the book of Joshua. The spies' actions offer a startling break in the pattern—in Sherwood's terms ("A Leader's Misleading," 49), "command/failed fulfillment" (italics, mine). He also interprets (50) the spies as "pawns in Joshua's struggle against the king" and suggests that, by a tactical overextension, Joshua "has placed his men in danger."

14. Nelson, *Joshua*, 46.

15. For "prostitute" (Heb. *zōnab*, lit. "a whoring woman"), cf. Judg. 11:1; 16:1; Prov. 6:26; Jer. 3:3; Ezek. 16:30; 23:44; S. Erlandsson, "זִנָּה," TDOT, 4:100–101. It also speaks against the view that she was a sacred prostitute (normally *qedēšab*).

16. Cf. Sherwood, "A Leader's Misleading," 50–51. For *šakab*, cf. Gen. 19:32, 35; 39:12, 14; 2 Sam 13:11; for *boʔ* ("to enter" [Josh. 2:1b, 2b, 4b]) and *boʔ ʔel* ("go into" [vv. 3b, 4b]), cf. Gen. 16:4; Judg. 16:1; Ezek. 23:44). For a similar, sexually suggestive use of double entendre, see Ruth 3:4, 7, 8; cf. Hubbard, *Ruth*, 204, n.33. Against this suggestion, see Hess, *Joshua*, 83–84.

17. Spina, *The Faith of the Outsider*, 54–55; Sherwood, "A Leader's Misleading," 47–48.

18. Nelson, *Joshua*, 43; P. Bird, "The Harlot as Heroine: Narrative Art and Social Presuppositions in Three Old Testament Texts," *Semeia* 46 (1989): 127–28. On the other hand, Horn's thesis that Rahab was an Israelite woman working in Jericho as an innkeeper presupposes a social situation for which Josh. 2 offers little evidence and contradicts the text's clear portrait of her as a Canaanite; cf. P. H. Horn, "Josua 2, 1–24 im Milieu einer 'dimorphic society,'" *BZ* 31 (1987): 264–70. She may have been, however, both prostitute and innkeeper (so Hess, *Joshua*, 83–84).

19. Cf. Spina, *The Faith of the Outsider*, 54: "Thus the phrase 'the spies lodged there' at the house of a prostitute likely is a double-entendre: one can't be sure whether they simply 'lodged' there or whether they—ahem—'lodged' there."

the land is to engage "in forbidden activity with the very people who are to be destroyed."²⁰ The above literary features are ambiguous, however, and an extreme sexual reading does run the risk of being anachronistic—of wrongly reading a modern perspective into an ancient text. The words "enter" and "lie down" may simply describe those actions without sexual innuendo. And the name *rahāb* may play on *reḥob* ("public square"), thus invoking the narrative type scene "hospitality to strangers in danger" evident in Genesis 19 (at Sodom) and Judges 19 (at Gibeah).²¹ In any case, whether as prostitute, innkeeper, or both, Rahab's house is where the spies stay in Jericho.

Alas, whatever her "establishment," it fails to provide the spies with adequate cover. Someone notices their arrival and informs the king (v. 2), who sends word demanding that Rahab hand them over (v. 3). At first glance, the Hebrew of verse 3 reads clumsily (unlike the more tidy versions), but the clumsiness may in fact convey a coarse, crude double entendre: "Send out the men who entered you . . . er, who entered your house."²² Undoubtedly, the narrative assumes that Israel's large encampment east of the Jordan will not go unnoticed in Jericho. Observation of Israel's comings and goings by Canaanite scouts seems likely and may partly explain how the king knows the two spies' whereabouts.

But two things bear mention here. First, Rahab's actions presume upon the ancient Semitic custom of hospitality. This practice accorded visiting guests, otherwise vulnerable to abuse as social outsiders, protection.²³ The king's envoys also seem to respect it, otherwise they would have forced their way in and dragged the spies out.²⁴ Second, the king interprets the coming of the Israelite pair specifically as something sinister (vv. 2b, 3b). Joshua's mandate was merely (lit.) to "see" the land and Jericho (v. 1). But the king and his men believe their intent is more serious—"to gather information" (*ḥapar*, lit., "to dig [in the ground]") about it (vv. 2, 3).

20. L. D. Hawk, *Every Promise Fulfilled: Contesting Plots in Joshua* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1991), 62.

21. Cf. Nelson, *Joshua*, 43; L. D. Hawk, "Strange Houseguests: Rahab, Lot, and the Dynamics of Deliverance," in *Reading between the Texts: Intertextuality and the Hebrew Bible*, ed. D. N. Fewell (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1992), 89–97.

22. The rendering of Spina, *The Faith of the Outsider*, 55. According to Assis, the messengers offer Rahab two possibilities, i.e., that the Israelites "came" for sexual relations or simply to "lodge" there (but not with Rahab); cf. E. Assis, "The Choice to Serve God and Assist His People," *Bib* 85 (2004): 83.

23. It is the violation of that custom that makes the mistreatment of guests in Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. 19) and Israelite Gibeah (Judg. 19:22–30) especially outrageous; cf. Fritz, *Josua*, 37; Nelson, *Joshua*, 43.

24. Against Spina (*The Faith of the Outsider*, 57–58), for whom this failure signals that the king's men are as incompetent as Joshua's spies.

If the spies sought safe anonymity with Rahab, the contrasting words literally imply that the Israelite pair has, so to speak, lost their "cover." Suddenly, the mission has turned sour. The spies have barely arrived ("tonight," v. 2b), but enemy intelligence threatens to imperil their mission and their lives. They find themselves at the mercy of a total stranger, Rahab the Canaanite prostitute. Their survival and the accomplishment of their mission lie completely in her hands. Cleverly, the narrator sounds what Sherwood calls a "calamity motif"—a foreboding sense of imminent disaster.²⁵

Rahab's life probably hangs in the balance, too. Socially, she already has one strike against her—her profession. As Bird observes, it marks her as "a marginal figure in the society, tolerated but despised."²⁶ By harboring enemies, she presumably faces execution by the king for treason. But, for reasons yet to be explained, Rahab risks her life and cunningly protects her two guests. She first hides them from the messengers at her door (v. 4a) and then, on the spot, spins a scheme to throw the king off their trail (vv. 4b–5).²⁷ The reader wonders how Rahab hid the men without the messengers' knowledge, but we are not told—at least, not now.²⁸

Withholding that information leaves two literary effects. It portrays Rahab as a smooth operator, as if she has covered for customers before. And it makes the reader wonder (and worry!) about what game she is playing. Is she out for profit, angling for revenge, or bent on betrayal? In reply, she concedes that the men "came to me" but denies knowing from where (v. 4). If Assis is right, the phrase aims to deceive the king by implying that the Israelites have had sex with Rahab and left satisfied. Her strategy would be to dispel any suspicions that she has cooperated with them and to head off the need to pump her for information.²⁹ The less the king thinks she knows, the greater her chances of surviving suspicions of treason. As verses

25. Sherwood, "A Leader's Misleading," 50–52.

26. Bird, "The Harlot as Heroine," 119.

27. The verbs of v. 4 suggest sequential action (so NRSV, "But the woman took . . . and hid . . . Then she said . . .") rather than either a retrospective report followed by a sequential action (against NIV, "But the woman had taken and hidden . . . She said . . .") or two separate contacts between the king and Rahab (against Hess, *Joshua*, 85). Alternatively, the taking and hiding might be contemporaneous to her speaking to the king's messengers. For a linguistic defense of a pluperfect (so NIV), see Howard, *Joshua*, 100, n. 11.

28. According to Fritz (*Josua*, 37), the spies are still in the house. In my view, however, v. 6 will detail in retrospect their actual location and how they came to be there.

29. Assis, "The Choice to Serve God," 83. But, in his view, the narrator had already signaled that they merely spent the night (cf. "lodged" [v. 1]). By contrast, had she claimed that they came only to get some sleep, her questioners would not have believed her statement that the visitors had already left.

9–11 reveal, however, this is a bald-faced lie. She knows exactly where they are from.³⁰

Next, Rahab lies about their present whereabouts (v. 5). She explains that the men left before the city closed its gate for the night. This is important: It places their whereabouts outside the city, probably hurrying toward the river and the safety of the Israelite camp. If the king believes her, she and her hidden guests will escape scrutiny, at least for a while. Playing for time, she urges the king's emissaries immediately to chase after the fleeing spies. The sooner they start the search, the sooner they will overtake them. This may be the cleverest move of all. It compels the messengers either to seize the moment, without thinking or even consulting the king, or to squander any hope of catching them. In sum, Rahab's lies buy her time to talk with her visitors, redirect royal attention eastward, and open up a way for the spies to escape Jericho safely.

A shift to subject-first syntax (v. 6) and an inclusio set off verses 6–8 from what precedes. In my view, the change signals a literary transition to the chapter's central scene (vv. 9–21).³¹ Initial pronouns or nouns emphatically position all the key players—Rahab ("she," vv. 6a, 8b), the pursuit team ("the men," v. 7), and the spies ("they," v. 8a)—for what follows. Verse 6 explains the truth behind Rahab's daring lies (vv. 4b–5)—and to the reader's great relief. She had hid her guests on the roof under piles of flax stalks.³²

Flax is an agricultural product well attested earlier in Egypt and Mesopotamia. The Gezer Calendar (tenth cent. B.C.) lists it among Canaan's annual crops. In the ancient world, flax provided fibers for linen, a lighter, more comfortable cloth than wool.³³ Some evidence confirms its cultivation in pre-Israelite Canaan, but the reference here may simply be to wild flax that Rahab harvested and laid out on the roof to dry.³⁴ Wild flax is

30. Inexplicably, LXX lacks her denial of an Israelite connection (v. 4b).

31. The pronoun *biʔ* (= Rahab) plus the root *alah* ("to go up") comprise the inclusio (vv. 6a, 8b).

32. Nelson, *Joshua*, 49; Howard, *Joshua*, 100, although he views v. 6 as "a parenthetical aside." I render *heʿelatam* "she had (i.e., caused) them go up," not "she had taken/brought them up" (so NRSV; NIV; et al.). My rendering leaves ambiguous her means of hiding them in conformity to the apparent ambiguity of the narrative.

