

Rahab the Harlot's Lies OK

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Rahab the harlot lived in the mighty city of Jericho in the Promised Land. At the time, Jericho was the major city in the region, i.e. the land of Canaan. From a military perspective, Jericho was formidable because two walls surrounded it, an inner and an outer wall. At the time, most viewed Jericho as impregnable. The story of Rahab begins in Joshua 2:1.

Prostitution in the region of the Promised Land was primarily of two kinds: temple prostitutes and streetwalkers. Many of the pagan religions practiced prostitution as some of the rites associated with the worship of the pagan gods. The streetwalkers were essentially the same as they are today; they made their living in the trade.

Rahab seems to have been a streetwalker. If she was a temple prostitute, then likely she would have been living in or near the temple of the god whose rites she supported. Since Rahab's house was on the outer wall of the city, likely, her house was near her consumers, i.e. the soldiers who manned the city walls. The Bible passage seems to show that the soldiers knew who she was.

Interestingly, the Bible frequently uses a metaphor in referring to those who turn from the Almighty to some other god as becoming prostitutes. With Rahab, could it be that the scenario is reversed? The reader can decide.

Briefly, Rahab's situation involved two spies Joshua had sent to reconnoiter Jericho. Rahab hid them on her roof and lied to some soldiers who were looking for them and who would have killed them. Later, Rahab allowed the spies to escape the city by lowering them on a scarlet rope from her house. She made a deal with the spies for the Israelites to spare her and her family when the Israelites took the city.

The scarlet rope may be symbolic of blood. Time and again, the Bible speaks of salvation or atonement through blood. If the rope was a symbol then God saved the spies through the "blood." Also, indirectly, God saved Rahab and her family by the "blood."

Some use this Biblical situation in support of situation ethics. This event seems to be a typical tragic moral choice according to ethicists. Rahab had to decide between two moral issues: lie or allow the spies to be killed. Religious legalists are in a quandary. Other Biblical passages seem to imply that Rahab made the correct choice and, in this case, her lying was acceptable. James 2:25 seems to say exactly that.

The situation was *not* situation ethics because Rahab's decision began before the spies arrived at Jericho. Joshua 2 describes the fear that fell on Jericho's inhabitants from the news they had heard relative to God's works earlier. Rahab herself seems to have spent some time thinking about the Israelites' imminent attack on Jericho. She decided to change sides if she had an opportunity.

Some would argue that self-preservation motivated Rahab. Doubtless, self-preservation was part of her motive. However, Rahab's comments in Joshua 2:9-11 seem to say that she had begun to believe in the true God based on the evidence of real-life events of which she was aware. She said, "...*he {is} God in heaven above, and in earth beneath.*" (v. 11, KJV)

Her belief, in this context and consistent with James' comments (James 2:25), was more than just a philosophical affirmation that God is God. Her belief was an active, committed belief that caused her to serve the true God. During the incident with the spies, she realized she had an opportunity to serve God. That opportunity involved saving the spies' lives. Doubtlessly, she had some sense of morality relative to lying even though she was not under the Ten Commandments. Her decision to save the spies' lives reflects several points.

One point is that she knew she could serve the Almighty God through one means, i.e. serving the servants of God, the spies. The only way mankind can really "... *love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind*" (Matthew 22:37 KJV) is to serve mankind. We allow Him to live in us by the way we choose to serve mankind.

Rahab chose to serve Jehovah by protecting the spies. Refusing to lie would have produced no positive results other than her adherence to an unqualified tenet of morality. Jesus reflected this same idea when He said, "...*The sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath.*" (Mark 2:27 KJV). That is to say that God gave His laws to mankind for mankind's sake and mankind was not created to keep those laws. Hence, God's laws *are* qualified based on whether they benefit mankind or not. In most situations, they *do* benefit mankind. In *some* situations, they *do not*. One size *does not* fit all. Christians should make tragic moral choices based on the best decisions for the *people* involved at the time.

Another point is that Rahab made a decision. She decided that saving the spies was a higher level of morality than was strict adherence to a moral rule. This *principle* is exactly the point Jesus conveyed in Luke 6:1-5. Jesus eventually told the Pharisees that He could approve or condemn based on a hierarchy of moral principles. Among the highest moral principles is one's service to mankind. If we make these choices based on legalistic, unthinking reactions without regard for the people involved, then we minimize God's justice and mercy by leaving God out of the decision.

Jesus rigorously criticized the Pharisees relative to their reordering those principles in Matthew 15:1-11. There the issue was whether a man should give money to the temple or take care of his parents. The Pharisees had ruled that, since he had pledged the money to the temple evidently before his parents' need arose, his temple pledge took precedence since it was to God. Jesus knew that the way mankind serves God is by serving mankind. There is nothing that we can give God that He does not already have except the abstraction of our personal commitments to Him. God does not need our gifts of any kind. He teaches us to give, not for His sake, but for our own sakes. God can provide everything the "temple" needs according to His will.

A similar situation arose with Hezekiah in 2 Chronicles 29-30. In that situation, Hezekiah knew the requirements for cleansing the people prior to the celebration of the Passover. However,

there simply were insufficient resources to complete the task in time. God overtly allowed an exception to the regulations He had specified. God knew the heart of Hezekiah and of the people.

A last point is that Rahab used her reasoning ability to consider the facts relevant to the spies' situation. Doubtless, she did not know the answer to every question she had in her mind prior to her decision. Still, she used the information she had to make her decision regarding the people involved.

So, Rahab's situation was for our example. Jesus summarized these ideas when He said, "... *Well hath Esaias prophesied of you hypocrites, as it is written, This people honoureth me with {their} lips, but their heart is far from me.*" (Mark 7:6 KJV). Christians' intent and purpose should be to do right in all situations. It is true that inevitably we will make bad decisions occasionally but, then, Jesus' blood will still cleanse us.

Does the story of Rahab have any relevance to Christianity in 2007? The answer is unequivocally, "yes." It is "yes" because every Christian should be seeking the best for all of the people around the Christian. In doing so, the Christian will be keeping the two foremost principles Jesus defined in Matthew 22:37-40. In keeping those principles, the Christian will be keeping all commands because the objective of all law, Christian and secular, is to do what is right for the people involved. Keeping those principles, then, means that a Christian will be doing what is right.

Christianity is for people. Christians will do well to abandon rule-based responses to the problems of people. It is easy to pull out a black and white rule relative to some situation rather than to take the time and to care enough to work with hurting people.