

RAHAB: THE WOMAN WHO FULFILLED THE WORD OF YHWH

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Most readers consider the book of Joshua to be a book about conquest, that is, the biblical writers' accounts of how the Israelites fought to regain their homeland.¹ Elsewhere I have argued that such an understanding misses the intent of the biblical writers.² Only four chapters (6, 8, 10, and 11) describe "conquest," while twenty chapters have other themes. War stories are part of the book of Joshua, but they make up only a small portion, and they have other purposes besides military ones. One of these stories involves a woman named Rahab. Some might see in her story a kind of auxiliary war account, because in it are mentioned two spies sent by Joshua to survey Cisjordan in preparation for war. I suggest that the story of Rahab has little to do with warfare or even spying. It remains focused on the same purposes as the rest of the book of Joshua.

The book was not written to provide a detailed or a complete explanation of what the Israelites did, but rather to describe what YHWH did. It was the biblical writers' plan to demonstrate that YHWH was the leading force that brought Israel into Canaan. The events, including the war stories and the story of Rahab, are confirmation of how YHWH acted on behalf of the Israelites, that is, the theme of the book of Joshua.

Rahab the Harlot

As far as nondivine characters are concerned, Rahab's place in the book is second only to that of Joshua himself.³ Caleb, a hero once paired with Joshua (Num 13-14), may be credited with more recorded speech than Rahab, but her role is pivotal to the larger Israelite effort and setting. Thus, Rahab's role in the Jericho story is one of the most significant events in which all Israel participated. Caleb has a role in the capture of Hebron, where he demonstrates his individual faith and effort in

¹I use the term "biblical writers" to mean whatever process brought the book of Joshua to its present Hebrew text.

²David Merling, "The Book of Joshua: Its Structure and Meaning," in *To Understand the Scriptures: Essays in Honor of William H. Shea*, ed. David Merling (Berrien Springs: Horn Museum/Institute of Archaeology, 1997), 7-28.

³Richard S. Hess, *Joshua: An Introduction and Commentary*, TOTC (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1996), 80, 81.

conquest.⁴ Rahab, however, speaks on behalf of all Canaanites. Caleb speaks for himself. No other individual in the book of Joshua comes close to having the distinct personality of Rahab.

If, as it was one time popular to suggest, this story is etiological in nature, the question is, What is there in this story that a later Israelite community would need to explain?⁵ The answer provided by the biblical writers is that Rahab was alive when this story was first recorded (Josh 6:25).⁶ Making this story etiological, then, suggests that it is historical and was written when Rahab was still living—a suggestion that may not please some.⁷

Rahab's story is found at the beginning of the Israelite saga in Canaan (Josh 2). While the Israelites were camped at Shittim, two nameless spies were sent by Joshua to reconnoiter Jericho and the surrounding territories. In my opinion, Shittim cannot now be confidently associated with any specific tell in Transjordan.⁸ Fortunately, we do not need to identify the site, because the name "Shittim" was intended by the biblical writers of the book of Joshua to be a general reference to a camping/staging area east of the Jordan, a synonym for the plains of Moab, and not a specific site. Wherever Shittim was located, it was far enough removed from Jericho and the travel lanes of Cisjordan for it to

⁴Caleb's story is found in Josh 14. Outside of this chapter, Caleb is not mentioned in the book of Joshua.

⁵Trent Butler provides a short summary of the etiological interpretation of this story, as first suggested by Wagner, but does not suggest this implication of such an interpretation (*Joshua*, WBC [Waco: Word, 1983], 28, 29), although Leonard J. Greenspoon does ("Rahab," in *ABD*, ed. David Noel Freedman [Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1992], 611).

⁶Butler, 152.

⁷Rahab (רַחַב) has the basic meaning of "wide" or "broad" (Francis Brown, *The New Brown, Driver, and Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* [Lafayette, IN: Associated Publishers and Authors, 1981], 932). What is interesting about this name is that no other hexatouachal character shares the name of Rahab. Except for its use in poetic or apocalyptic passages, it is not found at all in the OT outside of the book of Joshua (cf. Job 9:13; 26:12; Pss 87:4; 89:10; Isa 30:7; 51:9). Greenspoon, 611, suggests that Rahab may be a shortened form of a "theophoric" name. While this is possible, I find it more likely that if Rahab had a longer theophoric name, it would have been used, as was Rahab's occupation, to heighten the suspense in the story. I think it more likely her unusual name denotes historicity.

