

Andrews University

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Joshua 2, 6: Rahab as the Fulfillment of the Israelite Covenant

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Introduction

When discussing the covenant God made with the people of Israel, one might ask the question what about the Canaanites? Did God favor Israel so much that He was willing to destroy whole nations in order to make room for them? When these questions are asked, they are founded in the “us” and “them” mentality that can be seen throughout the history of Israel, Christianity, and remains quite prevalent today. While much scholarly work has been dedicated to the destruction of the native Canaanites, as well as the legal rights that existed for Canaanites who sought acceptance into the Israelite community, much less writing has been focused on the role of the covenant in relation to these “Canaanite foreigners.” One of the prime narrative examples of this principle demonstrated can be found in Joshua 2-6. At the very beginning of Israel’s quest into Canaan appears this rather out of place story of Rahab, Joshua, Israelite spies, a king, and ultimately, a treasonous choice to follow Yahweh the God of the Israelites. Through the examination of the acceptance of Rahab into the Israelite community, we will discover important principles about God’s covenant with Israel in relation to the Canaanites. God’s covenant was ultimately to provide the opportunity for all people to accept Him.

Background

Promise to Abraham

As early in the Bible as Genesis chapter 12, the theme of God’s covenant with Abraham and his descendants begins to develop. This covenant has three main factors. First, God calls Abraham to a specific land. Second, God promises to bless Abraham’s descendants. Third, God promises that through Abraham and his descendants all nations of the Earth will be blessed. God gives the covenant “so that you will be a blessing...and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.” God repeats this message to Abraham in Genesis 17, and makes clear that the

covenant includes “all the land of Canaan.” In Exodus 2 the covenant narrative is renewed, “and God remembered his covenant with Abraham.” The covenant is reiterated to Moses in chapter 3 where God once again promises to bring the people of Israel to “a good and broad land,” the land of Canaan. The rest of the Pentateuch details the journey of Israel from Egypt to Canaan, the organization of Israel into a society, and the attempts to keep the covenant with God. During this time God gave the principles of how Israel was to live when they finally made it to the land of Canaan.

Destruction of the Canaanites

At the beginning of Joshua, the Israelites encounter a problem. God has promised them the land of Canaan, but what was going to happen to all the Canaanites? Were they to be utterly destroyed or left to continue their inhumane religious practices? This has been a topic often addressed in theological and secular circles alike. How do we address the issue of God calling for the complete destruction of the people living in Canaan? Does God really sanction the wiping out of entire cities? Nations? Killing women and children with the sword?¹ There are several principles that help us understand this issue.

First, God would prefer to drive the Canaanites from the land rather than destroy them. Exodus 23:27-33 says “I will send my terror before you... and I will make all your enemies turn their backs to you... I will send hornets before you, which shall drive out the Hivites, the Canaanites, and the Hittites from before you.” In Joshua 2 Rahab confirms that this was taking place, telling the spies “all the inhabitants of the land *melt before you.*”

¹ This has led some to assume that the Old Testament demonstrates radical discontinuity to the God portrayed in the New testament, the argument for this is laid out in C. S. Cowles, “The Case for Radical Discontinuity,” in *Show Them No Mercy: 4 Views on God and the Canaanite Genocide* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003), EPub Edition.

Complete destruction was limited, it was carried out early in Israelites journey into Canaan and against mainly military forts². Jericho would be considered one of those forts, as would Ai.³ This would mean that the inhabitants of the fort would primarily be military personal. It is likely that the Israelite army marching around Jericho for seven days coupled with the fear already testified to by Rahab would have led most of the women and children to have escaped.

The destruction of the Canaanites was equal. God gave each nation sufficient time to turn from evil before He called for destruction. In Genesis 15:16 God tells Abraham that the “sin of the Amorites has not reached its full measure (NIV).” The Bible focuses on the Israelite story, but it does mention that God brought others to the land of Canaan and allots land for the Moabites and the Ammonites which Israel could not encroach on.⁴ The same amount of time God gave these nations, God gave Israel.⁵ When Israel had matured in sin until they were worse than those formerly living in Canaan, God let them fall into captivity.⁶

According to the Bible, God knows the heart of each individual, including children, and is the ultimate judge on their eternal salvation. 1 Kings 8:39 says that God judges and forgives because he alone knows the hearts of humanity. 1 Samuel 16:7 confirms that God looks at the hearts. The destruction that is prescribed is not eternal destruction, but rather the destruction of evil.

² Frank E. Gaebelin, ed. *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1992), 247.

³ See Thomas Evan Levy, P.M. Michele Daviau, and Randall W. Younker, eds., *Crossing Jordan: North American Contributions to the Archeology of Jordan* (New York: Rutledge, 2014), and Richard S. Hess, “The Jericho and Ai of the Book of Joshua,” in *Early Israelite History*, 1st ed., ed. Richard A. Hess, Gerald A. Klingbeil, and Paul J. Ray Jr. (State College, PA: Eisenbrauns, 2008).