33. Cf. I. Jacob and W. Jacob, "Flora" *ABD*, 2:815; J. Hoffmeier, "רָפָף," *NIDOTTE*, 3:711–12.

34. According to Jacob and Jacob (*ibid.*, 815), flax seeds were found in Early Bronze Stratum IV at Tel el-Areini in the Shephelah; cf. also M. Zohary, *Plants of the Bible* (New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1982), 72, 78. But Howard (*Joshua*, 100, n. 114) and Boling (*Joshua*, 146) prefer wild flax, following the case against flax cultivation by S. Talmon, "The Gezer Calendar and the Seasonal Cycle of Ancient Canaan," *JAOs* 83 (1963): 177–87.

typically scarce, so its availability as a hiding place here suggests a providential stroke of good luck.³⁵ The piles happen to be there just when they are needed.

Meanwhile, swallowing Rahab's lie, the king's "men" hotly pursue the allegedly fleeing Israelite "men" down the road to the river. They prove to be putty in her cunning hands—and gullible and incompetent, too.³⁶ The city's gates immediately close behind them (v. 7), ironically damning them to an all-night wild goose chase. They presume the Israelites are hightailing it for home, so the trackers head eastward, straight for the nearest crossing point. Probably, the "fords of the Jordan" is the silt sandbar known today as Al-Maghtas, eight miles southeast of Jericho.³⁷

For the spies, these mark ominous developments. The locked gates trap them inside Jericho, while the search outside cuts off their escape route back to Joshua. They, too, have fallen into Rahab's hands. Rahab joins the pair, snugly hidden on her roof, before they retire for the night (v. 8).³⁸ The "roof" is probably the floor of the top storey of Rahab's house—the place where its occupants slept and, hence, "the most private and secret part of the house."³⁹ Out of earshot of people below, it offers the ideal spot for the frank, revealing conversation that follows.

The reader still wonders, however, what game the prostitute is playing. From one angle, the scene is almost humorous. The spies came to "dig up" (*ḥapar*) information (vv. 2, 3) but end up "buried" (*ṭaman*, NIV "hid") under piles of flax. They sought obscurity in Rahab's house but end up in a highly visible hiding place.⁴⁰ And it is difficult to "see" the land (cf. v. 1) hiding under a rooftop pile of flax! Like it or not, their fate rests in the wily prostitute's hands. Clearly, she is no "dumb broad" or garden-variety madam. On the contrary, she seems the most competent character in the story, with quick wits and decisive action.⁴¹ Indeed, her intervention surprisingly

35. So Boling, *Joshua*, 146 ("the relative scarcity ... would heighten the sense of escape 'by the skin of your teeth'").

36. Assis, "The Choice to Serve God," 84.

37. H. O. Thompson, "Jordan River," *ABD*, 3:957; cf. Boling, *Joshua*, 137 (an excellent map), 170. When silt from surrounding hills piles up in a river bottom, a sandbar or "ford" forms, providing a shallow crossing point for foot traffic.

38. Nelson (*Joshua*, 49, n.21) provides a simple solution to the oft-discussed discrepancy between the report (v. 1) that the spies "lay down" or "went to sleep" (*šakab*) and the claim that they had not yet done so (*šakab*, v. 8). They did lie down (v. 1), were relocated by Rahab (vv. 4, 6 [a flashback of details]), but had not lain down again (v. 8).

39. Hess, *Joshua*, 87. For further comments on her house, see below.

40. Nelson, *Joshua*, 49 ("a place of dubious safety and undignified discomfort"); cf. 2 Sam. 11:2; 16:22.

41. Spina, *The Faith of the Outsider*, 58.

transforms the calamity motif into a "deliverance motif."⁴² The scene is set for the highpoint of the story, Rahab's speech and negotiations. The reader will soon learn why this Canaanite prostitute has risked her own life to protect two total strangers.

Rahab strikes a deal (vv. 9–21). On the roof, alone with the spies and temporarily free of royal scrutiny, Rahab finally explains herself (vv. 9–11). In truth, she proves to be a shrewd observer of the emerging historical reality about to engulf the land. Certainly, she is more in tune with it than Jericho's defiant king. She acknowledges ("I know that ...") three crucial things.

(1) She knows that Yahweh has given Canaan into Israel's hands (v. 9). The perfect "has given" states that truth as a "done deal"—an already established fact soon to become reality. This unexpected statement probably startles the reader as much as it undoubtedly does the two trapped spies. Who would have dreamed that this Canaanite woman knew Israel's God by name ("Yahweh") and that she knew anything about his intended future for her homeland? What Israelite would have ever considered the fall of Canaan as inevitable? Spina may be right: At this moment, she seems "more confident that YHWH will deliver as promised than Joshua is."⁴³ Soon we will learn why she has drawn this conclusion about Canaan's loss to Israel.

(2) She reveals the popular mood in Canaan. A terrible dread of Israel now grips the land.⁴⁴ If Yahweh has given the land to Israel, then Israel must be unstoppable—and a Canaanite massacre inescapable. The phrase "great fear of you" invokes the Old Testament tradition of Yahweh the mighty warrior who fights for his people (e.g., Ex. 15:16; 23:27; Job 9:34; 20:25). Such "great fear" is precisely what the warrior Yahweh promised to spread among Israel's enemies (Deut. 11:25).⁴⁵ Theologically, Israel's imminent victory derives from their alliance with Yahweh, not their own strength or cunning. The Canaanites also had warrior gods, but according to Rahab those gods are no match for Yahweh.

42. Sherwood, "A Leader's Misleading," 53, 54.

43. Spina, *The Faith of the Outsider*, 59; cf. Sherwood, "A Leader's Misleading," 54 ("the spies' lives are ironically safer in the hands of a Jericho native than in Joshua's").

44. The LXX makes this statement the reason (Gk. *gar*) for the preceding one (i.e., "Yahweh has given the land because fear of you has fallen on us") and omits the rest of the verse. Hess (*Joshua*, 89–90) suggests that a chiasmic or concentric structure underlies all of vv. 9–11.

45. H.-J. Zobel, "יְהוָה," *TDOT*, 1:220–21. For in-depth discussion, see the Bridging Contexts section. The fundamental study on Yahweh as warrior remains G. von Rad, *Holy War in Ancient Israel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), but see also conveniently T. Longman III and D. C. Reid, *God Is a Warrior* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995).

(3) The same tradition also underlies her third revelation, the terrible toll taken by this fear on Canaanite resolve. Plainly, whatever firm determination the inhabitants once had has become terrified panic like hard ground reduced by rain to mushy mud (cf. Ex. 15:15).⁴⁶ Keeping company with Yahweh the warrior gives Israel a terrible aura, too. But what caused this panic and fatalism? According to Rahab, they have “heard” (Heb. *šamaʿ*, vv. 10, 11) that Yahweh “dried up” the Red Sea and that Israel “completely destroyed” the two Transjordanian kings, Sihon and Og (Num. 21:21–35; cf. 32:33; 1 Kings 4:19; Ps. 136:19–20). These two events—the Exodus and the conquest of Transjordan—mark the beginning and end of Israel’s wilderness period. Hence, Rahab may be invoking a kind of historical merismus for all Yahweh’s wonderful deeds during that era.⁴⁷

Canaan’s inhabitants dread the prospect of similar divine miracles on their soil, and they are right. Indeed, by invoking two causative verbs (*yabaš* [“to dry up”] and *ḥaram* [“to exterminate” (ritually)]), Rahab anticipates two of the book’s main themes, Israel’s dramatic crossing of the Jordan on dry land (Josh. 4:23; 5:1) and the elimination of Canaan’s inhabitants (e.g., 6:21 [Jericho]; 8:26 [Ai]; 11:12 [northern Canaanite cities]).⁴⁸ In so doing, Rahab either draws on some form of ancient “common knowledge” or shows remarkable familiarity with two Israelite theological terms and the central concept of *ḥerem*.⁴⁹

For now, Rahab again underscores the panicked reaction in Canaan to the news from Egypt and Transjordan (v. 11). Besides sparking terror (v. 9), it has plunged the land into utter despair. Sensing imminent doom, the people no longer have either the courage (“heart”) or the physical strength (“spirit”) to resist.⁵⁰ In short, according to Rahab, Canaan is rife with popular panic and despair over Israel, and Rahab herself has already accepted the

46. Cf. A. Baumann, “*יָבַשׁ*,” *TDOT*, 8:149–52, invoking one of the root’s concrete meanings “to melt, dissolve”; cf. Amos 9:13; Ps. 75:3.

47. Similarly, Hess, *Joshua*, 88–89. Spina (*The Faith of the Outsider*, 59) contrasts the detailed accuracy of her geographical knowledge of these key events with the erroneous understanding of the Philistines in 1 Sam. 4:8.

48. *Ḥaram* hi. “to devote to the ‘ban’” is central to the Deuteronomistic theory of holy war, which guides Israel’s treatment of the Canaanites (see Deut. 7:2; 20:15–18); cf. Butler, *Joshua*, 33; Hess, *Joshua*, 89. See Josh. 6:17, 21; 8:26; 10:1; 11:11, for the noun *ḥerem*, cf. 6:18; 7:1, 11, 12, 13, 15; 22:20.

49. Spina, *The Faith of the Outsider*, 60, favors the latter, although the former is also possible. For definition and discussion of this term, see comments on Josh. 5–6. For discussion of the larger problem of violence in Joshua, see the Introduction (“Now, About All That Killing ...”).

50. For the phrase “our hearts melted,” see also Deut. 20:8; Josh. 7:5; Isa. 13:7, 19:1; H. Ringgren, “*מָלַךְ*,” *TDOT*, 8:438–39. To my knowledge, its parallel (“everyone’s courage failed”) only occurs here. Joshua 5:1b repeats verbatim both phrases from 2:11a.

loss of the land to Israel. Compared to Moses’ twelve spies, what a different story this pair will tell Joshua if they can only get back to him safely!

To conclude her explanation, Rahab returns to Yahweh, the cause of the current disarray in Canaan. She affirms that “the LORD your God is God in heaven above and on the earth below” (v. 11b).⁵¹ The phraseology is plainly deuteronomistic, occurring elsewhere only on the lips of Moses and Solomon (Deut. 4:39; 1 Kings 8:23).⁵² Not bad theological company for a Canaanite prostitute!

