



NEW HORIZONS: REBEKAH AND RAHAB

WEEK 3
03.18.18

FOCUS VERSE

Proverbs 4:18

But the path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day.

FOCUS TEXT

Genesis 24:48–52, 58–61, 67

48 And I bowed down my head, and worshipped the LORD, and blessed the LORD God of my master Abraham, which had led me in the right way to take my master's brother's daughter unto his son.

49 And now if ye will deal kindly and truly with my master, tell me: and if not, tell me; that I may turn to the right hand, or to the left.

50 Then Laban and Bethuel answered and said, The thing proceedeth from the LORD: we cannot speak unto thee bad or good.

51 Behold, Rebekah is before thee, take her, and go, and let her be thy master's son's wife, as the LORD hath spoken.

.....

58 And they called Rebekah, and said unto her, Wilt thou go with this man? And she said, I will go.

59 And they sent away Rebekah their sister, and her nurse, and Abraham's servant, and his men.

.....

67 And Isaac brought her into his mother Sarah's tent, and took Rebekah, and she became his wife; and he loved her: and Isaac was comforted after his mother's death.

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Joshua 2:1–4

1 And Joshua the son of Nun sent out of Shittim two men to spy secretly, saying, Go view the land, even Jericho. And they went, and came into an harlot's house, named Rahab, and lodged there.

2 And it was told the king of Jericho, saying, Behold, there came men in hither to night of the children of Israel to search out the country.

3 And the king of Jericho sent unto Rahab, saying, Bring forth the men that are come to thee, which are entered into thine house: for they be come to search out all the country.

4 And the woman took the two men, and hid them, and said thus, There came men unto me, but I wist not whence they were:

.....

Joshua 6:16, 25

16 And it came to pass at the seventh time, when the priests blew with the trumpets, Joshua said unto the people, Shout; for the LORD hath given you the city.

.....

25 And Joshua saved Rahab the harlot alive, and her father's household, and all that she had; and she dwelleth in Israel even unto this day; because she hid the messengers, which Joshua sent to spy out Jericho.



FOCUS THOUGHT

Faith allows one to leave the old life and walk toward new horizons in God's plan.



CULTURE CONNECTION

Take the Plunge

“Take the plunge” is an idiom in the English language with which many would be familiar. According to usingenglish.com, the idiom means “if you take the plunge, you decide to do something or commit yourself even though you know there is an element of risk involved.” Whether finally deciding to marry after a long engagement or quitting a job to pursue a business startup you have been dreaming about for years, the decision to “take the plunge” can be a little nerve-racking.

Someone once said, “The way to spell faith is R-I-S-K.” The writer of Hebrews told us that “faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen” (Hebrews 11:1). Faith sometimes requires us to believe

something that cannot be seen with the human eye or to expect something to happen for which we have no concrete proof.

To step out in faith and believe God for the impossible is a little like standing on the high diving board. You want to jump, but the thought of doing it can be paralyzing. Once the leap is made, however, the exhilaration of jumping can cause you to question why you were scared in the first place.

So it is when we step out in faith and begin to do what God has asked of us. We may fear and doubt whether God will come through. But when we take the plunge and reach for His promises, the exhilaration of watching the Lord come through will make the challenge worth it.

OUTLINE

I. THE OLD WORLDS

- A. Rebekah Was a Grandniece of Abraham
- B. Rahab Was a Harlot Living in Jericho

II. THE NEW HORIZONS

- A. Rebekah
- B. Rahab

III. THE LINEAGE OF JESUS CHRIST

- A. Both Rebekah and Rahab Left Their Homes for New Lives
- B. Both Were Included in the Lineage of Jesus Christ

CONTEMPLATING THE TOPIC

Two people who contributed to God’s plan could not be more of a contrast than Rebekah and Rahab. Rebekah, a virgin, lived in Haran; Rahab, a harlot, lived in a Jericho. Neither Rebekah nor Rahab could have anticipated what God had in store for them. Their backgrounds, though starkly different, were both headed for new horizons. Rebekah, the grandniece of Abraham, and Rahab, an unknown harlot without pedigree, surrendered to God’s plan that thrust them into roles of righteousness that are a challenge to believers today.

