

## CONTENTS

<i>List of Illustrations</i>	xi
<i>List of Maps</i>	xii
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	xiii
<i>Introduction</i>	xv
<i>List of Abbreviations</i>	xxi
<i>Time Line</i>	xxii
1. Rahab at Jericho	1
2. Joshua in the Valley of Aijalon	13
3. Deborah and Jael at Mount Tabor	25
4. Gideon at En Harod	37
5. Samson at Zorah	53
6. Ruth the Moabitess at Bethlehem	71
7. The Levite and His Concubine at Gibeah	89
8. David and Goliath in the Valley of Elah	99
9. David's Flight to En Gedi	115
10. King Saul at Mount Gilboa	127
11. Bathsheba in the City of David	139
12. Absalom's Flight to Geshur	153
13. Absalom's Rebellion in the Kidron Valley	167
14. Jeroboam in Dan	189
15. Elijah at Mount Carmel	205
16. Naboth's Vineyard at Jezreel	219
17. Elisha and the Wealthy Woman at Shunem	233

18. Hezekiah Prepares Jerusalem for War	245
19. Zedekiah Flees Jerusalem	261
20. Ezra and Nehemiah Rehabilitate Jerusalem	277
21. Megiddo: The Untold Story	297
<i>Appendix</i>	301
<i>Bibliography</i>	335

## ILLUSTRATIONS

1. Jordan River at Qasr el Yehud	2
2. Valley of Aijalon	15
3. View of Mount Tabor from the Hill of the Precipice	26
4. Spring of Harod	38
5. Tel Bet Shemesh	54
6. City of Bethlehem, 2013	72
7. King Hussein's unfinished villa at Tel el Ful (Gibeah)	90
8.1. Brook of Elah	101
8.2. Stones in the brook of Elah	102
9.1. A waterfall at En Gedi	117
9.2. A cave at En Gedi	118
10. Tel Bet She'an	128
11. Silwan village	140
12. City gate of ancient Geshur (Bethsaida)	154
13. Absalom's Pillar in the Kidron Valley, Jerusalem	169
14.1. The ancient cultic site at Tel Dan	191
14.2. A pool in the Tel Dan Nature Reserve	192
15. Carmelite Monastery on Mount Carmel	206
16. Tel Jezreel	220
17. Sulam village (Shunem)	234
18.1. Broad Wall	247
18.2. Hezekiah's Tunnel	248

19. Zedekiah's Cave	262
20. Western Wall Plaza	278
21. Tel Megiddo	298

### MAPS

1. Sites visited in <i>The Bible on Location</i>	xxv
2. Inside the Old City of Jerusalem	300
3. Outside the Old City walls of Jerusalem	304
4. Dead Sea vicinity	310
5. Greater Jerusalem and central Israel	315
6. Jezreel Valley	321
7. Northern Israel	330

## INTRODUCTION

Do you know anyone named Debbie? Josh? David? Everyone recognizes those names from the Bible, but how much do we really know about the characters from one of the greatest works of literature ever written? The Hebrew Bible is an anthology of thirty-nine texts. While most people are familiar with the Genesis stories and the Exodus narrative, the books that chronicle the Israelites after they arrive in the promised land are often far less familiar and infrequently read. Yet they contain a captivating array of complex characters faced with social, ethical, and spiritual dilemmas.

This is an unconventional guidebook. Rather than point you toward recognizable landmarks, it leads you in the footsteps of fascinating literary characters. In Israel little remains of monumental buildings and cities from the time of the Hebrew Bible, but the landscape is virtually unaltered.

The stories in this guidebook come from the biblical books of Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 Samuel, 2 Samuel, 1 Kings, 2 Kings, Ezra, and Nehemiah. In contrast to the Torah (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy), which we read cyclically in the Jewish tradition every year, the books that follow chronologically are often ignored, apart from selected readings as the *haftarot*. These nine biblical books form the outline of this guidebook because all their action takes place in the land of Israel, and almost all the locations mentioned in the narrative have been identified.

Did the events of the Bible really happen? The development of biblical scholarship as an academic discipline has enabled us to dig deeply into the text in search of linguistic clues, cultural patterns, and nuance. The modern science of archaeology has enriched our knowledge of the biblical period immensely—sometimes correlating, sometimes illuminating, and sometimes challenging the historical authenticity of the stories.