But a careful appreciation of her words sifts out what they say and what they do not say. The reference to “heaven ... and ... earth” forms a merismus affirming God’s sovereign power and right to exercise it throughout the whole universe. Clearly, Rahab pays the God of Israel high honor as a powerful deity everywhere—by implication, a deity worthy of her recognition, obedient response, and perhaps even worship. By honoring Yahweh’s victories at the Red Sea and over Sihon and Og (v. 10), she tacitly affirms the superiority of his power at least to that of some of the gods of Egypt and of the Amorites east of the Jordan. Further, the fear of Yahweh in Canaan implies an expectation that he may also prove superior to some of the gods of Canaan. But she stops short—just short, perhaps—of saying that Yahweh is the sole sovereign of the universe and the only God rightfully entitled to worship.⁵³

The limits of her statement become even clearer when she refers to Yahweh as “your [the spies’] God.” Yahweh is not yet her God; she has not yet made him her most important, much less her only, God as an Israelite would. The Canaanites worshiped a pantheon of gods headed by the parental pair, El and his consort Athirat. They presided over Baal (the storm god), Yam (the sea), and Mot (the underworld) in the council of gods.⁵⁴ In my view, Rahab may simply have added Israel’s God to that pantheon, albeit with exalted rank. The most important point is that her words signal the crossing of one significant line. She has sided with Israel against the king of Jericho at the risk of her life and with Yahweh against the gods of Canaan. She also seems to concede the superiority of Yahweh’s power over theirs.

51. In the ancient world, religion was the choice of the tribe or clan rather than the individual. Thus, here Rahab speaks on behalf of her entire family—and anyone else in Jericho who may have joined them in making an accommodation with Israel.

52. For the phrase “heavens above and earth below” cf. Ex. 20:4 and Deut. 5:8.

53. Her statement refers to “God” rather than, say, “the only God” or “God alone” (cf. Deut. 6:13; Ps. 86:10). In my view, if read carefully, the theological affirmations of Nebuchadnezzar similarly seem to stop short of recognizing Yahweh’s exclusive sovereignty (Dan. 4:2–3, 34–37).

54. Cf. conveniently, J. Day, “Canaan, Religion of,” *ABD*, 1:831–32. For more on Canaanite gods, see the Bridging Contexts section in Josh. 24.

In short, Rahab's words mark a step in the direction of a more complete, if not exclusive, commitment to Yahweh and toward the other missing pieces in her statement—the renunciation of all other gods and the use of idols. They mark a step of faith based on what she knows about Yahweh and Israel, not the mere acceptance of biblical ideas about them. Thus, it seems unwise to portray her as theologically an Israelite—at least, not yet—but she seems on the way there.⁵⁵ Further, her words imply support of Yahweh's right to cede Israel the land and subtly promote her worthiness to remain alive in the land.⁵⁶

At least she falls among a distinguished line of foreigners who acknowledge Yahweh's power and sovereignty: the seer Balaam (Num. 22–24), the Moabitess Ruth (1:16–17), the Syrian general Naaman (2 Kings 5), King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon (Dan. 4), and King Darius of Persia (Ezra 6; Dan. 6).⁵⁷ They symbolize a prominent Old Testament theme, the worship of Yahweh by other nations.⁵⁸ Canonically, that theme reaches its consummation with the eschatological gathering of "saints from every tribe and language and people and nation" (Rev. 5:9; cf. 14:6). At the same time, her affirmations may betray a subtle literary irony: It is a Canaanite, not an Israelite, who first introduces Yahweh into the narrative. On this occasion, *she* may be the one with the highest regard for Yahweh's power as divine warrior. She implies that Yahweh will deliver the spies from their current difficulty—and through *her*, of all things. Certainly, when the story began, no reader expected anything like that!⁵⁹

Now Rahab makes the request for which her statement paves the way (vv. 12–13).⁶⁰ She asks them to swear an oath in the name of Yahweh, the God whose greatness she has just affirmed. The oath obligates Israel

55. Cf. Spina, *The Faith of the Outsider*, 61 ("the narration seems clearly and boldly to present her as a confessing Israelite"). In his view, Rahab's confession arguably ranks as the best one in the book of Joshua, surpassing anything spoken by Joshua himself.

56. On the latter, cf. Assis, "The Choice to Serve God," 87–88; and Nelson (*Joshua*, 50), who also argues that her statement (vv. 9–11) and the subsequent survival in Israel of Rahab's family (6:25) support Israel's claim to the land. In my view, her words—certainly remarkable—stop short of being a full confession of faith in Israel's God; against Howard, *Joshua*, 103–4.

57. Nelson, *Joshua*, 50. The Contemporary Significance section below discusses several of these examples in more depth.

58. E.g., 1 Kings 8:41–43; Ps. 22:27–28; 86:9; 102:15; Isa. 2:3//Mic. 4:2; Jer. 3:17; Amos 9:12; Zeph. 2:11; Zech. 2:11; 8:22–23; 14:16; Mal. 1:11, 14.

59. Cf. Bird, "The Harlot as Heroine," 131; Sherwood ("A Leader's Misleading," 54, 55), who notes that Rahab is responsible for all occurrences of the name Yahweh in ch. 2.

60. Syntactically, "Now then" (*we'attah*) signals the logical outcome from what precedes (e.g., "Given these facts, now swear . . ."); cf. WO §39.3.4f; Isa. 5:3, 5; Ruth 3:11–12.

to spare the lives of her whole family when they take Jericho (v. 13).⁶¹ Elsewhere, people inferior in power seek to offset their vulnerability by asking a superior power to swear an oath to accept certain obligations (see Gen. 21:23; 1 Sam. 24:21). By conceding that Yahweh has handed the land to Israel (v. 9), Rahab concedes her powerlessness to Israel. By getting the oath, however, she hopes to overcome it in order to survive.

Moreover, notice the nature of the agreement in play here. Israel is not offering the Canaanite Rahab a covenant and thereby violating its obligation to impose *herem*. Rather, it is Rahab who affirms the sovereignty of Yahweh and accepts his purposes—a basic confession of her faith—and who, on that basis, asks Israel (and, implicitly, Yahweh) to promise to spare her life.⁶² But why should the spies bother? Her persuasive leverage is her kindness (*hesed*) in protecting them (v. 12; cf. vv. 4–5). Her kindness in sparing their lives obligates them to reciprocate with equivalent kindness, the sparing of her and her family's lives.⁶³

This request, of course, puts the reader (and perhaps the spies) in an awkward bind. Granted, Rahab's high respect for Yahweh and the risking of her life are worth something. By usual standards, some sort of reciprocation is in order. But do they justify waiving the demands of the *herem* mandate in her case (Deut. 20:16–18)? Nevertheless, the spies readily grant her request (v. 14). If Sherwood is right, their decision implies that Yahweh as divine warrior will deliver "not just the spies through Rahab, but also Rahab herself."⁶⁴

But the reader still wonders whether, trapped in Jericho and surviving at Rahab's mercy, the spies have simply taken the easy way out. Their initial, unconditional "Our lives for your lives!" (v. 14) betrays awareness of their precarious predicament. On the surface, their decision seems to violate Moses' prohibition against making covenants with any people in Canaan (Deut. 7:1–5). If so, it marks their fateful choice "as one of the most radical

61. The use of two parallel, synonymous statements ("cause to live" and "save from death") make this plea for survival all the more emphatic. The phrase "all who belong to them" would include servants and possibly domestic animals.

62. Sherwood, "A Leader's Misleading," 54, n.46. I depart from Sherwood in reading Rahab's request as a request for a covenant.

63. For the formula "to do kindness to," see Judg. 8:35; Ruth 1:8; 1 Sam. 15:6; 2 Sam. 2:6; 3:8; 10:2; 1 Chron. 19:2; 2 Chron. 24:22. According to Nelson (*Joshua*, 50), her kindness here derives specifically from the assumed host-guest relationship, but I trace it to her intervention with the king (vv. 4–5). On the subject of *hesed*, see K. Sakenfeld, *The Meaning of Hesed in the Hebrew Bible* (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1978), esp. 64–70.

64. Sherwood, "A Leader's Misleading," 55–56.

features of the story.⁶⁵ But while accepting a simple swap of “lives,” the spies also make it conditional on Rahab’s silence about the agreement. Only then will they keep their oath once they return to claim the land that Yahweh has given them (v. 14b).

Apparently, Rahab accepted that proviso, for immediately we learn that she lowers the pair by a rope dropped from her window (v. 15). To explain this, the author reveals something surprising: Rahab’s house, the place where she lives, is in the city wall and has an outside window.⁶⁶ “In part of the city wall” literally reads “in the wall (*qir*) of the wall (*ḥomah*),” a problematic phrase that requires brief discussion. Some scholars suggest that it designates the city’s casemate wall, a type of fortification consisting of two parallel walls with intervening cross-walls.⁶⁷ Filled with rubble, its series of compartments gave the city a defensive perimeter able to blunt invaders’ battering rams. But left empty, they served as storage rooms or residences (as possibly with Rahab).

Archaeological evidence, however, shows that casemates come into use later, in Iron Age Israel (tenth cent. B.C.), so it is unlikely that Rahab lives in one of that type. By contrast, Late Bronze Age (LBA) cities in the Levant basically neglected the fortification systems inherited from earlier generations. Most were small in size (on average, one to nine acres)—more “hamlets” or “towns” than “cities.”⁶⁸ Basically, they consisted of residences encircled by “a belt of houses with no city wall at all” other than the contiguous walls of the homes.⁶⁹ Thus, what “in part of the city wall” means is uncertain.

That she “let . . . down” the spies by rope through a window implies a location above ground level “in” (or possibly “atop”) a wall of some sort and a window facing outside the city. Joshua 6 also says that the city’s “wall” (sing.) collapsed (vv. 5, 20), yet Israelite troops were able to fetch Rahab and her family from her house, the latter apparently still intact (v. 22). Some LBA cities do reutilize older fortifications, and perhaps one such wall somehow

65. Spina, *The Faith of the Outsider*, 57.

66. Interestingly, LXX lacks both the rope (v. 15a) and the explanation concerning the house’s location (v. 15b). Since haplography seems an unlikely explanation here, both are probably additions in MT to clarify details implicit in the narrative.

67. Boling, *Joshua*, 148, 213 (an excellent drawing of Jericho’s excavated walls); cf. Nelson, *Joshua*, 39. Woudstra (*Joshua*, 74) compares Rahab’s house to houses built on dikes in the Netherlands.