Although not everyone around Rebekah was a believer, she was born into a family that respected and worshiped the one true God. Her great uncle, Abraham, yielded to God who told him to leave his country and kindred to go to a land He would show him. Rahab, by contrast, was surrounded by idolatry. Her yielding to God’s will was more of a miracle than Rebekah’s decision to go with the servant to become Isaac’s wife.

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

I. THE OLD WORLDS

A. Rebekah Was a Grandniece of Abraham

When Terah, Abraham’s father, left Ur of the Chaldees in Mesopotamia, he and his family migrated approximately six hundred miles west to the area of Mesopotamia known as Haran. It was here that Rebekah grew up. It is not known how much of the family still believed in the one true God. At least enough of them believed for Rebekah to be exposed to the truth.

Rebekah’s father was Bethuel, son of Nahor, Abraham’s brother. Bethuel probably

farmed and raised livestock. Rebekah's duties consisted of the normal domestic duties of housework and going to the well to draw water for the needs of the household. The latter responsibility brought her to the well when Abraham's servant arrived on his mission to obtain a wife for his master's son, Isaac.

Abraham, who had previously immigrated from this area to the land of Canaan, approximately five hundred miles south of Haran, ordered his eldest servant to go to Haran and find among his kindred a wife for his son Isaac. (It is commonly believed this servant was Eliezar mentioned in Genesis 15:2.) Abraham made Eliezar promise he would not select a Canaanite woman for his son and that he would bring a bride to Isaac. (See Genesis 24:3-7.) Abraham was concerned that his son remain in the land of promise.

Rebekah, though an insignificant maiden, had an enviable pedigree. As the grandniece of Abraham, she was kin to scriptural nobility. Although she would later become more of a role player in the drama of redemption, Rebekah was already privileged to be influenced by those who believed in the one true God.

B. Rahab Was a Harlot Living in Jericho

If Rahab was well-known in Jericho, it was for the wrong reasons. Employed in one of the oldest, yet infamous, professions known to man, she was a harlot. "The harlot who lives on the wall" may have been her distinction. This is all we know of her until two Hebrew spies knocked on her door. She was used to having male customers knock on her door at night, but she had never opened her door to men such as these.

The Israelites had left Egypt, had rejected their first opportunity to enter the Promised Land, and consequently had wandered in the wilderness for forty years. They were now at the border for the second time, ready to enter the land promised to Abraham and his seed. Joshua, their leader, sent two men to spy out the city of Jericho, the first city the Israelites would encounter after crossing the Jordan. Joshua wanted to know something of Jericho's military strength that would enable Israel to prepare appropriately. It was these two Hebrew men who knocked on Rahab's door.

Expecting a customer, Rahab opened the door and unknowingly welcomed two Hebrew spies into her home. When the king of Jericho heard that two men from Israel had entered the city and had gone to Rahab's house, he sent messengers to her ordering her to bring forth the men. She informed the messengers that the men had left that evening about the time of the shutting of the city gate. In reality she had hidden the spies in the stalks of flax on the roof of her home.

When the threat had passed, Rahab spoke with the spies, letting them know that the inhabitants of the city had heard how the Lord had dried up the Red Sea when they left Egypt and how the Israelites had slain two kings of the Amorites. Perhaps because of these things she had heard, Rahab had come to believe in God. She told the spies, "The LORD your God, he is God in heaven above, and in earth beneath" (Joshua 2:11).

Knowing Jericho would be defeated, Rahab asked the spies to promise they would spare her and her family since she had shown them kindness in saving their lives. The spies promised her and her family safety if she would bind a scarlet thread, or cord, in her window as a sign to them when they invaded her city. They also made her promise that she would keep all the information secret they had shared with her. After agreeing to all of this, she let them down over the wall with the scarlet cord, for her house was on the wall. At her instruction the spies fled the city and hid in the mountain three days before returning to Joshua.

