Rahab the Prostitute: A History of Interpretation from Antiquity to the Medieval Period

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April, 2018

A thesis submitted to McGill University in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of Master of Arts

Abstract

Rahab the Canaanite prostitute saves the two spies who were sent by Joshua to reconnoiter Jericho in preparation for the impending Israelite invasion. In recompense for her actions, Rahab and her family are saved from the destruction of Jericho and are allowed to live among the Israelites. This thesis investigates the history of interpretation of the Rahab story from antiquity to medieval times focusing on textual, narrative and moral issues. It is argued that an important theme in the history of interpretation of the Rahab story is its message of inclusiveness.

Le résumé

Rahab, la prostituée Cananéenne, sauve la vie des deux espions qui avaient été envoyés par Joshua en reconnaissance en vue de l'invasion Israélite imminente de la ville de Jéricho. En guise de récompense pour son aide, Rahab et sa famille sont épargnées et autorisées à vivre parmi les Israélites après la destruction de Jericho. Ce mémoire retrace l'historique de l'interprétation de l'histoire de Rahab de l'Antiquité au Moyen-Age, et ce en se penchant sur les problématiques textuelles, narratives et morales qui sont en jeu. L'importance de la thématique de l'inclusion dans l'interprétation de l'histoire de Rahab est tout particulièrement mise de l'avant.

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Acknowledgments

I am deeply indebted to my supervisor, Dr. Barry Levy, without whom I would never have undertaken or completed this project. Barry's enthusiasm, support and "noodging" provided me with the impetus to go back to school while still being a full-time faculty member. In addition, his teaching and supervisory skills rekindled my interest in Jewish studies and provided me with the incentive to persevere. I am very thankful that Barry was always available to answer my questions and point me in the right direction. Until recently, I never thought I would complete the thesis or an MA. Now, I'm trying to figure out how to continue my Jewish studies. As someone who has supervised many graduate students, I feel very fortunate to have been a supervisee of Dr. Levy.

I am also deeply indebted to my wife, Helen who has been teaching me to write for my entire professional life. She first taught me how to write "psychologese" for research articles in my field. She did such a good job at this that when I started my MA, I could not write in a style appropriate for the humanities and she had to teach me how to write all over again. Helen painstakingly read every word I wrote and helped me rewrite my jargon filled and overly concise prose until the ideas were expressed clearly and appropriately. Without her support, insightful comments, questions and challenges to my thinking, I would have been able to produce something understandable.

I would also like to thank my daughter, Ariella, and son-in-law, Ryan for reading many of the chapters and providing very useful feedback. I am also grateful to my daughter, Rebecca and son-in-law Francis for their support, interest and comments. For the last few years, my family has been very patient with my activities related to writing this thesis which they described as "Rahabing." Many thanks are also due to my research assistant, Marina who helped me gather, xerox and scan the materials related to this thesis.

I am indebted to the many wonderful teachers I have had both in Jewish Studies and in Psychology; there is nothing more motivating than a good teacher. Finally, I would like to thank my father, may his memory be for a blessing, who transmitted to me a love for Jewish learning. He filled our house with Jewish books and always encouraged me to pursue *Torah lishmah*.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Across the centuries, the story of Rahab and the spies has both perturbed and fascinated biblical commentators. Rahab the Canaanite harlot saves the Israelite spies, is exempted from YHVH's injunction to destroy all the local inhabitants, and becomes a member of the Israelite tribe. For the devout, who take the story as a faithful recounting of history, it is troubling that a prostitute is the heroine of a narrative introducing the conquest of the Promised Land. The non-devout are not troubled by such theological difficulties and instead enjoy the story's titillation and suspense. They are, however, concerned about the purpose and meaning of this story since it is a digression from the main conquest narrative and appears to add little, if anything, to the primary message of the Book of Joshua that YHVH is fulfilling his promise to the descendants of Abraham.

This thesis reviews the history of interpretation of the Rahab story from antiquity through the medieval period. It critically summarizes the major strands of interpretation in the biblical, Graeco-Roman, Midrashic, early Christian and medieval Jewish literatures. This choice of periods is based on a classification of the major eras of biblical interpretation proposed by Levy.[1] The order of presentation of the chapters is chronological and is motivated by the historical approach underlying the thesis. Within each chapter, however, a combination of thematic and historical criteria is used to facilitate presentation of the material. A final chapter summarizes the major approaches to the interpretation of the Rahab story and critically examines the evidence for an underlying theme.

It is the contention of this thesis that much of the history of interpretation of the Rahab story has reflected an ongoing theological discussion of the regulation of relationships between Jews and others. As compared with other biblical tales, the Rahab story takes a more inclusive view of the integration of non-Israelites into the Chosen People. Rahab, a Canaanite, a woman, and a prostitute, may arguably be the most "other" of biblical characters, yet she and her family are spared and invited to join the Israelites. It is not surprising, therefore, that commentators' reactions to this inclusivity are an important part of the history of interpretation of the Rahab

[1] B. Barry Levy, Jewish Masters of the Sacred Page (Jerusalem: Urim, in preparation).

story. Although other important themes will be discussed, this thesis focusses on the Rahab story as an endorsement of inclusivity in a Book in which the predominant thrust is exclusivity.

Interpretive interest in the Rahab story did not stop in the medieval period but continues to the present. Unfortunately, the space constraints of an MA thesis do not allow for a discussion of all the available material. Despite this limitation, this thesis appears to be the most comprehensive synthesis of the available interpretive material to date.

Summary of the Rahab Story

The story of Rahab is told in chapters two and six of the Book of Joshua. Moses has died and Joshua has succeeded him and is preparing to lead the Israelites across the Jordan to inherit the Land of Canaan as promised by YHVH. Three days before the crossing of the Jordan, Joshua sends two spies to investigate the Promised Land. These men go to Jericho and lodge in the home of Rahab the prostitute. Their presence is discovered by the king of Jericho who sends emissaries to Rahab's house to demand that she hand them over. Rahab hides the spies on her roof and after proclaiming her belief in YHVH, she negotiates a deal promising to save them if they agree to spare her and her family when they return to destroy Jericho. The spies accept her proposal and suggest that she hang a crimson cord from her window so that the Israelites can identify her home when they return.

In the interim, Rahab admits to the king's emissaries that two men had indeed lodged with her but maintains that she had not realized that they were Israelite spies. Since the spies had just left, she encourages the king's emissaries to pursue them and they do so. She then lowers the spies by a rope from the window of her house in the wall of Jericho and gives them instructions on how to flee and hide for three days to elude their pursuers. The spies return safely to the Israelite camp and report to Joshua what had happened. While the Israelites are destroying Jericho, Joshua sends the spies to find Rahab and her family who are the only residents saved. Despite YHVH's edict that all Canaanites be destroyed, Rahab and her family are permitted to live among the Israelites.

Chapter 2: Inner-biblical Interpretation

A careful reading of the Rahab story reveals allusions to and paraphrases of several other biblical texts. The occurrence of such intertextuality is not unusual in the Bible and has led to the development of the field of inner-biblical interpretation.[2] This kind of interpretation is closely related to modern intertextual literary analysis. In fact, the differences in interpretation between inner-biblical, intertextual and general literary scholars of the Bible are often difficult to distinguish. As a result, these approaches will be addressed in the chapter below under the traditional literary elements of plot, setting, characterization, narrative point of view, and theme.

Plot

There are several plot difficulties in the Rahab story. For example, the chronology of events in the story is not clear. In the context of the king's emissaries being told about the spies (2:2), the latter are referred to as having arrived "tonight." In verse 5, Rahab tells the king's emissaries that the spies escaped just before the gates were to close at dark, leading the reader to understand that the emissaries came to her house later that evening or at night. Nonetheless, she appears to convince them to chase after the spies in the dark after the gates have closed. In addition, it is not clear from the text whether Rahab hid the spies before, during or, after the king's emissaries arrived (2:4-6). It is also not clear whether she negotiated her deal with the spies before or during their escape (2:12-21). Finally, if the phrase "three days" mentioned in Joshua 1:11, 2:22 and 3:2 is to be taken literally, then there are problems with the chronology and duration of events starting with Joshua's preparation of the Israelites to cross the Jordan, the sending of the spies to Jericho, and the destruction of this city.[3]

Another problem with the plot is its logical inconsistency. If it were God's intention to destroy Jericho without a battle, then why were the spies sent altogether? One also wonders why the townspeople found the prostitute Rahab's report so credible. It would have seemed reasonable to search the brothel before spending three days scouring the countryside. Furthermore, if Rahab's house was in the walls as is stated in 2:15 and these walls were brought down by the blowing of the shofars, it is unclear how she and her family were saved afterwards. In fact, these internal inconsistencies are overshadowed by Joshua 24:11 which implies the

[2] Michael Fishbane, Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel (Oxford UK: Clarendon Press, 1985).
[3] David M. Howard Jr., "Three Days" in Joshua 1-3; Resolving a Chronological Conundrum," Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society 41, no. 4 (1998). 539-50.

occurrence of a battle in the conquest of Jericho, a totally different scenario: " … The citizens of Jericho and the Amorites, Perizzites, Canaanites, Hittites, Girgashites, Hivites, and Jebusites fought you, but I delivered them into your hands."

The author may have ignored these obvious plot difficulties because he was more concerned in modeling the Rahab story on another biblical tale rather than creating an independent story. There are striking similarities between the plot structure of the Rahab story and the story of the destruction of Sodom.[4] In both stories, strangers appear in a city that is to be destroyed by God and are discovered and pursued by the residents. The strangers escape harm and aid the principal character in escaping with his or her before the destruction of the city. Hawk[5] has formally charted the parallels between the Sodom and Rahab stories as reproduced below:

Sodom		**Jericho**
	Episode 1: Two Strangers Enter the City	
1. Strangers enter intending to sleep in the city plaza but lodge with Lot (vv. 1-3).		1. Strangers enter Jericho and lodge with Rahab (v. 1b).
	Episode 2: The Strangers are Sought	
1. Citizens demand the strangers be brought out (vv. 4-5).		1. The king's men demand strangers be brought out (vv. 2-3).
2. Lot offers his daughters, who "have not known men," in order to save his guest (vv.6-8).		2. Rahab claims "not to know" in order to save her guests (v. 4).
3. The men are blinded and sent away (vv. 9-11).		3. The men are fooled and sent away (vv.5-7).
	Episode 3: Destruction is Announced	
1. Visitors announce the destruction of Sodom.		1. Rahab anticipates the destruction of Jericho.
2. Lot is told to gather his family (vv. 12-14)		2. Rahab negotiates the deliverance of her family (vv. 8-14).
	Episode 4: Protest and Escape	

[4] L. Daniel Hawk, "Joshua 2:1-24," in Joshua in 3-D (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2010), 21-41; François Langlamet, "Josué, Ii, Et Les Traditions De L'hexateuque," Revue Biblique 78, no. 1 (1971). 5-17, 161-83, 321-54.

[5] L. Daniel Hawk, "Strangers in the Night, Joshua 2:1-24," in Berit Olam: Studies in Hebrew Narrative & Poetry, ed. D. W. Cotter (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2000), 35-51.

1. Lot is told to flee to the hills (vv.15-17).	1. Rahab tells spies to flee to the hills (v. 16).
2. Lot protests and requests shelter at Zoar (vv. 18-20).	2. The spies attempt to modify their agreement (vv. 17-20).
3. The angels agree to modify the command (vv. 21-22).	3. Rahab agrees to the modification (v. 21).
	4. The spies return to Shittim (vv. 22-24).
Episode 5: Destruction and Deliverance	
1. Sodom & Gomorrah are destroyed (vv. 24-25).	1. Jericho is destroyed (vv. 15-21).
2. Lot and his family are spared except for his wife (v. 26).	22. Rahab and her entire family are spared (vv. 22-26).

Hawk briefly offers two reasons for assuming that the Joshua author used the Genesis Sodom story as his model. First, the author wished to introduce the idea that Jericho was a wicked city. Although Hawk does not suggest the purpose for so doing, a possible explanation might be the need to justify the destruction of an apparently blameless population. Sodom is clearly described as a wicked place in Genesis 18, but Jericho is not characterized as such. There is no rationalization in the Book of Joshua for the total destruction of Jericho or for the curse that is should never be rebuilt. It just happens to be the first town in the way of the Israelite conquest of Canaan. By calling Sodom to mind through plot similarities between the two stories, the author suggests that Jericho is wicked like Sodom. Once this equivalence is achieved, Jericho's destruction is warranted.

Hawk's second reason for the use of the Sodom story as a model is that it presents "…a significant challenge to exclusivist notions of salvation."[6] The author is inviting a comparison between the two principal characters, Lot and Rahab. Lot is saved because of his kinship to Abraham not because of his faith or actions. Rahab lacks kinship but succeeds in making up for it by her profession of faith in YHVH and by her active negotiations with the spies. Hawk argues

[6] "Strange Houseguests: Rahab, Lot, and the Dynamics of Deliverance," in Reading between Texts: Intertexuality and the Hebrew Bible, ed. D. N. Fewell (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1992), 96, 96.

that the Rahab story is attempting to justify faith without kinship as a means of salvation. This view rationalizes the rescue of Rahab despite its contravening the חרם.

According to Fields, another biblical story, the Gibeah episode in Judges (19-21) shares many of the same plot elements with the Sodom and Rahab stories.[7] This story is one of the most horrific in the Hebrew Bible. An Ephramite travels to Bethlehem to retrieve his concubine who has returned to her father's home. The Ephramite succeeds and on the way home with her, decides to stop for the night in an Israelite (Benjaminite) city, Gibeah, rather than a foreign Jebusite one. He is taken in by an old man but the evil city residents come to the old man's home at night asking him to produce the stranger. In order to pacify them, the old man offers them his own daughter but the residents refuse. They finally accept the concubine whom they rape repeatedly and kill. The Ephramite offers them his concubine whom they rape and kill. The Ephramite returns to his home-town with the body. He cuts it up into 12 pieces and sends one to each Israelite tribe, asking if they will allow such an injustice to go unpunished. As a result, the Israelites wage a war on the Benjaminites, and after two unsuccessful attempts, succeed in destroying all the cities of Benjamin. The Israelites then vow never to give their daughters to the sons of Benjamin. Later, they realize the effects of such a vow and relent by taking 400 virgins as wives to repopulate Benjamin territory. The story ends with the sentence (21:25), "In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did as he pleased."

The plot parallels to the Sodom and Rahab stories are obvious: a stranger arrives in a city at night and is taken in by a local; the city residents attempt to harm the stranger; the local helps him elude harm; the stranger escapes and returns home; the city is destroyed. Although the Gibeah story may reflect the internal Israelite political wrangling of the time, it may also help us to understand some of the motivations of the Rahab author. The sins of Gibeah's inhabitants are graphically described in the story. The plot similarities between the stories suggest that Jericho is also meant to be perceived as an evil place that merited destruction. Although the Ephramite's distrust of non-Israelites (Jebusites) is expressed, the Gibeah story implies, that one may sometimes be better off trusting a stranger than one's kinsmen. In trusting Rahab, the spies appear to have arrived at the same conclusion.

[7] Weston W. Fields, Sodom and Gomorrah: History and Motif in Biblical Narrative, ed. David J. A. Clines and Philip R. Davies, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament (England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997).

Fields has described the parallel plot elements in the Sodom, Jericho, and Gibeah stories as examples of type-scenes. Alter[8] defines this concept as "recurrent sequences of narrative motif" that are commonly known to the reader or listener and are manipulated by the narrator to instruct, entertain or surprise. Common biblical type-scenes include scenarios such as a barren wife bearing a famous son, a man or his messenger meeting a future wife at a well, and a wife being passed off as a sister. Fields maintains that the central motif linking these three stories is the status and treatment of the "stranger in your gates." Although Rahab is not a stranger to Jericho, Fields considers her one because as a prostitute she is marginalized from society. He also points out that she literally lives on the fringes of society since her home is in the wall of the city. Certainly, from the point of view of the Israelites, Rahab is a stranger and her rescue perhaps elevates her to the status of גר in biblical law and as such she is accorded special protection. If Field's analysis is correct, seeing the Rahab story as a type-scene whose central theme is the "stranger in your gates" invites the reader to contrast the behavior of Rahab with that of Lot and the old man in the Gibeah story who both welcome strangers. In almost all respects, Rahab appears to be the most admirable despite being a woman, a prostitute and herself an outsider: she succeeds in facilitating the escape of the spies she harbored; she successfully protects her family; and she expresses true belief in YHVH.

There is further support for considering the Rahab story as a type-scene modeled on the Sodom story in that the author fails to allude to the famous spy story in Numbers 13. Since both stories feature Israelite spies entering the Promised Land, one might expect to find the Rahab author relying heavily on the “land of milk and honey” story. However, there is no such Inner-biblical reference; in fact, the Rahab author appears to have gone out of his way to avoid any linguistic, interpretive or thematic overlap with the Numbers. For example, the verb for “to spy” in Numbers תור is not used in the Rahab story where the instructions given by Joshua are לכו וראו. The spies in Joshua are referred by four different terms -- אנשים נערים מלאכים מרגלים --while Numbers uses only the generic אנשים. In Numbers, Joshua plays a role secondary to Caleb who is the hero. In the Rahab story, he is clearly in charge. In the Rahab story, the spies’ mission is vague and its value in question: they are sent with minimal instructions, end up in a brothel where they are saved by a prostitute and, after three days of hiding in the hills, return with the message that God has given the land to the Israelites. In Numbers, however, the spies’ mission

[8] Robert Alter, The Art of Biblical Narrative (New York: Basic Books, 2011), 77.

reads as a serious reconnaissance exercise in which they are given explicit instructions about where to go and what to look for. They take a significant amount of time (40 days) and bring back a detailed report.[9]

Setting

The Rahab story is set in the walled city of Jericho. Current archeological evidence suggests that although Jericho was one of the oldest known fortified cities, it was highly unlikely that it was surrounded by walls at the presumed time of the Israelite conquest.[10] It is significant, therefore, that the author gives the city walls and makes Rahab a resident within those walls.

Jericho is mentioned several times in the Torah, usually in reference to its being a strategic location for crossing the Jordan and entering Canaan (e.g. Num. 22:1; Deut. 34:2). The lack of reference to walls or fortifications probably accurately reflects the reality of Jericho at the time of Rahab but conflicts with the presentation of Jericho in the book of Joshua. One obvious reason for the author to have added walls is to emphasize the might of YHVH who brought down the walls and destroyed the city. The addition of walls evokes the symbol of Jericho as an ancient and mighty city. If such a city is easily conquered, so would be the rest of Canaan.

The addition of walls may also be an allusion the Numbers 13 spy story. In this story, the unnamed cities of Canaan are described as heavily fortified. In fact, these fortifications are cited by the spies as a reason for not entering the Promised Land. The author of Rahab may have added walls to Jericho to maintain some consistency with this description and to signal the Israelites' transition from a fearful desert tribe to a people ready to engage with a powerful enemy.

Rahab's home is described as being within the walls of Jericho. This location serves several functions. With respect to the plot, it allows the author to engineer the spies' escape despite the fact that the gates are closed for the night. With respect to Rahab's characterization it suggests that she lives on the border between the Canaanite and Israelite societies. For Rahab the Canaanite, living within the walls emphasizes that she is a prostitute who is marginalized in Jericho society; as a result, she can easily be considered as a "stranger in the gates" of her own

[9] Further support for this idea comes from the very next story in the Book of Joshua (chapter 7), the conquest of עי. Although the section on the spies is brief (verses 2-3), they are given specific instructions עלו ורגלו and bring back a reconnaissance report on which the initial military campaign is based.

[10] "Jericho," Oxford Biblical Studies Online, http://www.oxfordbiblicalstudies.com/article/opr/t94/e998.

city.[11] For Rahab who is saved and becomes an Israelite, she remains marginalized and moves from living within the walls to living at the edge of Israelite society "outside the camp."

The author may have chosen Jericho as the site of the Rahab story for other reasons as well. After the city is destroyed, Joshua pronounces a curse on anyone who tries to rebuild it (6:26). The reason for this curse, however, is never given in the text and a similar curse is not applied to any other Canaanite city. Why was Jericho chosen for such special status? One possible reason was to accentuate the parallels between Jericho and Sodom. Sodom was also seen as a cursed wasteland that would not be rebuilt. (see Deut. 29:22-27).

Another reason for this curse may be related to Jericho's reputation as a city of prophets. In 2 Kings 2, Jericho is mentioned as the home of בני הנביאים and as the place from which Elijah ascended to heaven (2 Kings 2). In fact, Joshua's prophetic curse about Jericho is fulfilled in I Kings 16:34. This would be in keeping with the parallels in miracles and deeds between Moses and Joshua listed in the first 6 chapters of the Book of Joshua. For example, Joshua reenacts Moses' parting of the Red Sea on the Jordan River (3:15-17). When Joshua is approached by an angel, "captain of the Lord's host", (5:15), he hears almost exactly what Moses heard from the burning bush (Exodus 3:5): " Remove your sandals from your feet for the place on which you stand is holy ground." Several other important incidents related to the Exodus and the wandering in the desert (e.g. manna, circumcision, celebration of Pesach) are also briefly mentioned with Joshua in charge. The purpose of these parallels seems clear; they are designed to portray the conquest of Canaan as the natural continuation of the Exodus and to elevate Joshua's status as the worthy successor to Moses.[12]

One final aspect of the setting is of importance. Rahab's home is described in the text as בית אשה זונה (2:1). There is continuing controversy about whether to consider this Hebrew phrase as "the house of a harlot" or to understand it as an "inn" or "alehouse" or possibly some combination of all of these.[13] Be that as it may, the sexual intimations of the phrase are clear and

[11] The language describing the physical location of Rahab's home is not clear. In Joshua 2:15 this home is described as follows: כי ביתה בקיר החומה ובחומה היא יושבת. The last clause of this sentence appears to be redundant as is the word בקיר that is usually translated as wall of a house but here is translated "in the actual." Frendo (2014) carefully examines this usage with respect to archaeological findings, later meanings of the word קיר and the Septuagint translation and concludes that it should be translated as "in the hollow" or "at the edge of" the city wall. He further suggests that the Masoretic text redundancy is an attempt by an editor to explain earlier a wall architecture or fortification that was no longer familiar at the time of redaction of this story.

[12] Robert Alter, in The World of Biblical Literature (New York: Basic Books, 1992), 120-23.

[13] This issue is discussed throughout the thesis. A summary is presented in the conclusion.

reinforced by the fact that the Jericho spies are sent by Joshua from שיטים (2:1) which is also mentioned in Numbers 25:1 as the place where the Israelites "profaned themselves by whoring with Moabite women." These sexual allusions are further emphasized throughout the Rahab story. For example, in the first four sentences of Joshua 2, three verbs (ידע שכב בוא) are used that have clear sexual connotations.[14] In verse 18, the phrase תקות חוט השני (length of crimson cord) can be seen as a reference to the story of Tamar and Judah[15] where a similar phrase appears (Gen: 38:28) and where the story also involves both trickery and prostitution. The scenario of men escaping from a woman's bedroom through a window is repeated in I Sam 19:12 and has become in the Western literary tradition a classic image denoting illicit sexual relationships.

Characterization

The hero of the conquest of Jericho is a woman. Feminist literary critics have frequently commented that Rahab fits the model of how women are typically portrayed in the Bible. They suggest that, for different reasons, biblical women are often tricksters who lie, hide things and people, and are particularly adept at deceiving men (e.g. the midwives in Egypt, Michal, Rachel, Yael, Delilah, Tamar, Rebekah).[16] Rahab fits these descriptions perfectly. She hides the spies,[17] lies to the King's men and tricks them into a futile chase. One critic claims that Rahab is one of the most clever and effective of biblical women.[18]

Her characterization as a prostitute follows from the authorial choice of gender. In general, the actions of biblical women are constrained by their roles as wives or members of a family or clan. Although there are exceptions (e.g. Potiphar's wife, Ruth, Bathsheba), most biblical women are loyal to their husbands and origins. As a prostitute, Rahab is allowed a degree of independence and moral latitude that most biblical women are not accorded.[19] She is

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[14] Aaron Sherwood, "A Leader's Misleading and a Prostitute's Profession: A Re-Examination of Joshua 2," Journal for the Study of the Old Testament 31, no. 1 (2006). 43-61.

[15] Elly Teman, "The Red String: The Cultural History of a Jewish Folk Symbol," in Jewishness: Expression, Identity, and Representation, ed. Simon J. Bronner, Jewish Cultural Studies (Oxford: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2008), 29-57.

[16] Elie Assis, " The Choice to Serve God and Assist His People: Rahab and Yael," Biblica 85, no. 1 (2004). 82-90; Naomi Steinberg, "Israelite Tricksters, Their Analogues and Cross-Cultural Study," Semeia 42, no. 1 (1988). 1-13; Mieke Bal, "Tricky Thematics," ibid. 133-56; Edwin M. Good, "Deception and Women: A Response.," ibid. 117-32; Esther Fuchs, ""For I Have the Way of Women": Deception, Gender, and Ideology in Biblical Narrative," ibid. 68-83.

[17] The incorrect singular object of the verb ותצפנו may be an allusion to the hiding of Moses in Exodus 2:2.

[18] Tikva Frymer-Kensky, "Reading Rahab," in Tehilla Le-Moshe Biblical and Judaic Studies in Honor of Moshe Greenberg, ed. M. Cogan, B. L. Eichler, and J. H. Tigay (Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 1997), 58-67.

[19] Phyllis A. Bird, "Harlot as Heroine: Narrative Art and Social Presupposition in Three Old Testament Texts," Semeia 46 (1989). 119-39.

not constrained by a patriarchal family structure and can act independently of a husband. Certainly, Rahab's marginalized societal status as a prostitute may help to justify her betrayal of her civic and religious origins.

As a prostitute who accepts YHVH and betrays her people, Rahab has the makings of a potentially interesting character. However, exploiting this potential is not the goal of the biblical author who has chosen not to develop her character at all. For example, the spiritual route through which she becomes a total and unwavering believer in YHVH is not traced. She undertakes to hide the spies for no apparent reason, at a point when she does not yet know that they will negotiate a deal to save her and her family and, while one might consider this a shrewd calculated risk, the available story does not really afford her adequate motivation. Presumably, she lies, hides and tricks to save herself and her family, an apparently adequate incentive, but the text does not make clear why she would assume that she needs to save anyone since there would be little reason to think that a nomadic tribe could overcome a walled city. Certainly, her immediate experience with the spies, who are so inept as to be quickly detected by the townspeople, would not have inspired confidence in Israelite military planning or might.

The author appears to have recognized this problem and, to resolve it, has provided Rahab, a Jericho prostitute, with a surprising knowledge of scripture and its language. For example, she appears to know about the parting of the Red Sea and the previous Israelite conquests of Sihon and Og. She describes YHVH as the true God בשמים ממעל ובארץ מתחת a formulaic expression that appears several times in the Tanakh including the Ten Commandments (e.g. Ex. 20:4, Deut. 5:8 Deut. 4:39, 1 Kings 8:23). In addition, in Joshua 2:9-11, she closely paraphrases the Song of the Sea (Exodus 15:15-16), a paraphrasing that Najman cites as an important example of Inner-biblical interpretation. She writes, "By repeating vocabulary from Exodus 15, the author of Joshua forges a parallel between two moments in time and hence expresses a philosophy of history: History repeats itself, and the activities of earlier generations are a sign for what will happen to their offspring."[20] According to Najman, the prophetic message is that, just as God saved the Israelites in Egypt, He will continue to save them in the future. The author gives us no insight into how Rahab arrives at belief in this message; he simply makes her a mouthpiece for what he takes for granted as authoritative.

[20] Hindy Najman, "Inner-Biblical Interpretation," http://www.oxfordbiblicalstudies.com/article/book/obso-9780195297515/obso-9780195297515-chapter-40.

The authorial disinterest in Rahab's characterization is revealed in several other ways. There is no description of her physical characteristics, although, given the sexual language of the rest of the story, one might have expected reference to her beauty. Midrashic authors did not hesitate to fill this in (see chapter 4). In fact, women's beauty is often referred to in biblical texts to explain male motivations but there is no such reference in the Rahab story to explain either why the spies ended up in her home or why they agreed to exempt her from the חרם.

The reader also has no details about Rahab's emotional state or relationship with her family. We are not told whether she was afraid when the king's emissaries came to her home or when the walls of Jericho started falling. There is no mention of how she convinced her family to congregate in her home or their reaction to the deal she made. After she and her family are saved, we are told that they were placed "outside the camp of Israel…as is still the case" (6:23-25). If she was resentful about being marginalized and living on the fringes of society again, we are not told. Rahab is never mentioned again in the *Tanakh*. She ends up as a totally flat character about whom we know only what is necessary to convey the authorial message about the value of belief in YHVH.

Considering his lack of interest in her character, it is not at all clear why the author has made Rahab the only named character in the story. However, the name is a hapax and is not explained in the text, as are many biblical names, possibly reflecting this lack of interest. Linguistic scholars[21] have concluded that Rahab is probably not a real name at all but has a sexual connotation that would be consistent with her characterization as a prostitute. [22] In other

[21] Hans M. Barstad, "The Old Testament Feminine Personal Name Rahab: An Onomastic Note," Svensk Exegetisk Årsbok 54 (1989). 43-49; Robert G. Boling, Joshua: A New Translation with Notes and Commentary, 1st ed., Joshua: A New Translation with Notes and Commentary (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Company, 1982); Daniel Bodi, "The Encounter with the Courtesan in the Gilgamesh Epic and with Rahab in Joshua 2," in Interested Readers: Essays of the Hebrew Bible in Honor of David J. A. Clines, ed. James k. Aitken, Jeremy M.S. Clines, and Christl M. Maier (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2013), 3-18; Athalya Brenner, "Wide Gaps, Narrow Escapes: I Am Known as Rahab, the Broad," in First Person: Essays in Biblical Autobiography (Sheffield UK: SAP/Continuum, 2002), 47-58; Moshe Garsiel, Biblical Names. A Literary Study of Midrashic Derivations and Puns (Ramat Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press, 1991).

[22] There have been many speculations concerning the meaning of the name Rahab. One theory (Barstad, 1989) suggests that the name Raḥav is related to expression in Arabic, Ugaritic, and possibly Akkadian that denote female genitalia. Another suggestion (Boling, 1982) suggests that it is a shortened form of a sentence name, rahab-N meaning "the God N has opened/widened (the womb)." Yet another suggestion is that the name is related to the term בית רחוב which may refer to a brothel (see Bodi, 2013) though it also refers to an actual place (Judges 18:28; 2 Samuel 10:8). Brenner (1998) suggests that the root רחב can be used in a sexual sense (e.g. Isa 57:8) . It is also possible that the name, Rahab is a pun or an allusion (see Garsiel, 1991) to some combination of words or letters known at the time of writing of the story. Such puns or allusions are not uncommon for Biblical name derivation but there have been no specific suggestions with respect to Rahab.

biblical stories, prostitutes are typically anonymous. However, it would be interesting to consider the possibility that Rahab is named to set her apart from all the other characters in the story who, with the exception of Joshua, are nameless and clueless male bunglers.