Yet despite the wealth of knowledge accrued in the modern age, the Bible still remains something of an enigma. It is written in an ancient Hebrew dialect no longer spoken. Letters and words are missing throughout the Hebrew text. The interpretation of a word can change the meaning of an entire sentence. The abbreviated storytelling style can be puzzling. All this means that the text is interpretable by anyone who chooses to read it.

But oddly enough, many Jews don't read the Bible. Classic Jewish scholarship concentrates on the Talmud, the rabbinic literature that interprets the biblical laws. Zionism reserves a place of honor for the Bible in the Israeli educational curriculum, but nonreligious Jews educated in the diaspora rarely crack the good book's spine in a methodical, studious fashion. I am a classic example. My Jewish upbringing was buttressed by membership in a Conservative synagogue, bat mitzvah, Camp Ramah, and the Zionist youth movement Young Judaea. The Jewish bookshelf in my home included tomes such as *The Joys of Yiddish*, *My Life* by Golda Meir, and *The War against the Jews* by Lucy Dawidowicz. The Bible wasn't anywhere on the shelf—it wasn't even on the radar.

The impetus for my Bible studies was embarrassment. Close to 70 percent of the tourists who visit Israel are Christians—bread and butter for Jewish tour guides. Early

on in my guiding career, I found myself standing before groups of evangelical Christians who knew the Hebrew Bible inside and out. Most had read the Bible in its entirety several times, many were members of church Bible study groups, many could recite text passages by heart, and they all wanted to visit the places where the events of the Bible had transpired. In order to get up to speed (and not look like an idiot), I spent hours poring over texts and marking up my travel-sized Bible. Ultimately I was able to whip out passages on site and refer to people and places with ease. Eventually I began reading these stories with Jewish groups too, who always clamored for more

However, I soon felt I was shortchanging people by simply reading the stories and not commenting on them. In order to expound I had to study the texts methodically, a challenge I embraced eagerly as a BA in English literature and an MA in creative writing. Jerusalem is probably the easiest place in the world to find a Bible teacher, so I got myself a rabbi, and together we began to read, comment, analyze, and deconstruct the historical books whose events took place in the land of Israel. I was intrigued by the complexity of the characters, the ethical dilemmas they often faced, and the uncanny parallels between them and many contemporary leaders. Early in the study process I already knew that I wanted to share what I had learned by writing a book.

Ultimately, I chose twenty compelling stories from the post-Torah books that frame the events and the geography of ancient Israel from the conquest of the promised land until the return from exile. I have approached the Bible first and foremost as a work of literature, and not from a faith perspective. The commentary on the stories reflects my fascination, wonder, and frustration as I attempt to find

meaning and relevance in this often perplexing tome. My subjective understanding, however, comes from a place of deep love and respect for the Bible and for Israel.

My role as tour guide is not spiritual; it's up to the pastors and rabbis to provide guidance and commentary on issues of faith. When I read a Bible story on site, my task is to provide the context and make the story come alive using history, archaeology, modern scholarship, and literary analysis. In my commentary I have relied heavily on the academic literature written by modern Bible scholars in an attempt to find the middle ground between those who read the Bible as an uncontested factual document and those who read it as a dubious historical account. However, I have also drawn frequently from midrash, the rabbinic folk literature, to help illuminate the texts. These commentaries range from the colorful to the outlandish, and while not historically based they have been used for centuries to teach the Bible and have deeply influenced our traditional understanding of biblical narratives.

So where do we start? The Bible attempts to portray an ancient historical reality. However, a wealth of evidence from textual analysis, extrabiblical sources, and archaeology indicate that it is not an objective historical document. In fact, it is unabashedly subjective, compiled by writers and editors spanning centuries of revision who had a clear message to impart. They interpreted the events described through the prism of their theological worldview, which, in its simplest form, was based on the idea that the people of Israel signed a covenant with God and were bound to abide by it.

From a literary point of view, this is a perfect set-up for imminent conflict, the heart of any good story. The authors, however, were determined to tell it on their terms. One of the most intriguing challenges in reading the Bible is



attempting to figure out what the writers *haven't* told us. Readers have been trying to crack this nut for centuries, and anyone can give it a shot, regardless of religion, spiritual inclination, or experience.

This guidebook sets out to accomplish two goals:

The first is to put you in the landscape where it is told the action transpired. Reading a Bible story on location imbues it with a new dimension, and this book leads you to the sites where the stories unfolded, most of which are off the beaten track. In the appendix you will find detailed instructions for walking or driving to all the sites visited in this book. Sites located in rural areas can be found either by setting your GPS to the key location words or by using a map. Sites in and around the Old City of Jerusalem are more easily reached by taxi, public transportation, or on foot. Shade is often hard to find, so be sure to set out equipped with hats and water. Remember that reading out loud takes far longer than reading silently. Allow yourself plenty of time on site if you plan to share the commentary out loud with others. You may wish to familiarize yourself with a story by reading it the night before your visit.