⁸Some have argued for specific sites to be associated with Shittim; see, e.g., Robert G. Boling and G. Ernest Wright, *Joshua: A New Translation with Notes and Commentary*, AB 6 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1984), 143, 144; N. Glueck, "Some Ancient Towns in the Plains of Moab," *BASOR* (1943): 7-26; J. M. Miller, "Moab and the Moabites," in *Studies in the Mesha Inscription and Moab*, ed. A. Dearman (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989), 27; Joel C. Slayton, "Shittim," in *ABD*, ed. David Noel Freedman (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1992), 5:1222-1223.

be necessary for Joshua to send the spies.⁹ In the hexateuch, Shittim is referred to only three times in two stories.¹⁰

The reason Shittim is mentioned in this story has nothing to do with its location and everything to do with the purposes of the biblical writers. It was at Shittim that the Israelites “played the harlot” with Moabite women, which eventually led to the death of 24,000 Israelites.¹¹ Once again the Israelites confront a harlot. Rahab is called a prostitute (זונה, Josh 2:2).¹² In what better way could the biblical writers create tension in this story than by first reminding the readers of the evil harlotries of Shittim through the use of this place name and then by introducing the main character as a *prostitute*, who interacts with two Israelite spies?¹³

The story is told as though the spies left the Israelite camp and went directly to Rahab’s house. There they sought lodging. Since the story demands that the two spies be strangers to Jericho and thus to Rahab, the connection between the spies and Rahab demands additional comment.

First, we must conclude that the spies stayed in her house precisely because she was a prostitute.¹⁴ There is nothing within Josh 2 that implies that

⁹This is an interesting anomaly in that the last time spies, one of whom was Joshua, were sent to see the promised land, they were sent because of the apparent faithlessness of the Israelites (Deut 1:21-22). So in this sense, the story is repeated. YHWH brings the Israelites to the borders of Canaan and once more spies enter the land (cf. Num 13 and 14 and the subsequent wilderness wanderings).

¹⁰Cf. Num 25:1; Josh 2:1; 3:1. Shittim is also mentioned in the apocalyptic passage of Joel 3:8 and in a recollection of the history at Peor in Mic 6:5. In this work, I use the term “hexateuch” in the restricted sense of literary continuity, since there should be no question that the books of Genesis through Joshua form a literary unit. For this reason I have placed the initial letter in the lowercase to make clear this distinction. The subjects of authorship and sources among and within these books are questions that fall outside the constraints of this paper.

¹¹Num 25:1, 9. All biblical quotations in this article are taken from the NASB.

¹²Cf. David J. A. Clines, *The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew*, vol. 3 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 122, 123.

¹³Tikva Frymer-Kensky, “Reading Rahab,” in *Tehillah le-Moshe: Biblical and Judaic Studies in Honor of Moshe Greenberg* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1997), 66; Butler seems to dismiss this story as narrative because “it contains no dramatic tension within it.” He follows Wagner and classifies the story as a “spy story” and a “literary report.” In my opinion, neither of these classifications gives full credit to the tension created by the name of Shittim and its literary relationship to the harlot heroine. While the two spies do have a role in this account, they are secondary players to Rahab and her speech. It is Rahab and her words that are the keys to understanding the reason for recounting the stories. In my opinion, this story is a classic narrative account. Butler’s statements are confusing, since he also makes the obvious connection between the Shittim mentioned here and in Num 25, as well as the “narrative tension” in this story (Butler, 29, 33).

¹⁴Phyllis A. Bird, “The Harlot as Heroine: Narrative Art and Social Presupposition in Three Old Testament Texts,” *Semeia* 46 (1989): 120, 121.