Narrative Point of View

The Rahab story is told from the point of view of an objective third person narrator who uses a mix of narration, dialogue and evaluative comments to convey his message. The author takes for granted that Canaan is YHVH's gift to the Israelites. Therefore, Rahab's actions are portrayed as appropriate, justified and laudable despite the fact that from the Canaanite perspective she is a traitor who betrayed her people and facilitated their destruction. Had we been told something about Rahab's marginal status or mistreatment in Jericho, this betrayal would be easier to understand. The author may have been trying to mitigate a potentially negative view of Rahab by emphasizing her concern for saving her family. Nevertheless, from a non-Israelite point of view, it is hard to be sympathetic to a traitor. Of course, the story does not present such a perspective.

It is also difficult to be sympathetic to the nameless spies who, before they have any chance to fulfill their mission, are immediately discovered in the brothel by the enemy. Because the text gives us no information about the spies' motivation or emotional state, their actions have been interpreted from totally opposite points of view. Zacovitch[23] suggests that they are inept fools who provide comic relief; Cross,[24] on the other hand, suggests that going to a prostitute's house is the ideal place to gather intelligence for an impending invasion. Given that the spies are nameless and that four different words are used in the text to refer to them, it seems clear that the author has no interest in characterizing them. His central purpose is to justify and to prepare the reader for the downfall of Jericho that will occur inevitably as the result of the will of YHVH, not as the result of military stratagems or intelligence.

Much of the dialogue in the text is consistent with this view. As discussed above, Rahab makes a three-sentence speech to the spies (2:9-11) filled with quotes from the Torah proclaiming YHVH's might. She ends this speech by requesting that the spies take an oath promising to save her and her family's life. The spies agree, also using somewhat formulaic

[23] Yair Zakovitch, "Humor and Theology or the Successful Failure of Israelite Intelligence: A Literary-Folkloric Approach to Joshua 2," in Text and Tradition: The Hebrew Bible and Folklore, ed. S. Niditch, The Society of Biblical Literature Semeia Studies (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1990), 75-98.

[24] Frank M. Cross, "A Response to Zakovitch's "Successful Failure of Israelite Intelligence"," ibid., 99-106.

language נפשינו תחתיכם למות. Another piece of dialogue in the story consists of the spies' report to Joshua (2:24) upon their return. This dialogue does not recount what actually happened nor does it give any basis for the spies' conclusion that "The Lord has delivered the whole land into our power." Significantly, Joshua does not respond, not even asking details about the reconnaissance exercise. Again, YHVH's might is assumed without question.

Hall[25] points out that one of the engaging aspects of the Rahab story is the dramatic reversal that occurs. The first four sentences of the story are filled with sexual language and allusions that lead the reader to imagine that the spies have been lured away from their mission and are likely to fail. This expectation is reinforced when they are discovered by the townspeople. However, Rahab's decision to hide and make a deal with them comes as a surprise that shifts the action in an unexpected direction. This reversal is marked in verse 9 by a transition from narrative report to dialogue. At this point, Rahab begins to cite the Torah and makes her pronouncement of faith in YHVH. According to Alter,[26] this kind of shift often signals that an important thematic statement is about to be made.

The narrator does provide some evaluative and etiological comments at the end of the story. The first of these (6:24) explains that Rahab and her family were spared because they saved the spies; it adds that they continued to live among the Israelites "as is still the case." The second (6:26) presents Joshua's curse that Jericho should never be rebuilt, while the third (6:27) lauds Joshua in the following way: "The Lord was with Joshua, and his fame spread throughout the land." These comments signal the end of the story and indicate its significance, but they also introduce new material and suggest possible themes.

Theme

The Book of Joshua reflects a Deuteronomistic theology which is often expressed in the form of a covenant: if you exclusively follow YHVH's laws as given to Moses then you will be rewarded with the land of Canaan and your independence; however, if you do not follow these laws and stray to other Gods, you will lose your right to Canaan and be subjugated to others.[27] This covenant often refers to the חרם that calls for or promises the total destruction of the local

[25] Sarah L. Hall, "Interloper or Integral Introduction? Joshua 2:1-24," in Conquering Character: The Characterization of Joshua in Joshua 1-11 (New York, NY: T & T Clark International, 2010), 28-45.
[26] Alter, The Art of Biblical Narrative, 79-110.
[27] Marc Zvi Brettler, "In the Fortieth Year...Moses Addressed the Israelites: Deuteronomy," in How to Read the Jewish Bible (Oxford UK: Oxford University Press, 2007), 85-94.

Canaanite tribes. Despite this brutal Deuteronomic attitude to the local Canaanites, there is a strong element of social concern for non-Canaanites. This sentiment is expressed repeatedly in Deuteronomy in sentences such as the following: "You too must befriend the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt" (10:19).

Rahab personifies this theology with one important amendment. She certainly reflects the mainstream Deuteronomic view that takes for granted that Canaan is God's gift to the Israelites. She unconditionally accepts YHVH as the one true God and the covenant that gives the Israelites sole possession of Canaan. A main theme of the Rahab story and most of the Book of Joshua is that the conquest of Canaan as ordained by YHVH is inevitable. There is no uncertainty in the Deuteronomic covenant just as there is no uncertainty in Rahab's actions to save the spies.

However, there is one aspect of the Rahab story that conflicts with Deuteronomic theology. The story takes for granted that Rahab and her family can be exempted from the חרם. This law is stated as follows: "When the Lord your God brings you to the land that you are about to enter and possess, and He dislodges many nations before you…you must doom them to destruction: grant them no terms and give them no quarter" (Deut. 7:1-2). In this version of the law, all Canaanites are to be exterminated and their possessions destroyed. The major stated biblical motivation for this law appears to be the fear that co-habitation with the Canaanites will lead to assimilation. Despite the law and the fear of assimilation, the spies grant Rahab a חרם exemption on their own non-existent authority and Joshua accepts this exemption without hesitation or comment. While it is true that other versions of חרם laws (e.g. Deut. 20) or instructions concerning conquest (e.g. Exodus 23 and 34) introduce exceptions to the total destruction of people and property,[28] none of these exceptions include the type of arrangement made by Rahab to save her and her family's lives.[29] Rahab's use of a verbal form of the root חרם in verse 10 suggests that she was aware of this practice and was also aware that her unconventional proposal to the spies contravened the Deuteronomic law.

It is particularly striking that in chapter 6, the author unconditionally accepts Rahab's exemption from חרם while, in the next chapter, severely punishing the Israelite Achan for violating the same law. This juxtaposition of two stories reaffirms the law but also suggests a new interpretation. Those individuals like Rahab, who willingly accept YHVH as the true God

[28] Fishbane, 199-210.
[29] Ibid., 380-407.

and follow his laws, need not be destroyed because they do not pose a threat of religious assimilation. Achan, an Israelite who violates the law, does pose a threat to the Deuteronomic covenant and is condemned to death. The novelty of exempting a believing Canaanite from the חרם is indirectly noted in the text by the comment that although Rahab and her family were spared, they "were placed outside the camp" (6:23).

Rahab's salvation certainly opens the door to the idea that Canaanites, or at least helpful ones, may be acceptable co-inhabitants and co-religionists. A similar exemption was made in Judges 1:23-26 to a helpful Canaanite who betrayed his city to the Israelites. The story of Naaman (2 Kings 5:1-19) also suggests a more tolerant view of the local Canaanite population even if they don't accept YHVH exclusively. At the very least, Rahab's exemption from the חרם can be seen as an extension of Deuteronomy's social justice ethic. Just as stranger non-Canaanites must be treated well, so must Canaanites. This focus on the "stranger in your gates" is consistent with the type-scene plotting discussed above. Alternatively, these exemptions may reflect the beginnings of a more basic theological change suggesting that belief in YHVH and corresponding actions can supersede kinship and destiny. This view potentially opens the door to religious conversion though this idea is not mentioned in Joshua nor is it pursued in the Bible.

Conclusion

The Rahab tale is the first story in the Book of Joshua. Most of this story appears in chapter 2 after an introductory chapter confirming Joshua's selection as the successor to Moses and a repetition of the Deuteronomic covenant. It is followed by three chapters recounting Israelite preparations for entering Canaan that culminate in chapter 6 with the destruction of Jericho. Because the Rahab story (chapter 2) does not closely fit thematically or chronologically with the adjacent chapters, a number of authors have suggested that it was inserted into the text at a later stage of editing.[30] In fact, if one deletes from the text all verses relevant to Rahab in chapters 2 and 6, the story of the conquest of Jericho reads smoothly without interruption. Whether the Rahab story was inserted or not, its important position at the beginning of the Book of Joshua suggests that one of its goals is to foreshadow the themes of the rest of the book.[31]

[30] Richard D Nelson, "Rahab Outsmarts the Scouts," in Joshua: A Commentary (Louisville KY: John Knox Press, 1997), 36-53; Fishbane, 380-407; Sarah L. Hall, Conquering Character. The Characterization of Joshua in Joshua 1-11. (New York/London: T & T Clark, 2010).

[31] Mark E. Biddle, "Literary Structures in the Book of Joshua," Review & Expositor 95 (1998). 189-201.

The Rahab story is the first important episode in Joshua's biography as leader of the Israelites. Although the major purpose of the Book of Joshua is to recount the conquest of Canaan, it is also concerned with giving an account of the life of Joshua. This biographical purpose seems to be reflected by the fact that the book is entitled "Joshua" rather than "The Book of the Conquest of Canaan." Joshua's active role as the new leader of the Israelites is immediately signaled in the first sentence of the Rahab story dealing with his sending out of the spies. He is not commanded to do so by YHVH but initiates this action on his own. He also receives and acts independently upon the spies' report that the land is ready to be conquered. This behaviour contrasts with his relatively passive role both in the spy story in Numbers and in following YHVH's commands in chapter 1.

One of the purposes of the Rahab story is to present Joshua as an effective and sometimes superior successor to Moses. Both Moses and Joshua sent out spies. Moses' spies bring back a discouraging report that he fails to overcome; Joshua, on the other hand, succeeds. The Rahab story also ends with the following comment on Joshua's leadership (6:37): "The Lord was with Joshua, and his fame spread throughout the land." He continues to act as a strong and effective leader throughout the book, a characterization that according to Hall, serves as the model of leadership for future kings of Israel.[32]

The Rahab story also foreshadows the rest of the book of Joshua in raising the question of how to deal with the indigenous Canaanite population that remained after the conquest. It is the first acknowledgment that the Deuteronomic promise of "ethnic cleansing" did not occur. Later in the book, we learn that the Gibeonites (chap. 9), Geshurites and Maachites (13:13), Jebusites 15:63), and the Canaanites in Gezer (16:10) as well as various groups in the lands of Issachar, Manasseh, and Asher (17:11) all continued to live in Canaan. The Rahab story suggests that accepting YHVH can make Canaanites acceptable co-inhabitants. The text, however, does not indicate whether these peoples accepted YHVH as Rahab did. One sign of full integration would have been the acceptance of intermarriage with believing Canaanites. Although this is likely to have occurred, it seems unlikely to have been officially sanctioned because at the end of the book, the narrator of Joshua admonishes the Israelites not to intermarry with the Canaanites or worship their Gods.

[32] Hall, Conquering Character. The Characterization of Joshua in Joshua 1-11.

In summary, the Rahab author does not appear to have been interested in crafting a well-organized story about military espionage and conquest. If he had been, he would have written a parallel to Numbers 13 rather than a Sodom and Gomorrah look-alike. The story in the Masoretic text is filled with plot difficulties, undeveloped characters, and a heavy-handed ideological overlay. Overall, it reads as a biblical morality tale. The characters are simple stereotypes of good and evil. Rahab personifies good while the residents of Jericho are evil. Rahab is the "righteous stranger in your gates" and is rewarded with the right to live with the chosen people. The tale is meant to edify and instruct as well as to entertain. The sexual allusions, the suspense of a spy story escape, the dramatic reversal and the imminent destruction of a great city ensure the reader's attention and get the message across.

Chapter 3: Translations and Paraphrases from the Graeco-Roman Period

The Graeco-Roman period (c. 300 BCE-400 CE) marks the beginning of a two-thousand-year history of translating and paraphrasing biblical stories. Although Jewish (Midrashic) and Christian interpretation also originated during this period, this work is summarized subsequently in separate chapters because it is explicitly exegetical and voluminous. While the translations and paraphrases are not explicitly exegetical, they offer important insights into how the Masoretic Text (MT) or its variants were interpreted and understood. The translations under review include the *Septuagint* (LXX), *Targum Yonatan*, the *Peshitta*, and the *Vulgate*. The most important paraphrase of the Rahab story from this period is that of Josephus which can be dated to the first century CE. The Samaritan Chronicle of Joshua is also discussed in this section, because it has been connected to the Graeco-Roman period.

Translations

Septuagint

The Septuagint (LXX) is the oldest known translation of the Masoretic Text (MT) probably dating from the third century BCE and is therefore an important starting point for textual and exegetical studies.[33] There are several accounts and much scholarly controversy about the origins of the LXX. Most agree that this translation is an important source for understanding the beliefs and language of the Hellenistic Jews of Alexandria.[34] From the time of its composition until the early Christian era, the LXX served as the major point of entry into the Tanakh for Greek-speaking Jews who often did not understand Hebrew. Ultimately, most Christians adopted the Septuagint as the primary text for their Old Testament which probably led to a reduction in its initial popularity among Jews.

A cursory reading of the Rahab story in the LXX suggests that it differs very little from the MT.[35] The major and minor elements of the plot are identical and both versions have the same number of sentences presented in the same order and divided in the same way between chapters 2 and 6 of the Book of Joshua. However, a careful comparison of the two versions

[33] Because I do not have a working knowledge of Greek, I have had to rely on Albert Pietersma and Benjamin G. Wright, New English Translation of the Septuagint (Cary, UK: Oxford University Press, 2007).
[34] L. J. Greenspoon, "Septuagint," in Encyclopedia Judaica, ed. Michael Berenbaum and Fred Skolnik (Detroit, MI: Keter Publishing House).
[35] Thomas B. Dozeman, Joshua 1-12. A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary, The Anchor Yale Bible (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2015).

reveals many variations.[36] Benjamin discusses these variations in an unpublished doctoral dissertation, listing over fifty in the Rahab story.[37] There is no obvious pattern to these; in some cases, the MT has a word or phrase or explanatory detail that does not appear in the LXX while in others the reverse is true.

Most of these variations are minor and occur at points in MT where the text is problematic. For example, in the MT version of Joshua 2:1, the word חרש (usually translated as "secretly") is used as an adverb, a usage not found elsewhere in the MT. The word is absent from the LXX version. Another example (Joshua 2:4) is the singular pronominal suffix ending of the verb "to hide" (ותצפנו "and she hid *him"*) which should be plural since it refers to the two spies. In the LXX, the object of the verb is plural ("and she hid *them"*). Since the chronological relationship of the MT and the LXX is in dispute, it is not clear whether such variations arose through scribal errors or deliberate changes or whether they arose relatively independently from different source manuscripts or traditions.

These previous examples indicate the kind of minor variations that occur between these texts, but Dozeman[38] has commented upon two major discrepancies that suggest significant theological or exegetical differences. The first occurs in 6:22 of the MT where Joshua justifies telling the spies to save Rahab and her family with the following phrase: כאשר נשבעתם לה, "as you swore to her." This phrase does not appear in the LXX. Dozeman suggests that Joshua's emphasis on the fulfillment of an oath as the rationale for saving Rahab suggests a more exclusive attitude towards outsiders in the MT than in the LXX; in other words, in the LXX, a promissory oath is not necessary as a rationale to save an outsider and include her with the Israelites.

The second example of a major discrepancy is Joshua's curse on anyone who attempts to rebuild Jericho (6:26). In both the LXX and the MT, this curse occurs after verses 6:22-25 which

[36] There have been and continue to be major discussions among scholars about the chronological relationship between the Masoretic and Septuagint versions of the Book of Joshua (see Dozeman, 2015 for a review). These discussions are fueled, in part, by the fact that the Masoretic text is approximately 5% longer than the LXX. The traditional scholarly view is that the Masoretic text is the primary one and that variations in the LXX represent textual corruptions or deletions. More recent commentators (e.g. Tov, E. 2012) suggest that the MT and LXX versions of the Book of Joshua are two different editions of an earlier unknown work with the MT expanding on this earlier text. This controversy is unlikely to be solved until new manuscripts are discovered.

[37] Charles D. Benjamin, "The Variations between the Hebrew and Greek Texts of Joshua: Chapters 1-12" (University of Pennsylvania, 1921).

[38] Dozeman, 313-16.

tell the story of the saving of Rahab during the destruction of Jericho. The JPS English translation (2nd edition) of the curse is the following:

> *At that time* Joshua pronounced his oath: 'Cursed of the Lord be the man who shall *undertake* to fortify this city *of Jericho*: he shall lay its foundations at the cost of his first-born, and set up its gates at the cost of his youngest.' [Italics mine]

Pietersma and Wright's[39] translation of the LXX version of the curse is as follows:

> And Jesous swore *on that day before the Lord* saying, 'Cursed be the person who shall build *that city*. At the cost of his firstborn he shall found it, and at the cost of his youngest he shall set up its gates. *And thus did Ozan of Baithel; at the cost of Abiron, his firstborn, he founded it, and at the cost of his youngest, although he escaped, he set up its gates'*. [Italics mine]

In the LXX, there is a sentence inserted which indicates that Joshua's curse has been fulfilled with the death of Abiron but is not extended beyond that. Ozan's youngest son's escape suggests that in the LXX, the curse has now been lifted, while in the MT, the curse is not lifted until several generations later (I Kings 16:24). In addition to the inserted sentence, there are several other minor variations noted in italics between the two texts.[40] Dozeman[41] interprets the different versions of the curse as a reflection of divergent socio-political views. In his view, "The theology of the promised land in the book of Joshua represents a rural utopian vison of society, which is a rejection of the city-states of the empire" (p. 77). He argues that in the MT, Joshua's curse reflects a long-term condemnation of the urban life of Canaan with its idol-worshipping peoples and monarchies. Rebuilding Jericho symbolizes an acceptance of this previous reality of Canaan and will be severely punished by the loss of one's heirs. Rahab is an important exception because she adopted the Israelite point of view and helped to destroy the existing culture. The LXX, on the other hand, does not share this rural exclusive view and thus

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[39] Pietersma and Wright.

[40] See italicized words above and Mazor, L. (1988). The origin and evolution of the curse upon the rebuilder of Jericho: A contribution of textual criticism to Biblical historiography. *Textus*, 1-26. for a detailed discussion of these and other differences. Mazor has attempted to unravel the differences between these texts in order to determine whether the MT or LXX is the original version and how the various traditions concerning the curse of Jericho evolved. In addition, Mazor points out that there are three fragmentary texts from the Dead Sea Scrolls which are relevant to the Rahab story. The texts on two of these fragments are identical to those in the MT. The third fragment (4QTest) is in the form of a Pesher and includes several sentences from the Pentateuch and then a sentence similar to Joshua 6:26.

[41] Dozeman.

the curse is not an open-ended prophecy but is fulfilled immediately on Ozan of Baithel and is therefore subsequently nullified. The more inclusive approach that Dozeman here identifies probably reflects the reality of the life of the urban Hellenized Jews of Alexandria who lived relatively freely under the domination of the Greek empire. The tempering of Joshua's curse in the LXX suggests that these Jews did not see an urbanized cosmopolitan life as a contravention of God's law and were more inclusive of non-Jews and open to foreign influences as represented by Rahab than were those Jews who finalized the Masoretic text of the Book of Joshua.

Targum Yonatan

Among Jews, Targum Yonatan (TY) is generally considered the official Aramaic translation of Prophets and is typically reproduced next to the MT in the printing of most Rabbinic Bibles. While the chronological relationship between the LXX and the MT is a matter of discussion, the translation of the Book of Joshua in (TY) indisputably dates from a period after the MT. There is no consensus, however, about TY's origins. The Babylonian Talmud (Megillah 3a) attributes its creation to Yonatan ben Uzziel, a student of Hillel in the first century B.C.E., who is reported to have transcribed the text as dictated by the prophets Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi. Most modern scholars see this attribution as an attempt to ascribe divine inspiration to the translation rather than as a serious attempt to assign authorship. Tal[42] has argued that the language of the Book of Joshua in TY reflects a Judean Aramaic from before the second century C.E. While this may be true, scholars such as Churgin[43] have suggested that our current versions of this Targum are based on manuscripts from the 7th century C.E. and thus may contain material dating from later than the second century C.E.[44]

TY offers a relatively literal translation of the Book of Joshua in general. However, Harrington and Saldarini[45] have identified variations between TY and the MT under the following eight categories: 1. names of people(s); 2. place names; 3. word or grammar changes for clarification; 4. clarification of an unclear MT; 5. anachronistic modernizing; 6. substitution

[42] See p. 3 in Daniel J. Harrington and Anthony J. Saldarini, in Targum Jonathan of the Former Prophets. Introduction, Translation, and Notes., ed. Michael Glazier, The Aramaic Bible (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1987), 1-26.
[43] P. Churgin, Targum Jonathan to the Prophets, Yale Oriental Series (New York: Ktav, 1983).
[44] My discussion of the Rahab story in TY is based primarily on an English translation by Harrington and Saldarini and my partial understanding of Aramaic in Sperber's (1959), critical edition.
[45] Harrington and Saldarini.

of more literal for methaphoric meanings; 7. changes in expression to describe God and his activities; 8. Midrashic or theological interpretations.

With respect to the Rahab story, TY and the MT have the same number of sentences presented in the same order and divided in the same way between chapters 2 and 6 of the Book of Joshua. There are no significant insertions in TY, leaving the Rahab story essentially the same as that in the MT. However, a word-by-word comparison of the MT and TY according to Harrington and Saldarini's categories reveals a number of differences falling into categories 3, 4, 6, and 7.

Regarding category 3, there are several changes in diction and grammar to make the meaning of the text more clear or explicit. In 2:4, the word כן is translated בקושטא ("in truth") presumably to make sure that it wasn't translated as "yes." In 2:5, the word עדן ("time") is inserted. In 2:19, the word בר ("out") is inserted to make it clear that the promise to Rahab and her family that they were safe was in force as long as they stayed inside. In 6:26, ובצעירו ("and by the youngest") is translated as ובזעיר בנוהי ("and by the youngest of his sons") in order to make explicit that the object of the curse was a son and not a daughter. In 6:26, ויהי שמעו ("his reputation was in all the land") is translated as והוי שמעיה סגי ("and his reputation was great in all the land"), adding an adjective in order to make explicit the nature of the reputation. In 2:4, ותצפנו ("and she hid <u>him</u>") is translated as ואטמרתנון ("and she hid <u>them</u>") in order to correct a grammatical mistake i.e. the pronominal suffix in the Masoretic text refers only to one spy but should refer to two. In 2:19, יד ("hand") is translated יד אנש ("hand of man") to make clear that the spies are unable to control God's will but can promise only that no Israelite will harm Rahab and her family.

With respect to categories 4 and 6, there are changes in TY to make some common biblical Hebrew idioms explicit. In 2:14, נפשינו תחתנו למות (an idiom understood to mean "we guarantee with our lives" but understood literally as "our lives are under us to die") is clarified through expansion into מסירא חלף נפשתיכון נפשנא ("our lives will be handed over in place of your lives to die"). In 2:19, דמו בראשו (literally reading as "his blood is on his head") is used twice and is translated חובת קטוליה ברישנה ("guilt of his killing").

Regarding category 7, on four occasions, expressions to describe God are changed. In verse 2:11, הוא אלהים בשמים ממעל ("is the Lord in heaven above ") is changed to הוא אלהא דשכינתיה בשמיא ("is the Lord whose *shekhina* is in heavens above"). In 2:12, השבעו לי ביהוה

("swear to me by God") is changed to קיימו כען לי במימרא דיי ("swear to me now by the word of God"). In 6:24, אוצר בית יהוה ("in the treasury of the house of the Lord") is translated as אוצר בית מקדשא דיי ("in the treasury of the house of the sanctuary of the Lord"). In 6:27, ויהי יהוה ("and God was") is changed to והוה מימרא דיי ("and God's word was"). These changes are typical throughout TY and other Targums and reflect a tendency to avoid any hint of anthropomorphism about God.

TY does not include the two most significant variations in the LXX as discussed above. First, there is no addition to Joshua's curse. Second, the phrase כאשר נשבעתם לה' (6:22) ("as you swore to her") which is omitted in the LXX appears in Aramaic in TY. This suggests that the translator was working with a text such as the MT rather than with the LXX. This notion is supported by the observation that the word חרש (ברז) that appears in 2:1 in the MT but not in the LXX is included in TY.

On two occasions, TY appears to understand the meaning of a biblical Hebrew word differently from how it appears to be understood through other translations, a variation that does not appear to fit into any of Harrington and Saldarini's categories. In 2:24, the word נמוגו describes the state of the residents of Jericho as described by the spies. TY translates this word as אתברו which Harrington and Saldarini translate as "shattered." Jastrow's Aramaic dictionary[46] appears to agree with this translation of אתברו since it lists one of the meanings of the root תבר as "break." However, ancient (LXX) and modern translations (e.g., JPS 2nd edition) and *The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew*[47] understand נמוגו to mean "cower" or "tremble" or "quake." In its translation of the word, TY may be dramatically foreshadowing the fate of the walls of Jericho.

The second of these variations is perhaps one of the most discussed in later medieval Jewish exegesis. In TY, בית אשה זונה ("house of a harlot") is translated as לבית אתתה פונדקיתא ("house of an innkeeper"). This translation suggests that the TY does not consider Rahab to be a prostitute because the typical phrase it uses for prostitute is נפקת ברא The etymology of the [48].

[46] M. Jastrow, A Dictionary of the Targumin, the Talmud Babli and Yerushalmi and the Midrashic Literature. (New York: Pardes, 1950).
[47] Clines, David J. A., 7 vols., The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew (Sheffield UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993).
[48] Strangely, Harrington and Saldarini in their English translation of *Targum Yonatan* translate פונדקיתא as "harlot" rather than its primary meaning in Aramaic as "innkeeper."

root זנה in various Semitic languages has recently been discussed by Riegner [49] in a monograph entitled The Vanishing Hebrew Harlot: The Adventures of the Hebrew Stem ZNH (2009). She points out that in Akkadian and Ugaritic, the root ZNH had no known sexual meaning but can be understood to refer to food or nourishment (e.g., in Akkadian, "zanānu" means "to provide food," see Riegner pp. 20 & 186).[50] In Aramaic, she lists eight such usages (p. 60) with no sexual reference until the Palmyrene Tarrif of 137 C.E.[51]

Despite its lack of sexual association in Akkadian, Ugaritic or early Aramaic, the root ZNH clearly has such a connotation in biblical Hebrew. Riegner argues that, in fact, there are at least three meanings ascribed to usages of the root ZNH in the Bible: 1. participation in non-Yahwist (i.e., erroneous) religious practices (verb); 2. to be promiscuous (verb); 3. innkeeper (noun). The Aramaic Targums for both the Pentateuch (*Onkelos*) and for the former prophets (TY) reflect these multiple meaning by using different expressions in different situations נפקת ברא, פונדקיתא, תעי,זני. According to Riegner, the choice in TY of the term פונדקיתא to translate זונה probably suggests the intention of the translator to describe Rahab primarily as an innkeeper but to also allude to the sexual and religious connotations of the word. Had the translator wanted to convey her profession as a prostitute in an unambiguous fashion, he would have used נפקת ברא.

Riegner and others[52] offer the reminder that in the ancient Near East, inns or taverns were known as places frequented not only by travellers but also by spies and prostitutes. She cites a relevant Akkadian text (p. 198) that describes how a waitress who appears to double as a prostitute flirts with a client who requests that she testify that he is not a spy. This incident, linking spies, sexual activity and inns, is reminiscent of the Rahab story. While an inn would have been a logical place for Joshua's spies to visit to gather intelligence, such a visit does not preclude the possibility that Rahab provided them with sex in addition to food.

The choice of the TY translator to render זונה as פונדקיתא with its associations of both food and sex, could be considered as an effort to improve the status of the person who saved the

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[49] I.E. Riegner, The Vanishing Hebrew Harlot: The Adventures of the Hebrew Stem Znh (New York: Peter Lang, 2009).

[50] This suggests that the meaning of the name Rahab might be linked to the Ugaritic words rḥbt yn ("a flagon of wine"), something an innkeeper would provide.

[51] According to Riegner, the LXX translates זונה as "prostituting woman" and refers to her home as an "inn". I can't confirm the translation of her home as "inn" in the two translations of the LXX that I have consulted (Pietersma & Dozeman).

[52] D. J. Wiseman, "Rahab of Jericho," Tyndale Bulletin 14 (1964). 8-11; Julia Assante, "The Kar.Kid/Harimtu, Prostitute or Single Woman? A Critical Review of the Evidence," Ugarit-Forschungen 30 (1998). 5-96.

Israelite spies, facilitated the conquest of Jericho, and became part of the Israelite nation. The TY translation of the Rahab story reflects the ideology of the MT that an alien prostitute or innkeeper can accept YHVH and be integrated successfully into Israelite society.

The Peshitta

The Peshitta[53] is a Syriac translation of the Old and New Testaments and Apocrypha that became the primary version of the Bible used by several Eastern Churches. Although the earliest estimates for the origins of this translation start in the second century AD, the oldest manuscripts date from the sixth or seventh century, leaving open the possibility for later authorship[54,55.] Dirksen[56] begins his review of the research on the Old Testament Peshitta as follows: "To say that very little is known about the origin and early history of the Old Testament Peshitta will be one of the few statements about this translation that will go unchallenged" (p. 255).

The Peshitta translation of the Rahab story reads very much like the MT.[57] Overall, there are no significant changes in the plot and no homiletical elaborations. Both texts have the same number of sentences presented in the same order and divided in the same way between chapters 2 and 6 of the Book of Joshua. As opposed to the LXX, the Peshitta does not insert the elaboration of Joshua's curse or omit the phrase כאשר נשבעתם לה ("as you swore to her").[58] זונה is translated as "prostitute" and, unlike in TY, there are no additions to avoid hints of anthropomorphism.

[53] The meaning of the word "Peshitta" is not clear. One interpretation suggests that "Peshitta" is the passive participle from the root, pešaṭ, meaning 'to stretch out' or 'to extend' which came to be used in Syria and Jewish Aramaic as meaning "straightforward or simple." A different explanation is that the original meaning of the participle was extended to mean "widespread" making the term "Peshitta" analogous to vulgata or "common text." (Weitzman, p. 2-3).

[54] Johann E. Erbes, The Peshitta and the Versions: A Study of the Peshitta Variants in Joshua 1–5 in Relation to Their Equivalents in the Ancient Versions, vol. 16, Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis. Studia Semitica Upsaliensia (Uppsala, Sweden: Uppsala University, 1999).