Israel is brimming with exciting sites that span the timeline. In the sections titled “Make It a Day,” you will find suggestions for additional locations of historical, cultural, and geographic interest in the vicinities of the Bible sites.

The second goal is actually attainable from the comfort of your living-room couch, without ever visiting Israel. While each of the twenty stories discussed in the guidebook stands on its own and may be read independently of one another, together they trace the chronology and the narrative arc of the biblical action. This trajectory begins with the Israelites’ arrival in the land (following the exodus from Egypt and the forty years of wandering) and continues over more than six hundred years, until the Babylonian

destruction of the temple and the eventual return of the exiles to the land. By reading the guidebook from beginning to end, one chapter at a time, a rich, complex picture of the post-Torah biblical period and its most prominent characters and events emerges.

Each chapter is preceded by a short historical introduction that explains the context of the events, so even if it's the first Bible story you've ever read you will grasp the bigger picture. The backstory is followed by the text. These stories were meant to be told orally, so don't be ashamed to read them out loud. People won't think you're loony—they'll probably come closer because they'll want to hear the story too (and they might even offer a few comments of their own). The text is followed by a short commentary that attempts to decipher what's between the lines of the narrative and to suggest food for thought. (References to biblical and extrabiblical sources are noted in the text; see the key to abbreviations at the beginning of the book.)

Behind this adventure is an attempt to rediscover perhaps the most influential work of literature ever written. Once a story becomes accessible, its layers of relevance begin to reveal themselves.

Many years of experience in guiding have convinced me that stories are gifts. While information is often quickly forgotten, tales of human endeavor reach and rest in a deeper place in the mind. When you lace up your walking shoes, decipher the map, and settle onto the cool rocks in the shade of tree to read a story, it becomes yours forever.

# Rahab at Jericho

Joshua 2:1–23; 6:21–25

*A Canaanite prostitute aids and encourages the Israelite spies*

See page 311 for visitor information.



## WHERE ARE WE?

Vered Yericho lies in the Jordan Valley area of the West Bank. It is a secular cooperative village founded in 1980 with a population of about fifty families. Most are engaged in tourism, agriculture, and small businesses.

## SETTING THE SCENE

Looking eastward, in the distance you can see the mountains of Moab, today Jordan. Although difficult to pinpoint from here, one of those mountains is Nebo, whose summit was Moses's lookout into the promised land after the forty-year sojourn in the wilderness (Deut. 34:1–5). The Jordan River lies just below; we will descend to the banks of the river at the next stop.

Looking northward to the left, you can see the present-day city of Jericho sprawled below. An oasis, Jericho's lush surroundings are fed by the spring of Elisha (Ein es-Sultan), a freshwater spring with an average capacity of fifty gallons of water per second. The abundant water source, rich alluvial soil, and its strategic location on the ancient trade routes have made Jericho a desirable place to settle since antiquity.



Fig. 1. The Jordan River at Qasr el Yehud baptism site

Home to the remains of the oldest city on the world (ten thousand years old), today Jericho is a Palestinian municipality numbering over twenty thousand inhabitants. Tel Jericho, the site of the ancient settlement, is the small brown mound to the right of the foot of the hill.

### THE CONTEXT

The book of Joshua is part of a larger unit within the biblical anthology known as the Deuteronomistic history, which was inspired by the ideas of the book of Deuteronomy and was probably penned in the seventh–sixth centuries BCE. The objective of the authors and editors was to tell the story of the people of Israel from the moment they stood poised to enter the promised land after forty years of wandering in the wilderness, until they were banished into exile over six hundred years later.

The Deuteronomistic history kicks off with Deuteronomy, when Moses, in his final act as leader, delivers his last long speech to the people of Israel. He reviews their experiences together, reiterates the laws by which they have agreed to abide, and exhorts them to remain faithful to their God. The central idea of Deuteronomy, at the heart of its history, is the importance of the covenant between the Israelites and God. The books that follow—Joshua, Judges, 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings—recount the ups and downs in this unique relationship as the Israelites take possession of the land, adapt to an agricultural lifestyle, fend off their enemies, establish a monarchy, and violate the covenant again and again. The story culminates with the destruction of Solomon’s temple and Jerusalem and the forced exile of the Jewish people from the land.