Rahab was a cult prostitute.¹⁵ Neither is there any hint within the story that implies she was working on behalf of a cultic center.¹⁶ On the contrary, it is to her home that the two spies went and where she hid them (Josh 2:1-2, 6). Jericho's king did not seek her at a temple to question her about her new clients, but said to her: "Bring out the men who have come to you, who have entered your house" (Josh 2:3).¹⁷ In other words, there was nothing religious about her activities that earned her the title "harlot." Rahab was an ordinary prostitute, i.e., one who sold sex for money.

The title "prostitute" contrasts Rahab, as a low-living non-Israelite, with Israelite women, who were commanded not to be prostitutes (Lev 19:29; Deut 23:18).¹⁸ Her profession also highlights her as part of the lower strata of society. Even in Mesopotamian society, which considered sexual license to be the natural, expected condition, prostitutes were placed on the same social level as sorcerers, lunatics, eccentrics, and demoniacs.¹⁹

Attempts to distance Rahab from harlotry undermine the literary intentions of the biblical writers.²⁰ That she was a harlot provides the initial drama in the story. On the other hand, nothing in this story implies that Rahab sold herself to the two spies.²¹ On the contrary, she is shown to be a woman of virtue, who gives allegiance to YHWH.²² To suppose she engaged in sex acts with the spies undermines the intentional literary twist in the story: an immoral woman giving allegiance to YHWH and becoming part of his chosen people. No Israelite, hearing the confessional affirmation of Rahab, would have supposed she had involved herself in immoral acts in the short time-frame of the story.

¹⁵Athalya Brenner, *The Israelite Woman: Social Role and Literary Type in Biblical Narrative* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1994), 78, 70; John D. Currid, *Ancient Egypt and the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997), 42; Elaine Adler Goodfriend, "Prostitution (OT)," in *ABD*, ed. David Noel Freedman (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1992), 505-510; Karel van der Toorn, "Prostitution (Cultic)," in *ABD*, ed. David Noel Freedman (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1992), 510-513.

¹⁶Van der Toorn, 510.

¹⁷Josh 2:3.

¹⁸Prostitution, however, was a part of biblical society (Gen 38; Lev 21:7, 14).

¹⁹Jean Bottéro, *Mesopotamia: Writing, Reasoning, and the Gods* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 197.

²⁰See, for instance, Chaim Herzog and Mordechai Gichon, *Battles of the Bible* (Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole, 1997), 45; D. J. Wiseman, "Rahab of Jericho," *TynBul* 14 (1964): 8-11.

²¹Contra Danna Nolan Fewell and David M. Gunn, *Gender, Power, and Promise: The Subject of the Bible's First Story* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1993), 117-118.

²²Hess, 83, 84.

The location of her house is in itself interesting. The text records that Rahab's house was part of the city's exterior wall. More precisely, it notes her house was sitting on top of the wall (Josh 2:15). According to J. Bottéro, Mesopotamian prostitutes resided on the walls of the city.²³ If the gate of a city was the place where business and social meetings took place,²⁴ the walls of the city, away from the commercial center, can be seen to be removed from a city's life. As Bottéro comments about Mesopotamian prostitutes, they were "pushed into the fringes of the social space."²⁵ Bottéro also notes that while the homes of prostitutes were in the most remote (i.e., inferior) areas of the city, they plied their trade in the setting of public taverns, which also served as inns.²⁶ Since ancient city builders built their approach road to the city parallel to the city wall,²⁷ the proximity of wall and road would make a house on the wall an ideal vantage point for exhibiting wares to arriving sojourners.

If it is legitimate to make societal parallels between the Canaanites and Mesopotamians, one could suggest that Rahab's house in Jericho might have served similar multiple purposes (lodging, food, drink, and sexual favors), given the small size of the Jericho community.²⁸ This would then explain how the Israelite spies knew where to find lodging and why they went there. Rahab's house would have been the expected place of lodging (and comfort) for strangers.²⁹ In the interaction between Jericho's king and herself, Rahab implies that the spies came to her house for comfort, that is, for food and sexual favors. She tells the king that they stayed only until dark, then left the city (Josh 2:5). We are led to believe that the spies had only been in Jericho for the afternoon. The king said they have come here "tonight," and Rahab replied that the spies left the city at dark (cf. Josh 2:2, 5). In any case, they did leave the city that night, only over the wall with the help of Rahab (Josh 2:15). Rahab extracted the promise from the spies that she and her family would be saved because of her efforts to save them. She showed them "grace," and they were asked to give the same to her.³⁰ Rahab was instructed to tie a

²³Bottéro, 197.