[55] M. P. Weitzmann, The Syriac Version of the Old Testament. An Introduction (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

[56] Peter B. Dirksen, "The Old Testament Peshitta," in Mikra: Text, Translation, Reading and Interpretation of the Hebrew Bible in Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity., ed. Martin Jan Mulder (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2004), 255-97.

[57] I am relying on George Lamsa's English translation retrieved from (https://web.archive.org/web/20140209044349/http://www.aramaicpeshitta.com/OTtools/LamsaOT.htm) since I cannot read the Syriac alphabet.

[58] The word "secretly" for חרש does not appear in Lamsa's translation and it is not clear to me whether this is a translation omission or not. I'm guessing that it is since Erbes does not discuss this as a variant.

Erbes[59] has carried out a detailed study of textual variants of the Peshitta in Joshua 1-5 by comparing the available Syriac, Hebrew, Greek, Aramaic, Latin, Coptic, Ethiopic, and Armenian manuscripts. With respect to the Rahab story, he discusses 29 variants but infers that 21 of them follow directly from the MT and are not influenced by the LXX or TY. His overall conclusion is as follows: "The Peshitta seems to have originated in a multilingual context, where the Hebrew environment was dominant without depriving the translator or transmitter of the possibility of consulting what others had done before. This freedom has, however, been used sparingly" (318-19). Overall, the Peshitta appears to take a literal approach to translating the MT and suggests that this was how the story was understood by Syriac interpreters.[60]

The Vulgate

The Vulgate translation of the MT was completed by Jerome, a church father, in 405 C.E. It supplanted other Latin translations and was adopted at the Council of Trent (1545-63) as the official version for the Catholic Church. Although Jerome was the primary and perhaps sole translator, there is significant controversy among scholars in trying to characterize his translation style. This controversy is in part the result of Jerome's other writings which suggest on the one hand that he believed that every word and even every word order was sacred, while on the other that he advocated free and idiomatic translation.[61] In fact, he appears to have applied both approaches to the task of translation to different books of the Tanakh; Joshua, Judges, Ruth and Esther are much more freely translated than the Psalms and Prophets.[62] In his study of Jerome's translation of the Book of Joshua, Sipila[63] gives examples of how Jerome did not employ a literal style. Most of his examples, however, reflect the variability in how Jerome dealt with various aspects of biblical Hebrew grammar or syntax. He gives only one example of where Jerome might have intended to change the meaning of the text.[64]

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[59] Erbes, 16.

[60] The *Peshitta* does fix some grammatical issues like translating **ותצפנו** as "she hid them." A detailed analysis is beyond the scope of this thesis because I cannot read the Syriac alphabet.

[61] Benjamin Kedar, "The Latin Translations," in Mikra: Text, Translation, Reading and Interpretation of the Hebrew Bible in Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity, ed. Martin Jan Mulder (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1998), 299–338.

[62] Ibid.

[63] Seppo Sipila, "The Book of Joshua: In the Vulgate," in Scripture in Transition. Essays on Spetuagint, Hebrew Bible, and Dead Sea Scrolls in Honour of Raija Sollamo, ed. Anssi Voitila and Jutta Jokiranta (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2008), 17-26.

[64] For Joshua 6:6-9 (where the priests and Israelites are circling the walls of Jericho), Sipila (p. 23-25) points out that Jerome's adoption of the Qere reading for verse 7 and condensing of part of the text of verses 8 and 9 resulted in an emphasis on the priest's role in playing the horns. My lack of knowledge of Latin prevents me from

With respect to the Rahab story, there are no significant plot changes and no homiletical elaborations in the Vulgate.[65] This translation contains the same number of sentences as the MT presented in the same order and divided in the same way between chapters 2 and 6 of the Book of Joshua. The Vulgate appears not to be influenced by the LXX in most instances. For example, it keeps the word חרש (2:1), the phrase כאשר נשבעתם לה (6:22), and the MT's version of Joshua's curse. There is no special avoidance of anthropomorphism and no novel word interpretations: זונה is translated as "harlot." However, like other translations, the Vulgate does make minor changes to correct some grammatical or textual difficulties. For example, like the LXX, TY and the Peshitta, Jerome corrects the grammar of the MT by changing ותצפנו ("and she hid him") to "and she hid them."[66] These and other changes in the Vulgate translation of the Rahab story are relatively minor and do not reflect significant theological or exegetical differences from the MT.

Translations Summary

Three of the four translations in the Graeco-Roman period (Targum Yonatan, the Peshitta, and the Vulgate) mirror the Masoretic Text quite closely. For the most part, their major deviations from the MT are the smoothing out of various textual difficulties about which they all tend to agree. Of these three, TY may exhibit the greatest interpretive tendencies which are evidenced by its avoidance of any trace of anthropomorphism and by its translation of זונה as "innkeeper." The fourth translation, the Septuagint, predates the others by at least three hundred years and may have been composed based on an earlier version of the MT (see footnote 4). In it, there are potentially significant interpretive variations from the MT which at least one commentator[67] has inferred reflect a more liberal attitude towards the inclusion of outsiders, like Rahab, into the Israelite fold.

Paraphrases

Josephus

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evaluating the importance of these changes, but Sipila makes no suggestion that these changes either reflect Jerome's views on the role of the priesthood or introduce a new interpretation of the story.

[65] I am relying on the Douay-Rheims English translation of the *Vulgate* for this section.

[66] The Vulgate deals with some textual difficulties in the Rahab story in the following way: in 2:15 it explains כי ביתה בקיר החומה ובחומה היא יושבת by translating "for her house joined close to the wall"; in 2:4 it translates כן by "I confess"; in 2:19 it adds the word "man" to the phrase "אם יד תהיה בו".

[67] Dozeman.

Josephus (c. 37-100 C.E.) was a Jerusalem-born Jew of aristocratic and priestly descent. He considered himself a Torah scholar and was also sufficiently fluent in Greek to represent Jewish interests on a mission to Rome in 64 C.E. During the Jewish rebellion (66 C.E.), he became a military commander in the Galilee, but his forces were routed by the Romans at Jotpata. According to his own account in Jewish Wars, Josephus and 39 survivors agreed to commit suicide rather than be captured by the Romans; somehow, he and one other survived. The Romans initially imprisoned Josephus but he was released by Vespasian and was granted Roman citizenship. He settled in Rome and ultimately became a historian, writer and respected member of the emperor's court. His major works, including Jewish Wars, Against Apion and Antiquities of the Jews, are important sources for the understanding of Jewish history during the late second-Temple period. Despite his popularity in Rome, the Jews of Palestine considered Josephus a traitor and despised him.[68]

In Antiquities of the Jews,[69] Josephus created an encyclopedic work summarizing Jewish customs, laws and history. In this work, he recounts many biblical tales including that of Rahab and the spies. There is much unresolved controversy about whether Josephus based his retelling of biblical stories on the Hebrew, Greek, Aramaic or some combination of all the versions of these texts available to him.[70] Josephus' paraphrase of the Rahab story is recognizably the same narrative found in the MT version of the Book of Joshua.[71] Spies are sent by Joshua to Jericho and stop at Rahab's house where they are discovered by the townspeople. Rahab hides them and facilitates their escape while negotiating a deal to save her and her family's lives. Joshua fulfills this promise when Jericho is conquered. In addition to these major plot parallels, Josephus reproduces specific details from the MT such as Rahab's hiding the spies in flax, using a red thread as a signal, and lowering the spies down the wall with a rope.

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[68] Abraham Schalit, "Josephus Flavius," in Encyclopaedia Judaica (Detroit, MI: Thomson Gale/Macmillan Reference USA, 2007).

[69] William Whiston, "From the Death of Moses to the Death of Eli," in Josephus. Complete Works. (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1960), 104-13.

[70] Louis H. Feldman, "Use, Authority and Exegesis of Mikra in the Writings of Josephus," in Mikra: Text, Translation, Reading and Interpretation of the Hebrew Bible in Ancient Judaism & Early Christianity, ed. Martin Jan Mulder (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2004), 455-517; Christopher T. Begg, "The Rahab Story in Josephus," Liber Annuus 55 (2005). 113-30.

[71] I am relying on the version cited in footnote 37 which is based on a combination of Whiston's original 1867 version and the Standard Edition published by Porter and Coates, Philadelphia, PA.

Despite these similarities, Josephus' paraphrase differs notably from his source. His changes to the Rahab story are consistent with the modifications that he makes to many biblical narratives.[72] Because he retells rather than translates the stories, he is able to avoid potential language, grammatical and plot difficulties in the original text. He is also able to add explanatory comments to fill in background details particularly military and strategic ones that are consistent with his own experience and the expectations of his readers. For example, he deals with the problem of the spies' managing to enter Jericho and to reach Rahab's house without arousing suspicion by describing them as curious visitors. Further, he explains away the fact that the King's emissaries did not search Rahab's house by adding that she told them that the spies had just left and would be easy to apprehend if the emissaries pursued them immediately. Where the MT does not define the purpose of the spies' mission, Josephus comments that it was to investigate the strength of the wall and gate. He also invents an intention on the part of the King of Jericho to torture the spies. [73]

Perhaps the most important changes Josephus introduces are motivated by his apologist goal of portraying the Jews positively to the Romans. For example, he eliminates all sexual elements and allusions from the Rahab story presumably because they would reflect badly on his people.[74] He significantly shortens Rahab's laudatory comments about YHVH as the one true God (Joshua 2: 9-11) in order to forestall Roman recriminations against the Jews for proselytizing. It was presumably this same concern that prompted him to emphasize the spies' keeping of their oath to Rahab. In so doing, he suggests that Rahab was saved because the Jews were law-abiding citizens who kept their promises and not because she was a biblical example of religious conversion.

Josephus is more explicitly positive about Rahab than is the MT. He closes his version of the story with the following statement: ". . . whereupon he [Joshua] gave her [Rahab] certain lands immediately, and had her in great esteem ever afterwards" (verse 7). The Bible makes no

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[72] Louis H. Feldman, "Joshua," in Josephus' Interpretation of the Bible (Berkley, Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1998), 443-60; G. J. Swart, "Rahab and Esther in Josephus: An Intertextual Approach," Acta Patristica et Byzantina 17 (2006). 50-65.

[73] Freed in the *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* (1987), volume 29, p. 12 suggests two additional positive characteristics of Rahab based on his reading of the Greek text. First, he suggests that God had informed Rahab of the impending conquest which confers prophetic status on her. Second, he indicates that Rahab was married and had children. Neither of these characterizations are at all obvious from a reading of the Whiston translation.

[74] Louis H. Feldman, "Josephus' Portrayal (Antiquities 5.136-174) of the Benjaminite Affair of the Concubine and Its Repercussions (Judges 19-21)," The Jewish Quarterly Review 90, no. 3-4 (2000). 255-92.

mention of reward for Rahab other the saving of her and her family's life and does not comment about how she was regarded. It closes her story with the following statement: "she dwelt among the Israelites as is still the case" (Joshua 6:26). It is tempting to speculate that Josephus elevates Rahab's status because he identified with her. Like her, he left his own people and joined a conquering enemy. Though he was ultimately well accepted in the Roman court, he was initially, like Rahab, an imprisoned outsider "outside the camp." Josephus was deeply influenced by Roman culture and society and appears to have believed that one could integrate foreign elements into Jewish society without abandoning Judaism.[75] This view is reflected in his version of the Rahab story.

Samaritan Book of Joshua

There are two different versions of the Samaritan Book of Joshua, one in Hebrew and one in Arabic, both of which include the story of Rahab and the spies. Strictly speaking, neither of these texts belongs to the period under discussion in this chapter, but they are included here as an addendum. The Hebrew version, also known as *Sefer Hayamim*, was originally published by Gaster[76] who maintained that it dates from the late second Temple period although this claim is not accepted by most current authorities who argue that it is a much later composition.[77] Most of the text of the Rahab story in *Sefer Hayamim* is identical to the MT and so will not be discussed further.[78] The Arabic version, known as the Samaritan Chronicle or the Samaritan Book of Joshua the Son of Nun, is based on a manuscript dated 1362 (available in an English translation by Crane[79]) in which chapter 13 and part of chapter 17 paraphrase the story of Rahab and the spies.[80]

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[75] "Josephus as Apologist to Non-Jews and to Jews," in Josephus's Interpretation of the Bible (Berkley, Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1998), 132-62.

[76] Moses Gaster, "The Samaritan Book of Joshua and the Septuagint," Proceedings of the Society of Biblical Archaelogy 31 (1909). 115-27, 49-53.

[77] Sholmo Hofman, "Samaritans," in Encyclopedia Judaica; A.D. Crown, "New Light on the Inter-Relationships of Samaritan Chronicles from Some Manuscripts in the John Rylands Library.," Bulletin of the John Rylands Library 55, no. 5 (1972). 86-111.

[78] I am relying on the work of Macdonald (1969) who republished and translated this text into English.

[79] Oliver T. Crane, "The Account of the Spies Whom Yusha, the King, Send Forth," in The Samaritan Chronicle or the Book of Joshua the Son of Nun (New York, NY: John B. Alden, 1890), 41-54.

[80] I am including it here for lack of another appropriate context in this thesis. As far as I am aware, there are no similar paraphrases of the Rahab or other Biblical stories authored by the Samaritans of this period. From a genre point of view, the Samaritan Chronicle is similar to apocryphal or pseudepigraphical works from the Graeco-Roman period.

In the Samaritan Chronicle retelling, Rahab is described as an innkeeper who hides the spies, helps them to escape, and negotiates her and her family's deliverance from the destruction of Jericho. Other elements consistent with the MT include the location of Rahab's house and the use of a sign so that the invading Israelites would know whom to save**.** However, she is mentioned only briefly and the author diminishes her role by deleting her proclamation of faith and by minimizing her bravery and ingenuity in tricking the townspeople and facilitating the escape of the spies. For example, there is no mention of Rahab lowering the spies from her window. The account reads as follows: "And she brought them out, by night, and God willed their safe escape, and they returned to the army" (p. 44). There is no mention of where Rahab and her family lived after the destruction of Jericho.

The truncated version of the Rahab story in the Samaritan Chronicle reads almost as if the author felt compelled to include it. In fact, this might very well have been the case as suggested by his closing of his paraphrase with an acknowledgement of her popularity: "And the report of her spread abroad throughout the army, and the whole congregation of them knew about her (p. 44)." Overall, the authorial lack of interest in Rahab may be the result of the concern in the Samaritan Chronicle to emphasize the role and leadership of Joshua who is portrayed as a King and scholar as well as a warrior.[81] In addition, the Samaritans were religious rivals of the Jews and, as such, would not be particularly interested in highlighting Rahab's acceptance of the Israelite God or her integration into the people of Israel.

Paraphrase Summary

Since the Samaritan Chronicle is probably a medieval composition, the only paraphrase of the Rahab story that can be linked unequivocally to the Graeco-Roman period is that of Josephus. There is a particularly notable omission in Pseudo-Philo which includes a brief account of Joshua sending spies to reconnoiter Jericho but does not mention Rahab at all.[82] It is somewhat surprising that Rahab is not explicitly mentioned in apocryphal, pseudepigraphical or related literatures of this period such as Pseudo-Philo.[83] It is hard to argue that Rahab was not

[81] See discussion in Dozeman (1982) pp. 83-84.

[82] Jacobsen (p. 363) suggests there is an allusion to the Rahab story in Pseudo-Philo's account of Abram and Tower of Babel. Richard Bauckman (1995) in *Novum Testamentum* p. 319 comments on Pseudo-Philo's lack of interest in non-Israelite women of the Tanakh, such as Asenath, Rahab, & Ruth. He does not, however, explain why.

[83] M. E. Stone (1991) in Selected Studies Pseudepigrapha and Apocrypha. With Special Reference to the Armenian Tradition Leiden, Brill, p. 71 has suggested that there may be an allusion to Rahab in the Penitence of Solomon, a

considered an important personage since she is mentioned three times in the New Testament and is discussed extensively in the Midrash and in Christian exegesis of the time. It is tempting to infer that her importance was down-played because of her gender. However, this explanation is undermined by the presence of several prominent female figures, in the New Testament (e.g., Mary Magdalen) and in apocryphal books (e.g., Judith). Overall, there is no satisfying explanation for the diminishment of Rahab in the paraphrases of the period.

Conclusion

None of the translations or paraphrases of the Rahab story from the Graeco-Roman period explicitly discuss Rahab as an outsider or directly broach issues of inclusivity. There are, however, some indirect indications of interest in this theme. Some of the variations between the LXX and MT become more understandable if one sees them as examples of the LXX's more open attitude to outsiders. Josephus was probably sensitive to Rahab's symbolic value as a "convert" to the Jewish God and therefore downplayed her statement of faith in YHVH to avoid Roman negativity to Jewish proselytization. The Samaritan chronicler did likewise because, as religious rivals to the Jews, the Samaritans were probably not interested in highlighting someone whom they would have considered to have made the "wrong choice." Nonetheless, there is no satisfactory explanation for why the Rahab story was omitted from most of the apocryphal, pseudepigraphical, and related literatures. The omission of the story from these literatures becomes more striking given its popularity in the concurrent Midrashic and Christian literatures that are reviewed in the next two chapters.

10th century Pseudipigraphal work. It does not appear, however, that Rahab or a spy story is mentioned specifically in this work.

Chapter 4: Midrashic Interpretation

As discussed in chapter 2, developing Rahab's persona was not the primary interest of the author of the Book of Joshua. The Midrashic Rabbis, on the other hand, appear to have been fascinated by her story and created a character that the biblical author might have had trouble recognizing. Although Rahab is not mentioned in the Mishnah, she is discussed extensively throughout the rest of the rabbinic literature.[84] I will refer to this literature as a single entity, "Midrash" because as far as I can determine, there does not appear to be significant evolution in the major Midrashic interpretations of the Rahab story during the periods of the Tanaim and Amoraim.[85] It is useful to summarize this literature under two major headings: 1. elaborating on the original biblical story; 2. discussing its theological implications.

Elaborating on the Story

Much of the material on Rahab exhibits a classic feature of Midrashic interpretation in elaborating on the characters and narrative. Details of characterization and plot events are added and new ideas are introduced that result in transforming the literal meaning of the text. Such elaborations include her life history, lineage, marital status, appearance, personality, divine inspiration, the meaning of her name and her interaction with the spies.

Life History

From the biblical text, we know nothing of Rahab's life before the episode with the spies or after the fall of Jericho. However, in the *Mekhilta De-Rabbi Ishmael*, we find the following passage:

... בת עשר שנים היתה כשיצאו ישראל ממצרים וכל מ שנה שהיו ישראל במדבר זנתה לסוף נ שנה נתגיירה.

[84]A search of using the term רחב in the ספרות חז"ל section of the Bar Ilan responsa data base yielded 117 relevant hits. A few additional references were found in other sources. Unless otherwise specified all quotations of Midrashic texts are from the Bar Ilan data base.

[85] There has not been a scholarly study of this issue. There are some minor variations between different versions of the same Midrash but these variations do not seem to reflect thematic evolution. Baskin (1979 p. 154, footnote 10) and Bamberger (1939 p. 194) both suggest that all the Midrashic traditions concerning Rahab were well developed by Tannaitic times. Dating specific Midrashim or variations in them is beyond the scope of this study.

[Rahab] was ten when the Exodus occurred and she whored for the forty years of Israelite wandering in the desert; at fifty she converted. [86] (Masekhet Amalek, chapter 1)

This biographical information is repeated almost word for word in several other Midrashim (e.g. Mekhilta De-Rabbi Ishmael; Mekhilta De-Rabbi Shimon Bar Yoḥai, chapter 18; She'iltah De-Rabbi Aḥai, Zot Habrakha, 166).[87] Such passages imagine the chronology of her life and her conversion to Judaism, although details of what happened before she was ten or after she converted are not provided. The only Midrashic information provided about her conversion is that it was carried out by Joshua (Otzar Ha-Midrashim, [Eisenstein], Yitbarakh).

Rahab's Profession

There is little doubt that most Midrashim consider Rahab to be a prostitute. In addition to the biographical statement cited above, other references to her whoring include the following:

שהיתה מזנה עם בני המדינה מביפנים ועם הליסטים מבחוץ.

She whored with the locals from inside the wall and the bandits from the outside. (*Sifrei Zuta, chapter 10*)

אין לך כל שר ונגיד שלא בא על רחב הזונה.

…there was no prince or ruler that had not slept with Rahab the Harlot.
(TB Zevaḥim, 116b)

שלשה שזינו (רואין קרי) על ידיהם :יעל בקולה אביגיל בזכירתה רחב בשמה.

Three that whored (saw ejaculate) on their hands [were responsible for men ejaculating]:, Yael through her voice, Abigail by memory and Rahab through her name.[88] (Otzar Ha-Midrashim, [Eisenstein], Rabbeinu Ha-Kadosh)

Not only were the Midrashic Rabbis, clear about Rahab's sex worker profession, they considered her to be one of the best and did not hesitate to be graphic in describing her work. However, despite this apparent consensus, there are other views expressed about her profession:

[86] Unless otherwise specified, all translations are mine.
[87] In She'iltah de Rabbi Aḥai, it states that Rahab is 12 as opposed to 10 years old when Israel left Egypt.
[88] This reference to whoring by one's name appears to refer to the Midrash from Megillah 15a cited below which indicates that repeating Rahab's name twice was sufficient to cause an ejaculation.

she is also referred to as an innkeeper (*Sifre Bamidbar Beha'alotekha*), as a worker in linen or pottery (*Sifrei Zuta, Beha'alotekha*), and as a perfumer (*Ruth Rabbah, chapter 2*).

Appearance

Although the text in the Book of Joshua gives no physical description of Rahab, the Midrashic Rabbis are not reluctant to elaborate. In the Babylonian Talmud (Megillah 15a), Rahab is considered one of the four most beautiful women in the world along with Sara, Abigail and Esther whose beauty is explicitly described in the text of the Bible. Rahab's beauty is considered so overwhelming that Rabbi Isaac is cited as saying the following:

> אמר רבי יצחק כל האומר רחב רחב מיד ניקרי א"ל רב נחמן אנא אמינא רחב רחב ולא איכפת לי אמר ליה כי קאמינא ביודעה ובמכירה.
>
> Said Rabbi Yitzchak: Whoever says 'Rahab, Rahab', at once has an issue [an emission or ejaculation]. Said R. Nahman to him: I say Rahab, Rahab, and nothing happens to me! He replied: I was speaking of one who knows her and is intimate with her. (*TB Megillah 15a, www.halakhah.com*)

The effects of her beauty on men are described in the following way:

> ואף רחב הזונה אמרה לשלוחי יהושע (יהושוע ב) כי שמענו את אשר הוביש ה' את מי ים סוף מאי שנא התם <דאמר> [דכתיב] <ליה> (יהושוע ה) ולא היה בם עוד רוח ומ"ש הכא <דקאמר> [דכתיב] (יהושוע ב) ולא קמה עוד רוח באיש דאפילו אקשויי נמי לא אקשו.
>
> …and Rahab the harlot too said to Joshua's messengers [spies]: For we have heard how the Lord dried up the water of the Red Sea. Why is "neither was there spirit in them any more" written in the first text, whereas in the second it says, "neither did there remain [stand] anymore spirit in any man"? - [She meant that] they even lost their virility. (*TB Zevaḥim,116a,b, www.halakhah.com*)

We can assume that loss of "spirit" or "virility" as the result of the drying up of water is a reference to impotence as a result of a recent ejaculation caused by fantasies about or contemplation of Rahab's appearance.

Marital Status, Descendants and Lineage

Neither Rahab's descendants nor her marital status is mentioned in the Book of Joshua. According to the Midrash, however, Rahab marries Joshua[89] and their descendants include a line

[89] There is no mention in the Tanakh of a wife for Joshua.

of illustrious priests and prophets. The most frequently cited list of descendants includes Neriah, Barukh, Serayah, Maḥseyah, Yirmiyahu, Ḥilkiah, Ḥanamel and Shallum (see Megillah 15a; Sifrei Bemidbar, 78; Pesikta De-Rav Kahana 13:5). Three additional prophets, Ḥuldah, Yeḥezkel, and Buzi are also sometimes mentioned (Sifrei Bemidbar, Beha'alotekha; Bereshit Rabbati Vayishlakh, 35:18). Rahab's descendants are also connected to the line of Judah (Ruth Rabah, [Vilna], chapter 2:1; Yalkut Shimoni, Divrei Ha-Yamim I, Remez 1074; Midrash Ha-Gadol, Genesis 23:1). The Midrash specifies that having such an illustrious line of descendants is Rahab's reward for her actions. In one Midrash, this reward is attributed to her having saved the spies (Yalkut Shimoni, Yehoshua, chapter 2, Remez 9) in another, it is the result of her repenting for her idolatry and accepting YHVH (Midrash Agadah [Buber], Matot). One difficult to understand Midrash (Midrash Zuta, Shir-Hashirim (Buber), Parashah Aleph) creates a connection between Abraham and Rahab and may suggest that she is descended from him.[90]

Divinely Inspired

In the original biblical story, Rahab has no divine connection other than knowledge of YHVH's intervention in the Exodus story. Although she does not attain the status of prophet, the Midrash describes her as being divinely inspired although she does not fully attain the status of prophet. Several texts repeat the idea that only through divine inspiration could Rahab have known that it would be safe for the spies to return from hiding in the mountains after 3 days: מלמד ששרתה עליה רוח הקדש (This teaches us that she was divinely inspired). (Sifrei Devarim, Devarim, 22; Midrash Tana'im, Devarim, chapter 1; Yalkut Shimoni, Parshat Devarim Remez 804). Other Midrashim describe her closeness to the divine in the following way: רחב נקרבה תחת כנפי השכינה (Rahab was brought close to the shekhina).[91] (Pesikta Zutarta [Lekakh Tov], Vayikra, Tzav)

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[90] ארבעה דברים שאתה אוכל פירותיהם בעולם הזה והקרן קיימת לעולם הבא. כבוד אב ואם, וגמילות חסדים, והצדקה, והבאת שלום שבין אדם לחברו, ותלמוד תורה כנגד כלם. ומה שכרו לעולם הבא, חלקו עם אביהם /אברהם/ יצחק ויעקב, שנאמר האדם הגדול בענקים (יהושע י"ד ט"ו), כן אמרו לאברהם אבינו נשיא אלהים אתה בתוכנו (בראשית כ"ג ו'), שהיה גדול כאלהים, ומה שכר נטלו על כך, שכבדו את אברהם נותרה מהם פלטה רחב וכל ביתה, מהם הלכו לאפריקי, אף פלטו במלחמה, הכל בזכות אברהם, שנאמר האדם הגדול בענקים הוא והארץ שקטה ממלחמה (יהושע י"א כ"ג).
There is a similar Midrash in Yalkut Shimoni, Joshua, Perek 14, Remez 23 which omits Rahab but talks about Canaanites.

[91] The phrase תחת כנפי השכינה is also typically used in the Midrash to refer to conversion.

Personality

Because there is no description of Rahab's character in the biblical text, the Midrashic Rabbis began to create one for her. It is not surprising that they were impressed with her abilities to act fearlessly in potentially dangerous situations since she was able to harbor and negotiate with the spies, hide them from the townspeople, engineer their escape, and sit tight while waiting for deliverance as the walls of Jericho fell. The Midrash describes Rahab as "tougher" than the residents of Jericho: שהיתה קשה כנגד כלם (*Midrash Tana'im, Deuteronomy, chapter 12; Sifrei Devarim 'Ekev,52; Midrash Mishlei [Buber] 31; Yalkut Shimoni, Mishlei, Remez 964*) and cites her in a list of courageous women including the widow from Zarepat (I Kings 17:7-24), Yael, Bat Sheva, and Michal *(Midrash Mishlei [Buber] 31;Yalkut Shimoni, Mishlei, Remez 1064).* The only attempted explanation for her fearlessness is that the scarlet cord given to her by the spies allowed her to believe in her salvation and to wait for deliverance while the walls were falling (*Yalkut Shimoni, Mishlei 1064*). Other than this, the Midrash does not propose reasons for Rahab's courage or toughness in the face of adversity, but it may take for granted that a true believer in YHVH will exhibit such traits.

Meaning of Rahab's Name

The meanings of many biblical names are explained in the text. These explanations are typically suspect from an etymological point of view but often reflect post-biblical interpretations or elaboration.[92] The name Rahab appears five times in the Book of Joshua, but there is no explanation given for it at any point. I have been able to find only one explicit attempt in the Midrash to attribute meaning to her name:

למה נקרא שמה רחב (הזונה) שהיא רחובה בזכות.

Why was she called Rahab (the prostitute) because she was of great merit.
(*Eliyahu Zuta [Ish Shalom] chapter 22)*

This interpretation of Rahab's name uses the root רחב, meaning 'wide' or 'broad,' to indicate that Rahab was very meritorious.[93]

[92] Garsiel.

[93] The only other possible reference to the name Rahab in the Midrash is in the context of the comment that repeating it twice could cause an ejaculation (Megilla, 15a). It is not clear whether this refers to a now obscure sexual meaning of the name.

The Spies

The spies are not named in the Book of Joshua. Most Midrashim identify the spies as Caleb, one of Moses' original spies, and Pinhas the priest; other traditions identify them as Peretz and Zerakh the sons of Judah, or as Kenaz and Seenamias the sons of Caleb. [94] Other Midrashim add a variety of suppositions about how the spies succeeded in eluding the townspeople before they got to Rahab's house. According to one version, two she-devils, Lilit and Maḥla, took possession of Caleb and Pinḥas and made them look so horrific that the townspeople were petrified.[95] In another tradition, Pinḥas tells Rahab that because he is an angel he would be invisible (Midrash Tanḥuma, Buber, Shlaḥ, Siman Aleph.Va-tizpeno). Other Midrashim suggest that the spies disguised themselves as pottery merchants or as carpenters or pretended to be deaf and dumb (Bemidbar Rabah, Shlaḥ, chapter 15). There is no elaboration in the Midrash of the story of the spies being lowered out of Rahab's window or of the negotiation between Rahab and the spies.

Theological Implications of the Rahab Story

In addition to these elaborations on plot and character, the Midrash invests the story of Rahab with theological implications beyond anything that is suggested in the Bible. At least one theory of the origin of the Midrash proposes that it developed out of rabbinic sermonizing in early synagogues.[96] Whether or not this is true, it is clear that the Rabbis used the Midrash to discuss and develop their theological ideas. With respect to Rahab, there were at least three such concepts that were repeatedly discussed: YHVH's miracles and glory, repentance, and conversion. A fourth theological issue, the justification for Rahab's salvation, is also briefly discussed in the Midrash.

YHVH's Miracles and Glory

In the original biblical account, Rahab is aware of God's miracles and deeds during the Exodus and reports these to the spies:

> ותאמר אל האנשים ידעתי כי נתן יהוה לכם את הארץ וכי נפלה אימתכם עלינו וכי נמגו כל ישבי הארץ מפניכם. כי שמענו את אשר הוביש יהוה את מי ים סוף מפניכם בצאתכם ממצרים ואשר עשיתם לשני מלכי האמרי אשר בעבר הירדן לסיחן ולעוג אשר החרמתם אותם.

