

(Devotional #20) *Character Studies from Hebrews 11:1-40*
Heroes of the Faith: Rahab and the Tumbling Walls of Jericho
(Hebrews 11:30-31; Numbers 13:27-31; Joshua 2:1-24; 6:1-27)

Our author begins this testimony of faith in Hebrews 11:30, citing the defeat of Jericho¹, then in verse 31 he turns to mention Rahab², who protected the spies and was spared as a result of her faith. The actual sequence of events in the Old Testament begins with Rahab and then turns to the defeat of the city. Of course, Rahab is mentioned in both accounts, but we may ask ourselves, why the author did not write verse 31 first, then verse 30 ... in order to follow the chronological sequence in the Book of Joshua. Perhaps, as important as her story is, the author wanted to place more emphasis on the defeat of Jericho as a supernatural, divine act, than on the faith of Rahab ... and one way to do that was to write about the fall of the city first. (*This likely being the case, we will follow the order of the text as it is written.*)

THE TUMBLING WALLS OF JERICHO:

By FAITH the walls of Jericho fell down after they had been encircled for seven days – Hebrews 11:30

The walls of Jericho are said to have been wide enough at the top for two chariots to drive side-by-side. This strategically located city was designed to withstand any enemy attack. It was considered to be impregnable and unconquerable; yet this verse says, “***the walls fell down.***” Of course, walls do not fall down without a cause, and it is the cause of the walls’ demise that is the main theme of Joshua Chapter 6. The point is this: the walls fell without human intervention. Israel’s army was commanded to perform a military maneuver more appropriate for a military parade than a battle. God’s instructions were, “***march around the city, encircle it once per day for six days, then on the seventh day, march around the city seven times and have the priests blow rams’ horns – have the people shout – and the walls will fall down***” (Joshua 6:3-5).

What sort of military strategy is this? How will marching, blowing trumpets, and shouting lead to the conquering of Jericho? Why would anyone follow these instructions? But this they did, and the walls of Jericho fell, “***unsmitten by battering-rams or siege-engines of war***³.” FAITH is said to have been the instrument of the victory at Jericho; but as always, the POWER behind the victory was THE STRONG ARM OF ALMIGHTY GOD.

BUT HOW IS DOING SOMETHING SO BENEIGN CONSIDERED AN ACT OF FAITH?

In the closing verse of the previous chapter, the spies, whom Rahab had sheltered, told Joshua in no uncertain terms, “***Surely the LORD HAS GIVEN all the land into our hands; moreover, all the inhabitants of the land have melted away***⁴ ***from before us.***” The Israelites *knew* victory was imminent because God had promised it. The phrase, ‘***HAS GIVEN***’ is prophetic. It speaks of a future act as if it were accomplished already. ***God had PROMISED, but God had not yet GIVEN.*** But faith is ‘***future-looking***’ and it allows believers to look to the future with confidence. So, when God said, in effect, ‘***just go walk around the city,***’ as odd as that may sound to the military mind, Joshua and Israel knew the defeat of the city would come as a result of ***God’s doing, not their own.*** God’s promise of ***a specific future*** was as certain ***as if the promise already had been***

¹ See Joshua 6:1-27 for the story of the fall of the Canaanite city, Jericho.

² See Joshua 2:1-24 for the story of Rahab and the spies.

³ Cited from 2 Maccabees xii.15

⁴ This means, the men of Canaan were demoralized because the news of Israel’s military victories had permeated the Middle East.

fulfilled. And victory was guaranteed because Israel had the historical record⁵ of God being true to His Word.

Remember, if you will, the opening words of Hebrews Chapter 11: “***Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.***” Biblical ‘HOPE’ is **NOT** wishful thinking; it is *complete confidence in the VERACITY OF GOD (that He will always do what He has promised) and the OMNIPOTENCE OF GOD (that He has the Power to do whatever He wills)*. The Israelites were not *pretending* to believe or *trying* to believe. They *did* believe, and as a result, they expected God to work ... and therefore they obeyed.

FAITH IN THE ADEQUACY OF GOD MADE ‘OBEDIENCE’ A RATIONAL RESPONSE.

There is a lesson in leadership here if we are willing to learn it. We are told, “***by FAITH the walls of Jericho fell down.***” This should cause us to ask, ‘***by WHOSE FAITH did the walls fall?***’ Certainly, if the people had not believed the Word of God, they would not have marched around the city in obedience to God. But if the people also had not believed in the faithful leadership of Joshua, they would have had no model after which to pattern their acts of faith. So, the faith of the people resulted in acts of obedience that were encouraged and demonstrated to Israel by the man, Joshua. As in previous examples in the Book of Joshua, the faith of the people was sustained and stimulated by Joshua himself.

