

Chapter Sixteen

RAHAB

Hebrews 11:30 *"By FAITH the walls of Jericho fell down, after they had been encircled for seven days. By FAITH Rahab the harlot did not perish along with those who were disobedient, after she had welcomed the spies in peace."*

The story of Jericho and Rahab is found in Joshua 2, 3 and 6:22f.

Jericho was the first fortified city that the Children of Israel came upon once they had crossed the river Jordan into Canaan. How were they to conquer this city seeing that they had no weapons of warfare? Joshua, the new leader of God's people, sends two spies to consider this problem. They enter the house of Rahab which was evidently set upon the wall of the city. She is recorded to be a harlot though some commentators suggest that this means nothing more than that she ran a boarding house. The people of Jericho were well aware of the approaching Israelites and had heard stories of the amazing things that their god had done for them, so when two strangers came to town, it was a natural assumption that they were spies. Rahab decides to deceive her people, hiding the spies from their searching and telling the enquirers that the two men had left the city soon after their arrival. We do not commend her for her deceit and lies, but history is to show that God had a destiny for Rahab far above anything she may have deserved.

The spies return to Joshua with the encouraging news that the city inhabitants are full of fear and that *"the Lord has given all the land into our hands."*

Joshua gives his people what seems to be some ridiculous instructions, but he has heard them from God and dare not disobey. He had had a good teacher in Moses! They are to march around the city once a day for six days and then seven times on the seventh day! The people could have questioned him, they could have argued, but by now they were becoming more aware of the ways of God. Faith is not *opposed* to reason; it is *above* reason. On the seventh day, after circling the city seven times, the priests blew trumpets, the people shouted and the walls fell down!

Was it the great belief of Joshua that did this? It is striking that his name isn't even mentioned in our verse above! If our author had wanted to point out Joshua's great belief in God he could have used the example of Joshua and Caleb returning from spying out the land (Numbers 14). Their ten fellow spies were full of fear and would not venture further, causing Caleb and Joshua to be angry with them, declaring, *"The Lord is with us; fear them not!"* They believed in God, but the writer to the Hebrews is not trying to show us their great trust, but rather, God's actions *by faith*. Faith does not need a man to understand and believe. It needs anyone who will obey - even when he does not understand, or believe! "O Lord, I believe; help Thou my unbelief!" (Mark 9:24). It requires one to be obedient to God's word, either heard, or still and small. Obedience was evident and the walls fell down, *by faith*. God had spoken, the people had

obeyed and God pushed the walls down. If He had told them to speak to the mountain and they had obeyed, He would have moved the mountain.

What a strange example of faith Rahab seems to be at first reading! Here is a woman who is a liar, a deceiver, a traitor to her own people. Yet both the writer to the Hebrews and the apostle James record her as an example of faith. Wherein is her faith revealed? It was by faith that she did not perish. God kept her alive because of her response to His witness within her. She said to the spies hidden on her rooftop, *"I know the Lord has given you the land, and that the fear of you has fallen upon us, and that all the inhabitants of the land melt away because of you. our hearts melted and there was no courage left in any man, because of you; for **the Lord your God is he who is God in heaven above and on earth beneath**".* All her neighbours believed the same as she did but they still clung to their empty hope that somehow they could deflect the judgement of God from themselves. They believed that their gods still had some power to stand against Him. Unlike her, they would not make confession of what they knew to be true, for theirs was a knowledge of the head based on the stories and rumours they had heard. Hers was a knowledge of the heart much like Peter's when he declared on Mount Hermon, *"Thou art the Christ!"* She had a conviction **and** a confession.

How wrong the people of Jericho were! - just like the multitudes today who believe that the Lord will not carry out His stated intention to judge this world for its sin and refusal to accept His (only) means of escape, the salvation found at the cross of Jesus. In the story of Rahab, God paints another picture of that cross, in requiring Rahab to hang a crimson thread from her window so that the attacking armies will recognise it as her guarantee of deliverance. The crimson thread has always been our means of deliverance; that stream of blood which still flows from the wounds of Calvary. When the walls fell, Rahab and her family were delivered as she had been promised, because she trusted that the crimson thread in her window would be honoured. Similarly, God is committed to honour all those who come to Him by way of the blood. There is no other way! *"He who believes in the Son has eternal life; he who does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God rests upon him"* (John 3:36) *"You were not redeemed with perishable things like silver and gold but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ."* (1 Peter 1:18,19)

Rahab was a idolator, brought up to worship other gods. The light she had might not have been very great - her advantages had been few - but she followed the gleam of that inner light, she believed *actively*, and was delivered. Here is the true principle of faith.