[94] See *Midrash Ha-Gadol, Ḥayei Sarah, 23:1* and Ginzberg's *Legends of the Jews* p. 844 notes 10 & 11.
[95] See Ginzberg's Legends of the Jews p. 843.
[96] Lieve Teugels, "Two Centuries of Midrash Study. A Survey of Some Standard Works on Rabbinic Midrash and Its Methods," Nederlands Theologisch Tijdschrift no. 54 (2000). 125-44.

She said to the men, "I know that the LORD has given the country to you, because dread of you has fallen upon us, and all the inhabitants of the land are quaking before you. For we have heard how the Lord dried up the waters of the Sea of Reeds for you when you left Egypt, and what you did to Sihon and Og, the two Amorite kings across the Jordan, whom you doomed." (Joshua 2:9-11)

The Midrashic Rabbis repeatedly cite these verses when discussing Rahab.[97] From their point of view, the miracles of the Exodus are crucial moments in the development of Judaism that YHVH carried out in order to glorify his name among the nations:

ומנין שלא עשה המקום נסים וגבורות על הים ובירדן ובנחלי ארנון אלא בשביל לקדש את שמו בעולם שנאמר +יהושע ה א+ ויהי כשמוע כל מלכי האמורי אשר בעבר הירדן ימה וכל מלכי וגו' וכן +רחב אומרת לשלוחי יהושע +שם /יהושע/ ב י

And how do we understand that God did miracles and wonders on the Sea of Reeds and on the Jordan and on the Arnon River? In order to glorify his name in the world, as it is written, Joshua 5:1, "When all the kings of the Amorites that were across the Jordan on the West etc. And thus Rahab says to Joshua's messengers in Joshua 2,10…. *(Sifrei Devarim Ha'azinu Piska 306)*

אמרו להקב"ה כשעשית לנו ניסים בים אמרנו לך –שמות טו – עזי וזמרת יה, הלא שמעה רחב ובאה ודבקה בו.

The Israelites said to God, "When You carried out miracles at sea, we answered - [in] Exodus [chapter] 15, 'The Lord is my strength and song'." Rahab heard this and devoted herself to YHVH. *(Shmot Rabbah [Vilna], Parshat Yitro, Parashah 27)*

For the Midrashic Rabbis, Rahab's knowledge and appreciation of the centrality of the events of Exodus make her a model of faith**.** The Canaanites are also aware of YHVH's miracles and are in terror of the resulting impending conquest by the Israelites, but they do not understand

[97] *For example, TB, Sotah 34a; Zevaḥim 116a & 116b; Mekhiltah De-Rabbi Ishmael, Masekhta De-Shirha 3 & 9, & Masekhta d'Amalek, 1, Beshalach, 3; Sifrei Devarim, Ekev, 52:25; Sifrei Devarim, Haazinu 306; Midrash Tan'aaim Devarim 11:25; Psikta de Rav Kahana [Mandlebaum] 13-Divrei Yirmiyahu; Mekhiltah De-Rabbi Shimon bar Yoḥai, 18:1; Sekhel Tov [Buber], Jetro 18:11; She'eltot De-Rav Aḥai, Zot Habrakha 166; Midrash Zuta Eichah [Buber] 1:1; Psikta Zutarta [LT], Jethro 18:1 & 18:11 & Shir Hashirim 3:6; Shmot Rabah, Jethro 27:4; Yalkut Shimoni, Jethro, 18:1 & 18:11& Joshua 2:9 & Eichah 999.*

or accept the significance of these events. On the other hand, Rahab's understanding of YHVH's power causes her to accept Him as the true God and as a result the Rabbis admire her.

Repentance

There is no explicit mention of repentance in the Rahab story.[98] In fact, it is not at all clear that early biblical stories recognize the idea that a change in belief and action can atone for a sin and result in forgiveness.[99] According to the Book of Joshua, Rahab affirms her belief in YHVH and saves the spies, and she is spared as a result. The story implies that Rahab's statement of belief and subsequent actions are sufficient to atone for her past sins and therefore to allow her to be exempted from the ḥerem edict. This story may therefore reflect one of the initial statements in the Bible suggesting the importance and efficacy of repentance.[100] However, because the text gives us little insight into Rahab's state of mind, her actions could also be considered as a very shrewd calculation to save her life rather than as a sign of repentance. In fact, there is no mention in the text that Rahab abandoned prostitution or worshipped YHVH after being spared during the fall of Jericho.

Although the biblical text may be open to interpretation, the Midrash has no doubt. The Rabbis were well aware of Rahab's sins and did not hesitate to list them (Sifrei Zuta, Bemidbar, 10:28):

> ר' יהודה אומר ארבעה שמות של גנאי היה לה. נקרא שמה רחב הזונה כשמה, ד"א רחב הזונה שהיתה מזנה עם בני המדינה מבפנים ועם הליסטים מבחוץ שנא' כי ביתה בקיר החומה ובחומה היא יושבת (שם /יהושע/ ב טו). ד"א רחב הזונה שהיתה מארץ כנען ולא היה בארץ כנען בני אדם רעים וקשים מהם. ד"א רחב הזונה שהיתה מאנשי יריחו מאותן שכתוב בהן כלייה שנ' כי החרם תחרימם (דברים כ יז) ועליה הוא אומר ומשפחות בית עבודת הבוץ (דה"י =דברי הימים= א' ד כא) שהיתה עסוקה בבוץ ד"א שהטמינה את המרגלים בבוץ.

> Rabbi Judah says, "She had four degrading nicknames. She was called Rahab the whore as her name since she whored with the locals from inside the wall and the bandits from the outside." As it is written, "…for her house was part of the city wall and she lived there." (Joshua 2:15). "Also, [she was called] Rahab the whore

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[98] The word תשובה is not used in the Tanakh but the root שוב is often used to imply a return from doing evil. This root does not appear in the Rahab story.

[99] Yehezkel Kaufmann, "The Biblical Account of the Conquest of Canaan," (The Hebrew University, Israel: The Magnes Press, 1953), 284-86.

[100] The concept of repentance is clearly developed in the story of Jonah and in the prophets. It may also exist in the story of Na'aman (II Kings 5). After being cured of leprosy, Na'aman declares his new belief and intention to worship only YHVH in the future except when he is with his master. This "partial repentance" is acceptable to Elisha. It is interesting that Akhan's repentance for stealing from the *ḥerem* in the chapter in the Book of Joshua immediately after Rahab's deliverance is not accepted as he is stoned to death.

because she came from the land of Canaan and there were in the land of Canaan no men more wicked or harsh than they. Also, [she was called] Rahab the whore because she was one of the inhabitants of Jericho, upon whom utter destruction is decreed," as it is written, "You must completely destroy them." (Joshua 20:17). "And she is described (I Chron 4:21) with reference to the family of linen makers (*botz*) so another reason [she was called] Rahab the whore is because she hid the spies in mud (*botz*)."

They also had no doubt about her repentance:

אבל בעבור שעשתה רחב תשובה קבלתי אותה, והעמדתי ממנה עשרה נביאים וכהנים.

Because Rahab repented, I received her and gave her ten prophets and priests as descendants. *(Midrash Agada [Buber] Be-Midbar, Parshat Matot, chapter 30)*

One Midrash juxtaposes Rahab's repentance with her sins*:*

בשלשה דברים חטאתי. בשלשה דברים מחול לי. בחבל בחלון בחומה

I sinned in three ways. I was forgiven in three ways: with a rope, a window and a wall. *(Mekhilta De-Rabbi Ishmael, Yitro, Masekhthta D'Amalek, Parashah Alef)*

This last quotation lists the three important objects in Rahab's saving of the spies.[101] The focus on action rather than on belief may reflect the importance the Rabbis attached to deeds as a sign of repentance. The Midrash valued Rahab's repentance as more important than prayer:

דבר אחר גדולה תשובה יותר מן התפלה, שכל התפלה שנתפלל משה רבינו לא קיבל ממנו להכניסו לארץ ישראל, אבל רחב הזונה נתקבלה בתשובה,

Also, [we understand that] repentance is more important than prayer since Moses's prayer was not sufficient for him to merit entry in the Land of Israel, but

[101]There are several versions of this Midrash with minor variations *: Mekhiltah De-Rabbi Shimon Bar Yoḥai, chapter 18; She-iltah De Rabbi Aḥai, Parashah, Zot Habrachah 166; Yalkut Shimoni Yehoshua, chapter 2; Yalkut Shimoni, Parshat Yitro)*. In one, the word "wall" is changed to "succah" and in another to "flax." The reason for these variations is not clear since they destroy the intended alliteration of "ח" in the version in M de R Ishmael. In addition, the formulaic expression of this Midrash suggests that three sins should be listed after the first phrase to parallel the three ways of forgiveness. In fact, the version in the Yalkut Shimoni does exactly this by including the following words בנדה בחלה ובהדלקה (with *niddah*, *challah* & lighting of candles) in parentheses after the phrase "I sinned in three ways." These sins do not have any origin in the Biblical story and are an anachronistic insertion that refers to *mitzvot* that are traditionally reserved for women.

Rahab the prostitute was accepted as a result of her repentance. *(Eliyhua Zutah [Ish Shalom] Parashah 22)*

Although it would not be unusual to find a discussion of the relative merits of various types of good deeds in a Midrashic text, it is surprising that this Midrash compares the relatively minor biblical character of Rahab to Moses. It is even more surprising that Rahab's repentance allows her to achieve what was denied to Moses.

In the Psikta de Rav Kahana (Mandelbaum, Piska 13) Rahab's repentance is seen as a model for all of Israel:

א"ר אבא בר כהנא כתיב ולא היית כזונה לקלס אתנן (יחזקאל טז: לא), ייתי ברא דמקלקלתה דתקנת עובדיה, ויוכח לברא דמתקנתה דקלקלת עובדיה. את מוצא כל מה שכת' בישר' לגנייי כתוב ברחב לשבח.

A. Said R. Abba bar Kahana, "It is written, 'Yet you were not like a harlot, because you scorned hire' (Ezek. 16:31).
B. "Let the son of the woman who was in a state of utter disarray but corrected her ways [come?] and rebuke the son of the one who was in order and who then corrupted her ways.
C. You find that whatever is written with respect to Israel in a negative spirit is written as a matter of praise for Rahab….[102]

Conversion

There is no mention of Rahab's conversion in the Bible, and it is highly unlikely that such a practice existed in biblical times. However, in the Midrash, Rahab's statement of faith and her actions to save the spies are seen as inevitably leading not only to repentance but also to conversion. According to *Kohelet Rabah*, (chapter 5 verse 1:6) Rahab converted along with all of her family. In *Shir Ha-Shirim Rabbah*, (*Vilna, Parashah 4*) the example of Rahab's conversion is compared to a gathering of doves attracted by the sweet smell of food:

רבי אומר יש מין יונה שמאכילין אותה וחברותיה מריחות אותה ובאוות אצלה לשובכה, כך בשעה שהזקן יושב ודורש הרבה גרים מתגיירים באוותה שעה כגון יתרו שמע הא ואתי, רחב שמעה ואתיה.

[102] Jacob Neusner, Jeremiah in Talmud and Midrash: A Source Book (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2006).

> Rabbi said, there are doves who, when fed, smell [of the food they have eaten] and attract others to the nest. So an elder sits and teaches, and many gentiles come and convert at the same time, like Jethro who heard and came and Rahab who heard and came.

Rahab is often mentioned when the Midrash discusses difficulties with conversion. In an attempt to counteract the tendency of native-born Jews to treat converts as inferior, the Rabbis cite opinions granting privileges to converts that are not granted to Jews, such as entering the sanctuary (*Sifrei Bemidbar, Beha'alotekhah, Piska 78*). In Sifrei Be-Midbar, Rahab, Jethro and Ruth are all praised for their conversion, and their resulting rewards are specified.

In another attempt to promote the equality of converts, Rahab is compared to some of the major figures in Israelite history. There is a lengthy Midrash *(Be-Midbar Rabah, Parshat Be-Midbar, chapter 3)* that discusses the difference between those who were "chosen" (בחר) to become one of YHVH's people and those who were converted, or "brought close" (קרב). Abraham, Jacob, Moses, Aaron, Saul, and David are listed as "chosen" while Rahab and Jethro are the examples of those "brought close." This Midrash accepts the idea that the "chosen" are superior to those "brought close." On the other hand, once this hierarchy is established, the Midrash begins to systematically question the superior status of the "chosen." For example, it points out that although Saul and David were chosen, they were then "pushed off" or "excommunicated," something that did not happen to Rahab.

The Midrash continues this discussion with the following story:

> מטרונה שאלה לר' יוסי א"ל אלהכון מאן הוא בעי מקריב הביא לפניה כלכלה של תאנים והיתה בוררת יפה ובוררת ואוכלת א"ל את ידעת לברור הקב"ה אינו יודע לברור מאן דהוא חמי עבדוי טבין הוא בחר ביה ומקריב ליה.

> A matron asked Rabbi Yose: "Does your God bring close anyone he wishes?" Then he brought a basket of figs in front of her so she would choose one and eat it. He said to her: "You know how to choose, doesn't God know how to choose? One whom He sees has good deeds, He chooses him and brings him close." *(Be-Midbar Rabah, Parshat Be-Midbar chapter 3)*

The matron is an appealing potential convert and is probably an allusion to Rahab whom the same Midrash refers to as someone who was "brought close" and not "pushed off."[103]

Rahab's good deeds and conversion were so valued by the Rabbis that they became a reference point in other discussions. The following story about Hezekiah's illness, prayer and negotiation with God is repeated in several Midrashim (e.g. *TY Berakhot chapter 4:4; TY, Sanhedrin 10:6; Kohelet Rabah, 5; Yalkut Shimoni, Melakhim Bet, Remez 242*):

> "…A person must turn to face a wall to pray. What is the basis [in Scripture for this view]? 'Then Hezekiah turned his face to the wall [and prayed to the Lord]' "[Isa. 38:2]
>
> What wall did he [Hezekiah'] turn to?
>
> R. Joshua b. Levi said, "He turned to the wall of Rahab."…
>
> [Hezekiah said] 'Rahab the harlot saved only two people for you. Look at how many people you saved for her'…
>
> [Hezekiah argued in his prayer,]' "My forefathers brought to you so many proselytes [i.e., saved so many souls]. How much more [should I be rewarded on account of their merits]."[104]

Rahab's example was valued by the Rabbis because she was a convert who came from a highly questionable background but was nevertheless portrayed in the Midrash as the equal of someone chosen by God.

Why was Rahab Saved?

There is no biblical discussion or comment about Rahab's exemption from the *ḥerem*. While the Bible often presents narrative without theological elaboration, it is somewhat strange that this issue is more or less ignored also in the Midrash. As far as I can determine, there is only one original Midrashic comment (Psikta de Rav Kahana, 15:5) about this issue which is later repeated in the Yalkut Shimoni, (Yirmiyahu, *Remez* 247).

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[103] The Rabbinic literature sometimes brings up important issues by attributing a question or action to an anonymous Roman matron. There are often sexual undertones in the question or in the interaction between the Rabbi and matron. It is probably not chance that this literary device of the "Roman matron" is used in this context. This Midrash and others like it (see also *Pitron Torah, Parshat Tsav, 86. p.23*, *Yalkut Shimoni,Yehoshua, 509, Yalkut Shimoni, Ruth, 566.)*

[104] Jacob Neusner, "Berachot," in The Talmud of the Land of Israel: Berakhot V. 1 : A Preliminary Translation and Explanation (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 180-81.

> R. Samuel bar Nahman commenced discourse by citing this verse: "But if you do not drive out the inhabitants of the land from before you, [then those of them whom you let remain shall be as pricks in your eyes and thorns in your sides, and they shall trouble you in the land where you dwell. And I will do to you as I thought to do to them]" (Num. 33:55-56). . . . But instead of doing so, you did this: 'Rahab the harlot and her father's household and all she had did Joshua save alive' (Josh. 6:25). Lo, Jeremiah comes from the grandchildren of Rahab the whore and is the one who serves as pricks in your eyes and thorns in your sides.[105]

The Midrash does not directly criticize Joshua for breaking the ḥerem commandment by saving Rahab and her family.[106] The Rabbis, however, do indirectly acknowledge this failure and indicate that the punishment was delivered by Jeremiah a descendant of Rahab and Joshua who later becomes a thorn in the side of the Israelites.

Hermeneutical Techniques

Rather than innovating or creating new ideas, the Midrashic Rabbis asserted that they were discovering "hidden" or non-explicit meanings or information already embedded in the biblical text. In order to justify these discoveries, however, the Rabbis felt obligated to cite a "proof," typically from the story being discussed or from somewhere else in the Bible. What constituted proof evolved into sets of hermeneutic rules or techniques that were generally used or accepted, rules that were sometimes based on logical considerations or inferences. In discussing narrative, the rules often focused on variations in language and style or on parallels in Bible stories. Common techniques included comparing the same or a similar word found in two different stories, revocalizing or dividing words, transposing word letters, assigning numerical values to words, and examining grammatical irregularities. Sometimes the actual technique for a proof is explicitly spelled out; at other times it is not but can be inferred with some knowledge of the hermeneutic practices. Occasionally, the method of the proofs is very obscure. However explicit the statement of the proof is, the Midrash often does not indicate what textual or theological problem is being addressed.

With respect to the Rahab story, the Midrash is sometimes very explicit about justifying its method of interpretation. For example, it asserts that Rahab was divinely inspired because she

[105] Jeremiah in Talmud and Midrash: A Source Book, 160.

[106] A later 13th century commentator, Pane'akh Raza (Parshat Ha'azinu) criticizes Joshua for having converted and married Rahab but does not explicitly criticize him for saving her life.

told the spies to hide for three days. In the Rabbis' view, there would have been no way for her to know that three days of concealment would be sufficient for the spies to escape their pursuers unless she had been told by YHVH. Another example of an explicitly rationalized interpretation is the one explaining her name. The Rabbis supply what they feel is missing in the text by stating that the name is based on the root of the word "rahab," meaning "wide" in biblical Hebrew. The Rabbis then add their positive evaluation of Rahab's actions by interpreting her name according to this root as meaning "of wide" or "of great merit."

Sometimes, the Midrash takes for granted that the reader will understand the derivation of a proof and does not spell it out. It also takes for granted that the reader will understand the textual problems that motivated the proof. For example, with respect to the Rahab story plot, the Rabbis wondered about how the spies got to her house without being discovered on the way once they entered Jericho. They also wondered about the use of the word חרש (pronounced "ḥeresh") in Joshua 2:1 as an adverb to meaning "secretly." This usage as a verb modifier does not occur anywhere else in the Bible. To solve these problems, they revocalized the word by changing the two *segolim* to two *kamatzim*, and they relocated to the left the dot over of the *shin* to reproduce the sound of a *samekh*. The resulting word, pronounced either "charas," to mean "potter" or "charash," to mean carpenter, then allows the Rabbis to speculate that the spies hid themselves from the townspeople by dressing as different types of workmen before they reached Rahab's house. Another example of the Rabbis' hermeneutical technique is their interpretation of the grammatical irregularity of the verb, ותצפנו, ("and she hid him") in Joshua 2:4. This verb has a singular object but, since it presumably refers to the two spies, the object should have been plural and written ותצפנם ("and she hid them"). This irregularity allows for the Midrash to claim that one of the spies could become invisible like an angel since, later in the text (Joshua 6:25), the spies are referred to with a word that can mean angels (מלאכים). Thus, one of the spies was invisible because he was an angel, so Rahab only needed to hide the other.

Sometimes interpretations are implied by puns, double entendres, and other word-plays. For example, the word הוביש ("dried up") in Joshua 2:10 is a potential double entendre referring to the drying up men's virility in a sexual sense as well as the drying up of the waters of the Reed Sea, giving the rabbis the opportunity to comment on Rahab's beauty and sexual prowess. Another example of such interpretations, this time through a pun, allows the Rabbis to connect Rahab to the house of Judah. The root of the word "to swear" (שבע), as in Rahab making the

spies swear to save her life, also appears in the phrase בית אשבע ("house of Ashbea") in verse 21of I Chronicles 4:21, referring to the descendants of Judah. Through the pun, Rahab is therefore connected to the house of Ashbea. A further example of word-play linking Rahab to the line of Judah is the reference to Judah's descendants in the context of a בית עבודת הבוץ ("a linen factory") (I Chronicles 4:21). Because Rahab in the biblical story hides the spies in flax, one of the raw materials for linen, the Rabbis create a link between Rahab and Judah.[107] A final connection between Rahab and Judah is made through a pun on the root of the name Yokim **(**יוקים**)**, of the house of Judah (I Chronicles 4:22). The Rabbis claimed the name to be related to the biblical Hebrew root קום, meaning "to fulfill" in the piel conjugation, thus connecting Judah's descendant to the notion that the spies fulfilled their promise to Rahab.

The Midrashic techniques used for other elaborations of the Rahab story, such as the creation of her descendants, her conversion, and her marriage to Joshua, are somewhat obscure and use combinations of word-plays and leaps of logic:

> אמר רב נחמן חולדה מבני בניו של יהושע היתה כתיב הכא (מלכים ב כב) בן חרחס וכתיב התם (יהושוע כד) בתמנת חרס איתיביה רב עינא סבא לרב נחמן שמונה נביאים והם כהנים יצאו מרחב הזונה ואלו הן נריה ברוך ושריה מחסיה ירמיה חלקיה חנמאל ושלום רבי יהודה אומר אף חולדה הנביאה מבני בניה של רחב הזונה היתה כתיב הכא בן תקוה וכתיב התם (יהושוע ב) את תקות חוט השני אמר ליה עינא סבא ואמרי לה פתיא אוכמא מיני ומינך תסתיים שמעתא דאיגיירא ונסבה יהושע ומי הוו ליה זרעא ליהושע והכתיב (דברי הימים א ז) נון בנו יהושע בנו בני לא הוו ליה בנתן הוו ליה.

> R. Nahman said: Hulda was a descendant of Joshua. It is written here [in connection with Hulda]. The son of Harhas, and it is written in another place [in connection with Joshua], In Timnath-Heres. R. 'Ena Saba cited the following in objection to R. Nahman: 'Eight prophets who were also priests were descended from Rahab the harlot, namely, Neriah, Baruch, Serayah, Mahseyah, Jeremiah, Hilkiah, Hanamel and Shallum.' R. Judah says: Hulda the prophetess was also one of the descendants of Rahab the harlot. [We know this] because it is written here 'the son of Tikvah' and it is written elsewhere [in connection with Rahab]. 'the line [tikvath] of scarlet thread' — He replied: ''Ena Saba' — or, according to another report. 'Black bowl' — the truth can be found by combining my statement and yours. We must suppose that she became a proselyte and Joshua married her. But had Joshua any children? Is it not written, Nun his son, Joshua his son — He had no sons, but he had daughters. (BT, Megillah 14b, www.halakha.com)

[107] Lyke (1998) suggests an alternative explanation for the connection between בוץ and בוסמין (p. 270). In this article, he also suggests several additional hermeneutic connections between Ruth and Rahab.

In the above passage both Joshua and Rahab are separately connected as ancestors of Hulda through word plays.[108] Since the Bible does not mention marriage for either Joshua or Rahab and yet both were ancestors of Huldah, the Rabbis assume that Joshua and Rahab were married to each other. If Joshua and Rahab were married, then the assumption is that Rahab had converted.

It is not at all clear why the prophets and priests other than Hulda mentioned above were considered descendants of Rahab. One possibility is that Jeremiah (38:6) and Rahab (Joshua 2:15) are linked *(see Psikta Rabbati, [Ish Shalom], Piska 26, Vayehi B'et Shesarḥa)* because of the parallel use of the word חבל (rope) in stories relating to both of them. In addition, all of the priests and prophets mentioned above are relatives of Jeremiah who were involved in the purchase of a plot of land (Jeremiah 32) prior to Nebuchadnezzar's invasion of Judah. Thus because there is a link between Jeremiah and Rahab and because these priests and prophets like Rahab were involved in events immediately prior to an invasion of Canaan, the Midrash may have selected these individuals as Rahab's descendants. This, however, does not explain why two others, Ezekiel and his father Buzi, are also mentioned as descendants of Rahab in another context. This may be understandable with reference to the following Midrash *(Bereshit Rabbati, Beshalaḥ, verse 35:18):*

אמר רבי שמואל ד הם שבאים ממשפחה בזויה, ואלו הן, פנחס .אוריה ,יחקאל ,וירמיה.

Rabbi Shmuel said: 4 were descended from a despised family. They are Pinḥas, Uriah, Yeḥezkel and Yirmiyah.

Later in this Midrash we find the following statement:

יחזקאל היו מליזים עליו ואומרים שהוא לא מבני בניה של רחב הזונה וצריך הכתוב ליחסו.
ירמיה היו מליזים עליו ואומרים שהוא מבני בניה של רחב הזונה, ויחסו הכתוב מן הכהנים.

Ezekiel was taunted saying that he was not a descendant of Rahab the prostitute. As a result, the text had to trace his genealogy. Jeremiah was taunted saying he was a

[108] Hulda is mentioned in II Kings 24;14 as married to Shalum son of Tikvah who is the son of Harhas. In Judges 2:9, it is indicated that Joshua was buried in Timnat Heres. Heres is identified as the same as Harhas thus connecting Joshua to Hulda. Rahab is connected to Hulda because her husband is the son of Tikva and the word "תקות" is used in the Rahab story in Joshua 2:18.

descendant of Rahab the prostitute. As a result, the text traced his genealogy to priests.

It is not clear whether the connection is a pun on the name בוזי (Buzi) and the word בזויה (Bezuyah = despised) or whether some parallelism is being drawn between Jeremiah and Ezekiel or both.

Another Midrashic interpretation that is difficult to understand relates to the dating of Rahab's life events: 10 years old when the Exodus occurred, 40 years of prostitution and conversion at age 50). There is no justification given for these numbers which, although commonly used in biblical texts, are often not taken literally by modern scholars. My conjecture is that they may have been chosen to create a biographical parallel between Rahab and Israel. Rahab came of age during the Exodus, as did the Israelite nation. Just as the Israelites spent much of the 40 years in the desert sinning, Rahab sinned for 40 years until she was ready to accept YHVH and become a believer. Once she becomes a convert, she is married to Joshua. In this way, the Midrash regularizes her status in Israelite society and assures the reader that she does not remain a single woman or a prostitute. Her marriage also fills a gap in the biblical narrative regarding Joshua about whom there is no mention of a wife or family. If one wishes to take the numbers more literally, an alternative conjecture is that this life chronology allows Rahab to have actually heard about the events of the Exodus that she reports to the spies.

Summary

The Midrashic Rabbis were dissatisfied with the minimalist and flat characterization of Rahab in the Book of Joshua. They used standard Midrashic hermeneutical techniques to transform her into one of the ancient world's most beautiful women and most successful prostitutes. Rahab leaves a glamorous life of consorting with royalty to convert to Judaism and marry Joshua. After this union, she disappears from sight except to initiate a line of celebrated descendants. The Midrash praises Rahab for her strength, courage, and faith, and she is blessed with divine inspiration. Her repentance adds to the glory of God by encouraging both Israelites and non-Israelites to believe in YHVH. She becomes an example for those who recognize YHVH and undergo conversion. As a convert, she becomes a model for all Jews in indicating the efficacy and power of repentance in overcoming a sinful past.

The Midrash chooses not to focus on Rahab's flaws and misdeeds. She is a liar but, maybe because she lies in a "good cause," this behavior does not result in even a minor reproach or a

legal-ethical discussion of when it is permissible to lie. Rahab is also a traitor and, although she sides with the "good guys," her ethics or motivation in aiding in the extermination of her people is not examined. The Midrash does comment repeatedly on her past as a prostitute, but the tone of these comments is closer to awe about her sexual prowess than real criticism of her misdeeds. The Rabbis' reluctance to criticize her apparently also shields the spies and Joshua from being chastised for saving the lives of her and her family, a direct contravention of YHVH's *ḥerem* commandment.

Midrashic Motivation

It seems unlikely that the author of the Book of Joshua would have been pleased with the Midrashic reconstruction of Rahab. The biblical Rahab is a relatively minor and undeveloped character who functions as a mouthpiece for the authorial Deuteronomist voice and view. Once Jericho is conquered, she plays no further role in Israelite history and is never mentioned again in the Bible. The Rahab of the Midrash, on the other hand, has a colorful history, is often favorably compared with other biblical characters, and lives into the future of Jewish history through her marriage to Joshua that yields illustrious descendants. This dramatic transformation raises the question of Rabbinic motivation. Why were the Rabbis motivated to expend their hermeneutical powers on such a minor biblical character? Moreover, why did Rahab escape the criticism and scrutiny to which many other biblical characters were subjected?

One way of addressing this question is to examine the Midrashic contexts in which Rahab is discussed. This approach is not unusual in trying to understand Midrashic thinking since the Rabbis felt free to draw links between biblical stories that were not obviously connected. Some scholars have characterized this type of Midrashic thinking as an early form of inter-textuality and have argued that finding a pattern in the inter-textual links can help us to understand the meaning and motivation of Midrash.[109] Focusing on context may be particularly appropriate for the Rahab story because there is no primary Midrashic text exclusively on the Book of Joshua. As a result, all references to Rahab, except for those in later compilations, occur in the context of Midrashim on other biblical material.

[109] Jacob Neusner, Intertextuality and the Reading of Midrash (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990); Teugels.

In fact, an examination of the context of references to Rahab reveals two foci of discussion: the nature of women and the conversion of non-Israelites. Both of these concerns are highlighted by the following Midrashic statement:

> נשים חסידות גיורות אסנת[110] הגר, צפרה, שפרה, פועה, בת פרעה, רחב, רות, ויעל אשת חבר הקיני.
>
> There are righteous women who convert [such as] Hagar, Osnat, Shifrah, Puah, the daughter of Pharaoh, Rahab, Ruth and Yael the wife of Hever the Kenite. (Yalkut Shimoni, Yehoshua, chapter 2, Remez 9)

This passage includes Rahab as a member of a group of righteous non-Israelite women mentioned in the Bible. Based on their biblical stories, these women have little in common except that, with the exception of Osnat, each takes the initiative to help threatened Israelites. These initiatives have varying motivations that might be understood in various terms: military (Yael), sexual/interpersonal (Ruth), political (Shifrah and Puah), or religious (Tziporah). However, the assertive actions of these women are often taken against men and are hard to reconcile with the Midrashic ideal of womanhood: humility, sexual modesty, domesticity, motherhood, discretion and passivity.[111] As a prostitute without children who takes the initiative to hide spies and to negotiate her and her family's rescue, Rahab does not fit this model of femininity. In fact, she may be the most significant misfit in the above group of righteous non-Israelite women.