In contrasting these two women who later became better known to us in Scripture, we find there were contrasts other than just their morality. As Rebekah had a pedigree being of the extended family of Abraham, Rahab was a nobody. Until she became a follower of the Lord, she was a heathen employed in immorality in a pagan city. Rebekah represented a type of the Jews, and Rahab represented a type of the Gentiles, who enjoyed the extended arm of God in salvation. Rebekah represented Jews who had an inside track by being chosen as a people to receive God's promises, and Rahab represented Gentiles who were not a people but became a people. (See I Peter 2:10.)

II. THE NEW HORIZONS

A. Rebekah

What a difference a day makes! Those words may have been the title of a popular song in the 1960s, but those words were more than a song to Rebekah. When what she thought would be just another uneventful day announced itself, she arose, breakfasted, and began her domestic duties. Unaware that her trip to the well would eventually hold more than water, she went about her daily duties.

When Eliezer arrived at the well outside the city of Nahor, he stopped and prayed that the Lord would let him know which maiden was the one for his master's son. "Let it come to pass, that the damsel to whom I shall say, Let down thy pitcher, I pray thee, that I may drink; and she shall say, Drink, and I will give thy camels drink also: let the same be she that thou hast appointed for thy servant Isaac; and thereby shall I know that thou hast shown kindness unto my master" (Genesis 24:14).

Before he had finished praying, Rebekah approached the well. When Eliezer asked Rebekah for a drink of water, she volunteered not only to give him a drink but to draw water and give to his ten camels, which she proceeded to do. Being so sure that this maiden was the one, Eliezer offered her a golden earring and two bracelets. With these gifts he asked whose daughter she was. Finding that she was of Abraham's kindred, he inquired about lodging. She was quick to assure him, "We have both straw and provender enough, and room to lodge in" (Genesis 24:25).

When the family was apprised of the visiting stranger's presence, they quickly made sufficient lodging and provisions available. Being invited to a meal, Eliezer refused to eat until he had related his story, which included his master's order to find a bride for his son. He then told of his arrival at the well, his prayer to the Lord, and Rebekah's response.

This is the first time the Bible links the well with marriage. Scholars refer to this as a "type scene." It is placed in the text to help the reader (listener) understand more easily what is going on.

When the family heard his story and had received the gifts Eliezer had brought, they enjoyed a meal and retired for the night. The

next morning Eliezer asked to be sent on his way along with Rebekah. He felt it needless to linger in Haran since he had found what he felt to be the Lord's will for his master's son.

The family responded to this request by saying in so many words, "Not so fast." They said, "Let the damsel abide with us a few days, at the least ten; after that she shall go" (Genesis 24:55). Abraham's servant refused to be deterred saying, "Hinder me not" (Genesis 24:56). They agreed to let Rebekah decide the time of her departure. They asked her, "Wilt thou go with this man? And she said, I will go" (Genesis 24:58).

Note Rebekah's willingness to accept what she felt to be the right thing to do. What daughter of a happy family would be eager to leave her loved ones to go to a strange land and marry a strange man? Yet, without hesitation, she said, "I will go."

Many who are faced with such a monumental decision would have asked for some time to think it over. It would not have been unusual for Rebekah to have said, "Give me a week or two to think about it." It was obvious she was convinced this was the will of the Lord for her, for there was no indication of hesitancy.

New horizons are not attained without taking risks. Usually God does not show us everything we will encounter. We have to step out by faith and trust Him. It is much like Noah's coming out of the ark after the flood. After the waters abated and the ground was dry, he and his family exited the ark, which had come to rest on a mountain. They did not know what they might find in the valley. God may not show us the valleys in advance, but those areas are where we spend most of our experience. If we knew in advance what the valleys held, we might be more reluctant to meet the challenge of new horizons. God shows us just enough for us to leave the ark and explore the new world He has planned. If we will trust Him on the mountain tops, He will see us through the valleys.