⁴ Deut. 2:9, 19,

⁵ Frank E. Gaebelin, ed. *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1992), 247.

⁶ 2 Kings 21:1-16

Ultimately, it was God's plan to bless all the nations through Israel as He had promised to Abraham. Deuteronomy 30:15-29 lays out the choice between Yahweh and other God's, Between the source of life and the reality of death. In this passage God through Moses implores the people to choose life. 2 Peter 3:9 reveals God's heart, His desire that no one would be destroyed, "but all should come to repentance." The story of Rahab is vital to understanding God's covenant with Israel and its inclusion of the Canaanites. The Rahab narrative represents what could happen for anyone in the land of Canaan who was willing to follow Yahweh.

Issues with the Acceptance of Rahab into Israel

Rahab: A Prostitute

What Rahab did for a living, her vocation, has been a matter of much scrutiny in the Joshua narrative. If Rahab was indeed as prostitute as the LXX and most English translations record, how does this impact the ultimate acceptance of Rahab into Israel?

The word used to describe the vocation of Rahab is זֹנָה, which appears 93 times in the Old Testament but only 4 times in Joshua, all of which refer to Rahab.⁷ The word is used primarily figuratively, speaking of Israel playing the harlot in relation to God (Lev. 17:7, 20:5, Numb. 14:33, 15:39, 25:1, Dt. 31:16, Judg. 2:17, 8:27, 1 Ch. 5:25, Ps. 73:27). It is the same root word used in Hosea 1: 2 to describe the woman God was asking the prophet to marry. She was a representation of the unfaithfulness of Israel to God. When the term is applied to women it usually refers to a sexual relationship outside of marriage, which is forbidden by the law (Lev. 21:7-14, 19:29). Judges 11:1 does present an interesting use of the word, it calls the mother of

⁷ James Strong, "Zonah," in *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1890).

Jephthah the Gileadite a *zonah*, which could mean prostitute but could also be translated “foreign.”⁸

Josephus translated the term *zonah* “inn-keeper,” citing an old use of the Hebrew as a title for someone who runs a hostel.⁹ The fact that that the Israelite spies went to her establishment when they got Jericho could be further indication that she was not a prostitute. In addition, Rahab was listened to and trusted by the King, she was an accepted member of society, and her family lived with her in her house. These all would be evidence to suggest she was an innkeeper rather than a prostitute.¹⁰

There is no indication that Rahab was a cult prostitute, but evidence does exist that point to her as a harlot of some sort. Prostitutes were often involved in intelligence gathering and so it is no surprise that the King asked Rahab about the Israelites who entered the city, nor that he believed her when she lied to him.¹¹ While the LXX does try to clear the spies of any hint of wrong doing by translating וַיִּשְׁכְּבוּ in 2:1 as “lodged,” rather than “slept,” it holds to the translation of *zonah* as prostitute.¹² Sherwood argues that the narrative is intentionally ambiguous, leaving open the possibility of sin on the part of the spies. To him, Rahab’s role of a prostitute is important to the narrative because it strengthens her identity as a Canaanite and a threat to Israel and increases the surprise when she turns out to be a positive figure.¹³ Harrison

⁸ G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren, eds., “Zonah,” in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, vol. 4, trans. David E. Green (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1980), 97-99.

The term can also be applied to Men as in Ex. 34:16 and Num. 25:1 R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: Moody, 1980), 246.

⁹ Flavius Josephus, “Antiquities of the Jews, vol. 8,” in *The Works of Flavius Josephus*, trans. William Whiston (London: Henry G. Bohn, 1845), 1.2.

¹⁰ Dr. Rahel Wells, “Joshua” (lecture, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, MI, October 7, 2019).

¹¹ Frank E. Gaebelien, ed. *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, 260.

¹² Trent C. Butler, *Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 7a, ed. Nancy L. DeClassé-Walford (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014), 238.

¹³ Aaron Sherwood, “A Leader's Misleading and a Prostitute's Profession: A Re-examination of Joshua 2,” *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 31. No. 1. (2006): 48, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0309089206068842>.

notes this ambiguity as well, but is quick to make clear that it seems that the term “sleep” is used in a platonic sense in this passage.¹⁴ The narrative is indeed designed to be striking. The one who is supposed to be a marginal figure,¹⁵ a temptress who would take away the hearts of the men of Israel, is the only named character in the story other than Joshua.¹⁶ She becomes the hero of the narrative in a surprise twist of expectations.

If Rahab was indeed a prostitute, this would be a serious hindrance to her acceptance into Israel. The penalty for illicit sexual encounters was punishable by death even when the act was committed by Israelites (Lev 21:7, Judg. 16:1, 1kgs 3:16, Prov. 6:26). Furthermore, Israel had a tendency to be led astray by pagan prostitutes, the incident at Baal Peor in Numbers 25 would be an example.