²⁴Cf. Ruth 4.

²⁵Bottéro, 194.

²⁶Ibid.

²⁷With the road paralleling city walls, the defenders on the walls had a clear view of and access to their enemies as they approached the city's gates.

²⁸Assuming that Tell es-Sultan's one acre represents ancient Jericho.

²⁹Bird, 128.

³⁰What I have translated "grace" is the Hebrew word חסד. Since חסד is not common in stories of the Israelite's journey from Egypt to Canaan, one wonders if there is not a hint of

scarlet cord on the window of her house at the place where she let them down from the wall as a reminder of this agreement (Josh 2:12-21).³¹

From the short time the spies were in the city, they could not have learned much more about Jericho's physical environs than what they knew before their visit. What they did learn, or at least what they reported to Joshua, was nothing about the city and everything about the citizens.

Rahab's Message

According to the biblical writer, the spies reported to Joshua that "surely the Lord has given all the land into our hands, and all the inhabitants of the land, moreover, have melted away before us" (Josh 2:24). This is all the text states. It says nothing about Jericho's defenses or any other matter. Their message is strange, since the spies are reported to have spent three days hiding from the very people that they say had melted away in fear of them (Josh 2:22). This suggests that we must look beyond the spies' words to the implications of their message.

What the spies actually reported to Joshua was an abbreviated version of "Rahab's acclamation."³² Rahab had said:

I know that the Lord has given you the land, and that the terror of you has fallen on us, and that all the inhabitants of the land have melted away before you. For we have heard how the Lord dried up the water of the Red Sea before you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to the two kings of the Amorites who were beyond the Jordan, to Sihon and Og, whom you utterly destroyed. And when we heard it, our hearts melted and no courage remained in any man any longer because of you; for the Lord your God, He is God in heaven above and on earth beneath (Josh 2:9-11).

Rahab's words are stated twice: once directly by her and once by the spies. We can only assume by this repetition that Rahab's words are

divine forgiveness intended in the use of this word in this situation. Clearly reciprocity of רָחַם is made between Rahab and the spies; cf. H. J. Zobel, "רָחַם," in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, ed. G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 47. A suggestion of forgiveness seems to provide, if not a rationale for her acceptance into the Israelite family, at least a connection with covenant, mercy, and forgiveness; cf. Exod 20:6; 34:6, 7; Num 14:14, 10; Deut 5:10. I question whether such a clear distinction can be made between "secular use" and "religious use" of רָחַם, as Zobel, 46, 54, makes, especially in this case, where the spies are in effect acting for Joshua and, thus, YHWH himself. This agreement affects all of Israel. These spies are speaking on behalf of YHWH.

³¹One wonders if this "scarlet cord," although only mentioned here in the OT—and I know of no parallel within the ancient Near East—was not a common advertisement for this type of dwelling (e.g., "red-light district"). The cord would be tied to the house so that visitors to the city would know where to find lodging, food, and comfort; cf. Hess, 94.

³²Hess, 88, notes that "this represents one of the longest uninterrupted statements by a woman in a biblical narrative."

central to her role in the Jericho story and the key to her place in the book of Joshua. As such, the role of Rahab in Josh 2 and 6 is more important to the aims of biblical writers than most commentators have realized. Many commentators have focused on her salvation of the spies and of her own family; however, her real usefulness to the biblical writers is elsewhere. Her words are important because they report the fulfillment of the promises and declaration of YHWH.³³ In the words of this prostitute, the biblical writers found evidence that what YHWH said had come true. As with Tikva Frymer-Kensky, I believe these words in Josh 2:9-11 are the focus of the Rahab story.³⁴

Based on her acclamation, Rahab serves as evidence that even those who were outside of the Israelite family were aware that the power of YHWH was with the Israelites and that the land had been given to them. In Chart 1, I have placed in parallel the words of Rahab from "Rahab's acclamation" (Josh 2:9-11) with statements made by YHWH. In these parallels, the biblical writers appear to be showing how the word of YHWH was being fulfilled.