B. Rahab

After wandering forty years in the wilderness, Israel paused on the east bank of the Jordan River ready to cross into the land promised to Abraham and to his seed. This was the time for which Israel had prayed and longed. Knowing

this, Joshua wanted to be sure they were moving according to God's divine plan.

It seems that God often puts water between the world and His people. When God called Abraham to leave his family for a new horizon, Abraham had to cross the Euphrates River, for Ur of the Chaldees was on the north side of the river. Crossing the Euphrates River, he became the first Hebrew, for the word *Hebrew* means "one from beyond" and comes from a root word meaning "to cross over." It is generally understood that this means the Euphrates River that Abraham crossed over to pursue God's divine plan.

When Joshua referred to "your fathers dwelling on the other side of the flood in old time" (Joshua 24:2), he was referring to Abraham's existence in Ur, for *flood* is from a term meaning, among other things, "stream" or "river." As God put the flood between Noah and the wicked world, as Abraham had to cross the Euphrates, as Israel had to cross the Red Sea, and as Israel had to cross the Jordan River, believers today must put the water of baptism between the world and themselves. New horizons always involve leaving the old behind and crossing over to the new.

After Israel crossed the Jordan River and entered Canaan, their first challenge was the city of Jericho. Ancient Jericho is thought to be the oldest continuously inhabited city in the world. Eight hundred feet below sea level, it is considered to be the lowest city on earth.

Little did Jericho or Israel know the strategy God had planned. He told Joshua and Israel to march around the city once each day for six days, and on the seventh day to march around seven times. After the seventh time around on the seventh day, the priests were to blow the trumpets and everyone was to shout. When the people followed God's instructions, "the wall fell down flat, so that the people went up into the city, every man straight before him, and they took the city" (Joshua 6:20).

As Israel entered Jericho, Joshua sent the two spies to Rahab's house to rescue her and her family. "And Joshua saved Rahab the harlot alive, and her father's household, and all that she had; and she dwelleth in Israel even unto this day; because she hid the messengers, which Joshua sent to spy out Jericho" (Joshua 6:25).

Because of her belief in God, Rahab not only assisted Israel in its conquest of Jericho, but she was able to save herself and her family. It is noteworthy that she believed in the one true God, but it is also noteworthy that she was able to influence the rest of her family not only to join her in her home but apparently to join her in her belief.

How much faith was required to believe the story of two strangers in the night to the extent that she would agree to cooperate in an act that was traitorous to her city? Obviously, Rahab had to do a lot of believing not only to accept such a story from two strangers but also to risk her life in hiding the spies if she were caught by the king's men. Rahab also manifested faith in telling her family, who believed her and assembled in her house that fateful day.

III. THE LINEAGE OF JESUS CHRIST

A. Both Rebekah and Rahab Left Their Homes for New Lives

No one ever moves forward without leaving something behind. We cannot change positions forward or backward without moving. When we vacate an area, something is left behind. As Rebekah vacated Haran and Rahab vacated Jericho, they left everything behind. They not only left behind their homes and families physically, but they also left behind their pasts. Before we explore their gains, let us discuss what they left behind.

All Rebekah knew was Haran. She was probably comfortable and happy there. But being happy in Haran is not always what God has planned for us. Sometimes it takes leaving Haran and home to find His will for our lives.

Rebekah did not know Abraham or his servant. She did not know Canaan and had never met her future husband. She was on her way to a new life with no hope of ever returning to the old. It is always easier to hold on to what you know rather than letting go and reaching for something you do not know. This is the reason many people do not respond properly to new truth that is revealed to them. They may see the validity of new truth, but it is difficult to let go of what they know, especially if it includes traditions they and their families have held for years.

As Rebekah and Rahab left their homes for new lives, people seeking the Lord today must be willing to leave old habits for new lifestyles. For these two women to leave everything behind is no different from new converts leaving everything of the world behind to follow Christ. As there was no way for these women to have remained in their homes and to have enjoyed their new lives, there is no way for individuals coming to the Lord to remain in their old habits and lifestyles and enjoy their new lives in Jesus.