An important theme in this context is the threat inherent in contact with the indigenous Canaanite population, which worshipped foreign gods. It was clear from the get-go that the Israelites would have a hard time resisting the temptation to mingle with their gentile neighbors. As they prepared to take possession of the land, Moses specifically commanded them to have no pity on the locals and to destroy all the peoples there in a sweeping injunction known in Hebrew as a *herem* (e.g., Deut. 7:1-2).

After Moses completed his instructive orations, he climbed up to the summit of Mount Nebo to view the promised land from afar as his last act. Following his death, the baton of leadership passed to Joshua, son of Nun, whose task was to lead the people of Israel on the next leg of their odyssey (Josh. 1:1-9). In the beginning of the book of Joshua, we meet the Israelites as they make ready to cross over the Jordan River and enter the land (Josh. 1-5).

In an unmistakable echo of the Exodus story, just as Moses led the Israelites through the parted waters of the

Red Sea forty years earlier (Exod.14), Joshua leads them across the waters of the Jordan River (Josh. 3-4). Just as Moses sent a squadron of men to spy in the land (Num. 13), Joshua dispatches two scouts to gather intelligence on the region of Jericho, the first city they will encounter after they cross the river. However, while Moses’s spies spent forty days hiking the width and breadth of the land, closely examining the terrain, Joshua’s spies embark on a completely different experience.

The first place they land is in a brothel.

---

## Joshua 2

<sup>1</sup>Joshua son of Nun secretly sent two spies from Shittim, saying, “Go, reconnoiter the region of Jericho.” So they set out, and they came to the house of a harlot named Rahab and lodged there. <sup>2</sup>The king of Jericho was told, “Some men have come here tonight, Israelites, to spy out the country.” <sup>3</sup>The king of Jericho thereupon sent orders to Rahab: “Produce the men who came to you and entered your house, for they have come to spy out the whole country.” <sup>4</sup>The woman, however, had taken the two men and hidden them. “It is true,” she said, “the men did come to me, but I didn’t know where they were from. <sup>5</sup>And at dark, when the gate was about to be closed, the men left; and I don’t know where the men went. Quick, go after them, for you can overtake them.”—<sup>6</sup>Now she had taken them up to the roof and hidden them under some stalks of flax which she had lying on the roof.—<sup>7</sup>So the men pursued them in the direction of the Jordan down to the fords; and no sooner had the pursuers gone out than the gate was shut behind them.

<sup>8</sup>The spies had not yet gone to sleep when she came up to them on the roof. <sup>9</sup>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. <sup>10</sup>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.

<sup>11</sup>When we heard about it, we lost heart, and no man had any more spirit left because of you; for the LORD your God is the only God in heaven above and on earth below.

<sup>12</sup>Now, since I have shown loyalty to you, swear to me by the LORD that you in turn will show loyalty to my family.

Provide me with a reliable sign <sup>13</sup>that you will spare the lives of my father and mother, my brothers and sisters, and all who belong to them, and save us from death.” <sup>14</sup>The men answered her, “Our persons are pledged for yours, even to death! If you do not disclose this mission of ours, we will show you true loyalty when the LORD gives us the land.”

<sup>15</sup>She let them down by a rope through the window—for her dwelling was at the outer side of the city wall and she lived in the actual wall. <sup>16</sup>She said to them, “Make for the hills, so that the pursuers may not come upon you. Stay there in hiding three days, until the pursuers return; then go your way.”

<sup>17</sup>But the men warned her, “We will be released from this oath which you have made us take <sup>18</sup>[unless,] when we invade the country, you tie this length of crimson cord to the window through which you let us down. Bring your father, your mother, your brothers, and all your family together in your house; <sup>19</sup>and if anyone ventures outside the doors of your house, his blood will be on his head, and we shall be clear. But if a hand is laid on anyone who remains in the house with you, his blood shall be on our heads. <sup>20</sup>And if you disclose this mission of ours, we shall likewise be released from the oath which you made us take.” <sup>21</sup>She replied, “Let it be as you say.”

She sent them on their way, and they left; and she tied the crimson cord to the window.

<sup>22</sup>They went straight to the hills and stayed there three days, until the pursuers turned back. And so the pursuers, searching all along the road, did not find them.