Chart 1 The Words of Rahab and the Words of YHWH	
Rahab	1a "I know God has given you this land" (Josh 2:9a)
YHWH	1b "Arise, cross this Jordan, you and all this people, to the land which I am giving to them, to the sons of Israel" (Josh 1:2)
Rahab	2a "The terror (אִימָה) of you has fallen on us" (Josh 2:9b)
YHWH	2b "I will send my terror (אִימָה) ahead of you, and throw into confusion all the people" (Exod 23:27)
Rahab	3a "All the inhabitants of the land have melted (מָוָה) away before you" (Josh 2:9c)
YHWH	3b "All the inhabitants of Canaan have melted (מָוָה) away" (Exod 15:15c)

³³Some of the parallels I have provided are spoken by Moses instead of directly by YHWH, but I have assumed that the biblical writers equated the pronouncements of Moses with those of YHWH (e.g., Exod 4:10-12, 15, 16). Joshua later took Moses' place (Josh 1:5).

³⁴Frymer-Kensky, 61.

Rahab	4a The Red Sea: "For we have heard how the Lord dried up the water of the Red Sea before you when you came out of Egypt" Sihon and Og: "And what you did to the two kings of the Amorites who were beyond the Jordan, to Sihon and Og whom you utterly destroyed" (Josh 2:10)
YHWH	4b The Red Sea: "But the sons of Israel walked on dry land through the midst of the sea and the waters were like a wall to them on their right hand and on their left. And when Israel saw the great power which the Lord had used against the Egyptians, the people feared the Lord, and they believed in the Lord and in His servant Moses" (Exod 14:29, 31) Sihon and Og: "And the Lord will do to them (Canaanites) just as He did to Sihon and Og the kings of the Amorites, and to their land when He destroyed them" (Deut 31:4)
Rahab	5a "And when we heard it, our hearts melted (מָצַח) " (Josh 2:11)
—	5b "Our brethren have made our hearts melt (מָצַח), saying, 'The people are bigger and taller than we; the cities are large and fortified to heaven'" (Deut 1:28)
Rahab	6a "YHWH is God in heaven above and earth beneath" (Josh 2:11)
YHWH	6b "The Lord, He is God in heaven above and on the earth below" (Deut 4:39)

Rahab's initial phrase, "I know God has given you this land" (Josh 2:9a), can be seen as the fulfillment of what YHWH said to Joshua: "Arise, cross this Jordan, you and all this people, to the land which I am giving to the sons of Israel (Josh 1:2).

Rahab also reported that the "terror" (אִימָה) of the Israelites had fallen on the Canaanites (2:9b). Her statement is written as though it were a direct fulfillment of Exod 23:27, where YHWH promised: "I will send my terror (אִימָה) ahead of you, and throw into confusion all the people." In the hexateuch, אִימָה ("terror") is used only five times, with Exod 23:27 and Rahab's use of the word accounting for two of those five times.³⁵ The rareness of the word supports the connection between these two passages, especially since Rahab not only uses the same word, but also repeats the

³⁵In the OT, this word is used only seventeen times: Gen 15:12; Exod 15:16; Exod 23:27; Deut 32:25; Josh 2:9; Ezra 3:3; Job 9:34; 13:21; 20:25; 33:7; 39:20; 41:6; Pss 55:5; 88:16; Prov 20:2; Isa 33:18; Jer 50:38.

entire message of Exod 23:27. The setting of the Exod 23:27 promise is a pericope describing YHWH's promise to conquer the promised land on behalf of the Israelites (Exod 23:20-31). Rahab, then, testifies that this promise has come to pass.

Rahab also says that the "inhabitants of the land have melted" (מָוָה; Josh 2:9c). The use of מָוָה ("melted") implies warfare.³⁶ Given the close context, the next verse concerning the Red Sea experience, the connection between Rahab's words and Exod 15:14-16a (which is part of the "Song of Moses and Israel") is evident (Exod 23:27). Exodus 15:14-16a reads: "The peoples have heard, they tremble; Anguish has gripped the inhabitants of Philistia, Then the chiefs of Edom were dismayed; the leaders of Moab, trembling grips them; *all the inhabitants of Canaan have melted* (מָוָה) *away*; terror and dread fall upon them" (emphasis supplied).