B. Both Were Included in the Lineage of Jesus Christ

Little did Rebekah know she was to be a vital link in the genealogical chain that connected Adam to Jesus. The royal line that began with Adam ran all the way to Jesus. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were three of the most well-known male links in that chain. Rebekah was to be the wife of Isaac and the mother of Jacob. When she left Haran and home for everything strange and unfamiliar, it probably seemed she was leaving the significant for the insignificant. But Rebekah was to be a key player in the drama of redemption, for Jesus was a descendant of Rebekah.

What if Rebekah had chosen not to go with Abraham's servant? She would not have been the wife of Isaac or the mother of Jacob. She would not have been in the lineage of Jesus Christ. Would her refusal have aborted God's plan? No! He would have chosen someone else and fulfilled His divine purpose. But Rebekah would have suffered for not yielding to God's divine will. Her life would have been quite different.

If we fail to surrender to God's divine will for our lives, God will still have a church and will accomplish His purpose. But we will be the losers. For this reason, we need to yield to God's will to enjoy the best life that can be experienced.

Not only did both of those women leave everything to allow themselves to be inserted into God's divine plan, but also they did so with no plans to return. Their decisions were final. Once they decided to yield to God's plan, there was no going back. This is the kind of determination required to follow God faithfully.

"We are not of them who draw back unto perdition; but of them that believe to the saving of the soul" (Hebrews 10:39).

"No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God" (Luke 9:62).

Until that fateful night when two Hebrew spies knocked at her door, Rahab's life was the life of a prostitute. It was as though God knocked on her door with the question, "Will you join the royal family of which physically one day you will be a part?" Although we can imagine this now, she could not then. She had no way of knowing how significant her decision was.

The Bible often appears to be a book of paradoxes. If we were God and intended to select our lineage, would we include a harlot? I think not. But God's ways are not our ways. Contrary to our thinking, He knew that a converted harlot would not represent a weak link in the royal chain.

Of all the houses in Jericho where the spies could have stopped, God chose a house of ill repute. Of all the people He could have used, He chose a woman whose reputation was the lowest. We know habits, but God knows hearts. For this reason, we must be slow to pass judgment on situations we know nothing about. God often works plans that are quite involved and difficult to understand until their fruition.

Rahab married Salmon and had a son named Boaz. Boaz and Ruth had a son, Obed, who was David's grandfather. And that is how a prostitute ended up in the lineage of Jesus.

It would be accurate to assume that Rahab felt her life was meaningless. Living in Jericho and making her living as a harlot was not a boon to her self-esteem. No one knows the moment of her spiritual awakening, but at some point she began to believe in the God of Israel. That alone makes life meaningful.

INTERNALIZING THE MESSAGE

When Rebekah and Rahab were challenged to leave their old lives and walk toward new horizons, they did so with faith. It had to be faith, for they had no way of knowing

how their decisions would play out. Because they believed in God, they accepted these new challenges as being best for them. Their decisions separated them from their past, their environments, their livelihoods, and their associates. True faith never lives alone; it is always accompanied by actions. James recorded, “Likewise also was not Rahab the harlot justified by works, when she had received the messengers, and had sent them out another way? (James 2:25).

No one needs to be an inmate in the prison of the past. Unpleasant and sinful pasts are

never able to forge chains so strong they cannot be broken by a will to escape and have a better life. With God’s help, new horizons can be enjoyed if we will step out by faith and walk toward them. As the two women had to leave everything behind to enjoy the fruit of the future, so must we forsake all to follow Him.

If our faith is in Jesus and we trust Him explicitly, we do not have to know the future. Understanding God is not necessary for believing Him. We must walk toward new horizons believing that He will take care of us. ■

REFLECTIONS

- How were Rebekah and Rahab alike?
- How were Rebekah and Rahab different?
- Was it more difficult for Rebekah to leave her home than for Rahab? Why or why not?
- In what way do we as believers have to make similar decisions to those of these two women?
- Did it require more faith for Isaac to accept a bride he had never seen than for Rebekah to accept a groom she had never seen? Why or why not?