<sup>23</sup>Then the two men came down again from the hills and crossed over. They came to Joshua son of Nun and reported to him all that had happened to them. <sup>24</sup>They said to Joshua, “The LORD has delivered the whole land into our power; in fact, all the inhabitants of the land are quaking before us.”

## 6

<sup>21</sup>They exterminated everything in the city with the sword: man and woman, young and old, ox and sheep and ass.

<sup>22</sup>But Joshua bade the two men who had spied out the land, “Go into the harlot’s house and bring out the woman and all that belong to her, as you swore to her.” <sup>23</sup>So the young spies went in and brought out Rahab, her father and her mother, her brothers and all that belonged to her—they brought out her whole family and left them outside the camp of Israel.

<sup>24</sup>They burned down the city and everything in it. But the silver and gold and the objects of copper and iron were deposited in the treasury of the House of the LORD. <sup>25</sup>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. For she had hidden the messengers that Joshua sent to spy out Jericho.

### PRETTY WOMAN

The account of the battle of Jericho comes shortly before this story in chapter 6, when the walls of the city come famously tumbling down. The archaeological excavations



at Jericho have not, as yet, yielded evidence to support the biblical account of the city's destruction. It seems that Jericho was deserted at the time of the Israelite conquest and probably had been abandoned more than four hundred years earlier. At most, a small settlement existed there, patched together from the salvageable ruins and probably ruled over by an insignificant king. However, in our story Jericho, the first city conquered by the Israelites, has enormous symbolic significance as proof of the guiding power of the Israelite God. Likewise, Rahab the Canaanite also has great symbolic importance; ultimately, she and her family will be adopted into the nation of Israel.

It's hard not to wonder how this harlot found her way into the narrative. Why would the honorable biblical editors choose to introduce a prostitute, the quintessential prototype of a depraved native, right at the beginning of the glorious story of the holy conquest?

The ancient rabbis clearly felt uncomfortable with the term "prostitute," and in early translations of the Bible into the vernacular Aramaic they referred to Rahab as a "supplier of provisions." When used in the feminine, and with a wink, the euphemism was understood by everyone. (When the Rahab text is taught today in Israeli elementary schools, Rahab is still called a supplier of provisions, but without the wink.)

Still, the problematic character of Rahab the hussy was nonetheless warmly embraced in the rabbinic literature because of her contribution to the Israelite victory. Her aiding and encouragement of the Israelite spies was a vote of confidence in God from a previously unenlightened foreigner. When she declared her faith in the Israelite deity, she transformed herself from the lowliest idolarter to the ideal proselyte, a fallen woman who has seen the light.

Liberated by Rahab’s complete moral makeover, in the midrash, the rabbinic folk literature, the sages really let loose in their discussion of the formerly licentious woman. First, they slam her: she became a harlot at age ten and worked until she was fifty years old (*Zevahim* 116b). She had an entrance to her establishment outside the walls for the convenience of her clients, which included thieves (*Pesikta Rabbati* p. 40:3) She had relations with every prince and ruler, and her talents were bought by everyone. Her name was a byword for lewdness (*b. Zevahim* 116b). Shhh . . . they even admit that simply to mention Rahab’s name was to risk having an involuntary seminal emission! (*b. Megillah* 15a).

After rollicking in the mud bath of Rahab’s earlier depravity, the sages clean her up very nicely. They note that the former lady of ill repute was one of the most beautiful women in the world (*Megillah* 15a). She was a model convert and even a kind of prophetess (*Deuteronomy Rabbah* 2:26–27). Two hundred of Rahab’s relatives survived the Jericho onslaught thanks to her, and her family and her descendants are the subject of in-depth discussion. She eventually married Joshua (don’t miss the movie, starring Richard Gere and Julia Roberts), and among her progeny were eight prophet/priests, including Jeremiah and Hulda (*Sifrei* on Numbers 78 et al.). The midrash notes that the Divine Spirit rested on Rahab when she stood up for Israel (*Ruth Rabbah* m1,1), and that rather than being called by God, she choose the faith of Israel by her own free will (*Exodus Rabbah* 27:2, p. 48b). Her transformation from harlot to shining moral example was complete.

**CHOOSE YOUR ENEMIES**

If Rahab experienced a religious epiphany, then it is easy to understand why she cooperated with the spies. However, if we attempt to deconstruct her as a real-life charac-

ter acting within the reality of her time and circumstances, then we have to wonder about her motives. Why would a local Canaanite woman sell out her people to an invading enemy? Why would she cut a deal to save her family, but no one else? Two hypotheses emerge.