In order to preserve her status as a biblical heroine, the Midrash gives Rahab a serious makeover.[112] She converts and marries Joshua, a prestigious Israelite leader, and then discreetly

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[110] The meaning of the words, גיורות הגר, is very confusing in this text. It becomes more clear when parallel texts from *Otzar Ha-Midrashim [Eisenstein], Pinas ben Yair)* and *Yalkut Ḥadash (Devorah Ve-Khol Ha-Neviot Ve-Nashim Ḥassidot)* are examined. *Otzar Ha-Midrashim* omits הגר altogether while *Yalkut Ḥadash* inserts the word כמו before הגר and puts Osnat in brackets. These texts make it clear that הגר is to be understood as referring to Hagar, Abraham's wife.

[111] Judith R. Baskin, "Women, Midrashic Constructions Of," in Encyclopaedia of Midrash. Biblical Interpretation in Formative Judaism., ed. Jacob Neusner and Alan J. Avery Peck (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2005), 979-98; "Woman as Other in Rabbinic Literature," in Judaism in Late Antiquity. Part 3., ed. Jacob Neusner and Alan J. Avery-Peck (Leiden, Boston, Koln: Brill, 1999), 177-98.

[112] Rahab receives more mentions in the Rabbinical literature than any of the other righteous non-Israelite women with the exception of Ruth. Although quantitative analyses do not necessarily reflect importance, in this case they are probably indicative at least of interest. Searches of the Bar Ilan data base indicate the following number of mentions for each of these women in the Rabbinic literature: Ruth (243); Rahab (117); Hagar (80); Bat Par'oh (70); Tziporah (44); Shifrah & Puah (37); Yael (31); Osnat (27).

disappears as an active persona in the narrative. Presumably she then becomes a sexually modest, married woman engaged in domestic pursuits and the caring of her children. However, as previously mentioned, Rahab is remembered for generations because of her illustrious descendants and because her repentance becomes a model for both Israelites and the nations. Despite her status as a Canaanite convert, the Midrash appears to be attempting to integrate her into Israelite society by comparing her to well-known Israelite women. When her beauty is extolled, she is compared to the native-born Israelites Abigail, Esther and Sarah rather than to converts. Like Rahab, these women trick men in order to save their husbands or their people and are all married to Israelite leaders or foreign royalty. That the Midrash wished to identify her with such women is suggested by its paralleling of the chronology of her life history with that of the Israelites after the Exodus (Mekhilta De-Rabbi Ishmael, Masekhet Amalek, chapter 1). Rahab was a prostitute for the same 40 years during which the Israelites sinned while wandering in the desert. At the end of this period, she and the Israelites affirmed their faith and were allowed to reside in Canaan. This mainstreaming of Rahab continues in a later Midrash (Yalkut Shimoni, Yehoshua, chapter 2, Remez 9) in which her major sin is not prostitution but, anachronistically, a failure to observe the three mitzvot of family purity, separating the challah, and lighting the candles, mitzvot whose origins date from well after biblical times. In their attempt to integrate her as an Israelite, the Rabbis seem to "forget" that Rahab is of Canaanite origin and they avoid the issue that saving her life was contrary to God's injunction. In sum, her portrayal by the Rabbis in the Midrash is designed to make her a more acceptable woman and heroine than her portrayal in the Bible.

Rahab's closest Midrashic counterpart may be Ruth who is also included in the above list of righteous non-Israelite women. In fact, there are many parallels in the portrayals of Ruth and Rahab.[113] For example, Ruth is also blessed with prophetic powers, converts, marries an important Israelite later in life, and has illustrious children. She also possesses great physical beauty sufficient to make men ejaculate just at the sight of her. Her name, like Rahab's, is not explained in the Bible but is interpreted in very positive ways in the Midrash.

[113] For a summary of legends about Ruth, see, Ginzberg, L. & Szold, H. & Radin, P. *Legends of the Jews, Volumes 1 and 2*. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2003. *Project MUSE*, pp. 862-867 & Meir, T. Ruth: *Midrash and Aggadah*. Jewish Women: A Comprehensive Historical Encyclopedia. 20 March 2009. Jewish Women's Archive. (viewed March 16, 2016) http://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/ruth-midrash-and-aggadah.

Their portrayals, however, are not identical. Based on the biblical narratives, a number of very positive personal qualities, including kindness, uprightness, and modesty, are attributed to Ruth but not to Rahab. On the other hand, Ruth's behavior does not escape criticism. Doubts are raised about her sexual behavior with Boaz on the threshing floor and she is compared to the seductive Tamar and daughters of Lot. Her acceptability as a convert is also questioned.

In fact, Rahab and Ruth are often coupled in the context of conversion (e.g. *Midrash Zutah Ruth [Buber] Parashah Alef; Sifrei Zutah 10:28; Pitron Torah, Tzav*). A typical example is the following passage that differentiates between those who are born into Judaism ("chosen") as opposed to those who convert ("brought close").

...רחב הזונה קירבה הקב"ה אבל לא בחרה, רות קרבה אבל לא בחרה...

> Rahab the prostitute was brought close by God but not chosen, Ruth was brought close but was not chosen… *(Midrash Agadah (Buber), Vayikra, Tzav, chapter 8)*

Rahab and Ruth become the most important Midrashic female converts during an era when there was significant interest among the Rabbis in conversion.[114] This interest probably contributed to the Rabbinic motivation for their transformation of Rahab. During the biblical period, there does not appear to have been a developed concept of conversion[115] and it appears that a man or woman marrying an Israelite became a de facto member of the community without any ritual.[116] The Bible specifically prohibits intermarriage only with the seven Canaanite nations (Exodus 34:15 & Deut: 7:3-4) and to varying degrees with four others (Deut. 23 2-9); however, these prohibitions do not seem to have been consistently observed. For example, Judah marries a Canaanite, Joseph an Egyptian, and Boaz a Moabite,[117] and nowhere is it indicated that these women converted. By Midrashic times, these practices had dramatically changed. Rabbinic

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[114] Bernard Bamberger, "Historical Survey and Conclusion," in Proselytism in the Talmudic Period (New York: KTAV Publishing House, 1939), 274-99; George Foot Moore, "Conversion of Gentiles," in Judaism in the First Centuries of the Christian Era. The Age of the Tannaim (Cambridge: Havard University Press, 1927), 323-53; Gary G. Porton, The Stranger within Your Gates: Converts and Conversion in Rabbinic Literature (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1994).

[115] Possible references to conversion in the Bible include the following: 1. Esther (8:17) "…many of the people of the land professed to be Jews."; Ruth (1:16) "… your people shall be my people and your God my God."

[116] Shaye J. D. Cohen, "From the Bible to the Talmud: The Prohibition of Intermarriage," Hebrew Annual Review 7 (1983). 23-39.

[117] There are situations where intermarriage appears to have been discouraged. Jacob is discouraged from marrying local women and therefore travels to Haran to marry within the family. Ezra forces the Israelites to leave their foreign wives.

Judaism prohibited marriage with all non-Jews and instituted ritual conversion.[118] More importantly, most of the Rabbis strongly encouraged and welcomed converts even though they appear not to have actively proselytized.[119]

In this context, it is not surprising that Rahab becomes a prototypical convert. Her acceptance and salvation in the Bible, despite her marginal background as a prostitute and a Canaanite, is used by the Rabbis to send a strong positive message to potential converts: no matter how bad one's pedigree or past, one could become a member of the chosen people. As the Midrashic "poster girl" for conversion, Rahab is often associated with Jethro, the paradigmatic male Midrashic convert:[120]

שבשעה שאת מביא לנו אורה הרבה באים גרים ומתגיירים ונוספים עלינו, כגון יתרו ורחב.

When you bring us much light, then many converts come and join us such as Jethro and Rahab. *(Shir Ha-Shirim Raba[Vilna], Parsha Alef)*

מה מקיים שמואל ידין לאומים במישרים דנן ככשירים שבהן מזכיר להם מעשה יתרו מזכיר להן מעשה רחב הזונה.

How does Samuel understand the verse, *He will minister judgment to the peoples with equity?* Judge them according to their worth. He remembers for them the deeds of Jethro, he remembers for them the deeds of Rahab the harlot.

According to the Midrash, Rahab's faith surpasses even that of Jethro who also experienced the events of the Exodus and accepted YHVH but did not totally forsake other gods.[121] In the following passage Rahab, Ruth and Jethro are all mentioned as righteous gentile converts:

כל זמן שהם עושים רצונו של הקב"ה רואה איזה צדיק באומות העולם כגון יתרו רחב ורות וכגון אנטונינוס מביאו ומדבקו בישראל.

[118] Cohen.

[119] Louis H. Feldman, "Proselytism by Jews in the Third, Fourth, and Fifth Centuries," in Jew and Gentile in the Ancient World. Attitudes and Interactions from Alexander to Justinian (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1993), 383-415.

[120] Judith R. Baskin, Pharaoh's Counsellors. Job, Jethro, and Balaam in Rabbinic and Patristic Tradition, vol. 47, Brown Judaic Studies (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1983).

[121] Jacob Z. Lauterbach and David Stern, "Tractate Amalek," Mekhilta de-Rabbi Ismael (Philadephia, PA: Jewish Publication Society, 2010), https://muse.jhu.edu/books/9780827610033/9780827610033-18.pdf.

> As long as they do God's will, He will recognize the righteous among the peoples of the word as, e.g., Jethro, Rahab, Ruth, or Antoninus, whom He brings and attaches to Israel. (*Kohelet Rabah, Vilna, Piska 5*)

Like Rahab, Jethro has a questionable background since he is described not only as an idolator but as the priest of idolators. Both Jethro and Rahab were impressed by the events of the Exodus whose significance leads them to accept YHVH and to repent.[122] Again like Rahab, Jethro's seven names are interpreted to invest him with positive attributes (Mekhilta De-Rabbi Ishmael, Tractate Amalek, Parashah Alef) and he too has illustrious descendants, the Rechabites, who are allowed to settle in Canaan and become members of the Sanhedrin (BT Sanhedrin 106a). However, it is important to note that although the Midrashic portrayal of Jethro is very positive and similar to that of Rahab in many respects, unlike Rahab, he is not immune to criticism. His faith is considered to be not as "complete" as Rahab's since he continued to worship other gods[123] and his motives for conversion are sometimes considered suspect.[124] Some Midrashim offer further critique, recounting that he threw Moses into a well for seven years and conspired with Amalekites to defeat the Israelites.[125]

Overall, Rahab's Midrashic rehabilitation can be understood as the result of changing attitudes towards women and conversion. A heroine in Midrashic times could not be portrayed with those feminine characteristics that were acceptable to biblical authors and could not remain a foreigner. The Rabbis would not contradict what was explicit in the text but they could elaborate and re-interpret; thus the absence of information about Rahab after the fall of Jericho and her acceptance of YHVH was extrapolated into conversion and marriage to Joshua, making her an acceptable Midrashic woman. Her conversion, however, was more significant than those of Shifra , Pua, Osnat, the daughter of Pharaoh and Yael, all of which are mentioned relatively infrequently. Along with Jethro and Ruth, Rahab became one of the most important Midrashic converts and is compared to the major biblical Israelites such as Abraham, Moses, Saul, David,

[122] Porton, 201.
[123] Lauterbach and Stern.
[124] Porton, 64.
[125] Louis Ginzberg and David Stern, "Legends of the Jews," (Jewish Publication Society, 2003), ProQuest Ebook Central, https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/mcgill/detail.action?docID=3039339.

Esther, and Sarah.[126] However, unlike Jethro and Ruth, there is no criticism of her whatsoever in the Midrash, a fate that few biblical characters escape.

The Rabbis' failure to offer criticism of Rahab may have been motivated by her appeal to the Christians of the time.[127] Rahab is mentioned three times in the New Testament (Matt. 1:4-5; Heb. 11:31; Jas. 2:25) and of particular note is her presence, along with Ruth, Tamar and Bathsheba, in the genealogy of Jesus at the beginning of the Book of Matthew.[128] Her inclusion has been interpreted as an attempt to emphasize the non-Jews among Jesus' ancestors and to promote the idea that salvation could be accorded to everyone including pagans. The Church Fathers used similar hermeneutic techniques to those of the Midrash to interpret the scarlet sign hung on Rahab's window as a symbol of the blood of Christ, or to highlight the potential parallel between the the spies visiting Rahab and the messengers coming to Mary. They also attributed prophetic powers to Rahab, reinterpreted her home as a church, and alluded to parallels between her history as a prostitute and that of Mary Magdalen. In early Christianity, the story of Rahab came to symbolize the power of both faith and good works as a path to salvation. She became a "type of the Church," her life in the Old Testament foreshadowing that of those saved by Christ. As Daniélou writes, "Rahab épargnée est la figure des hommes sauvés par le sang du Christ."[129] Baskin points out that Rahab's importance among the early Christians was reflected in her frequent portrayals in early Church art.[130] The Christians' interest in Rahab and competition between Jews and Christians for potential converts may have spurred the Rabbis to elevate

[126] Rahab's closest biblical parallel is probably Tamar who is also a Canaanite, a woman and does prostitute herself once. As far I can determine from searches of the Bar Ilan data base, Rahab is never compared to Tamar. Tamar's Midrashic persona is that of "killer wife" see Mordechai A. Friedman, "Tamar, a Symbol of Life: The "Killer Wife" Superstition in the Bible and Jewish Tradition," AJS Review 15, no. 1 (1990). 23-61. and does not fit with Rahab's Midrashic role.

[127] Langlamet; Judith R. Baskin, "Rabbinic-Patristic Exegetical Contacts in Late Antiquity: A Bibliographical Reappraisal.," in Approaches to Ancient Judaism: Theory and Practice, ed. William Scott Green (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press 1985), 53-80; Jean Danielou, "Rahab, Figure De L'eglise," in Sacramentum Futuri. Etudes Sur Les Origines De La Typologie Biblique, Études De Théologie Historique (Paris: Beauchesne, 1950), 217-32; A. T. Hanson, "Rahab the Harlot in Early Christian Theology," JSNT 1 (1978). 53-60; William L. Lyons, "Rahab in Rehab: Christian Interpretation of the Madame from Jericho " in Women in the Biblical World. A Survey of Old and New Testament Perspectives., ed. Elizabeth A. McCabe (UK: University Press of America, 2009), 31-42.

[128] See chapter 4 on Christian interpretation for a discussion of this.

[129] Danielou, 219.

[130] Judith R. Baskin, "The Rabbinic Transformations of Rahab the Harlot," Notre Dame English Journal 11, no. 2 (1979). 141-57.

Rahab's importance relative to other non-Israelite women converts and to abstain from criticizing her.[131]

The Rabbinic concerns about women, conversion, and Christianity can be understood in a larger and more unified context. Midrashic exegesis of the Rahab story can be seen as an attempt to address the issue of how to deal with the acceptance of difference or "other." The Rabbis certainly saw women as other in terms of gender roles, life functions, and religious responsibilities. Baskin[132] suggests that the Midrash saw an even more fundamental difference between women and men:

> Rabbinic views about women vary but all rest on the conviction of women's essential alterity from men. The Talmudic statement that "Women are separate people' (B. Shab. 62a) asserts that females are human entities created by God with physical characteristics, innate capacities, and social functions inherently dissimilar from those of males. (p. 979)

The Rabbis were uncomfortable with the Rahab of the Bible who acted too much like a man. Much of their exegesis attempted to transform her into how women, as "separate people," should act.

The concept of otherness is obviously relevant to the issues of conversion and attitudes towards Christianity. By Midrashic times, the boundaries between non-Jew and Jew were clearly demarcated and could not be crossed simply by marriage. Porton[133] describes this gulf in the following way:

> In the Mishnah-Tosefta, the gentile is primarily the "other." At times the term goy symbolizes that part of humanity not represented by the term benai yisrael. In other places, the gentile is merely one of the several groups who occupies the Land of Israel, but who does not adhere to the rabbinic practices, such as tithing. As the "other," the gentiles may be characterized as dangerous and sexually deviant. In a word, they are "uncivilized." (p. 216)

Most of the Rabbis saw formal conversion with its attendant rituals as the method of dealing with the gap between Jews and others. They did not tolerate otherness; they converted non-Jews so that they could become part of the in-group. Although the Rabbis recognized that converts were often still marginal, they apparently did not promote or create other forms of

[131] There is no direct evidence to support this hypothesis but Baskin discusses the significant interest of both the Jews and early Christians in the Rahab story (1979, pgs. 151-154).
[132] Baskin, "Women, Midrashic Constructions Of."
[133] Porton.

accommodation. Because the biblical Rahab represented the dangers of non-Jewish otherness and needed to be assimilated, the Midrashic Rabbis could not permit the Canaanite prostitute who became a believer in YWHW to remain "outside the camp." She enters the camp through conversion and becomes hard to distinguish from a native-born Israelite woman.

Chapter 5: Early Christian Interpretation

Rahab was a popular biblical figure among early Christian writers. She is mentioned three times in the New Testament (in the Book of Matthew, the Epistle to the Hebrews, and the Book of James) and is frequently referred to in the preaching of many of the early Church Fathers. In fact, Christian interpretation of the Rahab story played a notable role in the development of early Church doctrine and continues to influence some aspects of modern Catholic theology.[134] A review of the early Christian exegesis of the Rahab story will help to explain why the Rahab story ultimately became more influential in Christian than in Jewish theology. It will also reinforce the central argument of this thesis that a major concern for interpreters of the Rahab story is the issue of "otherness" and ethnic inclusivity.

New Testament

Book of Matthew: The Genealogy of Jesus

Rahab's importance to Christian thought becomes apparent in the first chapter of the first book of the New Testament where she is mentioned as an ancestress of Jesus: [135]

> This is the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah the son of David, the son of Abraham: Abraham was the father of Isaac, Isaac the father of Jacob, Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers, Judah the father of Perez and Zerah, whose mother was Tamar, Perez the father of Hezron, Hezron the father of Ram, Ram the father of Amminadab, Amminadab the father of Nahshon, Nahson the father of Salmon, Salmon the father of Boaz, whose mother was Rahab, Boaz the father of Obed, whose mother was Ruth, Obed the father of Jesse, and Jesse the father of King David. David was the father of Solomon, whose mother had been Uriah's wife…. (*Matthew* 1:6)

Why Rahab, along with Tamar, Bathsheba and Ruth, was included in the genealogy of Jesus has been the subject of considerable debate among scholars.[136] Leaving aside the issue of

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[134] Margaret Eletta Guider, Daughters of Rahab. Prostitution and the Church of Liberation in Brazil., Harvard Theological Studies (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1995).

[135] All citations from the New Testament come from the New International Version translation downloaded from www.biblegateway.com.

[136] John Paul Heil, "The Narrative Roles of the Women in Matthew's Genealogy," Biblica 72, no. 4 (1991). 538-45; Glenna S. Jackson, "The Canaanites in Matthew's Gospel," in "Have Mercy on Me". The Story of the Canaanite Woman in Matthew 15.21-28 (New York, NY: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), 60-100; L. Larry Lyke, " What Does Ruth Have to Do with Rahab? Midrash "Ruth Rabbah" and the Matthean Genealogy of Jesus," in The Function of Scripture in Early Jewish and Christian Tradition, ed. Craig A. Evans and James A. Sanders (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 262-84.

why women were included in this genealogy altogether,[137] scholars have speculated about what these women have in common. The most commonly suggested similarities are their non-Israelite identities and their histories as sinners. Another notion proposes that through their actions these women became instruments of God's purpose. None of these suggestions fits all four women,[138] but the elaboration of these ideas became important in different aspects of early Christian theology.

In his book, Gospel Women,[139] Bauckham argues that the most important commonality between these women is their non-Israelite status. He points out that it is clear from the biblical text that Rahab and Ruth are not Israelites and that it is highly likely that Bathsheba was a Hittite since her husband was Uriah the Hittite. Although he acknowledges that Tamar's ancestry is not even hinted at in the Bible, he makes a complicated genealogical argument that Tamar was not an Israelite.[140] The conclusive factor for Bauckham, however, is the underlying philosophy of the Book of Matthew. In early Christianity, there was a controversy about whether Jesus' ministry was directed only to the chosen Israelite people or to everyone. Bauckham argues that the author of Matthew supported the latter inclusive view. He cites the well-known story of the Canaanite woman:

> Leaving that place, Jesus withdrew to the region of Tyre and Sidon. A Canaanite woman from that vicinity came to him, crying out, "Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me! My daughter is demon-possessed and suffering terribly." Jesus did not answer a word. So his disciples came to him and urged him, "Send her away, for she keeps crying out after us." He answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel." The woman came and knelt before him. "Lord, help me!" she said. He replied, "It is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to the dogs." "Yes it is, Lord," she said. "Even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master's table." Then Jesus said to her, "Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted." And her daughter was healed at that moment. (*Matthew* 15:21-28)

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[137] Edwin D. Freed, "The Women in Matthew's Genealogy," Journal for the Study of the Old Testament 29 (1987). 3-19.

[138] For example, it is not clear from a simple reading of the text of the Bible that Tamar and Bathsheba were non-Israelites or that Ruth should be considered a sinner. The idea that these women were instruments of God is never suggested in the text of the Bible for any of the women but is a theological interpretation which could also be applied to many other biblical women (e.g. Yael, Esther).

[139] R. Bauckham, "The Gentile Foremothers of the Messiah," in Gospel Women. Studies of the Named Women in the Gospels (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2002), 17-46.

[140] Richard Bauckham, "Tamar's Ancestry and Rahab's Marriage: Two Problems in the Matthean Genealogy," Novum Testamentum 37, no. 4 (1995). 313-29.

The initial part of the story reflects some of the ambivalence in early Christianity about who should be the target audience of Jesus' teaching. However, the message of this story clearly suggests that Jesus' teaching is for everyone. To support his view, Bauckham also cites the story of the "faithful centurion" of Rome:

> "Truly I tell you, I have not found anyone in Israel with such great faith. I say to you that many will come from the east and the west, and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven." (*Matthew* 8:10-11)

Here again, the message is that Jesus' teaching is universal, designed for people "from the east and the west," and not limited to the Israelites. If Bauckham is correct, then the Book of Matthew includes Rahab, Tamar, Bathsheba and Ruth in the genealogy of Jesus in order to make the general point that non-Israelites were welcome amongst Christians. Rahab was a prototypical example since she was understood to be an early convert to the chosen people. Jesus saves the Canaanite woman's daughter just as Joshua saves Rahab the Canaanite. The story of the conversion, salvation and acceptance of Rahab the Canaanite was used as a model for Christian proselytization of "other" peoples. If their leader, and YHVH himself, saw fit to include non-Israelites amongst the chosen people, then Christians were justified in following suit.

Epistle to the Hebrews: An Example of Faith

Rahab is also mentioned during a discussion of the essence of faith in chapter 11 of the *Epistle to the Hebrews*. At the beginning of this chapter, Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham and Sara are introduced as important examples of "foreigners and strangers" who exhibited faith. These examples reflect the author's view that an important test of faith is the ability to maintain it as an outsider. Their experience reflects that of early Christians who exhibited faith under oppression by local rulers. After this introduction, chapter 11 proceeds with biblical stories about Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, the Red Sea, and the walls of Jericho falling, introducing them all with the words "By faith" followed by an explanation of how faith was demonstrated. Rahab is mentioned after the verse about the walls of Jericho falling:

> By faith the prostitute Rahab, because she welcomed the spies, was not killed with those who were disobedient.[141] And what more shall I say? I do not have time to tell about Gideon, Barak, Samson and Jephthah, about David and Samuel and the prophets. (Hebrews 11:31-32)

Although Rahab fits into this section of *Hebrews* as an example of a foreigner who displays faith, her mention in the same list as Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph and Moses seems out of proportion to any reasonable evaluation of her biblical role. In fact, the author of *Hebrews* seems to go out of his way to further emphasize her importance by indicating that he does not have enough time to mention other biblical heroes some of whom (e.g. Samuel, the prophets) certainly equal or surpass Rahab in biblical importance.

Mosser[142] has critically reviewed the interpretative literature addressing Rahab's inclusion in this list and suggested three possible reasons for the incorporation of her name: to highlight a pagan Canaanite's declaration of faith and resulting inclusion into the Hebrews as a model for the inclusivity of Christianity; to teach that if a pagan prostitute can exhibit faith, so can lesser sinners who have received Christ's word directly; to cater to popular opinion because the character and story of Rahab were so well-known. Mosser[143] adds to these suggestions by focusing on the rhetorical structure of the passages in the chapter. He maintains that the writer of Hebrews inserted Rahab's name into the list of heroes as a means of attracting attention. After the seven formulaic repetitions of the term "By faith" followed by reference to the major biblical heroes and events Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, the Red Sea, and the walls of Jericho, any contemporary reader or listener would have been primed to expect Joshua as the next reference. Mosser suggests that inserting Rahab's name at this point draws dramatic attention to her story, evoking for the early Christian the image of Rahab outside of the camp and its connection to Jesus:

> And so Jesus also suffered outside the city gate in order to sanctify the people by his own blood. Let us, then, go to him outside bearing the disgrace he bore. (*Hebrews* 13:12-13)

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[141] Some translations replace the word "disobedient" with "unbelieving."
[142] Carl Mosser, "Rahab Outside the Camp," in The Epistle to the Hebrews and Christian Theology, ed. R. Bauckham, et al. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009), 383-404.
[143] Ibid.

Mosser argues that replacing Joshua with Rahab is tantamount to reminding early Christians to do as Christ did: to exhibit faith despite potentially dangerous consequences.[144]

Whether one accepts Mosser's interpretation or not, it is clear from *Hebrews* that the Rahab story was an important example of faith for early Christians. Rahab is considered a "foreigner and stranger" who through her faith was willing to risk everything by leaving her city and people and joining the Israelites. She is an important example for Christian proselytizers.

Book of James: The Importance of Good Deeds

The final mention of Rahab in the New Testament is in the *Book of James* where the relationship between faith and deeds is discussed:

> You foolish person, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless? Was not our father Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did. And the scripture was fulfilled that says, "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness," and he was called God's friend. You see that a person is considered righteous by what they do and not faith alone. In the same way, was not even Rahab the prostitute considered righteous for what she did when she gave lodging to the spies and sent them off in a different direction? As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead. (*James* 2: 20-25)

The author suggests that faith without deeds is considered useless and links Abraham and Rahab as biblical exemplars of faith and good deeds. Although they both demonstrate their faith through deeds, the choice of the author of James to pair them seems incongruous. Rahab's role in Israelite history is trivial by comparison with that of Abraham. Although her actions to save the spies were courageous, they seem relatively insignificant alongside Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son. It is also odd that in the context of a discussion of the relationship between

[144] Mosser suggests that there are striking parallels between the Septuagint version of Joshua 6:23-24 and the Greek in Hebrews 13:13-14. He also engages in a linguistic analysis of the term "outside the camp" suggesting that its use in the Bible (except for Joshua) always refers to ritual purification laws. During the second temple period, he argues that the term continued to have this meaning but that outside the camp meant outside of Jerusalem. Thus, by evoking Rahab, the writer of Hebrews is asking early Christians to leave Jerusalem (Judaism) and accept Christ just as Rahab left Jericho and accepted YHVH.

faith and deeds, the author feels the need to emphasize Abraham's faith (verse 22-23) while that of Rahab appears to be a given.[145]

New Testament commentators[146] have attempted to explain these difficulties in various ways. They have pointed to parallels between Abraham and Rahab in terms of their hospitality to strangers. They have also suggested the need to provide a female counterpart to Abraham to match the reference to both a "brother or sister in need" (James 2:15) which initiates the discussion of faith and good works in James.[147] The author may also have been aware of various Midrashic traditions which pair Abraham and Rahab with respect to conversion, proselytization and even ancestry.[148] Whatever the explanation, it seems quite possible that the author of James chooses Rahab as the comparison with Abraham because her daring actions in the face of threat were an important message to early Christians fearful about showing their faith.

Conclusion

Rahab was a significant character for early Christians despite their acknowledgement that she was a Canaanite prostitute. There is probably no greater compliment to an individual in the New Testament than to make him or her an ancestor of Jesus. The authors of *Hebrews* and *James* come close to offering such a compliment by likening Rahab to major figures in the Torah. In the New Testament, Rahab is transformed from an accepted but marginalized outsider, as she appears in the *Book of Joshua*, to a heroic ancestress of Jesus and a paradigmatic example of faith and good works.

Patristic Interpretation

The Patristic period, or period of the Church Fathers, is considered to start at the end of the New Testament period (c. 100 AD) and to continue until approximately the eighth century AD.[149] The frequent references to Rahab in Patristic writings from both the Roman and Greek

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[145] The reference to Rahab in this context is limited to one sentence and the text reads as if she were a relevant but reluctant choice. The more obvious comparison to Abraham with respect to faith and deeds would have been Moses.

[146] Bo Reicke, The Epistles of James, Peter, and Jude, Anchor Bible (Doubleday & Company: New York, 1964). Martin Dibelius, James. A Commentary on the Epistle of James. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975); Robert W. Wall, "The Intertextuality of Scripture: The Example of Rahab (James 2:25)," in The Bible at Qumran, ed. P. W. Flint (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2001), 217-32.

[147] Luke Timothy Johnson, The Letter of James. A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary, Anchor Bible (New York: Doubleday, 1995).p.249

[148] Several of these are cited in the chapter 4 on Midrashic interpretation. A search of the Bar Ilan data base yields 18 examples.

[149] R.F. Harvanek, "Patristic Philosophy," in New Catholic Encyclopedia (Detroit, MI: Gale, 2003).

Churches attest to the continuing popularity and importance of her story to early Christians. Although there are exegetical differences between the different schools or eras of Patristic interpretation,[150] the Rahab story is interpreted quite uniformly and with little controversy by most Church Fathers. Most of the Patristic writing about Rahab is expressed in the form of homilies and can be summarized under two main headings: moral elaboration of Rahab's character and actions and foreshadowing the New Testament.

Moral Elaboration of Rahab's Character and Actions

Rahab's Profession

There is little doubt that most of the Church Fathers considered Rahab as a "harlot" or "prostitute" and referred to her explicitly as such.[151] Although it seems quite likely that the early Christians were aware of the Jewish translations of the word denoting Rahab's profession as "innkeeper," they did not adopt this idea.[152] Some of the Church Fathers appear to have been embarrassed by Rahab's profession and tried to moderate her history of sexual immorality in various ways. Ambrose (c. 340-395) referred to her as a "chaste" harlot[153] while Ephrem (c. 306-373) praised her sexual "boldness" because it was used in the service of Christ.[154] Origen (c. 184- 254) wrote the following (Homilies on Joshua 1:4) : "But the prostitute who received the spies sent by Jesus was no longer a prostitute since she received them." [155] Despite these attempts at justification, there is no direct or explicit criticism of Rahab's profession.

[150] M. Simonetti, Biblical Interpretation in the Early Church. A Historical Introduction to Patristic Exegesis. (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994).

[151] See Aphraphat (Demonstration XXI: 11), Augustine (Exposition on Psalm 87:5), Chrysostom (Homily 27 on Hebrews 3), Clement (First Epistle to the Corinthians 6:5), Cyril (Catechetical Lecture 2:9), Gregory of Nazianzen (Oration 40:IX), Irenaeus (Against Heresies 13), Justin Martyr (Dialogue with Trypho 111), and Origen (Homily 3:5). Unless otherwise specified, all references to the writings of the Church Fathers are downloaded from http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/.

