

Rahab



In the New Testament, Rahab is remembered as a faithful woman whose allegiance to the Israelites saved herself and her family, as well as progressing the story of Israel. But how do we read Rahab today? Is she a colonised woman, who betrays her people in order to survive? Or is an inclination to moralise the story counterproductive in our reading of the Old Testament? How do we hold these questions in tension with her portrayal by the New Testament writers?

Read Joshua 2

1. What do you think about the reading and about Rahab? *Potential initial discussion points: Rahab is a prostitute/innkeeper, clearly has responsibility as well as being a prostitute. An unmarried woman assisting the Israelites – why did they go to her? Did they need boarding as well as hiding? What drew them to a brothel in the first place? Is she known in the town for knowing a lot because of who she entertains in her work? Why does she betray her people and lie to the king? Does she have a choice? Helping them escape allows her to bargain for the safety of those in her family. Is she clever? Does she really have faith in God? What is the meaning of the red chord?*

2. The genealogy of Jesus in Matthew 1 includes a woman called Rahab – do you think this is the same woman and what are the possible connotations? *Joshua 6: 22-23 states that Rahab and her family were saved after Jericho was taken. Judaism has a tradition around Rahab which suggests she converted to Judaism and was a worthy convert. Another tradition in rabbinic Judaism is that she married Joshua, whereas the Rahab in the genealogy of Matthew is married to Salmon. We can't know for sure, but either way there are inconsistencies between traditions. What would it mean for Jesus (by marriage, remember, as this is Joseph's genealogy and not Mary's) to be descended from a prostitute? Do we see this reflected in his own attitude to those society would reject?*

3. What do you think of God's choice in Rahab? *What does she risk? What virtues are displayed?*

4. Are we guilty of judging people before we know them? Do we judge Rahab for lying to the king and causing the death of her kin? *Do we moralise the Old Testament? Do we look at it through our own cultural lens? How is the history of Israel progressed through militarism? Is Rahab free to make her own choices in this colonisation, in which she faces certain death? Do we ever lie when we think the end might justify the means?*

Read James 2:25-26 and Hebrews 11:31

1. How do these verses differ in their perception of faith and works?

2. James talks about works 'justifying' Rahab (note he specifies that she is a prostitute). How do we perceive the importance of good works in our own faith? *The Greek word often translated as 'justify' can also mean 'make righteous'. Do our works make us righteous in God's sight? Can we separate our works from our faith?*

3. Do we feel comfortable putting all of our trust in God? What might be a barrier to that, the safety nets we feel we need? *Do we actually rely on money/status/property? Is it wrong to be secure? What about when we have children and a family – is it fair to live hand to mouth? Are we storing up treasures by having some security? What about church investments – do churches hoard money and not rely on God?*

4. What hope can we take from the story from Rahab, if any?