THE FAITH OF RAHAB:

By FAITH Rahab the harlot did not perish along with those, who were disobedient, after she had welcomed the spies in peace – Hebrews 11:31

There is no one less likely to be spoken of in the Bible as a champion of faith than Rahab! Rahab was a harlot by profession, and a Canaanite by birth; yet it is this same Rahab, who acted in faith toward the spies, and who is listed as an ancestor of our Savior in Matthew Chapter One.

Joshua 2:8-11 records Rahab’s confession of faith. Having heard about the acts of God, and God’s promise to give the land of Canaan to Israel, she placed her faith in Yahweh, effectively turning away from the culture and from all of the gods of the Canaanites. The same truth that produced fear in the hearts of the majority, produced faith in the heart of Rahab. This was the work of the Holy Spirit, not the work of any man. And we, who have come to faith in Christ, have done so by the grace of God, and the efficacious calling of the Holy Spirit⁶, just like Rahab.

One of the things I learned from my Mother was, life’s lessons can be learned ‘**THE EASY WAY**’ or ‘**THE HARD WAY.**’ (*I’ll leave it up to you to guess how most of my lessons were learned.*) Israel seems to have preferred to learn her lessons ‘**THE HARD WAY.**’ One example of this begins to take shape in Numbers Chapter 13.

You may remember, the LORD instructed Moses to send a man from each tribe into Canaan on a reconnaissance mission to bring back intelligence that would aid Israel in the Conquest of the Promised Land:

Send out for yourself men so that they may spy out the Land of Canaan, which I am going to give to the Sons of Israel. Send one man per tribe – Numbers 13:1.

⁵ Israel had seen the ten plagues in Egypt, the Exodus, the splitting of the Red Sea, the divine provision of manna and the water from the Rock of Horeb, the defeat of the Amalekites, and the miraculous crossing of the Jordan River. All of these things were evidence that Jericho would fall at the Hand of Israel’s God, the LORD, Yahweh.

⁶ Read about the role of the Holy Spirit in calling sinners to faith in Romans 8:26-30 (especially focus on verse 30).

These spies returned with two different reports: the majority report was riddled with fear and angst, declaring *the cities of Canaan were too fortified to defeat, and the men of Canaan were too big to fight*. Only Caleb and Joshua disagreed and encouraged Moses to attack. As you know, the lack of faith on the part of the majority led to forty-years of Wilderness Wanderings and the death of that generation in the desert. But four decades later, Joshua and Caleb are planning to attack Canaan, and as before, spies are sent to collect information about their target: Jericho.

So, Joshua's two spies went into the city ... straight to the house of Rahab, a prostitute. Does this seem odd, or at the very least, maybe ... not a good idea? Well actually it was a great idea, because Rahab would have known more about the state-of-mind of the men of Jericho than any other person – and the spies were sent there to get just the kind of information Rahab would have known – and here is what they learned:

*The hearts of the men of Jericho have melted away. We all know God **'HAS GIVEN'** the Land of Canaan into your hands. We are scared to death and the men of the city are too afraid of you to fight – Joshua 2:9-11 (highly paraphrased but accurate).*

As you might expect, the men of Jericho, suspecting the spies would attempt to acquire information from Rahab, came to her door and demanded she turn over the spies. Rahab spoke to the men, but she did not give up the spies. Instead, she sent them on 'a goose chase' by saying:

They were here, but they aren't here now ... I don't know exactly where they went, but if you leave now, maybe you can catch them – Joshua 2:4^B (another paraphrase).

There is not time to examine all of the theological and moral arguments about Rahab's lie⁷. Right or wrong it is cited in Hebrews as an act of faith ... and following the principle we established last week, *viz., THE OLD TESTAMENT GIVES CONTEXT TO THE NEW TESTAMENT, BUT IT IS THE NEW TESTAMENT THAT INTERPRETS THE OLD TESTAMENT*, we will accept that God honored the intent of Rahab's protection of the spies ... while realizing it would be wrong to use this example to support the premise, 'the end justifies the means' – it does not.

Let's take a moment to think theologically about this passage, for it would be difficult to find a passage in Scripture that more clearly lays out for us the providence of God in the affairs of men. In Joshua Chapter One, God told Joshua to prepare the people for the battles they were sure to fight. Then in Chapter Two, the chapter that deals with Rahab, we see no matter how well we may plan for our futures, it is God, who already has prepared the way we will go.

It's hard to imagine a person better suited to play a key role in assisting Israel in the Conquest than the harlot, Rahab ... and the spies (*providentially*) walked into her place of business. Yet, we have no indication from the text that the spies knew anything about Rahab, other than ... she ran a house of ill repute ... that's it.

