

A Letter to My Readers

RAHAB AND SALA'S GREAT DESTINY, OF COURSE, WAS TO be among the direct forebears of Jesus. We know this because their names are listed with Christ's ancestors at the beginning of the gospel of Matthew: "Salmon the father of Boaz by Rahab . . ."

The most amazing thing about Matthew's genealogy is that it actually includes the names of women. This was highly unusual for Jewish pedigrees. Luke's genealogy of Christ, which names only men, is far more the norm. The reason for the accustomed absence of female names is that in the Jewish world women had no legal rights. From the time of their birth to the time of their death, they were under the command of a man—be it father, husband, or son. It has always seemed to me a wonderful sign of the changes that Jesus brought into the world that a woman's name should appear in His genealogy.

As those of you who have read the book of Joshua know, Rahab's story takes up about five paragraphs, and out of those five paragraphs I've created a book of 85,000 words. One part of Rahab's story in Joshua that intrigued me was the fact that she

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was a believer in the Israelite God. How did that come to be? I asked myself, and there was my story.

Clearly I had to look elsewhere to get material for my novel and so I investigated whatever information was available on the period. The areas that I looked into were the religion and archeology of Canaan generally and Jericho specifically.

When Jericho was excavated, no written records were discovered. Our knowledge of the city and its culture comes from the other archeological evidence that has been found there. Over the years there has been controversy among archaeologists about the date that Jericho fell. Kathleen Kenyon, who excavated the site in the 1950s and published a book about it—*Digging Up Jericho*—declared that the city was destroyed about 1550 BC, the end of the Middle Bronze Age. The biblical narrative, however, places Joshua in the early part of the Late Bronze Age, about 1400 BC. Needless to say, this difference caused many difficulties for biblical scholars.

The most recently accepted dating of the demise of Jericho and the earthquake that destroyed the city—about 1400 BC, the early part of the Late Bronze Age—can be found in the work of archeologist Bryant G. Wood.

Although we currently have no written records from Jericho, the city of Ugarit on the eastern Mediterranean had great libraries from which a number of scrolls written in early Canaanite were recovered. It is these scrolls that give us the stories of the god Baal, the goddess Asherah, and the fertility religion they embodied. I used the material from Ugarit as the background for the religion that was probably also practiced in Jericho; the ideas of a sacral kingship and a sacred marriage are drawn from these manuscripts.

The biggest difficulty I had in writing the story of Rahab was the dramatically different worldview of the people I was writing

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about. Joshua and his army were embarking on what Muslims today call *jihad*—the destruction of everyone and everything that does not conform to their own religious practices and belief. We don't approve of *jihad* today—in fact, we deplore it as being against everything the modern Christian believes to be ethical. How was I to make heroes out of people who thought like this? People who thought nothing of killing every man, woman, child, and animal in a city they conquered?

There really is no satisfactory answer to this problem, so I simply tried to create the world of three thousand years ago in a way that would seem coherent and real. You, the reader, will have to judge whether or not I have been successful.

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Reading Group Guide

1. What can you take from the ancient story of Rahab that will apply to your own life in the modern world?
2. How did you feel about this different way of viewing Rahab? She has been known as a prostitute for so long. Did it ever bother you that a prostitute was listed as one of Jesus's ancestors? Did you think the author was successful in explaining how this reputation might not be true?
3. The instructions of the God of the Old Testament often seem to contradict the teachings of Jesus. Certainly it would be hard to imagine Jesus advocating the murder of entire populations. Can you reconcile the two? And if so, how?
4. What is it that Sala sees in Rahab that makes him love her so much? Was it just her beauty or was there something else?
5. What is it about Sala that is so attractive to Rahab? Is it just the fact that he rescued her from the slavers or is it something more?
6. Rahab and Atene both have their prayers answered by God and this is a vital part of their conversion. Did you find these "miracles" came too quickly to be real? Or did they perhaps

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remind you of the miracles that Christ worked that resulted in the conversion of so many of the people of His time—or miracles in your own life that have strengthened your faith?

7. Obedience to a father was one of the ethical beliefs of almost every people throughout the world. In the book, Sala feels that he can never go against his father's wishes, even if it means breaking his own heart. Can you see why this duty to a father might be a good thing? Can you see where it might cause problems for a family and a society?
8. The friendship between Rahab and Atene grows as the book progresses and is a great help to Rahab. How important do you think friendship is to most women? Is it as important as family relationships and if so, how?
9. Fertility religions were practiced throughout the entire ancient world. Can you see why they might have been so prevalent and powerful? What does this say about the importance of revelation?
10. What are some of the essentials of a good marriage? Do you think that Rahab and Sala have them?