Rahab’s name most likely comes from a shortened version of the name Eluraheba, which means “God has opened the womb.” It is a confessional name given to a child when they are birthed safely. Rahab obviously is without the divine element in her name. This name appears throughout 18th century Mari and west Semitic people. This is very close to the word רָחַב which means “wide, or broad,” and carries references to the word “land.”¹⁷ The connection of the name Rahab with the land; and prostitution with the seducing of Israel away from God, could lead the reader to be apprehensive of a potential straying from God.¹⁸ But Rahab demonstrates none of the characteristics of the harlots of Moab. She does not act in a sexual manner nor does she do anything to seduce the spies or Israel from their God. In fact, the opposite happens.

¹⁴ R. K. Harrison, ed. “Joshua,” in *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1981), 69-70.

¹⁵ Bernard P. Robinson, “Rahab of Canaan—and Israel,” *SJOT* 23, no.2 (2009): 257–273, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09018320903303603>.

¹⁶ Richard D. Nelson, *Joshua: A Commentary* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1997), 46.

¹⁷ James Strong, “Rachab,” in *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1890).

¹⁸ Trent C. Butler, *Word Biblical Commentary*, 256.

The narrative includes another ominous connection - the story of Lot and the angel messengers in Genesis 19. Rahab, which sounds like רַחַב (*rechob*), translated “public square” in Genesis 19:2, associates in the mind of the reader the story of Sodom’s destruction. There are numerous parallels between the two stories. First, two strangers come in to the city and need a place to stay. Rahab, like Lot, shows hospitality to these two messengers of God. Once the visitors are safely in the house the reader could expect an event similar to what transpired in Sodom.¹⁹ Surprisingly, Rahab acts as the protagonist, rather than the antagonist which one would expect from a pagan prostitute. When the men of the town come looking for the two sojourners, Rahab turns them aside, in a sense blinding them by feeding them falsehoods. Here she both acts as the hospitable host played by Lot in Genesis, and as the protector played by the angels. Like Lot, Rahab is saved from the city that is devoted to destruction by following the words of the strangers. She demonstrates the positive characteristics of Lot without any of the negative traits and she protects herself when the spies who, unlike the angels, cannot help themselves. Creach writes in his commentary on Joshua that the Rahab narrative “employs irony, humor, and folkloric qualities in an irresistible plot,” one where a woman who should be bad news for Israel outsmarts all the men, saves the Israelite spies, herself, and her whole family.

While argument remains over the vocation of Rahab, I tend to agree that she was most likely a prostitute by profession. Nevertheless, Rahab in no way acts like a prostitute, instead choosing to act on behalf of Israel and God. The narrative causes the reader to confront their own presuppositions about Rahab based on her vocation, and evaluate her status as an Israelite based on her actions on behalf of the people of God.

¹⁹ Richard D. Nelson, “Joshua” in *The Old Testament Library* (Louisville Kentucky: John Knox, 1997), 43.

Rahab: A False Witness

Considerable debate exists, at least among lay people, over Rahab's response to the king when confronted about harboring the Israelite spies. In chapter 2, Rahab takes in the spies sent by Joshua and hides them on her roof. When the king finds out they came to her he immediately inquires into their whereabouts. At this moment Rahab has a decision to make. She could give up the Israelite spies and finish the ordeal, she could commit treason by hiding the spies and divert suspicion by offering false information regarding the spies' whereabouts, or she could commit treason by hiding the spies and offering no information one way or another.²⁰ She chooses to betray her country and proceeds to tell the king that the men have already fled from Jericho. She clearly lies to the king, deliberately making a false statement in order to misdirect the king's servants and protect the Israelites. Rahab receives no reproof for this action anywhere in the Bible, and this has been used by some to justify lying when considered absolutely necessary. This is a teleological ethical formula (the ends justify the means).²¹ Before we run ahead and justify lying because the Bible doesn't condemn it in this story, we should look at what the whole Bible teaches, both about lying and about Rahab's action. It is important to recognize that God portrays himself as truth (Deut. 32:4, Psalm 100:5, John 14:6, 17:17, 18:37). Satan, the adversary of God and humanity, is called "the father of [lies]" (John 8:44, Rev 12, 20:3). When the 10 commandments are relayed to Israel God makes clear "thou shalt not bear false witness" (Ex. 23:6-8). prohibitions of false language show up throughout Bible: "The LORD detests lying lips, but he delights in men who are truthful (Proverbs 12:22)," "Whoever

²⁰ Frank E. Gaebelien, ed. *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, 260.

²¹ For more on this see Andrew Woodfield, *Teleology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), Joel B. Green, ed. *Dictionary of Scripture and Ethics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011), 211, and John B. Pierce *Flexible Design: Revisionary Poetics in Blake's Vala Or The Four Zoas* (London: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1998), 40-43.

would love life and see good days must keep his tongue from evil and his lips from deceitful speech (1 Peter 3:10).” It is clear that the Bible teaches lying is contrary to the nature of God.