68. R. Gonen, “Urban Canaan in the Late Bronze Period,” *BASOR* 253 (1984): 61–73.

69. Jericho itself shows this same unwallled design. Interestingly, during the LBA both the average population of these unwallled towns and their total number declined sharply; cf. Z. Herzog, “Cities in the Levant,” *ABD*, 1:1036–37 (quote 1036); Gonen, “Urban Canaan,” 63–69; but cf. Hess, *Joshua*, 87, n.2.

protected Jericho and accommodated Rahab’s house.⁷⁰ For the moment, as Howard remarks, “the exact nature of Rahab’s house is unclear.”⁷¹

Some readers may suddenly wonder, however, when the two young spies first learned of this window escape route. If earlier, then they made their agreement with Rahab with full knowledge. If only now, then they immediately know that their harlot host has cunningly played them for suckers—and rued their foolish naiveté. In any case, though the men are no longer trapped in Jericho, Rahab still has charge of them. To avoid meeting the pursuit team, she instructs them to go west into the hills (the latter word is emphatic) and hide there three days. By then their pursuers would have returned to Jericho—empty-handed, of course!—leaving the Israelites a safe route home (v. 16).

Given the dicey circumstances, however, the reader finds it odd, if not amusing, that Rahab and the spies still continue to talk within earshot of Jericho with the city already on alert. The NIV pluperfect (“she had said”) avoids the oddity, making vv. 16–21 a flashback, but the Hebrew syntax seems to portray them as following v. 15 sequentially.⁷² There is no indication of a prior conversation or that they have all whispered to maintain secrecy. So their conversation must either presume safety—i.e., an isolated location along the wall, city guards occupied elsewhere, a safe distance from the pursuers, etc.—or intend to inject a little humor into the story.⁷³

Whatever the case, once free of Rahab’s trap (but not of Jericho’s listening ears?), the young spies regain the initiative and prolong the conversation rather than silently vanish into the hills (vv. 17–20). At first glance, their opening line seems to undo the deal just made (“This oath . . . is not binding”) because it was done under duress (“you made us swear”). Indeed, the same phrase forms an inclusio around vv. 17–20, a clue as to why the spies risk discovery to do further business. They attach two new stipulations to the oath they have just taken for it to be valid (vv. 18–19).⁷⁴

70. Were the wall with her house somewhat detached from the city itself, her window would not compromise the city’s defensive posture against would-be invaders.

71. Howard, *Joshua*, 113. For other escapes through windows, see 1 Sam. 19:12; Acts 9:25. In addition, Nelson (*Joshua*, 51) regards conversations involving women in windows or on walls as possibly “another stereotypical narrative situation”; cf. 2 Sam. 20:16–21; 2 Kings 9:30–31.

72. Attempts to identify this as another example of “dischronologized narrative” strike me as a form of special pleading; against Howard, *Joshua*, 114, 115; Hess, *Joshua*, 93.

73. For alternative explanations, see Howard, *Joshua*, 114.

74. Previously, the only condition was that Rahab keep their business a secret (v. 14). Syntactically, *hinneh* (v. 18a) introduces the condition (NIV “unless”; NRSV, Vulgate “if”) for vv. 18b–19; cf. WO §40.2.1d.

Certainly, the wording betrays their preoccupation with avoiding bloodguilt later on.⁷⁵

First, Rahab must display "this scarlet cord" (lit. "this cord of scarlet thread") in the window through which they have just escaped (v. 18). The context does not clarify whether the crimson cord is the one that just lowered them or one that the spies hand her (i.e., "this cord"). The latter seems unlikely (would the spies have it with them?), but a crimson cord also sounds a little luxurious for a normal means of escape.⁷⁶ That the Hebrew words for "rope" (*ḥebel*, v. 15) and "cord" (*tiqwah*, v. 18) differ may also suggest two different objects. Some scholars speculate that the red cord already hung out her window to identify Jericho's "red rope district."⁷⁷ But evidence for such a practice is lacking and may not quite fit if the proposal concerning her house offered above holds. Whatever the case, since the wall probably has other houses, the attacking Israelites will need something readily visible to find hers. Without it they might let the wrong family live and wrongly kill Rahab's.

Second, Rahab must assemble her family in her house when Israel conquers Jericho (v. 18b). To give their demand legal weight, the spies invoke two legal terms, the so-called "bloodguilt formula" ("blood on [his/our] head"; cf. 2 Sam. 2:16; 1 Kings 2:32, 33, 37; Ezek. 18:13; 33:4) and the word "innocent" (*naqi*) common in legal declarations (cf. Gen. 44:10; Ex. 21:28; 2 Sam. 3:28).⁷⁸ Relatives found outside the house will bear the bloodguilt for their own death, the spies' bloodguilt for any who die in her house (v. 19). Each pays the penalty (or enjoys the innocence) for disobeying (or obeying) the terms agreed upon.

Finally, the spies reiterate that if Rahab reveals their business, the spies will be free of the oath that Rahab got them to swear (v. 20; cf. v. 17). Perhaps not wanting to prolong the chancy conversation further, Rahab accepts the new conditions and sends them on their way (v. 21a). In tying the crimson cord in the window (v. 21b), she fulfills the first of the spies' two stipulations. She is half-ready for Israel's siege of Jericho. Indeed, here

75. Cf. Sherwood, "A Leader's Misleading," 56–57 ("not a renegotiation but a 'cover-our-backside' clause").

76. E.g., Spina, *The Faith of the Outsider*, 62–63 ("Rahab's business calling card"). Nelson (*Joshua*, 51) speculates that the cord may be a humorous touch (e.g., a "very feminine and sexy" thread).

77. So Bird, "The Harlot as Heroine," 130, n.34; cf. Nelson, *Joshua*, 51–52. For a discussion of the scarlet cord as typology, see Woudstra, *Joshua*, 75, and Howard, *Joshua*, 115–17. The latter associates the cord with the crimson cord tied on one of Tamar's newborns (Gen. 38:28, 30) and the blood on the doorposts at Passover (Ex. 12).

78. Cf. K. Koch, "Der Spruch 'Sein Blut bleibe auf seinem Haupt' und die israelitische Auffassung vom vergossenen Blut," *VT* 12 (1962): 396–416.

the word "cord" (*tiqwah*) may play on the same-sounding word "hope" (*tiqwah*), as if—besides guiding Israel to her house—the dangling rope symbolizes Rahab's expectant hope of survival.⁷⁹

The Spies Debrief Joshua (2:22–24)

HAVING PAUSED FOR A long conversation, the story now hurries to its conclusion. While Rahab obeys the two spies, the two spies obey her. They hide in the hills for three days, watching for the return of the search party (v. 22a). Meanwhile, east of the Jordan, Israel spends the same period preparing to enter that very land (1:11; cf. 3:2). As expected, the search party's thorough search of the road finds (Heb. *maṣaʿ*) nothing and they reenter Jericho empty-handed (v. 22b). Their escape route now free of scrutiny, the two fugitives descend the eastern slope, cross the Jordan, and reach Joshua (v. 23a).

Rather than replay everything, the narrator simply reports that the spies tell Joshua "everything that had happened to [*maṣaʿ*, lit. "find"] them" (v. 23b). By punning on the root *maṣaʿ*, the storyteller hints at an important irony—that while their pursuers failed to "find" them, incredible events did indeed "find [i.e., happen to] them."⁸⁰ But the reader is left to wonder about Joshua's reaction either to their perilous *modus operandi* or to the oath they had sworn. Does he applaud them for pluck or reprimand them for bungling? How does he assess their dealings with the cunning Rahab? How does he view the oath by which the two soldiers, invoking Yahweh's name, have obligated Israel to spare Canaanites in violation of Yahweh's orders? Does he read their story as a replay of Israel's sorry, unfaithful past or as evidence of divine providence at work?⁸¹

Instead, to conclude the story, the author has the spies basically borrow two of Rahab's lines (v. 24). Emphatically ("surely") they affirm their faith that Yahweh has given Israel the whole land (cf. v. 9a). They revel in their discovery that all its inhabitants "are melting in fear" because of Israel (cf. v. 9b). This positive report sharply contrasts that of Moses' infamous

79. Nelson, *Joshua*, 52; Sherwood, "A Leader's Misleading," 57.

80. Nelson, *Joshua*, 52. Their discoveries confirm God's assurance of victory (ch. 1) and may, thereby, imply the narrator's criticism of Joshua for initiating the spy mission rather than invading Canaan immediately; cf. Sherwood, "A Leader's Misleading," 57–58.

81. Note, of course, that the spies' agreement with Rahab may not have actually "violated" any prior command and put Israel at risk. If the main concern of *herem* is to wipe out Canaanites in order to stave off syncretism in Israel, then sparing Rahab poses no threat since she shows an interest in Yahweh, allegiance to Israel, and a willingness to join them. Also, the agreement does not compromise the prohibition against taking plunder since Rahab and her family would likely bring their goods with them rather than leave them in their homes.

twelve spies (Num. 13), much to the relief of readers who fear a sad reprise of that disaster. Israel now has the inside information that the troubled king of Jericho tried to deny them. It is as if the fall of Jericho's wall of secrecy anticipates the later fall of her physical walls.⁸²

Certainly, such powerful intelligence will boost spirits in the Israelite camp and build momentum for the coming invasion.⁸³ Enemy fear of Yahweh and Israel runs as a thematic thread through the book (see 5:1; 6:1; 9:1–3; 10:1–2; 11:1–5). But for Israel the essential thing is confidence in Yahweh, the divine warrior. That Israel embraces the reality of his awesome power from the words of a Canaanite prostitute, Rahab, adds one last irony to the story. Through her, Israel learns that a terrified Jericho predestines Israel for inevitable victory. Through her, Yahweh brings good out of Joshua's perhaps less than sterling debut as commander-in-chief. Soon, the book will take great pains to trace Joshua's long career of exemplary leadership. Here, Yahweh deserves praise: He providentially delivers the imperiled spies from death and also graciously spares Rahab and her family. He is indeed positioning Israel to conquer the land—finally!

