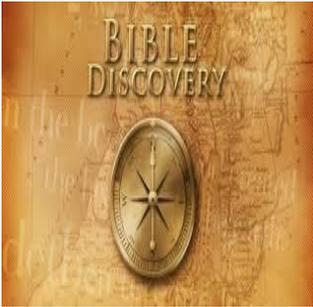


## A Harlot and a Scarlet Thread



The Bible, God's Word, is a curious thing - for many an enigma wrapped in a mystery. From beginning to end we're given an amalgamation of stories, rules, examples, and declarations of such complexity many simply throw up their hands in defeat in attempting to comprehend the theme of the Bible as a whole. The dangers of misinterpreting, or misappropriating, the Biblical narrative can be seen no more clearly than in our attempts to equate our mindset with that of the ways of God. Remember how God instructed Isaiah saying, "*For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways*"? [Isaiah 55:8] Why the bloodshed; why the tears, pain and sorrow? Why the disaffection of the people of God for their God? Wouldn't it make a better story if they only always obeyed, if they'd not strayed from God? As parents we know all too well that though we think it best if our children always obey and follow our instruction it's true they don't always do so.

Several folks choose to discard the Old Testament, focusing on the New as its replacement. They say the writings of the New Testament signify Christ has fulfilled the purpose of the Old and therefore we no longer need lean on its teaching. Yet Jesus and the disciples all taught from the Old. It's prophecies, history and stories, telling of the journey of a people formed from God, ultimately defines that which we claim to profess as our faith. Within the Old Testament is found the account of God's presence with a people chosen to reveal first our sinful state - being in need of salvation - and then the means through which we're redeemed because "*The Lord longs to be gracious to you; He rises to show you compassion.*" [Isaiah 30:18]

Against this backdrop sits the story of Rahab and the thread of redemption - just one individual amid us all in need of a Saviour. Her story - the story of a foreigner and a fornicator reminds us all have fallen short of God's glory and it's only by God's amazing grace we're given salvation. It's only by the scarlet thread woven

*The story of...*

**RAHAB**  
*and the thread of redemption*



throughout biblical history that any of us find relationship with our Father God. Our story encompasses two spies, sent to Jericho in advance of the Israelites' taking of that city. The Bible's always an honest book, always stating things as they are. Here it says Rahab was a harlot, a woman who sold her body for money. Some try to say she's just an inn-keeper. However, in those days, only men were innkeepers. In written bills of that time, the cost of a bed was listed as "a girl", whose services would've been included. It's likely Rahab worked in such a place. It'd be natural for the spies to find lodging there as it would've been the only place to stay in Jericho.

The spies were hidden in Jericho by Rahab who expressed her faith in Israel's God and protected them allowing them to escape by letting them down through her window by means of a rope made of scarlet thread. As they departed, the spies told Rahab, "*Tie this cord of scarlet thread in the window*", with the promise she and her household would be kept safe in the coming invasion. By faith, Rahab obeyed: "*And she tied the scarlet cord in the window*". It was this faith that gave Rahab her place in Jewish history. James includes her as an example of faith saying "*...Rahab the prostitute (was) considered righteous for what she did when she gave lodging to the spies and sent them off in a different direction.*" [James 2:25] Later, when the walls of Jericho fell down and the Israelites took the city, Joshua commanded that Rahab and all her family be spared [Joshua 6:22-23]. Marking her home was, of course, the "*cord of scarlet thread.*"

 **The common thread is found in God's mercy and forgiveness**

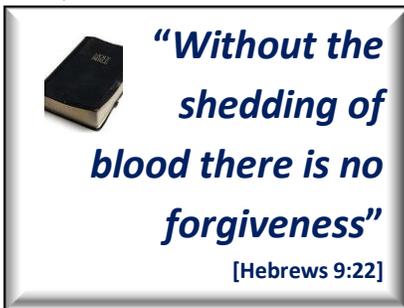
It's easy to dismiss the colour of Rahab's rope as mere coincidence, but the scarlet colour is significant. The rope in her window was a sign of her faith leading to her salvation, as she was not destroyed with the rest of Jericho. The scarlet rope - the colour of blood - worked for Rahab as much as the blood of the Passover lamb worked for Israelites during the exodus: every home marked with blood was spared-death that night [Exodus 12:13]. The common thread is found in God's

mercy and forgiveness for Rahab the harlot, and for you and me - signified for Rahab by a rope of scarlet thread, demonstrated for us as a symbol of the blood of Christ.