When Rahab’s action on behalf of the Israelite spies is addressed, her lying is never mentioned. Joshua instructs the spies to go into Jericho and bring out Rahab, citing the *oath* that the spies made to her as the reason for her acceptance. The author of Joshua adds to this in verse 25, writing that she lived in Israel “because she hid the messengers whom Joshua sent to spy out Jericho.” When Hebrews mentions Rahab, it attributes her faith and deliverance from destruction to her *hospitality* in welcoming in the spies. Rahab then, both demonstrates faith and at the same time acts contrary to the instruction of God? how is that possible?

As will be addressed in further detail in the following section, Rahab demonstrates a considerable knowledge of God. She cites the deliverance of the land to Israel which is part of the covenant made with Abraham as well as the miracles performed on behalf of Israel during the exodus. She also tells the spies that “the Lord your God, he is God in the heavens above and on the earth beneath.” Psalm 19:1-4 states that “the heavens declare the glory of God.” it goes on to specify that no people exist who cannot see the heavens and gain knowledge about who God is.²² Romans 2 unpacks the issue farther, claiming that those who do not have the Torah are a “law to themselves.” This means that they make ethical decisions based on the knowledge of God that they have. Although Rahab demonstrates a knowledge of God, it is unlikely that she knew about the law that God had given. Luke 2 adds to Romans specifying that those who do not know what the law requires will not receive as heavy a punishment.

Whether or not Rahab knew the law of God and chose to speak dishonestly anyway or she did not know God’s instruction and made the best choice she could under the circumstances,

²² Psalm 14:1, Romans 2:20 demonstrate that God can be seen through nature.

she is portrayed in the Bible as a woman of faith. The fact that she lied is not condoned in the Bible and should not be used as a justification of such action, nevertheless her decision to follow Yahweh and act in protection of the followers of Yahweh does exemplify a character of faith and is commended.

Rahab: A Worshipper of Foreign Gods

Let's assume for a moment that Rahab was accepted into Israel without converting to Yahweh.²³ A prostitute entering the ranks of Israel would bring about the potential for sin in the camp which could have dire consequences to the nation.²⁴ One would expect some hesitancy from the people of Israel to spare Rahab if her conversion was really in doubt.²⁵ Joshua and the spies show no such hesitation. This is due to Rahab's demonstration of conversion. The phrases used in her speech to the spies in Joshua chapter 2 are standardized confessions of faith.²⁶ In verse 9 she declares "I know that the Lord has given you the land..." which is the very statement used by the spies in their report to Joshua. As mentioned earlier this demonstrates a knowledge of the Yahweh's covenant with Israel. Verse 10 shows that Rahab had examined the evidence of God's power on behalf of His people, and verse 11 makes clear that she recognizes God as creator.²⁷ According to Butler, this is the third stage of the story, following the salvation of the spies and the demonstration of divine will.²⁸ The steps to becoming a "non-hostile sojourner"²⁹ in Israel were demonstrated by Rahab through testifying of her faith in Yahweh, swearing an

²³ For an examination of this claim see Jeffrey S. Shoulson, *Fictions of Conversion: Jews, Christians, and Cultures of Change in Early Modern England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013).

²⁴ Joshua chapter 7 details the destruction that Achan caused simply by taking some money and clothes from Jericho.

²⁵ Some scholars posit this as the reason Rahab and her family are kept on the outskirts of camp. For more information see the section Rahab and the Acceptance into Israel.

²⁶ Trent C. Butler, *Word Biblical Commentary*, 242.

²⁷ Frank E. Gaebelien, ed. *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, 262.

²⁸ Trent C. Butler, *Word Biblical Commentary*, 242.

²⁹ The Hebrew word is גַּל, see section titled Rahab: An Ethnic Enemy

oath requiring a continued relationship with Israel, and showing loyalty to that oath.³⁰ Based on this evidence of conversion the book of Hebrews in the New Testament can say with confidence that Rahab was a woman of faith, a follower of Yahweh.

Rahab: An Ethnic Enemy

If the fact that Rahab was a prostitute or liar was an obstacle to her acceptance into Israel, her ethnicity could have been a much larger one. Israel most certainly had dishonest people among their company, and no doubt had prostitutes of their own nationality. Although there were laws against adultery the practice still existed within Israel.³¹ The new nation doubtlessly wanted to remain pure from sexual sin, but more important was avoiding the worship of other gods. For the Israelite nation entering the land of Canaan, avoiding integration with the nations around them was of great importance. God provided statutes to Israel prohibiting them from mixing with the Canaanites specifically to avoid being led away from the worship of Yahweh. Exodus 23:32 makes clear that the Israelites were to make no covenants with the people of the land of Canaan. Exodus 34:15-16 repeats the same command, adding “for when they *prostitute* after their gods and sacrifice to their gods and you are invited, you eat of their sacrifice.” It goes on to warn against intermarriage with foreign nations because that could lead Israelites to “prostitute” after other gods. Likewise, Deuteronomy 7:1-5 commands Israel to abstain from marrying pagans *because* “they will turn your children away from following me to serve other Gods.”