Bridging Contexts

RAHAB IS TRULY ONE of the Bible's more fascinating characters—but an ambiguous one as well. Her profession does not commend her to most readers, nor does her lying under pressure.⁸⁴

And what is her relationship to Israel? Is she truly a friend, or merely an opportunist who schemes successfully to save her own skin? Her confession seems to stop short of full conversion (e.g., "Yahweh is my God"), and though her descendants continued to live in Israel for centuries (Josh. 6:25), the Old Testament says nothing more about her.⁸⁵ Some readers may even wonder whether the spies biblically erred in sparing her life.

Rhetorical strategy. But the most important question is this one: What do her character and confession contribute to the rhetorical strategy of

82. Nelson, *Joshua*, 52.

83. The dream that Gideon would secretly hear in the Midianite camp decades later will have that effect (Judg. 7:13–15; see below). Whether the Rahab episode implies the existence of other secret allies and Canaanite sympathizers is possible but speculative; cf. Hess, *Joshua*, 96.

84. Concerning Rahab's deceit, cf. B. Barnes, "Was Rahab's Lie a Sin?" *RTR* 54 (1995): 1–9. Barnes concludes (8–9) that since the king of Jericho aims to murder the spies, Rahab has the right, if not the obligation, to deceive him; hence, her lie is no sin.

85. Readers should not confuse her with Rahab the mythical sea monster (Job 9:23; 26:12; Ps. 87:4; 89:10; Isa. 30:7; 51:9), whose name has a different middle letter (*he* [ח] instead of *beth* [ב]) in Hebrew.

the book of Joshua? Obviously, the Rahab episode anticipates the events in chapter 6 concerning the fall of Jericho. Her agreement with the spies leaves the reader eager to see whether it holds—and whether her picture of Jericho's vulnerability proves true. Further, her confession demonstrates that God is at work to give Israel the Promised Land. Her reassuring words buoy Israel's confidence as they prepare to leave the safety of Transjordan, head toward their first target (Jericho), and launch the invasion of Canaan. It also leads the reader to expect a series of victories (chs. 6–11) and, more importantly, the actual allocation of lands among the Israelites in the end (chs. 13–21).

At the same time, the optimism of Rahab's confession cleverly pulls a set-up on the reader. It creates positive expectations that clash with the unexpected surprises to come—the shocking defeat at Ai, the execution of Achan (ch. 7), the clever Gibeonite initiative (ch. 9), and the altar controversy (ch. 22). Literarily, these reversals of expectation force the reader to engage the important questions that those surprises present.

Moreover, Rahab the character for the first time sounds the important theme of Israel's relationship with the Canaanites given the *herem* mandate. As the book's main Canaanite character, she foreshadows the later treaty with the book's other prominent non-Israelites, the Gibeonites, and later references to conflicts between Canaanites and Israelite tribes (e.g., 15:63; 16:10). Also, her acceptance into Israel subtly anticipates the author's later theological explanation for why Yahweh's imposition of *herem* in Canaan became inevitable (11:19–20). She wins that acceptance because she responds to what she knows about Yahweh and Israel by surrendering herself. Her choice serves sharply to contrast the response of the kings of the land, who have similar knowledge yet refuse to submit. The reader understands that they suffer appropriate punishment (*herem*) for not responding in a similar manner to what they, too, undoubtedly know.

A final, related theme concerns another surprising reversal, the contrasting fates of Rahab and Achan (ch. 7). The reader expects Rahab the Canaanite to die, but she escapes *herem* by identifying with Yahweh and Israel. The reader expects Achan, an Israelite from the prominent tribe of Judah, to live, but he dies as *herem* because he stole *herem* that belonged to Yahweh. Thus, early in the book (chs. 2, 6–7) the juxtaposition of Rahab with Achan underscores that what truly counts with God is submission to his will, not ethnic identity. A trusting Canaanite may join Israel, but a rebellious native son must be excluded. The juxtaposition of the two memorable characters, therefore, sheds further light on the thorny question of genocide against the Canaanites. It underscores that the underlying issue concerns submission to or rebellion against Yahweh.

The issue of unswerving obedience later echoes in the covenant ceremony on Mount Ebal (8:30–35) and in Joshua 22–24. The latter three chapters treat the early post-settlement period and anticipate the following era of the judges. The altar controversy (ch. 22), Joshua's farewell speech (ch. 23), and the concluding covenant ceremony (24:1–28) all feature the theme of obedience to Yahweh. The imminence of Joshua's death makes it critical that Israel embrace that truth, for only complete loyalty to Yahweh will enable Israel successfully to navigate their long future in the land. In short, though an intriguing, complex character, the Canaanite Rahab casts a long, narrative shadow over the rhetorical shape of the entire book of Joshua.

Yahweh war. To understand the book of Joshua as a whole also requires readers to understand the background of a specific theme that Rahab sounds—Israel's practice of Yahweh's war.⁸⁶ From early days, Israel knew Yahweh to be the divine warrior who routed his (and Israel's) enemies (Ex. 17:16; Deut. 4:34; Ps. 24:8; Isa. 42:13).⁸⁷ Numbers 21:14 briefly quotes the "Book of the Wars of the LORD," apparently a volume recounting divine battles and victories. The historically early Song of the Sea (Ex. 15) celebrates the decisive victory over Pharaoh at the Red Sea that freed enslaved Israel. It particularly revels in the awesome power, especially mastery of wind and sea, that Yahweh's wonders displayed (vv. 6–10, 19; cf. 2 Sam. 22:15/Ps. 18:14). It also highlights one stunning result of Yahweh's victory, the terror and panic that paralyzes the surrounding nations. News of the victory signals that they may be next-in-line for his wrath (vv. 13–16).

Later Yahweh promised to send that same terrible, confusing dread ahead of Israel's army whenever it went to war (Ex. 23:27), a debilitating phenomenon to which Rahab herself testifies (Josh. 2:9, 11; cf. Ex. 14:24; Josh. 10:10; Judg. 4:14; 1 Sam. 7:10). For their part, Israel goes to battle without fear because of God's presence with the army (Deut. 20:1). Even when biblical narratives feature human combat without direct divine action, they affirm that such combat actually fights the Lord's battles (1 Sam. 18:17; 25:28).

Biblical battle reports show that Yahweh's war wields a variety of elements rather than follows a rigid schema. I will limit myself to those parallel to Joshua 2, deferring until later treatment of elements particularly relevant

86. I prefer this term to the more common but too modern and misleading "Holy War." The latter denotes war waged by humans for religious reasons, while in the Old Testament religious wars are always waged by Yahweh, the divine warrior, albeit occasionally through human means (hence, "Yahweh's war"); cf. R. Smend, *Yahweh War and Tribal Confederation* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1970).

87. For a convenient overview, see T. Longman III, "Divine Warrior," *NIDOTTE*, 4:545–49; Longman and Reid, *God Is a Warrior*, 31–47.

to later chapters of Joshua. In some reports Israel seeks and receives Yahweh's instructions concerning when and how to fight.⁸⁸ In such instructions Yahweh commonly invokes the formula of reassurance, "I have given X [an enemy] into Y's [Israel or an Israelite leader's] hands" (Josh. 2:9, 24).⁸⁹ Occasionally, the formula supports the command "do not fear" (Num. 21:34; Deut. 3:2; Josh. 8:1; 10:8).

Two narratives parallel Joshua 2 in offering Israel the assurance of victory from the mouths of the enemy itself. Creeping through the Midianite camp at night, Gideon just "happens" to overhear an enemy soldier's dream predicting Israel's defeat of Midian (Judg. 7). The dream reassures Gideon of Yahweh's victory (v. 15) and signals him to launch the attack. On a later occasion, the words of Philistine sentries similarly give Jonathan and his armor bearer the "go-ahead" and offer divine reassurance (1 Sam. 14:6–12, 23; cf. 2 Chron. 20:15).

Theologically, holy war musters a mysterious synergy of divine and human actions. Parallel lines from another early Israelite poem, the Song of Deborah (Judg. 5), voice this assumption:

... consider the voice of the singers at the watering places.

They recite the righteous acts of the LORD,
the righteous acts of his warriors in Israel. (Judg. 5:10b–11)

According to Israel's singers, "the righteous acts" both of Yahweh and of "his warriors in Israel" won the victory over the Canaanite Sisera. To the combined effort, Yahweh contributes the awesome forces of his creation—deep sea waters, wind, river torrents, and the opened-mouth earth (Ex. 14:21; 15:5, 10, 12; Judg. 5:21). He also dispatches his heavenly army (the "hosts of heaven"), including "the angel of the LORD" (Ex. 14:19; cf. Josh. 5:13–15; 2 Kings 6:18) and even the stars of heaven (Judg. 5:20). Given Yahweh's spectacular firepower, one might assume Israel's role to be a passive one—to mop up on the ground when the fireworks end. But Israel's army marches into battle just like any other army (Judg. 5:11, 13–15), and tribes who fail to participate earn severe censure (vv. 16–18, 23). Indeed, Judges 5 highlights the irony that Sisera finally fell, not to the might of Yahweh or Israel's army, but to the simple hammer of a cunning woman named Jael (Judg. 5:26–27).⁹⁰

88. E.g., Judg. 1:2; 20:18, 21, 28; 1 Sam. 23:4; 2 Sam. 5:19; 1 Kings 20:13–14, 28, 22:15.

89. Num. 21:34; Deut. 3:2; Josh. 6:2; 8:1, 18; 10:8; Judg. 1:2; 7:9, 15; et al.; cf. Judg. 4:14.

90. For a comparison of Rahab and Jael, see E. Assis, "The Choice to Serve God," 82–90.

This brings us back to the clever Rahab, whom Bird rightly describes as “both savior and oracle.”⁹¹ She is “savior” in that she protects the two hunted spies and facilitates their safe return home. More importantly, in Yahweh’s war a priest or prophet customarily gives Israel the assurance of victory before the battle may commence. In this case, Rahab, the worldly wise prostitute, is the “oracle” who plays the role of priest or prophet (Josh. 2:9–11). By virtually quoting her (v. 24), the spies accept her words to be as true as any oracle, and her reassurance paves the way for Israel’s movement the next morning toward the Jordan (3:1). Her words—and the high view of God that underpins them theologically—encourage Israel that Yahweh is, indeed, on their side and that victory is certain.

