

# Midwife in Israel: Rahab's Story

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Questions to consider, discuss or journal.

## **Jericho**

Genesis 13:10–12 (NRSV)

*Lot looked about him, and saw that the plain of the Jordan was well watered everywhere like the garden of the Lord, like the land of Egypt, in the direction of Zoar; this was before the Lord had destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah. So Lot chose for himself all the plain of the Jordan, and Lot journeyed eastward; thus they separated from each other. Abram settled in the land of Canaan, while Lot settled among the cities of the Plain and moved his tent as far as Sodom.*

Does this description of the region in which Jericho is situated seem significant?

## **מָרָה - Utterly Destroy**

Joshua 10:36–40 (NRSV)

*Then Joshua went up with all Israel from Eglon to Hebron; they assaulted it, and took it, and struck it with the edge of the sword, and its king and its towns, and every person in it; he left no one remaining, just as he had done to Eglon, and utterly destroyed it with every person in it.*

*Then Joshua, with all Israel, turned back to Debir and assaulted it, and he took it with its king and all its towns; they struck them with the edge of the sword, and utterly destroyed every person in it; he left no one remaining; just as he had done to Hebron, and, as he had done to Libnah and its king, so he did to Debir and its king. So Joshua defeated the whole land, the hill country and the Negeb and the lowland and the slopes, and all their kings; he left no one remaining, but utterly destroyed all that breathed, as the Lord God of Israel commanded.*

Joshua 15:13–15 (NRSV)

*According to the commandment of the Lord to Joshua, he gave to Caleb son of Jephunneh a portion among the people of Judah, Kiriath-arba, that is, Hebron (Arba was the father of Anak). And Caleb drove out from there the three sons of Anak: Sheshai, Ahiman, and Talmai, the descendants of Anak. From there he went up against the inhabitants of Debir; now the name of Debir formerly was Kiriath-sepher.*

Utter destruction [מָרַת ] could be militaristic hyperbole apparently, and as we learn from Rahab, intercession on behalf of others will go a long way. Think about how Abraham interceded for Sodom. God acquiesced at every level, and Abraham never found out the true breadth of Yahweh's mercy—Abraham stopped asking at 10 for some reason, even though Yahweh gave no indication of limiting his mercy throughout the conversation.

Joshua 5:13–15 (NRSV)

*Once when Joshua was by Jericho, he looked up and saw a man standing before him with a drawn sword in his hand. Joshua went to him and said to him, "Are you one of us, or one of our adversaries?" He replied, "Neither; but as commander of the army of the Lord I have now come." And Joshua fell on his face to the earth and worshiped, and he said to him, "What do you command your servant, my lord?" The commander of the army of the Lord said to Joshua, "Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place where you stand is holy." And Joshua did so.*

### **Israel's Inaugural Battle**

Throughout the story of Jericho, there is not one point where Israel has the tactical advantage. It is clear to the reader that they are in no real position to win, as the spies are immediately found out, and instead of initiating a proper siege, Israel marches around the city for a week and plays trumpets. This showed that they listened to God's instruction, instead of relying on military prowess.

Further, the Angel of Yahweh appears to Joshua with sword drawn, indicating the Yahweh is not pleased (Numbers 22:22–23 & 1 Chronicles 21:16). When Joshua asks whose side this man is on, he says neither, but that he commands the army of the Lord. This implies that Israel's army is only circumstantially involved in this whole endeavor.

Part of Yahweh's character is to bring judgement against human evil, whether it be on the part of the Israelites or canaanites. Yahweh's character is also to be merciful, especially when humans intercede for each other.

The fact that Rahab correctly confessed Yahweh as the God of heaven and earth means that Yahweh was well-known among the Canaanites. She was even able to use the same wording that the Israelites came to use in their Torah:

Deuteronomy 4:39 (NRSV)

*So acknowledge today and take to heart that the Lord is God in heaven above and on the earth beneath; there is no other.*

If Yahweh is so well-known, then in theory any of the Canaanites could have sided with Yahweh. What does it mean that Rahab's faith brought mercy for her entire extended family (who we may assume did not initially confess Yahweh as God of heaven and earth), and that she was ultimately included (along with Tamar, Ruth, and Bathsheba) as one of the four *non-Israelite women* mentioned in the genealogy of Jesus? (Matthew 1)

## God works through People

The narrative makes it clear that God was responsible for making everything progress for his people. However, in the scriptures, God's purposes are almost always advanced by *humans*. What does it mean to you when we see that God works through the midwives in Egypt who were dishonest about the Hebrew infants, and then the prostitute Rahab, dealing treacherously with the king's men regarding the whereabouts of the Hebrew spies.

If you already knew these stories, try to imagine encountering them for the first time.

- How does this surprise you or subvert your expectations for the heroes of the Bible and the way God works out his plans in the world?
- What does it mean for us that God works out his plans through regular people, even prostitutes?
- If this is a birth narrative for the nation of Israel, how does it differ from the origin story of someone like a superhero?
- How does this fit with the way they should view themselves in relation to their gentile neighbors?
- What are ways that we can take seriously the claim that every human is the image of God?

How do the gospel authors riff on the lessons of Rahab?

Luke 19:1–10 (NRSV)

*He entered Jericho and was passing through it. A man was there named Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was rich. He was trying to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was short in stature. So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore tree to see him, because he was going to pass that way. When Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, hurry and come down; for I must stay at your house today." So he hurried down and was happy to welcome him. All who saw it began to grumble and said, "He has gone to be the guest of one who is a sinner." Zacchaeus stood there and said to the Lord, "Look, half of my possessions, Lord, I will give to the poor; and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will pay back four times as much." Then Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because he too is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek out and to save the lost."*

What else can you find occurring in or near Jericho in the gospel accounts?