[152] Church Fathers such as Jerome and Ambrose quote Josephus and were thus likely to be aware of his translation of זונה as "innkeeper," but I have not been able to find any reference in early Christian writings to Rahab as an innkeeper.

[153] J.P.K. Kritzinger, "Rahab, Illa Meretrix," Acta Patristica et Byzantina 17, no. 1 (2006). 22-36.

[154] Phil J. Botha, "Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, and Mary - the Bold Women in Ephrem the Syrian's Hymn *De Nativitate 9*," Acta Patristica et Byzantina 17, no. 1 (2006). 1-21.

[155] Origen, Homilies on Joshua, ed. Cynthia White, trans. Barbara J. Bruce (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2010).

Hospitality

The Church Fathers expand upon the praise accorded in the New Testament to Rahab for welcoming strangers. Chrysostom (c. 349-407) writes the following: "By faith, the harlot Rahab perished not with them that believed not, having received the spies with peace" (*Homily* 27 on *Hebrews* 3). Gregory Nazianzen (c. 329-390) takes this notion one step further and suggests that her hospitality alone was sufficient cause for her being saved: "Rahab the harlot was justified by one thing alone, her hospitality" (*Oration* 40:IX). Praise for her hospitality leads Ambrose to compare Rahab to Abraham, Sarah, and Lot:

> Love hospitality, whereby holy Abraham found favour, and received Christ as his guest, and Sarah already worn with age gained a son; Lot also escaped the fire of the destruction of Sodom. You too can receive Angels if you offer hospitality to strangers. What shall I say of Rahab who by this means found safety? (*Letter* 63:105)

Faith and Good Deeds

The most frequently mentioned attributes of Rahab are her faith and good deeds. According to Clement (c. 150-215), "On account of her faith and hospitality, Rahab the harlot was saved" (*Letter to the Corinthians* 12). Some Church Fathers focus on her faith, rather than her actions, as the primary reason for her salvation. For example, Ambrose says, "Rahab, too, was a harlot, but after she believed in God, she found salvation."[156] Cyril of Jerusalem (c. 313-386) echoes this idea: "The typical Jesus saved Rahab the harlot when she believed; and the true Jesus says, Behold, the publicans and the harlots go before you into the kingdom of God (Matthew 21:31)." (Catechetical Lecture 10:1)

Other Church Fathers mention faith but focus on actions that indicate repentance:

> Therefore touching Rahab in Jericho, because she entertained strangers, men of God, because in entertaining them she put herself in peril, because she believed in their God, because she diligently hid them where she could, because she gave them most faithful counsel of returning by another way, let her be praised as meet to be imitated even by the citizens of Jerusalem on high**.** (Augustine, *To Consentius: Against Lying* Book 2 chapter 60:34)

[156] William L. Lyons, "Rahab through the Ages: A Study of Christian Interpretation of Rahab," http://sbl-site.org/Article.aspx?ArticleID=786.

> …but these have become like the harlot Rahab, who received the spies of Joshua, and was saved with all her house (Joshua 6:25), after this no longer playing the harlot.... (Origen, *Commentary on Matthew* Book XII:4)

Jerome (c. 347-420) compares Rahab's transformation from "sinner to saint" to the process of transforming dirty flax into white stuff, particularly appropriate since flax was the material under which Rahab hid the spies:

> Flax with much labor and care becomes of dazzling whiteness. You yourselves know that flax grows from the soil and that when it has come forth from the ground, it is black; it has no beauty; it has no use. First, it is pulled up from the ground, broken, then twisted, afterwards washed. Next, it is pounded; finally, combed, and after so much care and hard work, it finally becomes white. Here, then, is the meaning; this harlot took the messengers in and covered them with her flax so that these agents might turn her flax into dazzling whiteness. (*Homily 18 on Psalm 86*)

Lying

Although the Church Fathers were almost uniformly positive about Rahab, they were concerned about her lying to the messengers of the King of Jericho. Augustine (c. 354-430) expresses this concern most directly:

> But in that she lied, although somewhat therein as prophetical be intelligently expounded, yet not as meet to be imitated is it wisely propounded: albeit that God has those good things memorably honored, this evil thing mercifully overlooked. (*To Consentius: Against Lying* Book 2 chapter 60:34).

Other Church Fathers not only rationalize Rahab's lie but celebrate it as a good deed. Cassian (c. 360-435) suggests the following:

> Scripture not only recalls nothing virtuous about her but even speaks of her immorality. Yet for her lie alone, whereby she chose to conceal the spies rather than betray them, she deserved to share an eternal blessing with the people of God. [157]

[157] Ibid.

He then goes on to compare Rahab to Jacob who lied to receive the blessing of the firstborn. Chrysostom also praises Rahab's lie and describes it in the following way: "O good lie! O good guile!"[158] It would appear that all the Church Fathers both Greek and Roman, with the exception of Augustine, feel that Rahab's lie was justified and rationalized it in various ways as a good deed.[159]

Meaning of Rahab's Name

The Church Fathers attempted to understand the Rahab story by interpreting the meaning of her name. Jerome suggests that "Rahab thus admits of two interpretations; the name may imply either 'a broad space' or, better, 'pride.' Consider, therefore, its impact. She who formerly walked the broad, spacious road to death, she whose pride was driving her to destruction, was later converted unto humility" (Homily 18 on Psalm 86).[160] Another interpretation understood Rahab to mean "ascent."[161] After she married Salmon, Rahab ascended spiritually, leaving her former evil life as a prostitute and becoming a model of faith and repentance.[162]

These interpretations of Rahab's name are consistent with Patristic attempts to use Rahab as a moral example and guide to Christian conduct. Origen extends this type of interpretation:

> You see how that one who was once a prostitute and impious and unclean, is now filled with the Holy Spirit: She makes confession of past things, has faith in present things, prophesies and foretells future things. Thus Rahab, whose name means "breadth," is extended and goes forward to where "his [God's] sound goes forth into all the earth." (*Homily 3:4*)

Origen's claim for Rahab is that not only was she able to recognize herself as a sinner but that, in proclaiming her faith, she is connected to a divine message, perhaps prophesying the coming of Jesus as a savior to all nations. The Church Fathers' emphasis on seeing the events and people of the Old Testament as foreshadowing the New underlies the second major type of Patristic interpretation of the Rahab story.[163]

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[158] H.F. Stander, "The Greek Church Fathers and Rahab," Acta Patristica et Byzantina 17, no. 1 (2006). 46.
[159] Kritzinger.
[160] Saint Jerome, The Homilies of Saint Jerome (1-59 on the Psalms), vol. 48, The Fathers of the Church, a New Translation (Catholic University of America, 2014).
[161] The derivation of this interpretation is not explained and it is not clear to me.
[162] M. Simonetti, The Gospel According to Matthew, ed. M. Simonetti, Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture. New Testament: Matthew 1-13 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001).
[163] Lyons, "Rahab in Rehab: Christian Interpretation of the Madame from Jericho ".

Foreshadowing the New Testament

A central preoccupation of Patristic exegesis is the attempt to find allusions in the text of the Tanakh that predict or foreshadow the New Testament. This type of interpretation is typically referred to as typology with individuals, events or objects mentioned in the Tanakh seen as "types" prefiguring narratives or messages in the New Testament. With respect to the Book of Joshua, this form of exegesis was facilitated by connections and parallels between Joshua and Jesus. For example, in Hebrew, the names Joshua and Jesus are very similar, while in the Septuagint's Greek they are identical. This led the Church Fathers to find parallels between the lives of Joshua and Jesus: both started their careers at the Jordan River; both appointed twelve leaders or Apostles; both sent out spies or messengers; and both saved prostitutes. [164] Using this type of interpretive strategy, the Church fathers concluded that Joshua is a type, or forerunner, of Jesus and that related events in the Book of Joshua such as the Rahab story could be interpreted in this context.

Rahab the Prophet

According to Patristic interpretation, Rahab recognizes that the spies herald the conquest of Canaan by the Israelites which will ultimately lead to the birth of Jesus and Christianity. Several Church fathers allude to Rahab's powers to foretell the future without specifically calling her a prophet. Ambrose wrote that Rahab "…uplifted a sign of her faith and the banner of the Lord's passion; so that the semblance of the mystic blood, which should redeem the world, might be in memory." (On the Christian Faith, Book 5, chapter 10:127) Augustine indicates that Rahab "…trusted beforehand in the promise;" while Origen comments that Rahab gives the spies "…mystic and heavenly counsel."[165] Clement describes her prophetic powers most directly: "Ye see, beloved, how there was not only faith, but prophecy too in this woman" (First Epistle to the Corinthians 10) Paulinus of Nola (c. 354-431) describes Rahab's ability to see the future in the following way: "She foresaw that Christ would purchase with blood nations that had been corrupted…"[166] (p. 30).

[164] Stander.
[165] Origen, 49.
[166] Kritzinger.

The Red Cord

The "red" or "scarlet" cord which Rahab hung as a sign to the invading Israelites is often interpreted by the Church fathers as a symbol of the blood of Christ through which sinners are saved. Justin Martyr (c. 100-165) expresses this view as follows:

> For the sign of the scarlet thread, which the spies, sent to Jericho by Joshua, son of Nave (Nun), gave to Rahab the harlot telling her to bind it to the window through which she let them down to escape from their enemies, also manifested the symbol of the blood of Christ, by which those who were at one time harlots and unrighteous persons out of all nations are saved, receiving remission of sins, and continuing no longer in sin. (*Dialogue with Trypho*, 111)

The importance of this symbol is emphasized by Origen who claims that Rahab had privileged fore-knowledge of the power of Jesus:

> No other sign would have been accepted, except the scarlet-colored one that carried the sign of blood. For she knew there was no salvation for anyone except in the blood of Christ. (*Homily 3:5*)

This symbol is mentioned or discussed by other Church Fathers including Augustine, Prudentius (c. 438-405), Paulinus, Jerome (*Letter 52:3*), Clement (*First Epistle to the Corinthians*: 6:10), Ambrose (*Bk 5:*10:127), and Irinaeus (c. 120- 203, *Against Heresies* IV:12), all of them making the link between Rahab and Christ as saviour, the core theology of the New Testament.

Rahab as a Symbol of the Church

Rahab's finding refuge in her house during the destruction of Jericho is often understood as a symbol of salvation by the Church. Augustine expresses this succinctly and directly: "She [Rahab] was saved there, and thus represented the Church of the Gentiles" (*Exposition on Psalm 87*:5). Origen sees Rahab's finding refuge in her house as equivalent to accepting Christianity: "Therefore, if anyone wants to be saved, let him come in the house of this one who was once a prostitute" *(*Homily 3*:5*). Variations on this idea are repeated by several Church Fathers including Cyprian (c. 200-258, *Epistle 75*:4), Augustine (*Exposition of Psalm 87*:5), and Jerome (*Letter 52*:3).

This construction of Rahab as a symbol for the Church facilitated typological interpretation of other elements of her story. Rahab's integration into the chosen people

was understood as symbolic of Christ's message being intended for all nations including non-Israelites. The saving of Rahab's family while the rest of Jericho was destroyed was assumed to represent the protection of the Church outside of which there is no salvation, as expressed by Cyprian.[167]

> Which also we see expressed concerning Rahab, who herself also bore a type of the Church, who received the command which said, 'You shalt bring your father, and your mother, and your brethren, and all your father's household unto you into your house; and whosoever shall go out of the doors of your house into the street, his blood shall be upon him' (Joshua 2:18-19). In which mystery is declared, that they who will live, and escape from the destruction of the world, must be gathered together into one house alone, that is, into the Church. (*Epistle 75*:4)

Rahab's harboring of the spies was understood as her receiving of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost, in other words, as her accepting of the Church.[168] Irenaeus expresses this as follows:

> Thus also did Rahab the harlot, while condemning herself inasmuch as she was a Gentile, guilty of all sins, nevertheless receive the three[169] spies, who were spying out all the land, and hid them at her home; [which three were] doubtless [a type of] the Father and the Son, together with the Holy Spirit. (Against Heresies IV:20)

Methods of Patristic Interpretation

According to Lyons, the history of Christian interpretation of the Bible can be summarized under four headings: tropological (moral meaning), allegorical, anagogical (mystical or spiritual), and literal. Such an approach helps to put into context the major methods of interpretation of the Rahab story used by the Church Fathers.[170] The first two methods are well represented in Patristic interpretations and have been examined above. For example, the tropological method uses Rahab's personal characteristics to emphasize certain highly valued early Christian moral values such as hospitality, faith and repentance. The allegorical method is evidenced in the kind of typological interpretation discussed above which can be understood as a specific kind of future-oriented interpretive approach. Although it would have been relatively easy to link certain parts of the Rahab story to common mystical themes such as heaven or the

[167] Ibid., 27.
[168] Lyons, "Rahab through the Ages: A Study of Christian Interpretation of Rahab".p.33;Stander.
[169] Irenaeus appears to have ignored the fact that only two spies were mentioned in the Book of Joshua.
[170]Lyons, "Rahab through the Ages: A Study of Christian Interpretation of Rahab".

after-life, it is noteworthy that there is little in the way of anagogical interpretation of the Rahab story in the Patristic exegesis of Rahab.[171]

There is, however, literal interpretation of the Rahab story in Patristic writings.[172] Many aspects of the Rahab story were taken quite literally by the Church Fathers. As previously discussed, they all accepted that Rahab was a Jericho prostitute, that she hid and saved the spies and that she and her family were saved and allowed to live outside the camp. This acceptance of the literal value of the text did not preclude other interpretations which were not seen to conflict with its surface or simple meaning.

In contrast to Lyons' broad approach, Blowers has focused solely on Patristic exegesis in an attempt to characterize its essential elements.[173] He has proposed four underlying principles:

> 1. "…internal unity and harmony (symphonia) of the Bible, discernible solely through careful attention to the letter and to hidden meanings, and through assiduous inter-scriptural interpretation."
>
> 2. "…the divine Word is semantically inexhaustible and polyvalent, with any text admitting of multiple legitimate meanings, allowing for the possibility of fresh insight, an ever 'fuller sense' (sensus plenior)."
>
> 3. "…the church is the primary hermeneutical matrix, since interpretation functions foremost to shape Christian identity, doctrinal consistency, liturgical and sacramental practices, and ethics."
>
> 4. "…. Scripture is sacramental communication, a medium of the presence of Christ the Logos, in which case interpretation itself demands the abiding presence and aid of the Holy Spirit." (p.7)

The first three principles are immediately apparent in the writings of the Church Fathers. The first principle of "internal unity" is exemplified by typological interpretation based on an understanding of the *Tanakh* and New Testament which should be interpreted together as a single and unified work. The Church Fathers took

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[171] It is not clear to me why this type of interpretation is not more common since it would have been relatively easy to link certain parts of the Rahab story to heaven, after-life or other common mystical themes. It is noteworthy that mystical interpretation of the Rahab story is also relatively rare in Jewish texts.

[172] Strangely, Lyons understands "literal interpretation" to be a 20th century socio-political approach. This, obviously. was not Cassian's intention.

[173] Paul M. Blowers, "Patristic Interpretation," in The Oxford Encyclopedia of Biblical Interpretation (Oxford UK: Oxford University Press).

the second principle for granted and saw many "legitimate meanings" in words of Scripture such as Rahab's name and the red cord. Making Rahab and her home a symbol of the Church is an example of the third principle and facilitated the extension of the proselytization efforts of Christianity to all nations. The fourth principle is not apparent in the Church Father's analysis of the Rahab story but may underlie their willingness to forgive Rahab for her lying and sinning past. Overall, early Christian interpretation of the Rahab story is consistent with the history of Christian exegesis in general according to Lyons and Patristic interpretation specifically according to Blowers.

Comparison with Midrashic Interpretation

The Church Fathers and Midrashic Rabbis often interpreted the Bible similarly. It is unlikely that these common interpretations resulted from mutual discussions since direct contact between these two groups apparently was limited. It also seems unlikely that the shared interpretations were the result of common scholarship since most of the Church Fathers did not master Hebrew and most of the Midrashic Rabbis avoided religious contact with Christians. It seems more likely that these commonalities resulted from the shared Graeco-Roman intellectual milieu in which both Jews and Christians lived.[174] Whatever the source, Patristic and Midrashic interpretations do appear to share several underlying principles. Both assume that there is an internal unity to their holy texts, that there are many different meanings to be discovered in each of the words of these texts and that moral direction is a significant purpose of interpretation. It is not surprising therefore, that both often come to similar conclusions about Rahab.

For example, both the early Christian and Midrashic interpretations are very favourably disposed towards Rahab despite their acceptance that she was a prostitute. Both make Rahab into a model of faith and repentance and attribute prophetic powers to her. Both compare her favorably to biblical heroes and make her the ancestress of great biblical characters. For both, she becomes a paradigmatic figure in their conversion attempts.

There are also, however, important differences in their exegesis. Obviously, the Midrash does not accept typological interpretations heralding Jesus and the advent of the Church. It is not

[174] Gunter Stemberger, "Exegetical Contacts between Christians and Jews in the Roman Empire," in Hebrew Bible/Old Testament. The History of Its Interpretation ed. Magne Saebo (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1996), 569-86; Burton L. Visotzky, "Fathers of the World: An Introduction " in Fathers of the World. Essays in Rabbinic and Patristic Literatures (Tübingen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck, 1995), 1-27.

immediately obvious, however, why the Midrash does not emphasize Rahab's hospitality and is not concerned with her lying.

There are several possible reasons why the Midrashic Rabbis did not understand Rahab to be hospitable.[175] They may have assumed that Rahab, whether prostitute or innkeeper, initially took in the spies because this was her livelihood. They also might have accepted the suggestions in the text of Joshua that Rahab saved the spies out of a desire for self-preservation and out of a new-found faith. While these notions may help in some way to explain the Midrashic lack of interest in hospitality, they do not seem sufficient. Hospitality was considered a highly meritorious act in the Midrash and the Rabbis were not reluctant to address the issue in other stories.[176]

One possible reason for their avoidance of Rahab's hospitality is that it readily lends itself to Christian typology. The Rabbis, of course, could not endorse the Church Fathers' conception of Rahab welcoming strangers into her home as symbolic of Christianity welcoming strangers into the Church. Another possible reason for the Rabbis' avoidance of the issue was the role hospitality played in early Church conversion efforts. Riddle suggests that welcoming strangers was very closely linked to proselytization.[177] He points out that the apostles were sent out with instructions such as "Take nothing for the journey—no staff, no bag, no bread, no money, no extra shirt. Whatever house you enter, stay there until you leave that town" (Luke 9: 3-4).[178] They were instructed to take nothing because it was assumed that they would receive hospitality from their hosts even in places that were hostile to Christianity. Householders, especially women and widows, were exhorted to take wandering Christian teachers into their homes which often served as early Churches.

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[175] A search of the Bar Ilan data base using various combination and forms of the words רחב, הכנסת אורחים yielded no hits. The Jewish Encyclopedia and yhe Encyclopedia Judaica articles on hospitality listed Rahab as an example of biblical hospitality but give no Midrashic references despite giving such references for almost all the other biblical examples. Lyke (1998) suggests that there may be an allusion to Rahab's hospitality in Ruth Rabbah 2:1 but this in not explicit in the text.

[176] See Genesis Rabbah 50-51 where Lot's wife is faulted for not being hospitable even though there is no mention in the text.

[177] Donald W. Riddle, "Early, Christian Hospitality: A Factor in the Gospel Transmission," Journal of Biblical Literature 57, no. 2 (1938). 141-54.

[178] See also Mark 6:7-11, Matthew 10:5-42. Luke 10:1-16.

The second noted difference between Patristic and Midrashic interpretation is the Church Fathers' frequent reference to Rahab's lying.[179] With the exception of St. Augustine, both the Church Fathers and the Midrashic Rabbis clearly felt that Rahab's lie was justified. The major difference appears to be that the Rabbis felt little need to even mention or justify her lying while the Church Fathers did. Perhaps this difference exists because of Augustine's major influence on Christianity and his absolutist view that lying is never justified. In contrast, Talmudic legal discussions take for granted that lying is permitted under certain circumstances.[180] The Midrash does discuss some biblical examples of lying, for example Abram lying about Sarai being his sister or Jacob tricking his father to win Esau's birthright, but typically finds rationalizations for such lies. It is also possible that the Midrash took a more permissive attitude to lying in women than in men. However, in the end there seems to be no good explanation for the difference between Patristic and Midrashic approaches to Rahab's lie.

Summary

It is hard to reconcile Rahab's prominence in early Christian writings with her very minor role in the Tanakh. In the New Testament she is an ancestress of Jesus and a heroine comparable to Abraham and Moses. In Patristic writings she is an important moral and typological figure. Her frequent representation in early Christian Art supports the notion of her importance and influence.[181] For early Christians, Rahab, a Canaanite prostitute, represented the prototypical outsider. Her fate was to be destroyed with the rest of the evil inhabitants of Jericho, but her avowal of faith and her saving of the spies were accepted by Joshua as sufficient reason for her salvation. Not only was she saved but she was permitted to live close to the Israelites. Her salvation and inclusion in the community provide a biblical precedent which justified the extension of Jesus' ministry to non-Israelites. Such a conceptualization of Rahab is reflected in Patristic writings such as Origen:

> [Rahab] says, "That place is too narrow for me. Make me a place where I may dwell. Yet who has nurtured these for me?" And again, it is said to her,

[179] I have been able to find only two references to Rahab's lying in the Midrash (Ruth Rabba 2:1 & Pirka d'Rabbeinu Hakadosh 15). In neither of these cases is there any moral concern expressed about her lying. For example, in Pirkah d'Rabbeinu Hakadosh the entry is "Three lied (to God) and inherited this world and the next, Rahab the prostitute, the midwives and the Givonim." (my translation of page 27 of the version appearing in שלשה דברים נפתחים edited by Samuel Sheinblum (1877).

[180] e.g. TB, Yevamot, 65b, Ketuvot, 16b-17a, BM 23b-24a, Nedarim 27b.

[181] Baskin, "The Rabbinic Transformations of Rahab the Harlot."

> "Lengthen your stakes and enlarge your tents." Therefore, that one is "breadth," the one who received the spies of Jesus. (*Homilies on Joshua* 3:4)

The notion that Jesus' teaching applies only to the Israelites is understood as too limiting or narrow. The Rahab story comes to symbolize the enlarging the scope of Christianity to all nations.

Like Tamar, Ruth and Bathsheba, Rahab's questionable sexual history did not preclude her from becoming a biblical heroine. In fact, her status as a prostitute was very appealing to early Christians in providing, as it did, a Christian response to Jewish criticisms of the virgin birth.[182] More generally, the rehabilitation of Rahab in Patristic thought from marginalized outsider to a symbol of the Church supports the Christian contention that even the worst of sinners could be saved. In sum, the Rahab story in the Book of Joshua became a major biblical justification for the Christian practice of inclusiveness. Rahab's home, which sheltered her and her family from destruction, represented the saving powers of the Church which were extended to anyone who exhibited faith and demonstrated good works.

[182] Freed.

Chapter 6: Medieval Jewish Commentaries

During the medieval period, much biblical interpretation took the form of line-by-line commentaries written by individual rabbis. There are many such commentaries and, with the advent of printing, some of the more popular ones continue to be published and studied alongside the biblical text in what has become known as the Rabbinic Bible or Mikra'ot Gedolot.[183] A review of all the medieval commentaries on the Rahab story is beyond the scope of this thesis, but I have chosen four well-known commentators, Rashi, Radak, Ralbag, and Abravanel, as examples of the type of exegesis of the time in Western Europe.[184] My choice was primarily determined by who wrote a commentary on the Book of Joshua in the medieval period[185] and whether this commentary is easily accessible today.[186] Although these criteria for choosing commentators are primarily practical, they happen to have resulted in a selection of material exhibiting interestingly significant differences in exegetical approaches.

Rashi

Rabbi Shlomo ben Isaac (1040-1105), or Rashi, is probably the best-known Jewish commentator on the Bible. His *peshat*[187] oriented approach to biblical interpretation was pursued by his grandson, Rashbam, (Rabbi Solomon ben Meir, c. 1085- c. 1158) and various other family members and disciples. From this "Northern French School" of biblical interpretation188 only Rashi and Rabbi Joseph Kara wrote commentaries on the Book of Joshua.

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[183] Levy.

[184] A search in the Bar Ilan data base for references to Rahab in the Geonic literature yielded only four hits (שאילתות דרב אחאי פרשת וזאת הברכה שאילתא קסו, תשובות הגאונים - מוסאפיה (ליק) תוכן ענייני תשובות הגאונים - מוסאפיה (ליק) סימן מה, ספר הלכות גדולות סימן מח - הלכות נחלות). These references to Rahab are very brief and repeat Midrashic material. The only reference I have found in the Kabbalistic literature is from Pinchas Giller (2000) p. 61 who quotes a text (Zohar Ha-Raki'a 9a, Gilyon) suggesting that Rahab was reincarnated as Ḥever the Kenite, the spouse of Yael.

[185] Depending on how one dates the end of the medieval period, Abravanel and Ralbag might be considered early renaissance commentators. From a Jewish exegetical perspective, they are both considered *rishonim* as are Rashi and Radak.

[186] Major Jewish commentators like Rashbam or Ramban did not write commentaries on the Book of Joshua but occasionally referred to Rahab in other contexts. These comments are typically minor and will be not be reviewed in this chapter.

[187] Traditionally, the term, *peshat*, is used in opposition to *derash* or the homiletical (Midrashic) meaning of the text. *Peshat* is often understood today as an approach to the interpretation of a biblical text derived from its context. Despite Rashi's assertion (see Rashi on Genesis 3:8) that his commentary concentrates on the *peshat*, he does incorporate a significant amount of Midrashic material, particularly in his commentaries on the Torah.

[188] Robert A. Harris, "Medieval Jewish Biblical Exegesis. The Medieval through the Reformation Periods," in A History of Biblical Interpretation ed. Alan J. Hauser and Duane F. Watson (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2009), 141-71

Unfortunately, the first eight chapters of Kara's work have not been preserved[189] leaving only Rashi's commentary which deals primarily with lexical issues.[190]

With respect to lexical issues, Rashi typically explains problematic words and phrases such as חרש (2:1), לחפור (2:2), בפשתי העץ (2:6), על מעברות המים (2:7) and תקות (2:18) by giving a simple translation, often citing Targum Yonatan or another biblical verse as support. He is very sensitive to biblical language and idioms and does not translate them literally. For example, in explaining the phrase דמו בראשו (2:19) which literally means "his blood is on his head," Rashi writes, עון הריגתו על ראשו תהא כי הוא יגרום מיתתו ("The sin of his killing will be his responsibility [on his head] because he will cause his own death").[191] Sometimes Rashi's translation is Midrashically inspired. For example, in commenting on 2:11 he explains the phrase ולא קמה עוד רוח באיש ("and there was no spirit left to rise in any man")[192] as suggesting that the loss of spirit includes impotence (אפילו לשכב עם אשה).[193]

Rashi also addresses the issue of why the spies are referred to by three other words ("youth," "men," and "angels,"):

> כאן היו צריכים זירוז, ונעשו כנערים זריזים. ובלילה הראשון היו כמלאכים ששמרו עצמן מן העבירה עם רחב הזונה והם אנשים לכך נקראו שם 'מלאכים' ולכך נקראו אנשים מלאכים נערים.

> Here [in verse 23] they needed to make haste and therefore became like speedy youth. On the first night [in Rahab's house] they were like angels who kept themselves from sin with Rahab the prostitute even though they were men, and therefore were called angels. Thus, they were called men, angels and youths. He concludes that the different words were used to reflect different aspects of the spies' mission.

Rashi comments on the word *zona* as follows: תרגם יהונתן פונדקיתא מוכרת מיני מזונות ("Yonatan translates [*zona* as] innkeeper, seller of different foods"). However, despite this comment, his congratulation of the spies for being angels by not sinning with her suggests that he believes that she was a prostitute, not an innkeeper. In his commentary on 2:11, he also cites a midrash saying that Rahab was a famous whore who had slept with ministers and princes for

[189] "Mikra'ot Gedolot Ha-Keter," ed. Menachem Cohen (Ramat-Gan, Israel: Bar Ilan University, 1992), 86.
[190] Based on the Bar Ilan data base, Rashi only refers to Rahab once outside of the Book of Joshua in Song of Songs (1:2). This reference quotes a Midrash indicating that Jethro and Rahab converted.
[191] All the translations of Rashi are my own.
[192] All English versions of biblical texts are taken from the Jewish Publication Society's 1985 translation.
[193] *TB Zevaḥim,116a,b*

forty years. Rashi does not address the contradiction between his adoption of *Targum Yonatan*'s characterization of Rahab as innkeeper and his own apparent view that she was a prostitute.

The only grammatical problem that Rashi mentions in the Rahab story is the word ותצפנו (2:4) ("and she hid him") which has a singular pronominal suffix even though it refers to the two spies:

> יש מקראות מדברים על הרבים כיחיד, לפי שמיהרה בהטמנתם ובמקום צר, כאילו יחיד. ומדרש אגדת ר' תנחומא (שלח א): פנחס וכלב היו, ופנחס עמד לפניהם ולא ראוהו לפי שהיה כמלאך. דבר אחר: ותצפנו- כל אחד ואחד בפני עצמו. ודוגמתו מצינו: "שמן וקטרת ישמח לב" (מש' כז,ט). ולא אמר 'ישמחו לב'. [194]

> Some verses speak of plurals as singular. Because she [Rahab] hurried in hiding them and hid them in a narrow place it was as if she hid one person. And Midrash Tanhuma (*Parashat Shlaḥ*, 1) explains that Caleb and Pinḥas were [the spies] and Pinḥas stood in front of them [the townspeople] and they didn't see him because he was like an angel. Another explanation [for the singular pronoun] is that she hid each one separately. A similar example [for a singular instead of a plural usage] is found in Proverbs 27:9 where it is written "Oil and incense gladdens the heart" rather than saying "gladden the heart."

In this and some other contexts, Rashi provides multiple explanations for a textual difficulty; he does not typically indicate which explanation he prefers or why he is providing multiple interpretations.

Rashi (2:1) is also concerned with the chronology and progression of events in the Rahab story.

> על כרחי אני צריך לומר, שבתוך ימי אבל משה שלחם. שהרי לסוף שלשה ימים שתמו ימי אבל משה עברו את הירדן, שמשם אנו למדים שמת משה בשבעה באדר, כשאתה מונה שלושים ושלשה למפרע מיום שעלו מן הירדן בעשור לחדש הראשון: ועל כרחך משנשתלחו המרגלים, לא עברו את הירדן עד יום החמישי. שנאמר 'וישבו שם שלשת ימים עד שבו הרודפים'[להלן כב]: בו בלילה: "ויעברו ויבאו אל יהושע בן נון" [להלן כג]: "וישכם יהושע בבוקר ויסעו מהשיטים" [יהו' ג,א]-- הרי יום ד': "וילינו שם טרם יעברו"[שם]—נמצא, שלא עברו עד יום ה':

> I am forced to conclude that [Joshua] sent them [the spies] during the mourning period for Moses. Since 3 days after the mourning period for Moses, they crossed the Jordan. From this we learn that Moses died on the 7th of Adar since when you count 33 days backwards from the day that they alighted from the Jordan on the 10th day of the first month. And if this is so, from the time the spies were sent, they didn't cross the Jordan until the 5th day as it is written: "And they stayed there 3 days until their pursuers returned." (verse 22) That night, "they crossed and they came to Joshua son of Nun."