Subsequent history. But, what happened to Rahab after Jericho fell and Joshua honored the spies’ oath (see Josh. 6:23, 25)? Despite her important role in Joshua, the Old Testament never mentions her again. Beyond the general report that “she lives among the Israelites to this day” (6:25), readers learn nothing more about her until she reappears in the New Testament. The genealogy of Jesus informs us that she became the wife of the Judahite Salmon and the mother of Boaz (Matt. 1:5; cf. Ruth 4:21). That would make her the paternal mother-in-law of another remarkable foreigner, Ruth, whom Matthew also mentions (Matt. 1:5). It would also imply a remarkable reversal of fortune for her. The once crafty Canaanite prostitute condemned under *herem* ends up a member of the prestigious royal line of David and an ancestress of the Messiah. The consummate outsider becomes the consummate insider in Israel.

She and Ruth, therefore, share company with two other notable women in the royal Davidic line—Tamar, wife of Judah (Matt. 1:3), and Bathsheba, wife of David (1:6 [“Uriah’s wife”]). Even more remarkable, Hebrews 11 lists Rahab in its “Hall of Faith.” The writer apparently takes his cue from Joshua 6:25, which explains that Joshua spared her life “because she hid the men Joshua had sent.” Hebrews 11:31 interprets her welcome of the spies specifically as an act of faith on par with that of the other honorees in the “Hall.” His comment that she escaped the fate of the “disobedient” also paints the welcome as an act of obedience, presumably to God’s will.

Finally, James 2:25 goes even further. In the apostle’s view, people commonly consider her “righteous”—in right standing with God—because she models James’s ideal combination of faith and works (v. 26).⁹² In short,

91. Bird, “The Harlot as Heroine,” 127.

92. As “works” he cites her offer of hospitality (“she gave lodging to the spies”) and her clever strategy (“[she] sent them off in a different direction”).

Matthew 1 honors her genealogically (her rise to prominence in Israel), Hebrews 11 and James 2 theologically (an example of faith, obedience, good works, and righteousness). A condemned non-Israelite has become a card-carrying full Israelite.

The above New Testament writers all read Rahab from a specifically Jewish-Christian perspective as a type of the ideal, righteous Israelite. But, in my view, her transition from religious outsider to religious insider also marks her as a type of the believing Gentiles who flooded into the early church in great numbers. It is this outsider-insider motif that shapes the meaning of her story for today.



BOTH RAHAB AND THE two young spies understand that spying is a dangerous business. But Aldrich H. Ames also knew its potentially lucrative financial payoff. The movie *Traitor Within* chronicles his now-famous spying, treachery, and eventual discovery. Ames was a mid-level bureaucrat in the Central Intelligence Agency who yielded to temptation—the easy money of espionage. The Russian KGB paid him \$2.5 million over nine years, and apparently no one at the CIA questioned how he could drive a Jaguar and own a half-million-dollar home on his \$70,000 salary.

But for the KGB it was money well spent. A thirty-year CIA veteran, Ames gave them precious, highly sensitive American military secrets, especially about intelligence moles within the KGB’s own ranks. Compromised by Ames’ espionage, hundreds of such double-agents went to prison in Russia or were executed. On February 21, 1994, however, Ames’ secret world collapsed when the FBI arrested him and his wife, and a federal court subsequently sent both to prison terms for spying. Today she has completed her prison time and resides in South America. Ames himself is serving a life sentence in the high-security federal prison at Allenwood, Pennsylvania.

Why does espionage pay so well? Because warring enemies crave inside information to gain strategic advantage over their foes. The more one knows about the enemy—his location, troop strength, supply lines, strategic philosophy, and current plans—the greater the chance of victory. By the same token, effective *disinformation* (i.e., the dissemination of false data) is also money well spent. In junior high, I read a book called *The Man Who Never Was*.⁹³ It told how during World War II the British created a fictitious intelligence agent, including an actual cadaver strategically released

93. E. Montagu, *The Man Who Never Was* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1954).

into the Mediterranean from a submarine for the Germans to recover. A very detailed scheme of fake identity cards and prior fictitious secret communications convinced Berlin that the cadaver carried real Allied war plans.

That discovery actually led the Germans to redeploy troops from Sicily prior to the Allied invasion. In warfare, good inside information and good disinformation serve to win one side in a conflict the advantage. But espionage is not limited to warfare. Some modern corporations have paid industrial spies top dollar for the secrets of their competitors. In response, new companies specializing in the prevention of such thievery have recently done a brisk business with corporate clientele.⁹⁴

Biblical Rahab also parlays her insider status in Jericho—and intimate knowledge of its workings—to preserve the life of her family. Some modern Bible readers may still suspect that she “gamed” two naïve Israelite GIs—that she is a Canaanite Aldrich Ames. But conniver though she be, she is probably best understood as a biblical character-type whom Frank Spina calls “the outsider.” She may have wangled a deal for herself, but her meaning for today derives from that unique status.

Remarkably (and perhaps ironically), God used her, a woman slated for destruction under *herem*, to encourage Israel that victory at Jericho was in the offing before they had even crossed the Jordan. Her description of terror in Canaan confirmed that God had kept his promise to do just that as part of Yahweh war. Her faith, however shallow and rudimentary, even won for her and her family survival and an entrée into the people of Israel. The shadow of divine providence that stalks her story seems to imply that God cares for her, a condemned outsider though she be. Rahab, thus, has much to teach us. Our own Jerichos (whether towns or churches) teem with such folk, and the God who apparently cared for Rahab cares about them, too. Indeed, she reminds us of an important truth that applies to everyone.

Who is the “outsider”? Biblically, an “outsider” is someone who stands outside Israel (in the Old Testament) or the kingdom of God (in the New). They do not belong to God’s inner circle of special relationship—his chosen people—and hence are not party to what he is doing with the latter. Even worse, like Rahab they stand condemned—not under *herem* for being Canaanite, of course, but under God’s eternal judgment for their sin and rebellion. The distant relationship of outsiders to God and his people appears in Paul’s comments about the former life of some early Christians. For example, he writes to the Ephesians:

94. C. Warren, “I Spy,” *American Way* (November 15, 2007), 58–64.

Therefore, remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and called “uncircumcised” by those who call themselves “the circumcision” (that done in the body by the hands of men)—remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ. (Eph. 2:11–13)

Formerly, these believers had many strikes against them. They were “Gentiles by birth”—they stood outside the in-group, God’s elect people Israel. The pejorative label “the uncircumcision” further underscored their nonmembership in that covenant community: They lacked the physical sign of membership. Paul piles up terms to hammer home their distance from God: they were “*separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise*” (italics, mine). A frightening destiny awaited them, though they did not know it. They were “without hope and without God”—a recipe for misery and doom if there ever was one. The fact that the blood of Christ had to “bring [them] near” confirms just how far away they were! In short, insuperable barriers and huge distances barred their entry into the kingdom of God.

The day the spies entered her house, similar (if not worse!) big disqualifications separated Rahab from the kingdom. She was, of course, a native-born Canaanite—in Paul’s terms, “a Gentile by birth” and “a foreigner to the covenant.” Her ethnicity doomed her and her relatives to certain death under Israel’s policy of *herem*. Her religious background posed a grave threat to Israel’s loyalty to Yahweh (see Josh. 23). That was why she and everyone like her had to be killed.

Rahab also had the social disadvantage in the ancient world of being a woman—and apparently unmarried and childless. Her description of her family (“father and mother, my brothers and sisters, and all who belong to them” [2:13]) mentions neither husband nor children of her own. She inhabited a world presided over by men—politically, the king of Jericho and, commercially, her male customers. Worse yet, she was a prostitute, and possibly even a madam running her own bordello. Her singleness, thus, may not be surprising. What self-respecting man would marry a prostitute or tolerate his wife practicing such a profession? Only a divine call to prophesy compelled Hosea to do so (Hos. 1:2–3).

In addition, her profession probably meant that she had few female friends, especially married ones. In short, it marked the third disqualifier—the third strike that declared her “out.” Ancient society apparently

accommodated her profession (see Gen. 38), but she still lived on its margins—literally. There is nothing more marginal in an ancient city than a house set in the city's outer wall!

But she is not alone in the Bible. The common impression is that Israel kept aloof from non-Israelites and excluded outsiders from God's people. Several outsiders figure prominently in Israel's history, however. Ruth, the central character in the biblical book that bears her name, is one of the best known.⁹⁵ She was a Moabitess who married into an Israelite family during their temporary stay in her country. Tragically, death claimed her husband, but rather than remain and remarry in Moab, she moved to Judah with her widowed mother-in-law, Naomi. There she experienced life as an outsider—a foreigner from one of Israel's competitor countries, a woman in a man's world, and a childless widow in a world of married couples with children.

The biblical author several times calls her "Ruth the Moabitess" (e.g., Ruth 1:22; 2:21), a subtle reminder that she is "not from around here." Her vulnerability as an outsider comes into sharp relief when Boaz, her family benefactor (and eventual husband), twice instructs his male workers not to mistreat her (2:15, 16).⁹⁶ But her loyalty to Naomi ushers in a remarkable reversal of fate. The childless, widowed foreigner becomes the wife of Boaz, a leading citizen of Bethlehem (4:9–12), and bears Obed, grandfather of the great King David. In short, through God's providence and her own stunning commitment (1:16–17), she moves from outside Judah to inside one of its prominent families. She becomes a full-fledged Israelite spiritually by her faith and sociologically by her marriage.

The Syrian general Naaman also transitions from Israelite outsider to insider (2 Kings 5).⁹⁷ But in one surprising way, his story departs significantly from Ruth's. As head of the Syrian army, royal confidant, and popular war hero, he was part of his country's upper crust. But a terrible skin disease plagues him. Providentially, a young Israelite woman captured during a raid works for his wife. She advises him to seek healing from Elisha the prophet in Israel. Initially, he angrily rejects the prophet's prescription—to immerse

95. For an excellent exposition of this book and its implications for women, see C. Custis James, *The Gospel of Ruth* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008). Cf. also Spina, *The Faith of the Outsider*, 117–36.

96. Naomi reflects a similar concern for her safety when she instructs Ruth to work beside Boaz's female workers, not his male ones, to avoid harm (Ruth 2:22).

97. Cf. the illuminating discussion in Spina, *The Faith of the Outsider*, 72–93. He notes how, like Achan, the sin of the insider, Gehazi (Elisha's servant), demotes him to the status of cursed insider (my term). This shows that ethnicity, geography, religious background, etc., are not the only determiners of membership in Israel.

himself seven times in the Jordan—as offensive. At his staff's urging, however, he obeys and pops up the seventh time healed. The experience proves to him that Yahweh is God, and he is converted (v. 15).