God gave the instruction to avoid intermingling with the Canaanite nations so that they would not end up worshipping the Canaanite gods. It was specifically this idea of a hostile

³⁰ Peter Jenei, “Strategies of Stranger Inclusion in the Narrative Traditions of Joshua–Judges: The Cases of Rahab’s household, the Kenites and the Gibeonites.” *Old Testament Essays* 32 no. 1 (2019): 138, and Andrzej Toczyski, “The ‘Geometrics’ of the Rahab Story: A Multi-Dimensional Analysis of Joshua 2,” *HB/OT Studies* 664 (2018): 67–91.

³¹ See Genesis 38, Hosea

stranger, one who refused to accept Yahweh or His instruction on worship and society, that the Israelites wanted to keep out of their midst. This can be seen by examining the terms the Bible employs when speaking about a hostile foreigner or an assimilated foreigner. The former got the title נָכַר (*nacar*), well the latter was called תּוֹשָׁב (*toshav*).³² The נָכַר is a person who refuses to assimilate into Israel, and the תּוֹשָׁב is a fully assimilated member. In between the two is the title גֵּר, which indicates a person living in Israel who seeks to assimilate. These terms help provide a background for the laws regarding foreigners in the Pentateuch. Deut. 17:15 prohibits Israel from having a foreign (נָכַר) king, Deut. 15:1-3 allows the Israelites to uphold debts belonging to this type of foreigner, and Deut. 23:21 allows for the charging of interest. Deut. 14:21 allows the selling of unclean meat to the foreigner (נָכַר), prohibits the eating of any unclean meat including meat that died on its own by the Israelite but allows the sojourner (גֵּר) to eat clean meat that died on its own.

Although a surface reading of the laws in the Pentateuch may produce evidence that God wanted to keep Israel from intermingling with other ethnic groups, a deeper study reveals that God's instruction to Israel was to avoid the religion of the Canaanites. God wanted to limit the temptation to follow after other god's that assimilating with non-Yahweh-believers would bring. This in no means excluded people of other ethnicities from joining Israel. Anyone who demonstrated a willingness to follow Yahweh gained an identity in God that replaced their Ammonite, Perizzite, Moabite, or any other Canaanite ethnic identification. They were not required to give up all cultural practices, but they were required to abide by the law of God. There are numerous laws in the Pentateuch about how to treat those who dwelt in Israel who

³² Peter Jenei, "Strategies of Stranger Inclusion," 128.

were not originally Israelites. Deut. 1:16 and 24:14 dictate that when judging cases, both natives and sojourners should be treated alike.³³

The Torah goes beyond simple legal transactions to include issues of worship. Leviticus 22:25 at first looks to be prohibiting non-Israelite people from joining in the worship and sacrifices to Yahweh. Nonetheless, the reason these individuals should not be allowed to offer sacrifices was because they were trying to offer blemished animals. If anyone wanted to offer sacrifices to God, they were allowed to do so if they followed the Levitical rules for what must be done. Num. 15:13-16, 29 says that the sojourner or anyone living permanently among them can offer sacrifices. Exodus 12:48-49 and Numbers 9:14 both make clear that sojourners could take part in the Passover, as long as all males were willing to be circumcised. Numbers 15:26 states “And all the congregation of the people of Israel shall be forgiven, *and the stranger who sojourns among them...*” The same forgiveness given by God extended to all those in the congregation of Israel. The phrase “there shall be one law for the native and for the stranger who sojourns among you,” is repeated throughout the Pentateuch.³⁴ God even takes special care to provide for the sojourners (Deut. 10:18-19) and instructs the Israelites to do the same (Deut. 14:28-29, 24:19-22, 26:12-13).

A regular Israelite tale of conquest would begin with chapter 1, immediately followed by chapter 3 and the destruction of Jericho.³⁵ In essence, Rahab disrupts the narrative, but she is in no way a partial character in the story. Rahab is included in the book specifically to represent the fulfillment of God’s covenant in the context of the Canaanites. Butler comments on the

³³ It is clear that there were non-Israelites who were living with Israelites, even in their towns. These people were to be treated the same, with full judicial rights *under the same law*.

³⁴ This statement is included in Ex. 12:49; Num. 9:14, 15:15-16, 29; Lev. 19:33, 24:22; For similar laws see also Lev. 18:16; Ex. 12:19, 20:10; Lev. 17:8, 10, 13, 22:18, 24:16; Deut. 5:14.

³⁵ Aaron Sherwood, “A Leader's Misleading and a Prostitute's, 46.

remarkable story of Rahab, calling her both “the first prophetic figure in the historical books” and “the first inhabitant of the land to join Israel and Israel’s God.”³⁶

These scriptures make clear that anyone who wanted to follow Yahweh could be a part of Israel.³⁷ The narrative of Joshua 2 and 6 drive home this point. The fact that the historical narrative includes stories of foreigner’s acceptance into Israel demonstrate importance of Canaanite involvement in God’s covenant with Israel.