[194] The text of quotes from Rashi is taken from Mikra'ot Gedolot Haketer.

(verse 23) "And Joshua rose that morning and they journeyed from Shittim:" (verse 23) Thus on day 4 "they rested there before crossing [the Jordan]." Therefore, we discover that they didn't cross until the fifth day.

Rashi does not directly discuss themes of the Rahab story, but his interpretation of the phrase וראו את הארץ ואת יריחו (2:1) ("and see the land and Jericho")[195] merits attention with respect to one of the two central ideas of this thesis, the theme of otherness:

והלא יריחו בכלל ולמה יצאת? אלא שהיה קשה כנגד כולן לפי שהיתה על הספר:[196] וכיוצא בו "ויפקדו מעבדי דויד תשעה עשר איש ועשאל" (שמ"ב ב ל). והלא עשאל היה בכלל ולמה יצא? אלא שהיה קשה כנגד כולן כיוצא בו "והמלך שלמה אהב נשים נכריות...ואת בת פרעה" (מ"א יא ,א) והלא בת פרעא בכלל, ולמה יצאת? אלא שהיה מחבבה כנגד כולן, וכלפי חטא שהחטיאתו יותר מכולן. כך שנויה בספרי (דב' נב).

Why is Jericho mentioned specifically since it would be understood to be included as part of the land? This [redundancy] is to teach us that [Jericho] was more difficult [to conquer?] than the rest of the land because it was a town near the border. A similar example occurs in II Samuel, 2:30 where it written: "and nineteen of David's men were missing and Asa'el". Why is Asa'el mentioned specifically since he would be understood to be included in the nineteen men? This [redundancy] is to teach us that Asa'el was more difficult [?] than the others. A similar example occurs in II Kings 11:1 where it is written: "and King Solomon loved foreign women…and the daughter of Pharaoh." Why is the daughter of Pharaoh mentioned specifically since she would be understood to be included as a foreign woman? This [redundancy] is to teach us that he loved her more than the others and, with reference to sin, she caused him to sin more than any of the others. This is recounted in Sifrei (Numbers, 52).

In this commentary, Rashi questions why the text specifies Jericho, after indicating that the entire land of Canaan, which includes Jericho, is to be spied upon. Rashi's explanation gives examples of similar biblical redundancies, thus implying that they are typical of biblical writing. In Midrashic fashion, he also suggests that there is another layer of meaning to be found in this redundancy, that Jericho was the most difficult Canaanite city to conquer.

With respect to the theme of otherness, what may be interesting is Rashi's choice of the example of Solomon's foreign wives. There are many other examples of such redundancies in biblical texts and it is possible that Rashi focussed on the Solomon example on purpose. After

[195] I did not use the JPS (1985) translation ("and reconnoiter the region of Jericho") because it does not preserve the redundancy central to Rashi's interpretation.

[196] See Jastrow's (1950) Aramaic dictionary where one of the meanings of ספר is "boundary, border district."

all, Rahab, like Pharaoh's daughter, was a foreign woman who was assimilated into the Israelites. What is striking in this example, however, is Rashi's highlighting of the negative biblical evaluation of Solomon's love for foreign woman as the cause of his sinning. Rashi may be indirectly disagreeing with Joshua's decision to save Rahab and to integrate her. He would not overtly critique a biblical character approved by the text, but he could express misgivings about the sanctioning of Rahab's salvation by citing another biblical story where contact with foreign women resulted in sin.[197]

Rashi is not hesitant to criticize non-Israelite figures such as Esau or Balaam or Vashti who, unlike Rahab, are not depicted supportively in the Bible. The source of Rashi's attitude toward these characters is not clear. It may be the result of a general antipathy to non-Jews and, in particular, to Christians. Despite the fact that he had significant and apparently friendly contact and business dealings with his Christian neighbors, he harboured a deep animosity towards them because of their persecution of and attempts to convert Jews. This attitude is reflected in the anti-Christian polemics in his commentaries on the Prophets and Writings.[198] Although Rahab would have excited his animosity as a non-Israelite, he is unable, as already noted, to critique her directly because of her positive treatment in the Bible. He refrains from commenting directly in any detail on her actions or character but adopts a similar approach to her as to other foreign characters who are portrayed positively, such as Yael or Ruth. However, as already noted, he covertly indicates his disapproval of her as an example of otherness, the non-Jews whom he so disliked, by linking her to the daughter of Pharaoh, thus suggesting her as a source of possible corruption.

Rashi's choice of Midrashim in his commentary on the Rahab story may be another indication of his disapproving attitude towards Rahab. Avraham Grossman points out that Rashi carefully selected the Midrashim he would use in his commentary based on the message he was

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[197] Based on a search of the Bar Ilan data base, Rashi makes only one other reference to Rahab outside of his commentary on the Book of Joshua. In commenting on Song of Songs 1:3, על כן עלמות אהבוך (therefore do maidens love you), Rashi cites a Midrash mentioning that Jethro and Rahab converted. He also suggests that the word עלמות refers to the nations of the world. The meaning of this commentary is not clear to me but may be part of a polemic that Rashi engaged in with Christian commentators about the interpretation of Song of Songs (see Grossman, A. (2012). Rashi. Oxford, pp. 128-129 & 194-19**5** & Sara Japhet, *The Bible in Light of its Interpreters: Sarah Kamin Memorial Volume* [Hamikra bire'i mefareshav: sefer zikaron lesara kamin] Jerusalem, Magnes Press, 1994). It may suggest, however, that Rashi continued to see Rahab as a foreigner despite her conversion.

[198] Avraham Grossman, Rashi (Oxford UK: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization 2012), 111-32.

trying to convey.[199] With respect to Rahab, Rashi does not cite any of the many laudatory Midrashim suggesting that Rahab married Joshua or that she was the ancestress of prophets and priests or that she was a model convert. He does, however, cite Midrashim in his commentaries on 2:11 and 2:15 emphasizing her past as a prostitute.[200]

Overall, Rashi's commentary on the Rahab story is very similar in style and content to his commentaries on other biblical stories. In all of these, his focus is on explaining the straightforward meaning of the story without engaging in philosophical, theological or mystical digressions or extrapolations as do other commentators. His comments are generally brief and designed to make the story understandable to Jewish readers. Although he frequently uses Midrashic examples and techniques to explicate textual difficulties, he primarily selects those that fit his purpose.[201] With respect to Rahab, this strategy usually results in choosing examples which emphasize her sinning past.[202]

Radak

Rabbi David Kimhi (1160-1235), known by his acronym Radak, was born in Narbonne, France to a well-known family of rabbis and scholars. His commentaries on the Prophets and Writings, influenced by the rationalist philosophy of Ibn Ezra and Maimonides, have enjoyed great popularity and are typically reprinted in most modern rabbinic Bibles. He is also well-known for his grammatical and lexical works, *Mikhlol* and *Sefer ha-Shorashim*, to which he often refers in his Bible commentaries.[203]

With respect to the Rahab story,[204] Radak raises almost all the same lexical problems as Rashi and suggests similar solutions. Like Rashi, he often cites Targum Yonatan or other biblical verses as support. However, Radak adds additional comments such as pointing out that על ("on" in 2:7) should be understood as עד (until) and that עליהם ("on them" in 2:8) should be

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[199] Ibid., 73-110.

[200] Rashi does cite one positive Midrash about Rahab In his commentary on 2:17, where he explains how Rahab knew that the spies should hide for three days by writing: ראתה ברוח הקדש שישובו לסוף שלשת ימים [She saw with the holy spirit [that the pursuers] would return after three days.]

[201] Grossman, 73-110.

[202] He does cite (2:16) one Midrash which states that Rahab knew that the spies had to hide for three days because she saw this via the holy spirit.

[203] Frank Talmage, "Kimḥi, David," in Encyclopedia Judaica, ed. Michael Berenbaum and Fred Skolnik (USA: Macmillan 2007).

[204]Based on the Bar Ilan data base, outside of his commentary on the Book of Joshua, Radak refers to Rahab only twice (Judges 11:1 & 15:1). Both comments deal with the meaning of the term *zona*.

understood as אליהם ("to them"). With respect to the word *zona*, Radak writes the following in his commentary on Joshua 2:1:

> כמשמעה; או מוכרת מזון, כמו שתרגם יונתן "פונדקיתא", והוא בשקל 'טובה'.[205] והאמת כי דעת יונתן: זונה ממש, כי כן דרכו במקומות לתרגם כל זונה "פונדקיתא", וכן "שתים נשים זונות" (מ"א, ג ,ט"ז)- "פונדקיאן", ואף על פי שתרגם מקצתן "נפקת ברא" (יר' ג ,ג ועוד) ודעתו: לפי שהזונה כפונדקית, שמפקרת עצמה לכל.[206]

> To be understood either in its usual meaning [i.e. prostitute] or as a seller of food as Yonatan translated "an innkeeper". And this is the same word form as *tova*. But the truth is that the writer of *Targum Yonatan* believes that *zona* here means an actual prostitute even though it was his custom always to translate *zona* as innkeeper. For example, in the verse "two female *zonot*" (I Kings 3:16), [he translated] *pundaki'an* (innkeepers). And even though the writer of *Targum Yonatan* occasionally translated *zona* as *nafkat berah* [the typical Aramaic expression for prostitute], his opinion was that a prostitute was like an innkeeper because both give themselves over to everyone.

Although he cites both the translations of *zona* as prostitute and innkeeper, Radak appears to believe that the primary meaning of the word *zona* in the Rahab story is the former. He also suggests that the writer of Targum Yonatan probably also thought the translation to be "prostitute" but used the Aramaic term for "innkeeper" in many instances because he equated innkeepers with prostitutes. Radak repeats this explanation using Rahab as an example in a commentary concerning Jephthah (Judges 11:1) who is described as בן אשה זונה (the son of a *zona*).[207]

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[205] The Even-Shoshan dictionary (1983) indicates that the word, *shekel*, can mean "תבנית יסוד׳ת במבנה מלה" and cites Radak's commentary on Jeremiah 6:29 as an example. In fact, according to the Bar Ilan data base, Radak uses the term בשקל one hundred forty-six times usually as part of a grammatical explanation about the form of a word. In this case, it appears that he is suggesting that *zona* is of the same form as *tova.*

[206] All Hebrew texts of Radak's commentary are based on the version available in Mikra'ot Kedolot Haketer. The translations are mine.

[207] **בן אשה זונה** - בן פלגש גלעד היה ונקראת זונה לפי שאינה עם בעלה בכתובה וקדושין והיא כמו הזונה ואף על פי שהיא מיוחדת לו וי"ת פונדקיתא כמו שתרג' ג"כ רחב הזונה פונדקית' או הוא הענין בעצמו כי הזונה כמו הפונדקית שמפקרת עצמה ובתרגום של תוספתא דא היא נימוסא הות בישראל מלקדמין דלא מיסתחרא אחסנתא משבטא לשבטא ובכן לא הוה יכיל גברא למיסב איתתא דלא משבטא וכד הות איתתא דרחמא גברא דלא משבטהא הות נפקא מבי נשא בלא אחסנתא והוו אנשי קרון לה פונדקיתא דרחימת גברא דלא משבטהא וכן הוה ליה לאימיה דיפתח ודומה כי הצריכו כל זה למתרגם לפי שאמר לא תנחל בבית אבינו כי בן אשה אחרת אתה וכן תרגם ארי בר איתתא משבטא אחורי את ולפירושינו יהיה פי' לא תנחל לפי שהיה בן פלגש וזהו בן אשה אחרת לפי' היו אומרים שלא ינחל עמהם ושלא כדין היו מגרשין אותו כי בן הפלגש יורש כמו שאמרו רז"ל מי שיש לו בן מכל מקום בנו הוא לכל דבר חוץ ממי שיש לו מן השפחה ואמרו לכל דבר למאי הלכתא לירשו וליטמא לו וכן אמר להם יפתח ותגרשוני מבית אבי כלומר עשיתם עמדי שלא כדין:

Considering his interest in grammar, it is not surprising that Radak raises many grammatical issues in his discussion of the Rahab story, often in the context of discussions concerning spelling or the Masoretic vocalization of particular words. For example, in his commentary on Joshua 2:16, Radak comments on a missing *aleph* in the word ונחבתם:

האל״ף ׳נחבא׳ נחה; או שרשו ׳חבה׳ בה"א, כי נמצאו בשורש הזה בה"א.

> The aleph in the verb *neḥbah* is missing or its root is *ḥbh* with a h because this root is found with an h [instead of an aleph].

Another example is in his commentary on verse 18 on the verb הורדתנו ("you let us down"):

בא התי"ו בצרי במקום חירק כי יבוא זה במקום זה כמו ׳יפעיל׳ ׳ויפעל׳.

> The *tav* [in the verb "horadtanu"] is vocalized with a *tzere* instead of a *ḥirik* as in similar examples such as *vayaf'el* instead of *vayaf'il*.

In these examples, Radak discusses the grammatical implications of the variant spellings or vocalizations and compares them to similar usages elsewhere. In other examples, Radak interprets grammatical difficulties as indications of plot information missing in the text. For example, in verses 14 and 20, the spies make Rahab promise not to disclose their deal to save her and her family. In verse 14 they address her in the plural form, while in verse 20, they address her in the singular. The singular is, of course, the correct form but Radak explains the variation in verse 20 in the following way:

הראשון בו"ו: כנגדה וכנגד בית אביה, כי אי אפשר שלא היה שם עמה מבית אביה, כי לא היתה יושבת יחידה; או אפשר שאמרו כנגד בית אביה ואע״פ שלא היו שם, כמו שאמרו גם כן ״נפשנו תחתיכם למות״. והשני: תגידי (להלן כט) ביו"ד כנגדה; ומה היה דבר זה שאמרו לה שלא תגיד? לא אמרו על דבר היותם שם בביתה, שלא חשדו אותה שתגלה אותם בצאתם מביתה, שהרי כסתה עליהם לשלוחי המלך; אבל לאחר זמן כשבאו ישראל על העיר, אי אפשר שלא נגלה הדבר, כיון שאספה בית אביה לביתה; אלא מה אמרו לה שלא תגיד? דבר האות שהיה להם עמה; שאם תגיד יעשו גם כן האחרים שהיה להם בית בחומה להנצל, והם יטעו בדבר זה:

This commentary also provides Radak's views about travelling and lodging in ancient Israel and about inheritance laws. The information about travelling and lodging does not appear relevant to the Jephthah story but may be an attempt to rationalize why the spies stopped at Rahab's house.

> The first use of the verb "to tell" is with a *vav* [indicating a plural] because it refers to her and [the members of her] father's house because it is impossible that there were no other family members there with her since she would not live alone. Or, perhaps they refer to her "father's house" even though her family was not there in the same fashion as they said [in the plural in verse 14] "*naſsheinu taḥteḥhem lamoot.*" The second use of the verb "to tell" [in verse 29] is with a *yud* [appropriate for feminine singular usage] refers to her [Rahab]. But what was the content of what they asked her not to tell? It was not about them being in her house since they did not suspect that she would disclose her hiding of them to the king's messengers. It would also be impossible to hide this once the Israelites arrived in Jericho and saved her and her family. Rather, they asked her not to disclose the sign [crimson cord] they had given her; because if she disclosed this, then others living in the wall would also use it and the Israelites would be confused about whom to save.

In his discussion of singular and plural usage, Radak is suggesting here that Rahab's family were present when she saved the spies but that the action of their saving was hers alone. He argues that the variation in grammatical form is being used to add information that is not explicit in the text. Radak takes advantage of other ambiguous grammatical variations to explain potential plot difficulties. For example, verse 7 contains an ambiguous verb and a variation on a phrase that does not to exist anywhere else in the Bible. The verse reads as follows:

> והאנשים רדפו אחריהם דרך הירדן על המעברות והשער סגרו אחרי כאשר יצאו הרדפים אחריהם.

> And the men pursued them [spies] in the direction of the fords of the Jordan and the gates (were?) closed a*fter/when* (?) the pursuers left chasing them.

In this verse, it is not clear who closed the gates or when they were closed. The reason for this ambiguity is that the subject of verb סגרו is not clear and the כ in the phrase אחרי כאשר is a unique usage. Radak discusses the different possible meanings of the phrases אחרי אשר יצאו and כאשר יצאו and concludes that the usage of אחרי כאשר means that the spies did not close the gates immediately after they left the city because had they done so, their pursuers would have realized that they had been hidden in the city. So the spies waited until their pursuers had passed through

the gate and were far from it, and then they closed the gate without the pursuers realizing that it was they who had closed it.[208]

Radak also shows concern with the flow and plausibility of the plot in non-grammatical contexts. For example, verses 20-21 imply that Rahab tied the red cord to her window immediately after the spies told her to do so. Radak makes the following comment:

> ותקשר - לא קשרה אותו עתה אחר שיצאו, אלא ספר הכתוב כי כן עשתה כמו שצוו אותה. שקשרה התקוה בחלון בעת שכבשו העיר:

> And she tied -- she did not tie it [the red cord] immediately after they left, but the text recounts that she did as they commanded her. [In fact,] she tied the cord to the window at the time they conquered the city.

Radak's commentary suggests that tying the cord to the window immediately after the spies asked her to do so and leaving it there for several days would not make sense since presumably this action might arouse suspicion. He therefore suggests that, even though the text says that she did this immediately, in fact she waited until the time the Israelites were conquering the city.

Radak cites many Midrashic interpretations in his commentary on the Rahab story; in each case, he also cites a *peshat* interpretation. For example, in discussing the word ותצפנו (2:4) Radak writes:

> כל אחד ואחד לבדו כדי שלא יכירו מקומם אם יעלו לגג, ובדרש (תנחׄ שלח, א): אלו שני המרגלים היו כלב ופינחס, ועמד לפניהם פינחס ולא ראוהו, לפי שהיה מלאך ואמר ותצפנו על כלב לבדו:

> [She hid] each one separately so that they [the king's messengers] would not find them if they went up to the roof. And according to the Midrash (Tanḥuma, Shlaḥ a) these two spies were Caleb and Pinḥas. And Pinḥas stood before them and they didn't see him because he was an angel. Therefore, it says *vatitzpeno* [in the singular] as if referring to Caleb alone.

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[208] The logic of Radak's argument is not entirely clear to me and so I am reproducing his entire commentary as follows:

> אחרי וגו' - אינו תוספת ביאור, אלא: אם היה אומר ׳אחרי אשר יצאו׳ ידמה אחר זמן, והם לא אחרו לסגור השער מפחדם להם. ואם היה אומר ׳כאשר יצא׳ ולא אמר ׳אחרי׳ ידמה כי תכף בצאתם מן השער סגרו, ואם היו עושים כן, היו מרגישים הרודפים כי המרגלים נחבאים שם: אלא כשהרחיקו האנשים מהשער, עד שלא ירגישו בסגירת השער, סגרוהו, וזה טעם אחרי כאשר.

Another example is Radak's comment on the words שלשת ימים ("three days") (2:15):

> אמרו רבותינו ז"ל (ספ״ד כב): מגיד ששרתה על רחב רוח הקדש, שישובו לסוף שלשת ימים שאילו לא שרתה רוח הקדש עליה, מאין היא יודעת שעתידין לחזור לסוף שלשת ימים? ועל דרך הפשט: כי מדרך הסברא אמרה זה; כי מיריחו עד הירדן יום אחד או יותר מעט, וחשבה כי בין הליכתן ושובם וחפושם בכל הדרך יהיו שלשת ימים:

> Our Rabbis of blessed memory said (Sifrei, 4:22) that [Rahab] was inspired by the holy spirit [to know] that they [the pursuers] would return after three days because were it not for this holy inspiration, how could she know. But according to the *peshat,* she said [three days] based on logic since it would take one day or slightly more to get from Jericho to the Jordan and she thought that between their coming and going it would be three days.

Radak's frequent quoting of Midrashic texts is somewhat surprising since biblical commentators who stress grammar and who pay critical attention to plot generally avoid the liberties of Midrashic interpretation. Frank Talmage notes this apparent contradiction: "…the more R. David Kimhi (Radak) became the lord of the peshat, the more he was the vassal of midrash."[209] There continues to be serious scholarly discussion about why and how Radak combined these differing interpretive approaches.[210] In his commentary on the Rahab story, he uses both but usually does not indicate a preference.

Radak's willingness to discuss theological and moral issues may be the most significant difference between him and Rashi. In his Rahab commentary, he raises two such issues with respect to Joshua's curse forbidding the rebuilding of Jericho. The first concerns the primacy of divine authority as opposed to human. Radak suggests that divine authority is required for such a curse even though the biblical text (6:17) implies that it was Joshua's initiative. Radak concludes that divine authority was indeed required but that Joshua's curse was an exceptional situation in which God accepted and affirmed human authority (see Jerusalem Talmud Berachot 9:5). Radak also questions the rationale for the severity of the curse. His response quotes Maimonides:

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[209] Frank Talmage, "The Way of Peshat," in David Kimhi: The Man and the Commentaries (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1975), 134.

[210] Naomi Grunhaus, The Challenge of Received Tradition: Dilemmas of Interpretation in Radak's Biblical Commentaries (Oxford UK: Oxford University Press, 2012).

והחכם הגדול רבינו משה בר מימון ז"ל (מו"נ ג ,ג) פרוש הטעם. להיות המופת קיים שנפלה חומת עיר תחתיה מכל צד. כי כל מי שיראה החומה שוקעת בארץ יתבאר לו שאין זה תכונת בנין נהרס, אבל נשתקע במופת:

And the wise man Rabbi Moses ben Maimon, may his memory be for a blessing, (*Guide to the Perplexed*, 3:3) explained the reason [for the curse]. It serves as living evidence that the all the walls of Jericho fell so that everyone who sees the walls sunken into the earth will understand that this is not just a wrecked building but that the walls sunk as a result of a miracle.

The last theological issue that Radak discusses may relate to the theme of inclusiveness. He questions (6:25) how Joshua allowed Rahab to be integrated into the Israelites despite the *ḥerem* injunction and the commandment not to intermarry with the seven Canaanite nations.

החיה יהושע - שצוה לשמור לה השבועה שנשבעו לה המלאכים, כמו שאמר "רק רחב הזונה וגו' (לעיל יז), ויש לפרש עוד החיה שנתן להם מחיה: ממון או נחלה במה שיחיו, וזהו שאמר "ותשב בקרב ישראל" וזהו הפירוש הנכון. ויש בו דרש (מגילה יד,ב) כי יהושע לקח רחב לאשה וזהו "החיה" כי כיון שראו שיהושע לקח רחב לאשה, נדבקו בבית אביה מגדולי ישראל; ואף על פי שכתוב בשבעה אומות "לא תתחתן בם" (דב' ז,ג) אמרו כי רחב ובית אביה נכרים היו בארץ ולא היו משבעה גוים; ויש מי שאומר כי כשנכנסו מרגלים ששלח יהושע ביריחו נתגיירה, ועדיין לא נכנסו ישראל לארץ (תוס' מגילה יב, ב,ד"ה 'ואיגיירה'); וכל זה למי שאמר כי כתוב "לא תתחתן בם" (שם) - בגיותן כתוב (יבמות עו,א):

Joshua spared – to fulfill the oath sworn to her by the spies, as it is written ("Only Rahab the *zona*…" etc., verse 17). And some interpret the word *heḥya* to mean that he gave her sustenance, either money or land from which she could support herself, which is suggested by the phrase "and she lived among the Israelites." This is the correct interpretation. There is a Midrash (Megillah 14b) that Joshua married Rahab and this is the meaning of *heḥya.* Because as soon as it became known that Joshua married Rahab, important Israelites attached themselves to her family. And even though it is written of the seven nations "You shall not marry them" (Deut 7:3), it has been said that Rahab and her family were strangers in the land [Canaan] and not one of the seven nations. There is also another interpretation which suggests that when the spies sent by Joshua entered Jericho, she converted even before the Israelites entered the land (Tosefta Megilla, 12b). And all this [these interpretations] are for those who cited the verse "you shall not marry them" (Deut 7:3) in their gentile status. (Yebamot, 66b)

Radak is uncomfortable with the idea that Rahab had been spared but rationalizes it by saying that the spies' oath must be kept. He is also uncomfortable with a midrash indicating that Joshua married Rahab since a Deuteronomic commandment forbids marriage to a member of the

seven nations. Radak mentions some possible solutions to this problem and also cites a Talmudic discussion (Yebamot 71b) which discusses possible exceptions to the prohibition of marrying into the seven prohibited nations. Radak's major concern seems to be the contravention of divine commandments. If such commandments are not broken then he does not appear to be concerned about Rahab's inclusion into the Israelites nor does he appear to worry about marriage with gentiles once there is conversion.

Because of his amalgamation of peshat, derash, linguistic, grammatical and philosophical approaches, Radak's exegetical style has been described as a synthesis between the Northern French and Spanish schools of biblical interpretation.[211] This skillful synthesis written in a clear, concise and understandable style has, no doubt, resulted in the continuing popularity of Radak's commentary. Apart from his concern that keeping Rahab alive or that her Midrashic marriage to Joshua may have contravened divine commandments, Radak is not particularly interested in Rahab. Once he rationalizes that no commandments have been broken his attitude to Rahab appears to be one of neutrality or disinterest.

Ralbag

Biographical information about Rabbi Levi ben Gershon, also called Gersonides or by his acronym Ralbag, is limited, but he is thought to have lived for most of his life (1288-1344) in Orange, France. He is known to have had broad intellectual interests which included astrology, astronomy, mathematics, physics, and philosophy. Historians of astronomy are well-acquainted with his work because he invented "Jacob's Staff," an instrument which became an important navigational tool in the 16th century. He wrote on non-Judaic topics such as commentaries on Aristotle and Averroes and a book on mathematics.[212] His philosophical approach to Judaism, as exemplified in Sefer Milḥamot Hashem (The Wars of the Lord), emphasized a highly rational approach which made him a controversial figure among other Jewish philosophers.[213] His Judaic

[211] Harris.

[212] Tamar Rudavsky, "Gersonides," in The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, ed. Edward N. Zalta (Stanford University, 2015).

[213] Charles Touati and Bernard R. Goldstein, "Levi Ben Gershom," in Encyclopedia Judaica, ed. Michael Berenbaum and Fred Skolnik (USA: Macmillan Reference 2007).

scholarship also included Talmudic and liturgical works, but he is best known for his Bible commentaries[214] which were very popular and reprinted in many later Rabbinic Bibles.[215]

Considering Ralbag's intellectual background, it may not be surprising that he opens his commentary on Rahab by questioning the credibility of the spy story. He points out that by the time Joshua sent out the spies, God had already promised (1:11) that the Israelites would be crossing the Jordan in three days so there would not have been time for a serious military reconnaissance mission. He also wonders whether Joshua's sending of spies reflected his lack of faith in God's fulfilling of his promise. Part of his conclusion about Joshua's purpose reads as follows (2:1):

> שיחקרו אם נפלה אימת ישראל עליהם ואם נמוגו מפניהם, כי בזה יתחזק מאד לב אנשי המלחמה, ולזה תמצא שהם לא רגלו הארץ ואת יריחו כי אם בזה האופן. לפי שכבר באו שם בלילה, ובלילה בעצמה יצאו משם, אחר שנתפרסם להם על פי רחב מחשבת הארץ ושכבר נמוגו כל יושבי הארץ מפני בני ישראל. וזאת היתה גם כן תשובתם ליהושע...

> [Their purpose] was to investigate whether the fear of the Israelites had fallen upon them [the Canaanites] and whether they were quaking before them because, if this were true, then the result would be to strengthen the resolve of the [Israelite] soldiers. And this is supported by the fact that they didn't really spy out the land and Jericho except in this way. They came and left at night after they discovered from Rahab the state of mind of the inhabitants, namely that they were quaking before the Israelites. And this is exactly what they said to Joshua….

Ralbag here provides a non-military rationale for Joshua's sending of the spies, but he neither explores what would have happened had the spies discovered the inhabitants of Jericho to be unafraid, nor discusses his suggestion that Joshua lacked faith. What he does is repeat the above rationale several times in different words in a verbose and redundant style that is typical of his commentary not only on Rahab but also on other sections of the *Tanakh*. Nonetheless, his comment about the impossibility of a true military reconnaissance does reflect significant sensitivity to a potential plot problem in the story.

Ralbag closes his introduction to the Rahab story with the following comment about its significance:

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[214] These include the Torah, Former Prophets, Job, Song of Songs, Ecclesiastes, Ruth, Esther, Proverbs, Daniel, Nehemiah, & Chronicles.

[215] B. Barry Levy, "Levi Ben Gershon of Orange," in Planets, Potions and Parchments (Montreal, CA: McGill-Queens University Press, 1990), 28-29.

והסתירה אותם רחב בחכמתה למלט את נפשה ונפש בית אביה, והנה נספר אחר זה, בזכרנו תועלות זה הסיפור מה היה מאופן החכמה בדבריה:

> And Rahab wisely hid them to save her and her family's life. And when we recount the useful lessons of this story, we will understand the wisdom of her words.

Ralbag congratulates Rahab on saving herself and her family; he also congratulates her on how she deceived the King's emissaries. He elaborates on her 'wise words' in his *toalot* or "useful lessons which characterize his exegetical style.

In his biblical commentaries, Ralbag typically refers to the "useful lessons" or *toalot* of the story. His *toalot* both interpret the biblical passage and often serve as general moral or religious teachings. In his commentary to chapter five of Joshua, Ralbag presents twelve *toalot* dealing with different aspects of the story of the conquest. The topics range from discussions of prophecy and miracles to practical advice on how to deal with jealousy between the twelve tribes. Four of these *toalot* -- the seventh, eighth, ninth, and tenth -- are relevant here because, using Rahab as the example, they deal with the question of how to save someone in danger.

In these *toalot*, Ralbag also provides additional scenarios and dialogue not mentioned in the text about what might have happened between the spies and Rahab and the townspeople. For example, he says that Rahab hid each spy in a separate place so that if one were found the other would still be safe. He also suggests that Rahab considered the possibility of negotiating with the spies for the release of all the inhabitants of Jericho but rejected this possibility as impractical. He points out that Rahab cleverly said to the king's emissaries that the spies left at nightfall so that if they searched her home and found them, she could claim could claim that she thought they had left but that it had been dark and she hadn't noticed that they had concealed themselves

These *toalot* are lengthy and somewhat redundant, but the overall idea is that Ralbag is using the Rahab story to instruct his readers on how to lie and deceive effectively in order to achieve positive practical results. He expresses no concern about the sin of lying, presumably because he considered Rahab's cause to be just since the purpose of her lie was to save lives. It is also interesting to note that the details of these *toalot* have to do with concealing and providing a

means of escape -- one can't help but wonder whether they were directed to Jews who were hiding or fleeing from persecution.