But now comes the surprise: Naaman the convert has to return to his life in Syria where he faces a more complex future as an Israelite than Ruth does in Bethlehem. In a poignant gesture, he requests a two-mule load of Israelite soil to build a dirt altar to Yahweh back home (v. 17). Further, his job requires him ceremonially to bow before the god, Rimmon, so he asks Elisha in advance for Yahweh's forgiveness for that apparent idolatry (v. 18). Amazingly, Elisha sends him home with a reassuring word—in essence, "Not to worry" (v. 19). The reassurance dispenses a startling moment of divine grace: Yahweh accommodates his demands for exclusive worship in light of Naaman's evident sincerity and unique circumstances. In theology and religious devotion, both Ruth and Naaman belong to Israel, but in national identity and geographical homeland Naaman remains a Syrian.⁹⁸ Naaman signals that one can be an Israelite insider in belief but an outsider in geography—in one sense, the beginning of the Israelite diaspora.⁹⁹

Finally, King Nebuchadnezzar marks an outsider who, I would argue, comes close to the kingdom but does not quite acquire Israelite status. He personally recounts the astounding story of God's dealings with him in Daniel 4. He dreams of a gigantic, lusciously leafy fruit tree—a typical biblical symbol for a thriving kingdom (cf. Dan. 5:22–23; Ezek. 17:23; 31:6; Matt. 13:32). Alas, divine judgment dooms this tree to be cut down and stripped of its many branches and delicious fruit (Dan. 4:14). Daniel explains that the dream decrees the king's own fate—a double dose of humiliation. He is to lose not only his grip on royal power but also on reality itself; his mind is to become utterly deranged (vv. 25, 33). Driven from human society, the once mighty monarch will live for a long while among cattle, grazing on grass and drenched with dew.

But, the king reports, when he came to his senses—when he humbly bowed before the sovereignty of God and praised his greatness—God restored both his mind and his monarchy (vv. 34–36). His report ends where it began, with a personal testimony acknowledging the supremacy of God's kingdom over all human ones (v. 37; cf. vv. 1–3). But notice that Nebuchadnezzar simply refers to "God" but never invokes God's personal

98. Cf. Spina, *The Faith of the Outsider*, 88.

99. The "Israelite diaspora" designates the scattering of many Israelites from the Promised Land to permanent settlement in other nations. This phenomenon probably began with the falls of the Northern and Southern Kingdoms (722 and 587 B.C., respectively) and underlies the encounters of the apostles with Jews around the Mediterranean in the book of Acts.

name ("Yahweh"), unlike Ruth and Naaman. In modern terms, he sounds more like a deist—someone who accepts the existence and sovereign working of God in his or her life but who lacks an ongoing, personal relationship with God. His experience of humble submission is genuine and his affirmations about God's sovereignty are true. But, in my view, his relationship with God lacks the same closeness of true Israelites like the Moabite and the Syrian general. At least, not yet.

Lessons for insiders. The above outsiders represent an intriguing cross-section of personal traits. One is a prostitute, another a military hero of one of Israel's enemies, and the other an emperor with a huge ego who had also destroyed Jerusalem. From an insider's perspective, each is in some way problematic for a typical Israelite. Imagine, for example, the conversations that followed the news that the spies had promised a prostitute named Rahab that she and her family would live. Ridicule or praise might shadow the young GIs—ridicule for being snookered by the worldly wise Rahab, praise for cleverly escaping Jericho alive. Religious purists would scorn the spies' deal as a violation of God's plain mandate to kill every Canaanite. They would fret that Yahweh might punish the whole camp for what they regarded as the spies' foolish naiveté.

Others would simply wonder whether Rahab would remain in Israel or migrate to another country once Israel settled. She did not belong to any existing tribe, so where would she fit if she stayed? Would she be entitled to share in any tribal territory? Others would joke about what the notorious prostitute would do for a living in settled Israel! Parents might even agonize over what Rahab's presence might do to the morals of their sons—and wives, the morals of their husbands. A common thread links these thoughts: This woman is not like us!

This marks the first lesson for insiders: We must confess that outsiders are "not like us." They know little or nothing about life inside the average church. They do not speak "churchese" and are clueless as to the unique subculture that constitutes the average church. Do they understand why the first name of some churches is "First," "Bethany," "Calvary," "Immanuel," or "Ebenezer"? Where else would they encounter a "foyer," "narthex," "nave," or "fellowship hall"? Where else would they meet a "deaconess," "elder," "trustee," "liturgist," or "sexton"? Where else would they sit in pews surrounded by stained-glass windows and sing music led by an organ? (Most would probably experience organ music only at funerals). Where else would they drop money into plates or felt pouches passed down rows by nicely-dressed "ushers"? Where else would they be handed a "bulletin" or asked to fill out a "record of attendance"? Where else would they see someone receive "the right hand of fellowship" or witness an "invitation"?

How would they know what the "Dorcas Circle" and "Sunday School" are? How would they know which class to attend—the "Kingdom Builders," "Overcomers," or "Bereans"? Would they know the difference between "pneumatology" and "eschatology" or between an "invocation" and a "benediction"? If the pastor mentions the "Pauline epistles," would they wonder who "Pauline" was? The fact of the matter is that the larger culture is more "pagan" than "Christian." This means that the cultural distance between the average church and the folks next door is huge. They are "not like us" and we are "not like them." They enter our world as "outsiders"—the same status we enjoy in theirs.

This leads to the second lesson for insiders: We must confess our reluctance to welcome outsiders, especially those with problematic pasts or presents. Normally, we Christians settle into comfortably snug small groups of friends who are like us. Even if we avoid forming actual cliques, we tend to associate with people with whom we have a lot in common. This is "normal" behavior for most human beings.

Few of us have faced prostitutes or enemy military leaders on the church doorstep, but we usually can spot people with other kinds of baggage who show up. They may be people who live on the economic margins, often in low-paying jobs or bouncing around from job to job. They may be mentally ill or emotionally damaged—people very different from us (or so we think). They may be recovering alcoholics whose faces still bear the scars of their past defeats and current struggles. Their clothes, speech, personal habits, or story may give them away. Such people may be as foreign to most of us as Rahab was to the Israelites. Their differences unsettle us because our normal ways of relating to people do not quite work with them.

Another difficulty is that relationship with them requires more time than we are used to giving to relationships. Quite simply, such people are demanding of time and energy, and they rarely get better. Americans are "fix-it" kind of people—the world's best problem solvers—and that is one reason that we avoid these kinds of outsiders. Fix-it people find it difficult to hang in with less-than-fixable people.

But Joshua let Rahab live in Israel, and our Lord Jesus models a lifestyle of hanging in with people in trouble, people in need, people on the margins, people others avoid. We, his followers, can do no less. How can we do this? We need to overcome our natural skittishness about such people. As Rahab welcomed the Israelite spies, outsiders in her world, so we are to welcome outsiders into ours. Initially, Israel may not have been overjoyed to have Rahab and her family among them, and our challenge is a similar one. Prayerfully, we need to swallow our pride, set aside our preferences, and set out to cross the boundaries. We need to prepare ourselves to get our

holy hands dirty to do the work of the kingdom. We need to remake our church life to make anyone who walks in off the street feel welcome.

We must remember as well that Jesus hung out with “tax collectors and sinners”—a motley crew if there ever was one. The crowd that surrounded Jesus included a Zealot (Simon, a man whose party espoused violence against Rome) and a tax collector (Matthew). Remember, further, that without embarrassment the Bible includes Rahab in the ancestry of Jesus himself. Kingdom work may require us to hang out with people whom fellow believers might deem “the wrong crowd.” It may require us to include people usually unwelcome in our hallowed halls.

The third lesson for insiders is that God not only welcomes outsiders but also uses them to encourage his people. That is how powerful and caring God is! Through Rahab, Yahweh confirmed that victory at Jericho was certain because he had already sent panic among the Canaanites. Through her, he boosted the morale of his people in anticipation of the long conquest ahead, displaying that, prior to their arrival in Canaan, God had already paved the way for them. God’s providential introduction of faithful Ruth into Judah from Moab reminded Israel of God’s faithfulness to them. Her winsome life signaled that God was still at work in their midst, regardless of what chaos or change might swirl surround them.

Naaman’s newfound faith likewise verified that Yahweh was, indeed, the only true God—the only one able to heal incurable diseases. Naaman’s healing showed Israel just how much more powerful Yahweh is than other gods like Baal and, thus, how right it is to worship Yahweh alone. Similarly, Nebuchadnezzar’s testimony of God’s sovereign power would have encouraged God’s people, at the time enduring a long, dispiriting exile.

In short, one lesson for insiders is that God is at work abroad in his world, not just within the Christian community, and that some of his activities benefit his people. This truth is both humbling and inspiring—humbling in reminding the church that it is not the only arena of God’s dealings, and inspiring in reminding us just how very much God cares for his world. Further, this truth encourages us that whatever we may be doing to serve him, God may already be paving the way ahead of us to enhance the effectiveness of our efforts.

How do we respond to these lessons concerning outsiders? (1) We need to embrace and celebrate the idea that God is at work in all kinds of ways and with all kinds of people. To do so is simply to expand our mental horizons and to open our eyes to things he is doing that we might otherwise miss. God may, in fact, be preparing us to involve ourselves in one of those “missed” things. At least, seeing them confirms that God is in the neighborhood, so to speak—an important message for times when he seems very absent.

(2) We need to work hard at getting past first impressions. As with any human beings, behind the outward appearance—unkempt, smelly, offensive, demanding—is a person for whom Jesus died. Here are a few suggestions. Pray that God will help you get past the unpleasant sights, smells, and habits. Get to know the people on their terms, not yours. Find out what they like or dislike. Ask them to tell you their story, and listen to it without reacting. Ask them to share their dreams, if they have any. Above all, take them seriously. Treat them as a genuine human being, not as some category or type or project.

(3) See them as people whom God has on the way somewhere, not people who have reached their final destination in life. Pray for them as people in whom God’s Spirit can miraculously cultivate more Christlikeness. Pursue the relationship expectantly. Expect to see signs in their attitudes and behavior that reveal Christ’s love at work in them. Tell them how you see God at work in them. This is important because they may be too down on themselves to recognize the signs.