- They did not know God had gone there before them and opened her heart to consider what had taken place in Egypt (*viz., through her knowledge of the ten plagues*).
- They did not know she would protect them from the men of Jericho, or that she would tell them of the fear that had overtaken the city because of the knowledge of what God had done to the Egyptians.

⁷ I covered this in our lesson on Rahab on 03 November 2019, Lesson #3 on the Foundation's Class web page if you are interested: <https://www.gracebiblechurch.org/adult-bible-classes/lessons/foundations/joshua/>

- They did not know she would say to them: *“I know the LORD has given the land to you and the terror of you has fallen on us, and all the inhabitants of the land have melted away from you.”*
- They did not know she knew about the defeat of the Amalekites and the miracle at the Red Sea.
- But most significantly, they had **NO IDEA** she would say, **“YHWH YOUR GOD, HE IS GOD IN HEAVEN ABOVE AND ON EARTH BELOW⁸.”**

All of these things happened by the providence of God ... and as a result, the Israelites were encouraged, and Rahab was saved! This is an Old Testament testimony to the words Jesus will speak centuries later to the legalistic Pharisees: *“Truly I say to you, tax collectors and prostitutes will get into the Kingdom of God before you do”* – *Matthew 21:21^B*.

Rahab made one request of the Israelites: *“Since I have dealt kindly with you ... I beseech you to deal kindly with me”* – *Joshua 2:12*. Does this remind you, at least in part, of a story in Luke 23:39-43? Jesus is on the cross between two criminals. One criminal ridiculed him: *“If you are the Messiah, save yourself and us.”* But the other criminal, aware of his own guilt and who Jesus is, said: *“Lord, remember me when you come into your kingdom.”* Jesus replied, *“Today you will be with me in paradise.”* Two unworthy sinners: Rahab and the crucified criminal – Both turned to God in faith and acknowledged Him for who He is: (1) **RAHAB**: *“Yahweh your God; He is God in heaven above and on earth beneath,”* and (2) **THE CRIMINAL**: *“Lord, remember me when you come into your kingdom.”*

At the end of the story, whether it was because of something the Israelites said, or because the LORD already had called her to faith in the God of Israel, Rahab the harlot now is a believer!

Neither Rahab’s past, nor her profession, prevented her from believing in the LORD. Over the years I have met people who think their pasts make it impossible for them to be forgiven by God. I conversed once with a well-respected businessman who, because of his actions as a soldier in Vietnam, believed he could not receive the forgiveness of Christ. He wanted to believe, but he found it impossible to accept that God would forgive him for what he had done.

Rahab shines as a light to men such as he, and shouts **“GOD DOES CARE! GOD WILL FORGIVE! GOD’S GRACE IS GREATER THAN YOUR SIN!”** God demonstrated His love toward us when he sent Jesus to die on the cross for our sins⁹. He offers to any, who will believe His Word, the opportunity to be joint heirs with Christ, sons of the Living God, with a secure place in heaven. *God does and will forgive*, when by faith we believe His promises, and accept Christ’s death on the cross as payment-in-full for our sins.

We know this, not only from the Old Testament story in Joshua, but from the New Testament. As we have read already in Hebrews:

By FAITH Rahab the harlot did not perish along with those, who were disobedient, after she had welcomed the spies in peace – Hebrews 11:31

Now listen also to the words of James:

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

⁸ See *Joshua 2:11*

⁹ See *2 Corinthians 5:21*

James is not claiming Rahab earned her salvation through a good deed; however, what she did for the spies was indicative of **THE FACT** that she already was a believer.

Now we can't leave this line of thinking without pointing out that Rahab was the ancestor of King David, and as already mentioned, she is listed in Matthew's genealogy as a prominent ancestor of Jesus, the Messiah – (*Matthew 1:5, 16*).

Rahab is significant in two ways: (1) she is God's ordained instrument, who is responsible for protecting the spies, and (2) she gives voice to the perspective of the Canaanites toward the imminent invasion that began the Conquest – the Canaanites became **WEAK** because of their **FEAR** of the Israelites. Her report to the spies was relayed to Joshua, and it affirmed that the promises God had made to the Sons of Israel are true. And by the faith and brave actions of a Gentile prostitute, the faith of Joshua and the Israelites was made much stronger. Humanly speaking, the walls of Jericho were an insurmountable obstacle to the nation of Israel. But God uniquely and creatively removed that obstacle.

There are times in our lives when we face what appear to be insurmountable obstacles – they may be financial, emotional, medical, relational, physical, or even spiritual. In times like these, Joshua and Rahab are examples God has given to us to encourage us to persevere by trusting in the LORD; we must trust the promises of God, while at the same time, being reminded of the power of God. Despite our circumstances, we are commanded to live by faith, for “*the justified shall live by faith*¹⁰”!

¹⁰ See *Habakkuk 2:4^B*