Exodus 15:15 shares with Josh 2:9 the Hebrew word מָוָה ("melted"). The Hebrew word used by Rahab in Josh 2:11, where she speaks of the inhabitants as "melted," is a different word (מָסַח) than is used in Exod 15:15 and Josh 2:9.³⁷ The word מָוָה ("melted") is used only three times in the hexateuch: Exod 15:15, and Josh 2:9 and 24. The connection between the words of Rahab and the promises of YHWH is again clearly implied.

The fourth parallel between Rahab's words and the Lord's has two main divisions: her reference to the Red Sea and the two defeated Transjordanian Amorite kings, Sihon and Og (Josh 2:10). Rahab's mention of Sihon and Og is an exact fulfillment of what was predicted. In Deut 31:3-4, Moses says that what happened to Sihon and Og is going to happen to those living in Canaan. Rahab's acknowledgment of these events highlights Moses' promise. Rahab's reference to the Red Sea (Josh 2:9c) foreshadows a statement of Joshua and one previously made by Moses, stating that the reason for the Red Sea and the Jordan River crossings was to instill in "all the peoples of the earth" knowledge that YHWH is with the Israelites (Josh 4:23-24; cf. Exod 15:14-18). The words of Rahab bridge those of Moses and Joshua, thus serving to demonstrate that what the leaders of YHWH predicted had come to pass.

Rahab's description of their hearts as "melted" (Josh 2:11; Heb. מָסַח) is a metaphor, literally fulfilled by the manna when it "melted" (Exod 16:21). In this case, what happened or could happen to the Israelites has now happened to the Canaanites (Deut 1:28; 20:8). The Canaanites are not able to stand before the Israelites because their hearts have melted (Deut 1:28; Josh 5:1; cf. 2: 25). Dennis J. McCarthy has seen the use of this word and those who

³⁶Dennis J. McCarthy, "Some Holy War Vocabulary in Joshua 2," *CBQ* 33 (1971): 230.

³⁷מָוָה will be discussed below.

"melt" as a kind of theophanic experience.³⁸ The presence and power of YHWH are just too much for the Canaanite inhabitants. Rahab's description again fulfills the prophecy of earlier times (Deut 2:24, 25).

One of the more striking parallels between the words of YHWH and those of Rahab is her statement that "YHWH is God in heaven above and earth beneath" (Josh 2:11). This is a direct quotation of Deut 4:39 and a definite parallel with the words of Moses (Deut 4:39).³⁹ The context of Deut 4:39 includes a mention of the Exodus (Deut 4:37) and the nations (גוֹיִם), which were driven out of Canaan (Deut 4:38). The recognition of the supremacy of YHWH is spoken first by Moses, then repeated by Rahab.

Thus, Rahab serves to pronounce the fulfillment of earlier promises to the Israelites. What has been promised has begun to be fulfilled. Rahab's speech is confirmation that YHWH's promises are true.

Similarities between the books of Joshua and Deuteronomy have been catalogued many times. Yet when parallels are sought with Rahab's words, it seems her words were the fulfillment of not only the Deuteronomist's statements, but also those of the Exodus. The Rahab story seems to be more a completion of the Exodus-Wilderness-Wandering story than a Deuteronomistic one. Frymer-Kensky has written: "The Rahab story is a masterpiece of allusive writing. It is set in the first five chapters of the book of Joshua, which contain numerous pentateuchal allusions designed to have readers keep in mind the activities of Moses as they read Joshua."⁴⁰ In Josh 1:8, YHWH says to Joshua: "This book of the law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it." The "book of the law" is without doubt intended to especially signify the book of Deuteronomy, but giving Rahab's words full weight should include the entire Pentateuch.⁴¹

Rahab does not simply repeat the words of YHWH. Rather, her acclamation serves as confirmation of YHWH's promises. K. M. Campbell has suggested that Rahab's words reflect covenant form.⁴² While some aspects of a covenant relationship are exhibited within the dialogue, I believe that Campbell has overdrawn the similarities.

