**Rahab and the Spies**

Is there such a thing as a righteous lie? The 9th commandment states “You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor”. Some people take the position that not telling the truth under any circumstance is sinful. Others cite the example of hiding Jews from the Nazis in WW2 and lying about it was actually righteous since it was to save lives. In our study of Joshua chapter 2 we are introduced to Rahab who is a rather contradictory character. Should we define her as a harlot or hero, a liar or protector? That she was a harlot in the KJV and prostitute in the NIV is undisputed as she is identified thusly 5 separate times in the Bible. Some writers attempt to soften how she is portrayed by referring to her as an innkeeper.

Chapter 2 begins with Joshua secretly sending 2 spies into Canaan to look over the land. Notice how different this approach was to the spy mission described in Numbers chapter 13. Joshua only sent 2 men instead of 12 and sent them secretly to avoid a repeat of a bad report spreading among the camp. It is likely that he picked 2 men he most trusted and some believe that Caleb was one of those. Unlike the previous trip into Canaan, this was no exploration, rather it was a military scouting mission. The 2 men went into the house of Rahab and stayed there. Although how they chose her home is not stated, we can assume that they were led there by God. Word of the 2 men got back to the King of Jericho who called on Rahab to hand the men over. She deceived the king by saying that the men had already left her home and that they should pursue them when in fact, she had hidden them on her roof.

After the city gate was shut, Rahab went to the men and told them how much the Israelites were feared. The people in Canaan had heard that God had given them the land and how He had parted the Red Sea when they came out of Egypt. She had also heard how they recently defeated the 2 Armorite kings. She then acknowledged that the God of the Israelites was the God in heaven. She then entered into a pact with the men, asking them to promise to spare her and her family during the coming invasion in return for her protecting them. They agreed and told her to identify her home by hanging a scarlet cord from her window which she did. The chapter ends with the men returning to Joshua, telling him that God had given the land into their hands and that the people in Canaan were melting in fear of them.

This chapter is mostly about Rahab but her story hardly ends with this chapter. We will see in chapter 6 that she and her family were spared when the Israelites attacked Jericho. More importantly, she is among the saints listed in Hebrews chapter 11, the “saints hall of fame” chapter. This chapter mentions the faith of such luminaries as Abraham, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Gideon, David, Samuel and Rahab the harlot. While some might not consider her worthy of such company, she is the first recorded Gentile saved in the Bible, the beginning of the fulfillment of prophecy revealed to Abraham that he would be the father of many nations. She was saved by the faith she professed in God. The scarlet cord she hung from her window can be compared to the blood painted on the door frames of the Israelites so that the death angel would pass over their houses. Several scholars have written that she is in the lineage of Jesus (see Matt. 1:5). That may be true or it could be that there was another woman named Rahab who was the mother of Boaz. The events of chapter 2 occurred around 1400 BC and the time frame of the book of Ruth was around 1283 BC. If Boaz was 80 when he married Ruth, he would have been born around 1363 so it is possible that Rahab was his mother. Some speculate that the Salmon listed as the father of Boaz was one of the two spies sent into Canaan by Joshua. Rahab is one of only four women mentioned in the genealogy of Jesus.

Finally, many writers have noted the lie Rahab told to the representatives of the King of Jericho. While acknowledging her motive, most maintain that her lie was sinful. This is a thorny issue but I wonder if those who condemn her lie would prefer that she told the truth about hiding the spies and more importantly, would God have preferred that (see Ex. 1:19-20 and John 7:8-10). Rahab was clearly a prostitute and clearly saved by her faith. As Ray Pritchard noted, every saint has a past and every sinner has a future.