God intended to bless all the families of the Earth through the Israelites, and the narrative of Rahab is a powerful demonstration of this covenant. While some claim that allowing Rahab and her family to live within Israel undermined their mission and decreased their claim to the land, the text seems to say the opposite. Israel’s right to the land was based on the authority of Yahweh, and since Rahab acknowledged that authority it actually supported Israel’s claim to the land and demonstrated the covenant God made with Abraham.³⁸

Rahab and the Israelite Exodus

Sherwood has demonstrated a very detailed parallel structure between the Exodus of Israel from Egypt and the exodus of Rahab from Jericho. The promise of God to Israel that He would “bring them up out of that land to a good and *broad* land,” the word used to describe the land is רָחַב which means “to widen.” The name Rahab calls to mind the very description of the land that God promised. When God promises to take Israel to Canaan, he refers the land as “broad.” The word used is רָחַב which comes from the same stem as the name Rahab which refers to a widening often connected with the land of Canaan.³⁹

³⁶ Trent C. Butler, *Word Biblical Commentary*, 261.

³⁷ Frank E. Gaebelien, ed., *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, 245.

³⁸ Richard D. Nelson, “Joshua” in *The Old Testament Library*, 44.

³⁹ Ex. 34:24, Deut. 12:20, 19:8, 33:20;

The parallels between the exodus of the Israelites led by Moses and the deliverance of Rahab have been demonstrated by several scholars.⁴⁰ Both Moses and Joshua encountered a heavenly being who gave them instruction on their calling. During this encounter the leaders follow a similar pattern 1) each one encounters a remarkable sight; Moses a flaming bush, and Joshua the commander of the Lord's army. 2) Both divine figures identify themselves and ask the Israelite leader to remove the sandals from off their feet. 3) The heavenly messenger proceeds to tell the human leaders the way in which God will bring about deliverance and fulfill the covenant that God made with Abraham. 4) Both the account in Joshua and Exodus relate closely with the Passover. Israel celebrates the first Passover on the fourteenth day of the first month in accordance with God's command while Joshua and all of Israel celebrate the Passover as well, specifically referencing the fact they kept it on the assigned day. 5) In Exodus God commanded males who wanted to partake in the Passover to be circumcised, including any sojourner. Joshua 5 details the circumcision of all the males before the Passover is observed.

It is at this point that the connection to the Exodus shifts to include Rahab. In both Exodus and Joshua chapter 2, those who wanted to experience deliverance were required to stay inside their house. Not only that, but an external sign marked the residence of this individual who looked for deliverance. While wisdom would caution the jumping at too many typological connections between the scarlet cord and the blood over the doorpost, the two symbols do perform the same service in the structure of the narrative. The scarlet cord may very well have served as a guide for the spies had the ensuing battle been hand to hand as the spies would have assumed. If nothing else, the location of the scarlet cord in the structure of Joshua in relation to

⁴⁰ David A. Dorsey, *The Literary Structure of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker, 1999): 101, and Sarah Lebharr Hall, *Conquering Character: The Characterization of Joshua in Joshua 1-11* (London: T&T Clak, 2010), 54-58.

the Exodus at least strengthen the connection between the angel of the Lord passing over the houses of the Israelites in Egypt and the hand of Yahweh sparing the house of Rahab from the destruction visited on Jerusalem.

Another interesting connection to note is that the deliverance of Israel from Egypt parallels the deliverance of Rahab from Jericho. Although there are obvious differences between the circumstances that free Israel and those that spare Rahab, both parties experience deliverance in a similar manner. With the people of Israel, it is more obvious because they were set free from physical slavery, but for Rahab deliverance comes through the salvation from the certain destruction commanded by God. This deliverance can be seen through an examination of the idea of exodus, which means “to go out.” The word הוֹצִיא, “go out,” appears numerous times throughout the Exodus narrative.⁴¹ The same word is used for Rahab in Josh. 6:22, 23 when she is “brought out,” by the spies. Furthermore, the covenant extends to all the members of Rahab’s family that are with her in her house. Salvation is often a family matter, it is integral to the Passover ceremony and the exodus of the Israelites as it is in the story of Rahab.⁴² The story of Rahab demonstrates the gentile exodus, a parallel acceptance into the covenant of God to that of Israel.⁴³ A simplified parallel structure is demonstrated in the following figure.

⁴¹ “go out,” appears in Ex. 11:4, 8, 12:17, 22, 42, 13:3, 8, 14, 16, 14:11, 16:6, 32, 20:2, 23:15, 34:18

This connection has been noted in Nicholas P. Lunn, “The Deliverance of Rahab (Joshua 2, 6) As the Gentile Exodus,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 65 no. 1 (2014): 11-19, David A. Dorsey, *The Literary Structure of the Old Testament*, 101, Sarah Lebharr Hall, *Conquering Character: The Characterization of Joshua in Joshua 1-11* (London: T&T Clak, 2010), 54-58, and R. Michael Fox, ed. *Reverberations of the Exodus in Scripture* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2014). See also Anton van der Lingen “BW’ -YS’ as a Military Term,” *VT* 42, no. 1 (1992) 59-66.