³⁸McCarthy, 230.

³⁹"Know therefore today and take it to your heart, that the Lord, He is God in heaven above and on the earth below; there is no other" (Deut 4:39).

⁴⁰Frymer-Kensky, 58.

⁴¹This conclusion is contrary to Butler, 8-9, and Hess, 72-73, among others.

⁴²K. M. Campbell, "Rahab's Covenant: A Short Note on Joshua 2:9-21," *VT* 22 (1972): 243-244.

As far as her words are concerned, Rahab's speech to the spies is composed in a chiasmic structure (Chart 2).⁴³ In this chiasm, the first and last statements have the same meaning (1a and 1b). In other words, to say that "YHWH has given you the land" is to admit that it rightfully belongs to him.

Chart 2

Rahab's Speech: A Chiasmic Structure

1a "I know the Lord has given you the land" (Josh 2:9a)

2a "The terror of you has fallen on us, and that all the inhabitants of the land have melted away before you" (Josh 2:9b)

3 "We have heard how the Lord dried up the water of the Red Sea before you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to the two kings of the Amorites who were beyond the Jordan, to Sihon and Og, whom you utterly destroyed" (Josh 2:10)

2b "And when we heard it, our hearts melted and no courage remained in any man any longer because of you" (Josh 2:11a)

1b "For the Lord your God, He is God in heaven above and on earth beneath" (Josh 2:11b)

I would identify this chiasm as a "mirror chiasmic order," where the first and the last, and the second and fourth phrases are paired.⁴⁴ Such a structure would suggest that the center of this speech (3) would be the most significant message or most important idea offered by Rahab. The second statement in this chiasm is also paralleled with the next-to-the-last sentence (2a and 2b). In both cases, Rahab says that the strength of the Canaanite heart has melted before the Israelites.

Rahab states: "We have heard how the Lord dried up the water of the Red Sea before you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to the two kings of the Amorites who were beyond the Jordan, to Sihon and Og, whom you utterly destroyed" (Josh 2:10). These words foreshadow the two stories that follow Rahab's encounter with the spies—the crossing of the Jordan and the destruction of Jericho. When the Israelites are said to have crossed the Jordan, Josh 5:1 reports: "Now it came about when all the kings of the Amorites who were beyond the Jordan to the west, and all the kings of the Canaanites who were by the sea, heard how the

⁴³Hess, 89-90, also notes the chiasmic nature of Rahab's speech, but he arranges the structure somewhat differently and does not emphasize the significance of the central section as I do.

⁴⁴M. O'Connor, *Hebrew Verse Structure* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1980), 393.

Lord had dried up the waters of the Jordan before the sons of Israel until they had crossed, that their hearts melted, and there was no spirit in them any longer, because of the sons of Israel.”

This statement is almost identical to Rahab's statement to the spies, except she referred to the Red Sea crossing as causing their hearts to “melt.” In both cases, the same Hebrew word for “melt” (צָמַד) is used. I believe there is an intentional literary connection between these two events (the drying up of the Red Sea and the drying up of the Jordan River) and the statements of Rahab and Joshua.

Sihon and Og (Num 21) were absolutely defeated. No Israelite losses are mentioned in their stories, and their defeat became the watchword of the biblical writers. In this case, Rahab's words about Sihon and Og became a foreshadowing of what would happen at Jericho. Rahab's recollection of the Red Sea crossing and the defeat of Sihon and Og, then, is portentous of two coming events: the Jordan crossing and the defeat of Jericho. Thus, I believe Rahab's words present a chiasmic structure, of which the role is both fulfillment and prediction. The predictive element is positioned in the most important place of her speech, at the center of the chiasm.

