

Hebrews 11:31

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

By faith the harlot Rahab perished not with them that believed not, when she had received the spies with peace.

Analysis

By faith the harlot Rahab perished not with them that believed not, when she had received the spies with peace. Rahab's inclusion in faith's hall demonstrates God's grace extending even to unlikely candidates. A Canaanite prostitute from doomed Jericho, she exercised saving faith while her entire culture 'believed not' (apeithēsin, ἀπειθήσασιν, 'disobeyed' or 'disbelieved'). Her faith, demonstrated by hiding Israelite spies and confessing God's supremacy (Joshua 2:8-11), saved her and her household from Jericho's destruction.

Rahab's faith confession is remarkable: 'The LORD your God, he is God in heaven above, and in earth beneath' (Joshua 2:11). Despite pagan upbringing, she recognized Yahweh's sovereignty based on reports of His works—Red Sea crossing, defeating kings. Faith came from hearing God's mighty acts (Romans 10:17). She risked everything to align with God's people, trusting His promises over her own people's futile resistance.

James cites Rahab as an example that 'faith without works is dead' (James 2:25-26). Her faith produced action—hiding spies, lying to protect them, displaying the scarlet cord. Matthew's genealogy includes Rahab in Messiah's line (Matthew 1:5), showing God's grace grafts unlikely people into His redemptive purposes. Her example encourages that no one's background disqualifies them from salvation—even pagans from condemned cultures can be saved by genuine faith in God's revealed character and promises.

Historical Context

Rahab lived in Jericho, a Canaanite city devoted to pagan deities like Baal and Asherah, practicing idolatry and sexual immorality as religious acts. Ancient Near Eastern 'harlots' sometimes served cultic functions in pagan temples. Jericho's inhabitants knew Israel's reputation—forty years had passed since the Exodus, providing time for reports to spread throughout Canaan. Rahab's statement that hearts melted with fear (Joshua 2:11) shows widespread knowledge of God's power. Her faith stands in stark contrast to her culture's hardened unbelief. Her marriage to Salmon (Matthew 1:5) and inclusion in Christ's genealogy demonstrates complete acceptance into God's covenant people.

Related Passages

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Study Questions

1. How does Rahab's inclusion in faith's hall encourage you that no background disqualifies someone from salvation?
2. What risks has genuine faith required you to take, aligning with God's people despite personal cost?
3. In what ways does Rahab's example challenge cultural or personal prejudices about who can be saved?

Interlinear Text

Πίστει Ῥαὰβ ἡ πόρνη οὐ συναπώλετο τοῖς
By faith **Rahab** ^{G3588} **the harlot** **not** **perished** ^{G3588}
^{G4102} ^{G4460} ^{G4204} ^{G3756} ^{G4881}

ἀπειθήσασιν δεξαμένη τοὺς κατασκόπους μετ'
with them that believed not **when she had received** ^{G3588} **the spies** **with**
^{G544} ^{G1209} ^{G2685} ^{G3326}

εἰρήνης
peace
^{G1515}

Additional Cross-References

James 2:25 (Parallel theme): Likewise also was not Rahab the harlot justified by works, when she had received the messengers, and had sent them out another way?

Matthew 1:5 (Parallel theme): And Salmon begat Booz of Rachab; and Booz begat Obed of Ruth; and Obed begat Jesse;