⁴² EX. 12:3, 24:15, Acts 16:31

⁴³ R. Michael Fox, ed. “Reverberations of the Exodus in Scripture,” 11-19.

In Exodus

- A Israelites brought out of Egypt following Passover
- B Crossing of the Red Sea / manna begins
- C Wilderness journey
- D Fulfillment of covenant at Jericho

In Joshua

- D' Making of the covenant at Jericho
- C' Wilderness journey
- B' Crossing the River Jordan
- A' Rahab brought out of Jericho following Passover⁴⁴

Here the Exodus of Rahab is connected to the beginning of the Israelite journey. It is interesting to note that the conquering of Jericho marked the first Israelite military victory beyond the Jordan River.⁴⁵ This event of course is not found in the Pentateuch, but I chose to include it because it marks the fulfillment of God's covenant to give the land to Israel accomplished by the Israelite Exodus. With this fulfillment comes a new interpretation of the exodus in the person of Rahab. Israel reached the land that they had been promised, but with this would come the exodus of the Canaanites. They had the option to leave the land, to run from the Israelites as many did. They could remain and fight the Israelites, but God showed at Jericho that when He led the armies of Israel no kingdom could stand in the way. The third option was chosen by Rahab and her family. Canaanites had the option to "come out" of their pagan religions and accept Yahweh as Rahab had done, and this exodus would be their deliverance.

Rahab's Acceptance into Israel

Coote argues that despite the evidence pointing toward the acceptance of Rahab and her family into the ranks of Israel, she was never fully welcomed. Instead, her and her clan lived as perpetual aliens.⁴⁶ The other extreme posits that Rahab married Joshua after the events detailed

⁴⁴ I added D and D' even though it is not included in Lunn's structure and D is not in Joshua because it demonstrates the first fulfillment of God's covenant with Israel to give Israel the land. Lunn, Nicholas P. *The Deliverance of Rahab (Joshua 2, 6) As the Gentile Exodus* 65 no. 1 (2014): 17.

⁴⁵ They had some victories before this like defeating Sihon and Og which Rahab mentions in Joshua 2:10.

⁴⁶ R.B. Coote, "The book of Joshua" in *NIB*, vol. 2 (Nashville: Abingdon, 1998), 619.

in Joshua 6.⁴⁷ I will seek to address what biblical evidence that exists for the acceptance of Rahab into Israel and how Biblical scholars have interpreted this evidence.

The last two mentions of Rahab in the book of Joshua come in verse 23 and 25 of chapter 6. Verse 23 says “So the young men who had been spies went in and brought out Rahab and ... all who belonged to her... and put them *outside* the camp of Israel.” The word “outside,” is חוץ which refers to the “outward part.” It is used in Ezekiel 40-46 to specify the “outer court” of the temple and in Numbers 5:3, 12:14 to refer to the outskirts of the camp where lepers were exiled. It was also outside the camp that certain portions of the burnt offerings took place (Lev. 4:12).⁴⁸

Nelson sees Joshua 6:22-27 as happening between the time the city is taken and its complete destruction. If Rahab and her family were led out of the city and touched any dead body, they would be considered unclean for seven days (Num. 19:11).⁴⁹ This would have led them to be quarantined outside the camp until they were considered clean. Harrison supports this interpretation of the text, noting that it was because of ceremonial uncleanliness that Rahab and her family were kept on the outskirts of Israel.⁵⁰ In the battle narrative of Numbers 31 this practice is clearly outlined. God commanded the people to destroy everything that belonged to the Midianites, and all the people of the Midianites. This was similar to the instruction given concerning the destruction of Jericho. When the men of war returned, they brought back spoils and women and children. For those foreigners who were allowed to live, they had to remain on the outskirts of camp and go through ritual purification in order to enter the camp. The soldiers,

⁴⁷ Richard J. Bauckham, “Tamar's Ancestry and Rahab's Marriage: Two Problems in the Matthean Genealogy,” *NovT* 37, no. 4 (1995): 320–329. Andrzej Toczyski, “The ‘Geometrics’ of the Rahab Story: A Multi-Dimensional Analysis of Joshua 2,” 67–91.

⁴⁸ Bruce K. Waltke, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, 273.

⁴⁹ Richard D. Nelson, “Joshua,” in *The Old Testament Library*, 94-95.

⁵⁰ R. K. Harrison, ed., “The Book of Joshua,” in *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1981), 115.

as well as the spoils has to do this. This purification of fire and water was meant both as physical cleansing, and spiritual cleansing.⁵¹

Another theory is that Rahab was placed on the outskirts of town as a temporary asylum.⁵² Israel was designed to be an extremely organized society as they were travelling through the wilderness. This meant that the camp was very structured. Nevertheless, Israel was about to be divided in the land of Canaan, and this would provide much more room for expansion and reorganization. Well it could have been difficult to incorporate Rahab and her family into the camp while it was in its mobile structure; it would be easy to include her in the redistribution. For this reason, the temporary asylum theory makes a lot of common sense, albeit without explicit textual support.⁵³

The textual evidence in support for the uncleanliness theory seems sufficient to posit that this would be the reason she was kept on the outskirts of Israel. It does not seem to denote any sort of discomfort on the part of Israel that she would be considered an Israelite, but rather a regular practice of purification following the instruction of Moses. That is not to say that the temporary asylum theory is not also true, but the text does not give us enough reasoning to say for certain.