This story's told in context of the struggle for the Israelites – a people reduced to slavery yet set free. A people who on their first approach to Canaan were turned back to wander forty years in the wilderness because their hearts weren't confident enough to claim what God told them was theirs. After a new generation grew up, they again entered against Canaan, fought those who lived east of the Jordan River, and found decisive victory. Interestingly archaeological evidence may indicate a time of destruction of Canaanite cities began in the late 13<sup>th</sup> century BCE, and while there's no specific evidence to tie this destruction with the invasion of the Israelites, the cities excavated match many of those mentioned in the tales of the Israelite conquest.

One can imagine this story of the spies and Rahab first being recounted again and again to generations who followed. Yes it was the tale told at many campfires and many bedtime story times to honour the God who'd rescued them yet it also gave a special place for the Canaanite woman who chose to have faith in a God she did not know but trusted to keep her and her family from harm. Theologian Dr. W. A. Criswell said, "Rahab the harlot is an example of *the grace of God at work* (*Italics added*). Her salvation was not based on her character or merits: she lived in a doomed city, practiced a condemned profession, engaged in subversive activities, and falsified [lied about] her actions. Nevertheless she...acted upon faith, and was spared the judgment of God which was executed at the hands of the Israelites. In addition to her deliverance, Rahab was rewarded beyond measure when she married into the household of Nahshon...by Salmon; Rahab became the mother of Boaz and ancestress of David in the Messianic line [of those who were the ancestors of Jesus]. As one of four women listed in the genealogy of Matthew 1, Rahab is in the company of Tamar, who was also a harlot, and Ruth, who was a virtuous Gentile"

(W. A. Criswell, Editor, *The Criswell Study Bible*, Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1979, note on Joshua 2:1).



Again, Dr. Criswell comments, "The scarlet line of Rahab is a symbol of her faith that God will provide deliverance in the time of judgment." God's Word reminds us, "*Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness*" [Hebrews 9:22], and that's why the symbolism of the scarlet thread in the Bible is significant. The scarlet thread is the theme of atonement found throughout the pages of Scripture. The Bible mentions a scarlet thread in several different contexts, from an unusual childbirth to the children of Tamar, to the high priestly garments worn in the Temple, to the very conquest of Canaan.

Tamar, the daughter-in-law to Judah, had tricked him into sleeping with her by dressing as a temple prostitute. She resorted to this because Judah had promised her a husband from his younger son when her husband died to provide an heir as was the custom. But Judah never did. During the birth of the twin sons of Judah and Tamar [Genesis 38:27–30] as Tamar was giving birth, the arm of one twin, Zerah, reached out of the birth canal, and immediately the midwife tied a scarlet thread to the baby's wrist to designate Zerah as the firstborn. As it turned out, however, Zerah was not the firstborn; the arm was withdrawn into the womb, and the other twin, Perez, was born first. In God's providence, it was through Perez that the line of the Lord Jesus Christ proceeded [Matthew 1:3]. No, it was not because the people of the Old Testament were perfect that they were used – it was, and is, because our Lord God is gracious and loving that any of us are used.

The Bible also mentions scarlet thread or scarlet yarn as part of the tabernacle's curtains [Exodus 26:1] and the high priest's ephod [Exodus 28:6], along with threads of gold, blue, and purple. Scripture doesn't comment on the significance of those colours in the curtains or ephod, but some commentators surmise the gold, blue, and purple foreshadow Christ's glory, heavenly origin, and kingly position, while the scarlet thread represents Christ's atoning work on the cross through the shedding of His blood.