(4) Work with them to meet their practical needs. Rahab provided the spies protection, hospitality, and guidance. According to Hebrews 11:31, that was the way she showed her faith and confirmed her righteousness (cf. James 2:24–26). Similar practical deeds act out our own trust in God. They show tangibly that he truly has transformed us and confirm that our faith is the real deal. At the same time, do not hesitate to say “no” or to set boundaries whenever requests for help exceed your means or violate your sense of what is appropriate. The needs are always greater than the means available, so focus your attention on what you deem to be doable.

(5) The final lesson that Rahab teaches is that God continues to work to woo outsiders inside. In retrospect, a sense of hidden providence is subtly evident in the Rahab narrative. Looking back, the sparing of her life and her settlement in Israel seem to enjoy God’s approval—in my view, a harbinger of all the Gentiles who would later join God’s people.¹⁰⁰ They include us! Given the gentle wooing of the Holy Spirit and the persuasive power of the gospel, no one is doomed to be an outsider forever. Anyone willing to surrender to the wooing can become an insider free of charge.

In summary, an open door to the usually unwelcomed demonstrates that God cares for outsiders—that he is truly an inclusive God. This is the God visible in the book of Joshua—a God who uses a Canaanite prostitute and opens the door for her to become part of Israel. This God is also visible in the book of Jonah—a God who goes to great lengths to dispense

100. As we will see, the sparing of the Gibeonites marks a second such harbinger in the book of the Joshua (ch. 9).

mercy even to people like the hated Assyrians. Our open door to outsiders is nothing less than God's always-open door to them. Remember that the church is not an exclusive club of elites who preserve their own special status by keeping the Rahabs of this world out. Rather, over its doors hangs the welcoming words of Jesus, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest" (Matt. 11:28). Its doors are open to prostitutes, warmongers, egotists, broken hearts, failures, and the successful.

Rahab's reminder. Surprisingly, to look at Rahab is to look in a mirror at ourselves. In Paul's words, "... that is what some of you were" (1 Cor. 6:11). Rahab the outsider reminds us of what we were all like once—"outsiders," pure and simple. To look at her is to glimpse ourselves as God saw us before we came to Christian faith. In fact, that glimpse confronts us with an uncomfortable truth: Our natural bent toward rebellion still occasionally drives us back across the line into our old outsiders' ways. It shreds all our claims to righteousness and purity; it shatters all our pretensions. Granted, most of us were not prostitutes before Christ, but in God's eyes we were just as awful in our own way.

This glance in the mirror called Rahab is important for two reasons. (1) The fresh confrontation with the ugliness of our sin (both then and now) leads us to appreciate all the more the work of God's grace in us. It gives us a fresh glimpse of how far we have come since we first believed the gospel. The then-and-now contrast highlights how profound and life-changing have been its effects. We were all once prisoners pardoned from death sentences. We owe our very lives to God, the pardon-giver (see John 3:18). As a result, we will sing "Amazing Grace" with deeper feelings of gratitude than ever before. In turn, those grateful feelings will find arms and legs to live out thankfulness in practical service for Christ.

(2) Some years ago, I read a humorous story that took place aboard an aircraft carrier at sea. The flight deck was a hubbub of activity, with pilots trying to qualify for carrier duty. Back aft, plane after plane landed fast, their tail hooks catching the cable across the runway to slow down to taxi speed. At the bow, the steam-driven catapult hurled plane after plane off the end of the ship fast enough so each could fly. Radio communications between pilots and the ship blared over speakers on deck. But unexpectedly, one launch did not go smoothly. In silent horror, the crew watched as the just-launched aircraft like a wounded bird valiantly struggled to stay in the air. Precious seconds passed as the plane's fate hung in the balance. The pilot radioed nothing during the battle to stay aloft. Finally, the plane leveled off and began to fly normally, much to the relief of everyone. (Occasionally, aircraft are lost on take-off). Finally, the pilot broke his silence: "OK, God, I'll take over from here."

This story illustrates the second reason for glancing in the mirror that is Rahab: She steers us clear of our bent toward self-righteousness. The pilot credits God's flying skills with sparing him a possibly fatal plunge into the sea. But, once rescued, he takes over from God, as if God were no longer needed. In my view, long-time Christians often experience a similar change in attitude. At first, they feel greatly thrilled and relieved to be "saved by grace"—like the pilot snatched from death at a critical moment. As time passes, however, an attitude of spiritual self-confidence creeps in, as if to say, "OK, God, I'll take over from here."

Worse, a subtle self-satisfaction also may come into play. I would put the unspoken assumption this way: "We were saved by grace, but in retrospect, God really did a smart thing to do so." From there a subtle, small step may follow from thinking our salvation was deserved to looking down self-righteous noses at others as if we were spiritually superior. The prophet Ezekiel faced a similar problem among the exiles to whom he ministered in Babylon. He addressed it in an allegorical story about the history of Jerusalem, the city whose imperiled fate so concerned his audience (Ezek. 16).

Jerusalem, he reminds them, was born a baby girl whose gender and mixed racial ancestry led her to be despised and abandoned rather than cleaned and cuddled (Ezek. 16:2–5). But Yahweh passed by and commanded the girl, "Live!" then raised her to become a strikingly beautiful young woman (vv. 6–7). When he passed by again, Ezekiel continues, Yahweh saw that she was old enough to marry, so he himself married her. A generous, loving husband, he showered her with all kinds of wonderful gifts and tasty delicacies (vv. 8–13). Under his tender care, she became a queen renowned worldwide for her stunning beauty (v. 14).

Alas, however, the queen trusted, not in her loving husband, but in his gifts—her beauty and her fame. She thought they were hers by right, so she abandoned her husband and became a prostitute (Ezek. 16:15). Here Ezekiel joins Hosea in portraying idolatry—the worship of gods other than Yahweh—as an unfaithful wife turned prostitute (vv. 16–34).¹⁰¹ Twice Ezekiel voices Jerusalem's big mistake: "You did not remember the days of your youth" (vv. 22, 43). She had forgotten her own story, a story of rescue from certain death by the grace of a generous, loving, committed God. Similarly, Rahab reminds us of our story—that God saves by grace—to underscore that we still live by that same grace regardless of how long we

101. Ezekiel's allegory goes beyond Hosea, however, in also describing as prostitution Jerusalem's trust in international diplomacy for survival rather than in dependence on God (vv. 26–30).

have been Christians. As people ever sustained by grace, we have no reason whatsoever to don robes of self-righteousness. On the contrary, we were born sinners and we will die sinners—but sinners “being saved” by God’s wonderful grace (cf. Eph. 2:8).

The fateful choice. Finally, Rahab marks an early example of a larger biblical theme, an individual who faces a radical choice for or against submission to God. As Stek notes, the agents of two conflicting kingdoms knocked on her door that fateful night—that of Yahweh (the Israelite spies), and that of Canaan’s religio-political system (Jericho’s king and his men). He writes: “This same radical choice faces everyone wherever, whenever, and however the kingdom of God comes knocking on the door.”¹⁰² Only those willing to risk their lives—to throw away their past lives, their selfish dreams, their previous identity—receive inclusion in God’s people and enjoy the “rest” that comes with belonging to that kingdom.

I hasten to add that that is a choice Christians must make every day. Granted, at a certain moment we may have “decided to follow Jesus,” as the song says. But in another sense, we face the same choice in small ways—every time we face a choice between doing what would please Jesus or what would please someone or something else. Outsiders came abruptly into Rahab’s life and she chose to give them hospitality—protection, shelter, information, and good advice. We face a similar choice when outsiders intrude into our lives. Jesus clearly models the welcoming of outsiders, so the choice confronts us as to whether or not to follow his example or that of someone else.

Canadian singer Shania Twain captures the choice in her hit song, “Dance with the One That Brought You.” The song tells the reflections of a young woman whose date has taken her to a dance but left her to watch while he dances with other women. Her natural instinct is to abandon him and find someone else. But, in the song’s thematic refrain, the girl quotes the sage advice her mother gave her about loyalty and commitment: “Dance with the one that brought you, and you can’t go wrong.” That is good advice for Christians: Remember the gracious God who got us to where we are. He is, indeed, the one who “wants you” and “loves you” and “brought you.” He is the one with whom “you can’t go wrong.” His is the grace that draws every Rahab from outside to inside; his is the grace that sustains us every step of the way. He is truly someone with whom to stick forever.

102. J. H. Stek, “Rahab of Canaan and Israel: The Meaning of Joshua 2,” *CTJ* 37 (2002): 48.

Joshua 3:1–5:1



EARLY IN THE morning Joshua and all the Israelites set out from Shittim and went to the Jordan, where they camped before crossing over. ²After three days the officers went throughout the camp, ³giving orders to the people: “When you see the ark of the covenant of the LORD your God, and the priests, who are Levites, carrying it, you are to move out from your positions and follow it. ⁴Then you will know which way to go, since you have never been this way before. But keep a distance of about a thousand yards between you and the ark; do not go near it.”

⁵Joshua told the people, “Consecrate yourselves, for tomorrow the LORD will do amazing things among you.”

⁶Joshua said to the priests, “Take up the ark of the covenant and pass on ahead of the people.” So they took it up and went ahead of them.

⁷And the LORD said to Joshua, “Today I will begin to exalt you in the eyes of all Israel, so they may know that I am with you as I was with Moses. ⁸Tell the priests who carry the ark of the covenant: ‘When you reach the edge of the Jordan’s waters, go and stand in the river.’”

⁹Joshua said to the Israelites, “Come here and listen to the words of the LORD your God. ¹⁰This is how you will know that the living God is among you and that he will certainly drive out before you the Canaanites, Hittites, Hivites, Perizzites, Girgashites, Amorites and Jebusites. ¹¹See, the ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth will go into the Jordan ahead of you. ¹²Now then, choose twelve men from the tribes of Israel, one from each tribe. ¹³And as soon as the priests who carry the ark of the LORD—the Lord of all the earth—set foot in the Jordan, its waters flowing downstream will be cut off and stand up in a heap.”

¹⁴So when the people broke camp to cross the Jordan, the priests carrying the ark of the covenant went ahead of them. ¹⁵Now the Jordan is at flood stage all during harvest. Yet as soon as the priests who carried the ark reached the Jordan and their feet touched the water’s edge, ¹⁶the water from upstream stopped flowing. It piled up in a heap a