In Matthew 1 we find the genealogy of Jesus, the son of David, the son of Abraham. The apostle's purpose is to show his Jewish readers, the great and royal heritage from which Jesus has come. He is fully a Jew, as son of Abraham; he is fully a king by male descent, as son of David. But notice the name honoured there in verse 5. Rahab the harlot, delivered by faith, is the great great grandmother of David the king. She is recorded as a direct ancestor of the Saviour!!

My daughter Corinne is much involved in tracing our family tree. This was very interesting to me at first, but as she began to dig deeper I became a little anxious. I had been reading a *Time Life* book on the *Pirates of the Caribbean* in the eighteenth century, and was startled to find that

some of the most notorious were Welshmen, like myself! I dreaded the day when Corinne would announce, with a smug look on her face, that one of my ancestors was an infamous pirate. When the Holy Spirit directed the apostles to write the Gospel, He did not hide from our view that Jesus was descended from harlots, deceivers, murderers and womanisers. Indeed, His mother Mary could not have found it easy bearing the suspicious looks of her neighbours when it became evident she was with child outside of wedlock! Nothing is told us of her parents, the grandparents of the Saviour. Could that be because they found it very difficult to accept the shame such a pregnancy would bring upon them? After all, how could they be expected to believe that their daughter was still a virgin when it was evident she was pregnant!

If I had been God, I would have done it differently! I would have had my son born in the finest hospital in Jerusalem, tended by the finest doctors. I would have chosen a royal princess, the most beautiful, talented, educated woman in the world, for his mother and I would have surrounded him with all the trappings of wealth and glory that he was accustomed to. I would announce to all the world by a voice like thunder from heaven, that my son had been born. Instead, God chose that Jesus should be born in a barn, a dirty smelly place occupied by cattle. His father would be embarrassed and his mother lonely, rejected by her friends (and family?) with the taunts of 'harlot' in her ears. His announcement was heard only by some humble shepherds tending their sheep. God's PR man really blew it, didn't he!

Herein is love! There is no way that Jesus would draw men to follow Him because of His status, wealth or pedigree. He will not allow these things to rob you of your right to choose. The only thing He requires of you is your *love* and that cannot be forced from you. He would not manipulate you to follow Him. The mighty men of this world have their followers who hang on because of the status it gives them. When a new President is elected, we watch our TV set with interest to see those who he will gather around him. Jesus offers His followers nothing of this world's wealth and power. Instead, He identifies Himself with the lowest of people so that all may feel they can draw close to Him. Are you misunderstood, rejected, beaten down, accused? He can empathise because He was treated the same way. Are you poor, of little esteem, having little of which to boast? He understands for He has walked that same road. Napoleon Bonaparte is reputed to have said, "*At the age of thirty three Alexander the Great conquered the known world. At the same age, I have conquered the known world. We both conquered by the power of the sword. At thirty three years of age Jesus also conquered the whole world, but He conquered by the power of love - and He has conquered me!*"

God chose a harlot, by *faith*, knowing that, from her would come the Saviour of the World, His own precious Son, Jesus. This is grace!- unmerited love!

Summary

Both the writer to the Hebrews and James the apostle, give Rahab as an example of faith at work. As the Children of Israel drew near to Jericho, God was working out His purposes. He would pick out a woman who was to become an antecedant of Jesus, a harlot from a heathen people. Little did she know her destiny when she hid the spies!

We should learn the following principles:

- 1. Joshua believed God and obeyed. He is not even named in our verse because faith does not bring honour to man; its purpose is to bring honour to God.**
- 2. Rahab's conviction became a confession.**
- 3. God's promises to us are contingent on the application of the crimson thread (the blood).**
- 4. God has a mighty destiny for all who walk by faith.**
- 5. Grace reaches to the lowest and raises them to the heights of royalty.**