The symbol of the scarlet thread runs through the bible carrying the theme of Jesus and His sacrifice for the redemption of mankind. It's seen in the animals killed in Eden to provide garments for Adam and Eve. It's found on the Mountain of Moriah at the altar where the ram took Isaac's place; in the Passover Lamb, and in the thousands of years of sacrifices performed at the tabernacle and temple. It's a reminder that when Jesus came as "*...the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!*" [John 1:29] it marked an end to the Jewish

system of sacrifices, and it is fitting that at the foot of the cross, where Jesus finally says, “*It is finished*” [John 19:30] the scarlet thread is found in the spilt blood of God’s own Son who was the substitute for the penalty we owe for our sins.

For Rahab the decision was a clear one. She was a wise woman who acted in light of proper information. She used discretion in talking about them and shrewdness in hiding them. She was hoping in light of what she’d done for them, they would do something for her. “*Since I have saved your lives, will you in turn save mine and that of my relatives?*” She made them swear by God because she knew then they would keep their promises. She was sure when the Israelites attacked; Jericho didn’t have the slightest chance against them. She’d heard what they’d done to the kings, Og and Bashan. The Hebrew term for “destroyed” used here in verse 10 refers to the irrevocable giving over of things or persons to the Lord, often by totally destroying them. So Rahab asked for a sign they would save her when their armies returned to take the city. What better but that they told her to put a scarlet cord on her window and no one who was inside with her would be harmed. Some commentators think this scarlet cord represented her occupation. It was her ‘red light’ in the window, and therefore would not arouse suspicion. That may or may not be true; but it represented an agreement – a covenant - between the two parties. The fitting use of a scarlet cord was the perfect reminder of the only source of redemption available for eternity. As soon as they left, she bound that scarlet cord in place demonstrating her faithfulness. She took it seriously and didn’t want there to be any mistake. And I’m sure as the Israelites marched around the city; she checked and rechecked that it was still there and clearly visible, for her life would soon depend upon its being seen.



Rahab’s faith was so strong that the Joshua account tells us “...*she lives in Israel to this day.*” Faith is a fixed and profound trust in God and His Word. Rahab had this kind of faith. Therefore, God took her tarnished portrait, cleansed it and hung it in the gallery of the heroes of faith. Yes, for God is no respecter of persons. There are no impossible cases with Him. God, through His beloved Son Jesus justifies the ungodly. Because of God’s grace, Rahab abandoned her former way of life, married an Israelite named Salmon, and became the father of Boaz, the husband of Ruth. Rahab becomes the great-grandmother of King David. Scripture doesn’t tell us the names of the two spies sent to Jericho, but the romantic in me likes to think one of them was Salmon, who eventually became her husband. I believe he was impressed with her faith in a God she’d only learned about from afar. Joshua didn’t need the report of the spies in order to know to attack the city – He was working on God’s instruction. But our sovereign God was searching out a particular woman to be saved – something God continues to do today – seeking that no one should perish but that all may have eternal life. Notice that God provided protection to Rahab and her whole family, but they needed to be inside that house marked by the scarlet thread. Likewise **STOP** and consider, merely knowing of Jesus, merely having head knowledge that Christ is our shelter from God’s judgment for our sinful, wayward ways doesn’t help us. We must be ***in Christ!*** And like Rahab, we must act with urgency to secure our eternal safety. Christ is the Scarlet Thread that saves all who believe what He has promised but we must accept Him and be in Him to be saved. Yes, we must thank God for searching us out in His love and for His faithfulness and mercy toward us but we must also act on His invitation to receive His Son as our Lord and Saviour. Waiting on the sidelines is not an option. No longer



can you continue to either consider yourself ‘***too good***’ to need a Saviour trusting in your work and lifestyle to save you, nor condemn yourself as beyond God’s mercy, such as a foreign harlot like Rahab. Just like Rahab none of us are too far from God’s perfect gift of grace. God chose to associate with the very ones the society of his day – the world of our day – rejects. Now, how will you respond? Give us a call. Blessings, Pastor Dave.