The very last time Rahab is mentioned in Joshua is in 6:25, “But Rahab the prostitute and her father's household ... Joshua saved alive. And *she has lived in Israel to this day...*” the final phrase is used often in the historical narrative of the Bible.⁵⁴ There is some argument over what this phrase means. Some say that this phrase is referring to Rahab’s reputation and influence and

⁵¹ Jarome Creach, “Joshua,” in *Interpretation Commentary* (Louisville: John Knox, 2003), 66.

⁵² Peter Jenei, “Strategies of Stranger Inclusion,” 134.

⁵³ This theory relies on the idea that that Rahab and her clan were numerous held by Richard D. Nelson, “Joshua,” 43, and Trent C. Butler, *Word Biblical Commentary*, 379.

⁵⁴ For example, 2 kings 8:22, 17:34; 2 Chron. 21:10.

in no way is making a claim to the historical fact that she was still alive at the time the book was written.⁵⁵ Others believe that this statement is not etiological, but should be read as it is translated, that Rahab was alive at the time of writing.⁵⁶ The interpretations rely heavily on when the book of Joshua was written. I lean toward the historical view of the statement in Joshua based on the other uses of the phrase in scripture. Nevertheless, that does not discount the etiological impact of its inclusion.

What is particularly important about this statement is its use of the word בְּקֶרֶב (*beqereb*). When the stem קָרַב is combined with the preposition the object which it applies to, in this case Rahab, is seen as contained within a group. It is the same term applied to Israel dwelling “in the midst” of the Canaanites (Ex. 34:12).⁵⁷ So, in this instance the final phrase of verse 25 could rightly be translated “she has lived *in the midst* of Israel to this day...” This statement confirms Rahab’s full acceptance into Israel as a permanent resident in the midst of the Israelite community.⁵⁸

The rest of scripture confirm Rahab’s complete integration into Israel by including her genealogy. Matthew 1:4-6 is the only place where Rahab is explicitly mentioned, here it is recorded “Salmon the father of Boaz *by Rahab*. And Boaz the father of Obed *by Ruth*.” In Ruth 4 it includes the same genealogy naming Salmon the father of Boaz and Obed his son. In each of these genealogies the generations are included for the purpose of providing the family tree of David. Luke 3 also includes a genealogy of David beginning with God creating Adam and

⁵⁵ Frank E. Gaebelien, ed. *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, 263-264.

⁵⁶ R. K. Harrison, ed., “Joshua,” 115.

⁵⁷ Helmer Ringgren, ed., *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, vol. 13, trans. David E. Green (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1980), 148-152.

⁵⁸ Frank Anthony Spina, “Israelites as *gērîm*, ‘Sojourners,’ in Social and Historical Context,” in *The Word of the Lord Shall Go Forth: Essays in Honor of David Noel Freedman in celebration of his 60th birthday*, ed. C. L. Meyers & M. P. O’Connor, ASOR Special Volume Series 1 (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1983), 329.

concluding with Jesus. He records that Boaz was the father of Obed, and the son of Sala.⁵⁹ In each genealogy Ruth and Boaz are the great grandparents of David. The inclusion of Rahab in the genealogy of Jesus is no small detail. This shows not only that Rahab was accepted into Israel, but that she became a vital part in carrying on the covenant line of the Messiah promised to Abraham.

Conclusion

An analysis of the covenant between Israel and Yahweh beginning with Abraham and continuing through the nation of Israel reveals the purpose of the agreement: through the selected people all nations of the earth would be blessed. An important element of the covenant was the positioning of the nation of Israel in the land of Canaan. This included the destruction of pagan religion, as well as certain people groups who had matured in sin. The narrative of Rahab demonstrated that the covenant was meant to incorporate anyone who chose to follow Yahweh, including Canaanites. Rahab demonstrates the Canaanite Exodus by choosing to follow the Lord at the peril of her own life. She was ultimately accepted into Israel as a full member of society although she was a Canaanite. Although some may hold to conclusion that God's covenant with Israel was impartial and exclusive, the testimony of Rahab declares the Biblical covenant has always been for anyone who chooses to follow Yahweh.

⁵⁹ There are a few differences between Matthew 1:4-6 and Luke 3:31-33. It is possible that the name Sala (Σαλά) is referring to a different person (LXX renders the name in Ruth as Σαλμαν). More likely it is the same person because the name sounds so much alike. It could be simply a shortened name. There is an addition of several generations between Amminadab and Hezron than is found in Ruth, but this is not uncommon for genealogies.

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