Rahab's words, then, become diagnostic for all of Canaan. On one hand, from a literary point of view, it is her words that show her to be an insightful disciple of YHWH. She and her family are allowed to live, even though allowing her to live ignores the stipulations of Deut 20:10-20.⁴⁵

Rahab's Fellow Confessors: The Gibeonites

While this article is focused on Rahab, the epic of the Gibeonites (Josh 9) serves a similar, albeit expanded, role of confirmation of YHWH's words. The Gibeonites respond similarly to Rahab, assuming that their only hope was to make a treaty with the Israelites. This conclusion was based apparently on what happened to Ai and Jericho (Josh 9:3) and in Egypt and Transjordan (Josh 9:9,10). The Gibeonites approached the Israelites at Gilgal and sued for peace, falsely telling the Israelites that they were from a distant country (Josh 9; cf. Deut 20:10-15). The biblical writers assumed that the Gibeonites knew that the Israelites were not supposed to make peace treaties with the inhabitants of Canaan, thus the ruse. This account, like the story of Rahab, serves the biblical writers as evidence that the people of Canaan were terrified of the Israelites and knew their only hope was in surrender. The Gibeonites were so terrified that they pretended to be inhabitants of a distant land. When Joshua demanded that

⁴⁵Boling, 150-151, has noted the problem of trying to explain the exception of Rahab and her family to the traditional rules of *ḥtm*. On the other hand, Rahab provides evidence of the fear possessed by those opposed to the Israelites.

they explain why they had lied about their identity, they replied: "Because it was certainly told your servants the Lord your God had commanded His servant Moses to give you all the land and to destroy all the inhabitants of the land before you, therefore we feared greatly for our lives because of you, and have done this thing" (Josh 9:24).

The biblical writers assumed that the Canaanite inhabitants had access to, or at least an understanding of, the accounts recorded in Exodus and Deuteronomy. This may also be why the name "Gibeonite" is so prominent in this story. Deut 20:16-17 reads: "Only in the cities of these people that the Lord your God is giving you as an inheritance, you shall not leave alive anything that breathes. But you shall utterly destroy them, the Hittite, and the Amorite, the Canaanite and the Perizzite, the Hivite and the Jebusite, as the Lord your God has commanded you."

The absence of the name "Gibeonite" from this list is significant since nothing is said in the book of Joshua about conquering the Hittites, Perizzites, or the Hivites. In other words, the picture one might have gained by reading Deut 20:16-17 is that the Israelites would attack and conquer each of these groups in turn, which is not the way the biblical writers present the story. The Gibeonites are not mentioned in the Pentateuchal stories, being introduced to the reader in the book of Joshua, but they are more prominent than all other ethnic groups mentioned in the book.

In summary, the words of the Gibeonites, then, reflect the words uttered by YHWH in Josh 1:2, 5 and also mirror Rahab's words. The difference between Rahab and the Gibeonites is the time of reference. Rahab testifies before Jericho is conquered, while the Gibeonites confirm the point of the biblical writers after that event. Additionally, they differ in terms of where they place their faith and loyalty. Rahab's lie to the king of Jericho evinces her trust in and loyalty to the God of Israel. The Gibeonites' lie to the leaders of Israel shows their self-centered distrust of Israel's God.

Rahab's Elevation

The words and actions of Rahab move her from the ash heap, as it were, to sit with princes (Ps 113:7, 8). Rahab shows herself to be more than a fearful Canaanite, looking to find life in the face of death. In her words, she claims YHWH as her God. She is not a foreign city to be destroyed, but an alien who has treated the spies fairly and deserves just treatment (Deut 24:14, 17). Beyond that, her words mark her as a convert to YHWH, and she is allowed to live.⁴⁶ Rahab's story is memorably unique and worth repeating; or as Phillis Bird suggests, it is a story that depends on a "reversal of expectations." Who would expect a "shrewd and calculating operator" like a prostitute to save the

⁴⁶Fewell and Gunn, 119.

spies and declare her allegiance to YHWH? But she does. "The harlot understands what the king of the city does not—that Israelite victory is imminent and inevitable."⁴⁷

This element of irony enhances the impact of the story.⁴⁸ Rahab was the opposite of the spiritual prostitute, for which Israel and Judah were eventually denounced.⁴⁹ The biblical writers call Rahab a prostitute, and she was. On the other hand, she is presented as wise and spiritually on a par with the Israelites, of whom she became a part.⁵⁰

⁴⁷Bird, 130, 131.

⁴⁸Brenner, 80.

⁴⁹Cf. Ezek 23.

⁵⁰Josh 6:25; cf. Matt 1:5.