Ralbag's commentaries are not limited to *toalot*. He does comment on lexical and grammatical issues in the text but to a much lesser extent than do Rashi or Radak. For example, he suggests a different interpretation of חרש (2:1) and variations on the interpretations of ותצפנו (2:4) and עליהם (2:8):

ונאמר כי מלת חרש תאמר בפנים רבים: המכוון ממנה פה, לפי מה שאראה, הוא מענין ׳אל תחרוש על רעך׳ (מש״ ג,כט); ׳חורשי און׳ (איוב ד׳ח) שהוא מענין מחשבה:

It is said that the word ḥeresh has many meanings: the intended meaning here according to what I see is similar to the use in Proverbs 3:29 or Job 4:8 and has to do with thought.[216]

ותצפנו – רוצה לומר שצפנה כל א' מהם במקום מיוחד שאם ימצא האחד ינצל הב' והיה לה התנצלות בזה לפי שכבר זכרה שהיה חשך בעת שיצאו ולזה אפשר שיצא הא' ונשאר השני והיא לא ידעה:

And she hid him- it means that she hid each one separately so that if one were found the other would be saved. And she would have an excuse, having already mentioned that it was dark, that perhaps one had left and she had not realized that the other had not.

והיא עלתה עליהם - רוצה לומר אצלם כמו ״ועליו מטה מנשה״[במ׳ ב,כ]: ״ויבואו האנשים על הנשים״ [שמ׳ לה,כב]

And she went up onto them- It means [she went up] next to them. This usage is similar to that in Numbers 2:20 and Exodus 35:22.

Ralbag does not directly discuss the meaning of the word, *zona*, but refers to Rahab as an innkeeper in one of the his *toalot* and elsewhere in his commentary. He seems to take this meaning for granted since he does not cite previous commentators or provide any rational such

[216] This meaning as derived from the quoted texts is not clear to me.

as equating innkeepers with prostitutes. He does not cite any midrashim related to Rahab's sexual past or her marriage to Joshua and their descendants.

In fact, Ralbag does not cite any midrashim at all in his commentary on the Rahab story and only rarely cites Midrashic material in his other commentaries. Ralbag typically uses the text as a point of departure for discussing "useful lessons" or theological issues of interest to him. With respect to Rahab, he limits these discussions to her actions in saving the spies which he describes at one point as "wise." His commentary does not touch even peripherally on issues related foreign women, conversion, otherness or inclusiveness.[217]

Abravanel

Isaac ben Judah Abravanel (1437-1508) has been described as a statesmen, financier, biblical commentator and theologian.[218] He was born in Portugal and became an important financier and statesman to King Alfonso V. However, he fell from favor during the reign of Alfonso's successor and was expelled from Portugal in 1483. He managed to re-establish himself as a financier and statesman in Castille but was ultimately expelled with all the Jews of Spain in 1492. Abravanel spent the last years of his life in Italy in Naples, Padua and Venice where he died. Although he wrote several philosophical works including a commentary on the Guide for the Perplexed, he is probably best known for his biblical commentaries on the Torah, the Prophets, and the Book of Daniel.

Abravanel typically begins his commentary on each biblical section with a set of questions. For the Rahab story, there are six such questions:

> השאלה הראשונה מה שהעיר הרלב"ג, איך יהושע שלח המרגלים האלה ולא בטח בדבר ה..
>
> The first question, already raised by Ralbag, is why did Joshua send spies rather than relying on the word of YHVH…?[219]

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[217] Menachem Kellner, "Ralbag's Surprising Take on Ruth's Conversion," http://thetorah.com/ralbags-surprising-take-ruths-conversion.(Kellner suggests that, to some extent, Ralbag saw the differences between Jews and non-Jews as biological and unbridgeable. He reluctantly believed in conversion as one way of overcoming these differences and this attitude is reflected in his commentary on the Book of Ruth. It is curious that he did not bring these issues up with respect to Rahab.)

[218] Benzion Netanyahu, Don Isaac Abravanel: Statesman and Philosopher (Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press, 1998); E. Lawee, "Isaac Abarbanel:From Medieval to Renaissance Jewish Biblical Scholarship," in Hebrew Bible/Old Testament. The History of Its Interpretation, ed. Magne Saebo (Gottingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2008), 190-213.

[219] The Hebrew text of Abravanel is taken from the Bar Ilan data base. The English translation is mine.

השאלה השנית במה שספר הכתוב שני פעמים הטמנתם...

The second question is why did the text of Joshua indicate twice that [Rahab] hid the spies?

השאלה השלישית במה שאמרה רחב, ונשמע וימס לבבינו והמאמר הזה היה בלתי צריך אחר שכבר אמר וכי נפלה אימתכם עלינו וכי נמוגו כל יושבי הארץ מפניכם וגו'...

The third question is why Rahab said "We heard and our hearts melted with fear." This comment is repetitious since Rahab had already said "Your fear is upon us and all the inhabitants of the land are quaking before you".

השאלה הרביעית במה שאמרו המרגלים לרחב אחרי הורידה אותם בעד החלון, נקיים אנחנו משבועתך אשר השבעתנו הנה אנחנו באים בארץ וגו', ויקשה זה משני פנים. האחד למה לא אמרו אליה כל זה בהיותם על הגג כשהשביעם... והפן השני מהקושי כי יראה שאין בפסוק הזה גזרה[220], כי אמרו נקיים אנחנו משבועתך אשר השבעתנו ולא אמרו למה ולא באיזה אופן יהיו נקיים מאותה השבועה, ואחר זה התחילו במאמר אחר, הנה אנחנו באים בארץ, ועל כל אחד מהדברים אמרו עוד והיינו נקיים, ויהיה א"כ המאמר הראשון (נקיים אנחנו) בלי צורך כלל לפי סדר הדברים?

The fourth question pertains to what the spies said to Rahab after she lowered them from her window: **"**We will be released from this oath which you made us take [unless] when we invade the country….". This statement is difficult in two respects. The first is why they didn't say all of this when they were on the roof and when they swore an oath. The second difficulty is that there are no conditions [under which the oath would not be binding] in this sentence. They said, "we will be released from this oath," but they did not explain why or how they would be released from their oath, and then they began another dialogue with "When we come to the land" [thus specifying the conditions under which the oath would indeed be binding]. Considering this [second] dialogue, the first reference to the oath not being binding is not necessary and out of order.

השאלה החמישית למה שנו בכאן הדברים שכבר אמרו למעלה בהיותם על הגג?

The fifth question is why did they [the spies] repeat the things they had already said when they were on the roof?

השאלה הששית במה שאמרה רחב, ותאמר כדבריכם כן הוא ותשלחם וילכו ותקשור את תקות השני בחלון. ויקשה המאמר הזה גם כן משני פנים. האחד למה אמרה כדבריכם כן הוא, והיה ראוי שתאמר כן יהיה? והפן השני למה קשרה מיד תקות השני בחלון, והנה האות הזה לא היה [צריך] כי אם בתת ה' להם את הארץ?

The sixth question pertains to what Rahab said: "'Let it be as you say' and she sent them away and they left. And she tied the crimson cord in the window." This

[220] The meaning of this term is not clear to me but it refers to some difficulty with the text.

text is difficult from two points of view. The first is why she said "Let it be as you say". It would have been more appropriate for her to say "I accept".[221] The second is why she immediately tied the red cord on the window since this sign was not necessary until the actual conquest.

Abravanel introduces his commentary to chapter 6 of the Book of Joshua with six additional questions but only one is relevant to Rahab:

השאלה החמשית אם חומת העיר כלה נפלה תחתיה ועלו איש נגדו, אם כן במה נכר בית רחב הזונה אחרי אשר בקיר החומה היא יושבת? ואיך ראו תקות השני תלוי בחלון ביתה, אם היה שנפלה כל החומה והבתים אשר בה יחויב שיפלו גם כן בנפלה?

The fifth question is if all the city walls fell and the people crossed over them, then how could the house of Rahab the prostitute, which was in the city walls, be recognized? And how did they see the crimson cord tied to her window. If all the walls and the houses in them fell, hers would have fallen too.

After raising these questions, Abravanel then presents a line by line commentary in which he refers back to these questions and adds additional material. The structure of introducing the commentary with preliminary points is similar to that of Ralbag although Abravanel begins with questions rather than *toalot*.[222] Abravanel raises one theological issue in his first question, but his major concern with respect to the Rahab story is redundancies and difficulties in the dialogue and plot. For example, his fifth question is about the text's repeated reference to the spies' oath to save Rahab. He suggests that this duplication be taken literally because the spies' oath was first given to Rahab under duress while they were being threatened by the townspeople. As a result, the spies felt that the oath was not binding, so they repeated it after they had escaped, in order to make it clear that they were swearing of their own free will and that the oath would be binding. In his commentary, Abravanel, like previous medieval commentators, takes advantage of a textual irregularity to expand on the story and speculate on what might have happened.

Abravanel's sixth question asks why Rahab hung the crimson cord immediately after the spies' departure. He argues that she did this because if she had waited until the time of battle, the townspeople would have noticed and killed her.[223] He also concludes that the rope with which

[221] It is not clear to me what distinction Abravanel is making.
[222] Levy, Jewish Masters of the Sacred Page.
[223] Radak (see above) uses similar logic to suggest that Rahab waited until the time of battle.

Rahab lowered the spies was made of the same material as the crimson cord. He supports this idea by noting that the spies refer to it as this crimson cord (2:18), the use of the demonstrative article suggesting that the material was at hand and had just been used to lower them.

Abravanel's fifth and sixth questions are examples of his interest in textual redundancies and difficulties. However, his first question raises a theological concern similar to that of Ralbag, the issue of why Joshua felt it was necessary to send out spies altogether and whether this sending of spies demonstrated a lack of faith in God's promise to inherit the land. He disagrees with Ralbag's assertion that the purpose of the spies' mission was to assess the state of mind of the inhabitants and argues that this kind of psychological spying was not typical in biblical times and the spies could not have known in advance that they would end up in Rahab's house. He then addresses the issue of why Joshua would even consider sending spies after himself having been part of the disastrous spy mission initiated by Moses. He concludes that Joshua took great care to avoid the same outcome experienced by Moses by changing key characteristics of the mission such as reducing the number of spies, limiting the scope of the mission, and keeping the expedition secret from the people. However, although he broaches the significant theological question of Joshua's possible lack of faith, like Ralbag, he shies away from any discussion or analysis of the idea.

Abravanel also deals with some lexical and grammatical issues. He repeats previous interpretations of the singular pronominal suffix of the word, ותצפנו (2:4) and also includes a Midrashic reference. He defines חרש (2:1) as בסוד גדול ובשתיקה רבה ("in great secret and quiet") and says this interpretation is based on previous commentators. He notes that in verse 8, עליהם ("on them") should be understood as אליהם ("to them") and cites I Samuel 2:11 as support for this interpretation. In his discussion of this usage, he also points out that perhaps the word "on them" might also be taken literally since Rahab hid the spies under the flax and may have actually walked on them to wake them up. Abravanel also discusses the meaning of the term *zona*. He quotes Targum Yonatan's translation of "innkeeper" and suggests that innkeepers usually were prostitutes.[224] Despite these observations, it would appear that based on his discussion of the Rahab story, Abravanel is not strongly interested in lexical or grammatical issues.

[224] In this context, he faults the spies for entering a brothel saying they sinned and could have stayed in a field or the street. This is the first mention I have found of any commentator blaming the spies.

Abravanel makes only one personal comment about Rahab. He describes her as having great physical strength (2:15-16). He notes that women are typically weak and that Rahab must have had to gather all her strength to let the spies down out of her window. Otherwise he mentions her only incidentally while discussing other aspects of the story. He does not write about issues related to foreign women, conversion, otherness or inclusiveness.[225]

Although Abravanel occasionally cites midrashim, his approach is *peshat* oriented. This approach does not include great concern with lexical or grammatical issues. Many of the issues he raises about the Rahab story had already been raised by previous commentators but he is often able to suggest novel interpretations based on a keen literary feel for the text. With respect to Rahab, he avoids philosophical or theological interpretation but uses his keen literary understanding of the Bible to explicate the story.

Conclusion

The exegetical styles of Rashi, Radak, Ralbag and Abravanel differ significantly with respect to their use of midrash, their interest in lexical and grammatical issues, their treatment of theological issues and their writing styles. However, they share the same attitude to Rahab: a uniform lack of interest.[226] They all ignore Rahab's character, actions, motives and background. They do not praise her for her proclamation of faith in YHVH or for her courage in saving the spies. They do very briefly mention some of her attributes such as physical strength, good judgment, skills at deception, and divinely inspired knowledge, but they choose to avoid the very positive evaluation of the midrash which transforms the biblical Rahab from a prostitute into the wife of Joshua, the ancestress of prophets and priests, and a model of conversion to Judaism, material with which they would all have been familiar.[227] Despite citing Targum Yonatan's normalization of her as an innkeeper, all reveal their negative attitude towards her by continuing nevertheless to refer to her as a prostitute.

It is not clear why these medieval commentators did not continue and expand upon the Midrashic interest in Rahab. Perhaps they felt that she was a minor biblical figure whose story

[225] Considering Abravanel's personal history of being expelled from Portugal and Spain and the forced conversions of Jews it is tempting to speculate that Abravanel avoided writing about such issues out of fear of consequences.
[226] I believe that this is true of most medieval commentators though a full review is beyond the scope of my thesis. The Keli Yakar commentary of Samuel Lanaido, who lived in 16th century Syria, may be an exception though his commentary should probably not be considered medieval. Lanaido's writing on Rahab includes comprehensive summaries of Midrashic material and thus includes positive evaluations of Rahab.
[227] Radak does refer (see above) to a Midrash about her marriage to Joshua but in a negative context worrying that such a marriage contravenes a divine commandment not to marry the seven nations.

played no significant role in Jewish ritual practice and thus did not merit much attention.[228] They may have also been embarrassed by her background as a prostitute which is hard to reconcile with her role as heroine and her salvation. It is also likely that the precarious position of Jews in medieval Europe made them reluctant to comment positively on Rahab's proclamation of faith in YHVH and assimilation into the Israelites since such an approach might be interpreted as Jewish interest in conversion, a practice which was not tolerated by most Christian authorities in medieval Europe. On the other hand, a negative approach could be interpreted as a disagreement with the inclusive exegesis of Rahab by Christian commentators and might have provided additional grounds for public disputations between Christians and Jews which rarely resulted in good outcomes for the Jews. It may have been the case that the safest course of action for medieval commentators was to say as little as possible.

[228] The *haftarah* for *Parshat shlaḥ* is Joshua chapter 2 but this does not compare with the ritual use of the story of Ruth which is read on *Shavuot* or the story of Esther which is central to the celebration of Purim.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

Biblical narrative interpretation through the ages has been concerned with three central issues: textual problems, perceived gaps in the biblical story, and moral and theological questions. Commentators have addressed these concerns in different ways depending on the story under consideration. Below, I briefly summarize the results of my research on the Rahab story with respect to these issues. In addition, I critically review and evaluate the history of interpretation of what I have suggested is a key socio-theological issue: attitudes towards the inclusion of the "other."

Textual Problems

Many biblical sentences are lexically and grammatically problematic. Almost all commentators who have engaged seriously with the Masoretic Text (MT) of the Rahab story recognize the same grammatical and lexical problems. Attempts to solve these problems have included the examination of parallel passages from early manuscripts such as the Dead Sea Scrolls and the Septuagint (LXX) and the application of various interpretive strategies based on internal analyses of the MT.

Unfortunately, the comparative manuscript approach has not yielded many solutions. The Qumram scrolls are not useful since no manuscripts including the Rahab story have been discovered. Although the LXX does contain a full version of the Rahab story, it is of only limited use in unravelling the textual difficulties in the MT, because many scholars believe that it is a translation of an earlier proto-Masoretic text.

Solutions to textual problems based on internal analyses of the MT have typically depended on interpretive strategies that were available or commonly used during a given era. For example, Midrashic interpreters often found solutions to grammatical and lexical problems by re-vocalizing texts, or by assuming the presence of double entendres, puns, word plays, or allusions to other texts. Medieval commentators often cite these Midrashic interpretations but then try to find peshat-like explanations based on contextual or grammatical solutions. Translations or paraphrases from the Graeco-Roman period may correct a grammatical problem or leave a troubling word out without any indication of the wording of the original reading or why it was

changed. Modern commentators[229] are still discussing most of the same textual problems using strategies and tools derived from contemporary biblical criticism such as emending troubling texts or deriving meanings from cognate Semitic languages. There have been few definitive solutions to any of the problems reviewed.

In my discussion of the ongoing debate over the lexical problem posed by the meaning of the word *zona*, typically understood to mean prostitute in biblical Hebrew, I point out that Midrashic and Christian commentators almost always consider Rahab to be a prostitute but Targum Yonatan (TY), using a questionable linguistic derivation, translates *zona* as *pundekita* or innkeeper. Although most medieval commentators cite TY's translation as the primary meaning of *zona*, they still discuss Rahab as if she were a prostitute or suggest that innkeepers generally were, in fact, prostitutes. On the other hand, Josephus and some recent Orthodox Jewish translations[230] refer to Rahab as an innkeeper, not as a prostitute. One possible explanation for these differing translations is that TY, Josephus and some Orthodox Jewish commentators may have been embarrassed by the fact that a prostitute was a heroine and were therefore motivated to grant Rahab the more acceptable status of innkeeper. Midrashic and Christian interpreters, however, readily accepted Rahab's past as a prostitute because they focused on her repentance, thus making her past sins a testament to her penitence. This motivational explanation for the varying translations of *zona* has recently been challenged by Riegner's comparative Semitic linguistic analysis which suggests that, in fact, *zona* in biblical Hebrew can legitimately mean "innkeeper" but that the word also has sexual connotations.[231]

Perceived Gaps in the Biblical Story

My literary analysis in chapter 2 indicates that the author of the Rahab story was more interested in modeling this story on the Sodom and Gibeah tales than in presenting an independent and well-developed narrative. Potentially important aspects of the plot, the characterization of Rahab and the setting are missing. For example, the sequence of events relating to the spies' arrival at and departure from Rahab's house is not indicated; Rahab's motivation to save the spies is not adequately justified; and exactly how her home was located "at the outer side of the city wall" is not clear.

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[229] Dozeman; Boling; Richard D. Nelson, Joshua: A Commentary, The Old Testament Library (Lousiville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997).
[230] Nosson Scherman, The Prophets: Joshua/Judges, Artscroll (NY: Mesorah Publications, 2000).
[231] Riegner.

Such missing details often occur in biblical stories and the response of many commentators has been to invent developments in plot, characterization, setting and so on. For example, the Midrashic Rabbis identified the spies by name and devised explanations for how they managed to enter and leave Jericho without being caught. They also developed Rahab's characterization by describing her beauty and sexual prowess. Josephus added military details about the fortifications of Jericho and the possibility that the spies would be tortured if captured. Christian commentators emphasized Rahab's hospitality while medieval Jewish writers imagined the dialogue between Rahab and the spies and proposed various solutions to the chronological difficulties in the story's timeline.

Because Rahab is not mentioned again in the Bible, commentators also wondered about what happened to her after Jericho was destroyed. Josephus suggests that Joshua held her in great esteem and rewarded her with land. The Samaritan Chronicle projects that she became a well-known and popular figure among the Israelites. According to the Midrash, she married Joshua and her descendants became prophets and priests. The Book of Matthew reports that she married Salmon and became an ancestress of Jesus. Her story continues to interest modern writers and there are at least nine recent fictional works which elaborate on the Rahab story. [232]

Moral and Theological issues

Since much biblical commentary is religiously motivated, it is not surprising that the Rahab story has been carefully discussed from a moral and theological perspective. For example, early Christian theology used the example of Rahab's being accepted by the Israelites as a justification for expanding Jesus' mission to all nations. Nevertheless, Patristic interpreters raised the question of the appropriateness of Rahab's lying despite it being for a good cause. For both the Midrashic Rabbis and Patristic Fathers, Rahab's actions became a prototypical model of repentance. Medieval Jewish commentators discussed whether Joshua's sending of spies implied that he did not have sufficient faith in YHVH to fulfill His promise of conquering

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[232] E.g. Afshar, Tessa. *Pearl in the Sand* (2010), Chicago:Ill: Moody; Burton, Ann. *Rahab's Story* (2005), NY: Signet; Havel, Carlene and Faucheux, Sharon. *The Scarlet Cord* (2014), USA: Prism Book Group; MacFarlane, Hannah. *The Scarlet Cord* (2009), Milton Keynes: Scripture Union; Morris, Gilbert. *Daughter of Deliverance*. (2006) Minneapolis, Minn: Bethany House; Rivers, Francine. *Unashamed* (2000), Wheaton, Ill: Tyndale House Publishers; Slaughter, Frank G. *The Scarlet Cord* (1956), NY: Pocket Books; Wolf, Joan. *This Scarlet Cord: The Love Story of Rahab* (2012), Nashville, Tenn. Thomas Nelson; Smith, Jill Eileen. *The Crimson Cord: Rahab's Story (2015),* Grand Rapids, MI: Revell. Rahab is also mentioned in Dante's *Divine Comedy* (Paradiso 9.112ff) and in the mythological writings of William Blake (e.g. Jerusalem, Plate 35 [39], (E 181)).

Canaan and whether his contravention of the *ḥerem* presented a human challenge to divine authority.

What is somewhat surprising, however, is the limited scope of the moral inquiry. With one exception, (Abravanel) no commentator faults the spies for visiting a prostitute. No one questions the ethics of Rahab's willingness to betray her townspeople and facilitate their deaths. No one questions whether the inhabitants of Jericho, including the women and children, deserved to die. There is only one indirect suggestion that Joshua's curse on Jericho never to be rebuilt is too severe. These omissions suggest that the moral questionings of this story are limited by a theological framework that takes for granted God's promise to the chosen Israelites that Canaan belonged to them. All actions related to achieving this purpose are therefore accepted as justified.

I have suggested that there is one socio-theological issue that is important in the understanding of the Rahab story and much of its interpretation: the regulation of relationships between Israelites and the "other." As discussed in chapter 2, the structure of this story mirrors that of the stories of Sodom and Gibeah both of which deal with the treatment of outsiders. As aforementioned, Rahab is a Canaanite, a woman and a prostitute, and thus is perhaps the most marginalized of all biblical characters.[233] Despite these three strikes against her, the spies and Joshua are willing to make her the exception and to forego YHVH's instructions to kill all the inhabitants of Jericho. Moreover, Rahab is granted a place adjoining the camp of Israel. In biblical terms, this appears to be a positive message about the possibility of including others as co-inhabitants in Canaan. Despite the promise of YHVH that all the Canaanites would be driven out of the land, there were other peoples who remained because they were not conquered or because they tricked the Israelites (see Joshua 9, 13:13,15:63, 16:10, 17:10). However, Rahab's situation is unique in that, despite belonging to a conquered people, she not only was not slaughtered but was granted permission to live alongside the Israelites.

The biblical justifications for Rahab's salvation and integration into the Israelites are her proclamation of faith in YHVH, her good deed in saving the spies, and Joshua's approval of the spies' resulting oath to save her and her family. These actions foreshadow what later became a

[233] Tikvah Frymer-Kensky, "Rahab: Bible," in Jewish Women: A Comprehensive Historical Encyclopedia. (Jewish Women's Archive, 2002); Danna Nolan Fewell, "Joshua," in Women's Bible Commentary. Expanded Edition., ed. Carol A. Newsom and Sharon H. Ringe (Louisville, KT: Westminster John Knox Press, 1992), 69-72.

legalized system for conversion to Judaism: the requirements to accept the Jewish God, to perform *mitzvot*, and to obtain approval from community authorities. However, there was no such system in biblical Israel. "Conversion" for women appears to have happened naturally through marriage as in the case of Ruth and of men such as Joseph, Moses, David, and Solomon taking "foreign wives." "Conversion" both for men and for groups of people occurs after miracles or great events (Jethro, Naaman, the peoples of Nineveh [Jonah, 3:5] and Persia [Esther 8:17)). However, in the biblical story, Rahab did not marry anyone nor was she a witness to any miracle. Her story could easily have ended with her disappearance. Yet we are told the following (6:25):

> ואת רחב הזונה ואת בית אביה ואת כל אשר לה החיה יהושע ותשב בקרב ישראל עד היום הזה כי החביאה את המלאכים אשר שלח יהושע לרגל את יריחו.

> Only Rahab the harlot and her father's family were spared by Joshua, along with all that belonged to her, and she dwelt among the Israelites -- as is still the case.

She and her family are no longer "outside the camp of Israel" (6:23), but have been integrated into the Israelite nation. This is the only example in the Bible where a woman is assimilated without marriage.

Although assimilation by marriage may have been common in biblical Israel, it was not officially sanctioned. The Bible prohibits the Israelites from inter-marrying with many of the nations inhabiting or surrounding Canaan (e.g. Deut 7:3)**,** a prohibition that is usually justified as a measure to prevent idolatry (Deut 7:4). Thus, when Solomon marries an Egyptian princess, the Book of Kings criticizes him as follows:

> ויהי לעת זקנת שלמה נשיו הטו את לבבו אחרי אלהים אחרים ולא היה לבבו שלם עם יהוה אלהיו כלבב דויד אביו.

> In his old age, his wives turned away Solomon's heart after other gods, and he was not as wholeheartedly devoted to the Lord his God as his father David had been. (I Kings 11:4)

The Book of Ezra uses the same rationale to justify forcing the post-exilic Israelites to give up their foreign wives:

... אנחנו מעלנו באלהינו ונשב נשים נכריות מעמי הארץ ועתה יש מקוה לישראל על זאת.

> …we have trespassed against our God by bringing into our homes foreign women from the peoples of the land. (Ezra 10:2)

This idea that foreign wives encourage idolatry is not the only rationale for avoiding inter-marriage. Some biblical stories suggest that Israelites were inclined to marry within their own family. This predilection for inbreeding is expressed viscerally by Rebekah:

ותאמר רבקה אל יצחק קצתי בחיי מפני בנות חת אם לקח יעקב אשה מבנות חת כאלה מבנות הארץ למה לי חיים.

> Rebekah said to Isaac, "I am disgusted with my life because of the Hittite women. If Jacob marries a Hittite woman like these, from the among the native women, what good will life be to me?" (Genesis 27:46)

The sentiment is repeated by Samson's parents:

ויאמר לו אביו ואמו האין בבנות אחיך ובכל עמי אשה כי אתה הולך לקחת אשה מפלשתים הערלים ויאמר שמשון אל אביו אותה קח לי כי היא ישרה בעיני.

> His father and mother said to him, "Is there no one among the daughters of your own kinsmen and among all our people, that you must go and take a wife from the uncircumcised Philistines?" (Judges 14:3)

Samson's choice of the Philistine Delilah leads to his downfall. Such stories and explicit prohibitions against intermarriage reflect a strong exclusivist tendency in the Bible, an attitude that is consistent with the concept of a Chosen People confirming the notion that the Israelites are special and stand apart from other nations. It is the Chosen People, not the Canaanites, who will inherit the land. The message of the Rahab story stands in contrast by suggesting that others can indeed become special and co-exist in Canaan with the Israelites. While the biblical story does not specifically mention marriage, it does refer to Rahab and her family continuing to live among the Israelite עד היום הזה ("as is still the case"), in other words at the time of the writing of

the story. This phrase, with its implication that Rahab's bloodline continued amongst the Israelites generations after the fall of Jericho, suggests the possibility that Rahab had descendants through intermarriage.

The Midrashic Rabbis were very sensitive to the suggestion that Rahab had descendants through intermarriage. However, the only path to intermarriage and inclusion in Talmudic times was conversion. Thus, according to the Midrash, Rahab became a convert. However, her conversion was exceptional since the Midrash has her marrying the Israelite leader and imagines their children as priests and prophets. Despite her background as "other," Rahab became a highly popular Midrashic heroine who was never criticized and was included in the lists of archetypical converts like Jethro and Ruth. It is hard to imagine a more inclusive rehabilitation.

Equally strong was the inclusive message in the interpretations of the Rahab story in early Christian writing. In the Book of Matthew, Rahab, along with three other sinful non-Israelite women, was included in the genealogy of Jesus. This inclusion marks Rahab's transition from a whoring Canaanite outsider to a central figure in Christian theological history. Later in the New Testament, she is compared to Abraham and Moses and is praised for her faith and good works. Patristic writers saw her acceptance into the Israelite nation as a major theological argument for extending Jesus' mission from the Chosen to all peoples. Her name, which means "breadth" or "wide," was interpreted to signify the inclusivity of Christianity and its relevance for all peoples. Rahab's home became a symbol of the church whose powers of salvation were extended to all those who accepted Jesus. This tradition of interpretation continues today and is used to justify recent Church initiatives to include such marginalized populations as the prostitutes of Brazil.[234]

In the Graeco-Roman and Medieval Jewish periods, biblical commentators avoided direct interpretations related to otherness and inclusivity probably because of the precarious socio-political situation of Jews. For example, Josephus' downplaying of Rahab's proclamation of faith may well be the result of his concern over the Roman objection to Jewish attempts to recruit converts. By the same token, the Septuagint's limiting of the effect of Joshua's curse on Jericho may well be an attempt to promote the possibility that Jews could live in harmony alongside other societies. Similarly, for medieval Jewish commentators who lived in societies which expelled and oppressed Jews, it would have been foolhardy to propound inclusive interpretations

[234] Guider.

of the Rahab story that fostered the idea of conversion. Most simply avoided such an interpretation of the story although Rashi seems to have gone out of his way to mention Solomon's poor judgment in marrying an Egyptian princess (see chapter 6). However, current feminist and post-colonial biblical interpretation of the Rahab story is returning to a direct discussion of inclusivity and the oppressed "other." [235]

The history of the interpretation of the story of Rahab reveals that it serves several important purposes in the biblical narrative. It initiates the story of the conquest of Canaan in an entertaining fashion. It affirms YHVH's promise that Israelites would inherit Canaan. Its parallel with the story of Moses' spies gives credence to Joshua's suitability as Moses' successor. It confirms the fame of YHVH and illustrates how faith in Him can be rewarded. It is an important contribution to the few voices in the Bible that speak positively of the idea of including the "other." In addition, it foregrounds what is still today an ongoing discussion about the relationship between Israel and other peoples. The message of Rahab is a welcoming and inclusive one.

[235] Frank Anthony Spina, The Faith of the Outsider. Exclusion and Inclusion in the Biblical Story (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2005); D. N. Fewell and D. M. Gunn, in Gender, Power and Promise (Nashville Tenn: Abingdon Press, 1993), 120; Musa W. Dube, in Post-Colonial Feminist Interpretation of the Bible (St. Louis MO: Chalice Press, 2000), 77-81.

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