News of the exploits of the Israelites and their God had reached Canaan by wandering nomads before the twelve tribes' arrival. As Rahab described it, the Canaanites were quaking in their boots just thinking about what would happen to them once the actual invasion began. Rahab may have coldly calculated that militarily, the locals had no chance against the Israelite army. She may have decided to help the spies after plainly considering the options and concluding, if you can't beat 'em, join 'em.

Another possible explanation for Rahab's betrayal of her own people may lie in the feudal nature of ancient Canaanite society. City-states like Jericho typically comprised two sectors: the royalty and the upper class, who owned all the land, and the peasantry, who worked it. We may assume that there was no love lost between the two. In fact, there was often deep animosity between the privileged class and the poor. When the invading Israelites appeared on the scene, the local Canaanites were forced to choose their loyalties. While the kings of the city-states naturally resisted the invaders, many of the people of the lower class may have opted to throw their lot in with the Israelites. It is certainly possible that Rahab, a woman who lived on the margins of society, felt she had nothing to lose by turning her back on the local aristocracy and joining forces with the foreign attackers.

**WE ARE FAMILY**

Yet other considerations quietly surface when we contemplate Rahab's social role. Let's remember that the Bible

was written from a male perspective, for a male audience; anything relating to sexual matters was to be understood from the male point of view. In ancient times prostitution was considered a necessary evil. The laws against fornication, or extramarital relations, applied mainly to married women, who were considered the exclusive sexual property of their husbands. Since the unmarried ladies who plied the trade profaned no man's honor, technically they weren't doing anything illegal. The professional gals enabled the men of ancient patriarchal society to jealously guard their women's chastity, and at the same time get a few thrills on the side whenever the need arose. References to prostitutes are scattered throughout the biblical text (Jephthah's mom was one [Judg.11:1]; Samson visited one in Gaza [Judg.16:1]), indicating that they were a tolerated part of the landscape, albeit strongly stigmatized. (In an echo of the biblical toleration of prostitution as a necessary evil, modern Israel has adopted a fairly lenient attitude toward women who choose to sell their bodies. Prostitution is not a criminal offense, but brothels, pimping, and advertising sexual services are all illegal.)

For a prostitute Rahab receives fairly positive treatment from the biblical author. While we know what she does for a living, we're given to understand that she is a smart, resourceful woman who acts coolly and confidently in a time of crisis. She knows where to hide the intruders, she lies artfully to the king, and she cunningly plans the spies' getaway. From the Israelite perspective, she's the classic whore with a heart of gold, and we're led to believe that beneath her coarse exterior lies one tough cookie.

Rahab's gumption notwithstanding, it's reasonable to assume that, like most women forced to sell their bodies, she did not choose to be a prostitute. The midrash mentions that Rahab went out into the streets at age ten. While

this is not a reliable historical source, it's reasonable to surmise that under any circumstances, Rahab most probably did not grow up in a loving, supportive family.

Modern research on women who practice the oldest profession in the world reveals that the overwhelming majority of young women who go into prostitution have been sexually, physically, and emotionally abused by family members. They flee the home environment with low self-esteem, a negative self-image, and a sense of deep isolation. Most of them have never experienced parental love or affection.

It seems highly unlikely that smart and sassy Rahab bore no scars from her troubled personal history. Yet when she named her conditions to the Israelite spies, she bargained not only for her own life but for the safety of all the members of her family—father and mother, brothers and sisters, and all who belonged to them. When we pause to consider what a damaged human being Rahab probably was, it's easier to understand her motivation for the betrayal of her fellow Canaanites. A woman who has been ostracized her whole life suddenly is presented with an opportunity to become the savior of her family. By joining forces with the Israelites, Rahab transformed herself from a despised, degraded woman into a heroine.

Indeed, the story of the conquest of Jericho relates that Rahab and her family were the only living creatures allowed to leave the city before the Israelites obliterated it. However, despite Rahab's important contribution to the victory, she and her Canaanite family were not warmly welcomed into the Israelite circle at first. Instead, they were left on the edge of the camp and treated like outsiders (Josh. 6:23). As they encountered the exclusionary treatment on the part of the Israelites, Rahab and her clan—we may assume—stuck to their guns. They explained, again

and again, the unshaking belief of their matriarch in the God of Israel and the role she played in the Israelite victory until, despite their pagan roots, within a short time they were assimilated into Israelite society (Josh. 6:25), and the story of Rahab the prostitute became part of the larger history of the people of Israel.