

The Hebrew Corner

In the pages of the Tanach, it is clear that God establishes a close relationship with the people of Israel. In fact, in the book of Genesis, there is much more scripture devoted to the founding of the tribes of Israel (39 chapters) than there is to the creation of the earth and all animal and plant life (1 chapter). However, the Tanach also reveals that God's favor does not exclusively lie with the descendants of Israel, as we will discuss in this session.

Prior to bringing the Israelites that had been wandering in the wilderness into the land of Canaan, Joshua sent two men into Jericho to search out the land, as described in Joshua 2:1-6:

“And Joshua the son of Nun sent out of Shittim two men to spy secretly, saying, Go view the land, even Jericho. And they went, and came into an harlot's house, named Rahab, and lodged there. And it was told the king of Jericho, saying, Behold, there came men in hither to night of the children of Israel to search out the country. And the king of Jericho sent unto Rahab, saying, Bring forth the men that are come to thee, which are entered into thine house: for they be come to search out all the country. And the woman took the two men, and hid them, and said thus, There came men unto me, but I wist not whence they were: And it came to pass about the time of shutting of the gate, when it was dark, that the men went out: whither the men went I wot not: pursue after them quickly; for ye shall overtake them. But she had brought them up to the roof of the house, and hid them with the stalks of flax, which she had laid in order upon the roof.”

Harlot in Hebrew is zona (זונה, zoh-NAH). Rachab reveals what her purpose was in protecting these men, as the story continues (Joshua 2:9-13):

“And she said unto the men, I know that the LORD hath given you the land, and that your terror is fallen upon us, and that all the inhabitants of the land faint because of you. For we have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red sea for you, when ye came out of Egypt; and what ye did unto the two kings of the Amorites, that were on the other side Jordan, Sihon and Og, whom ye utterly destroyed. And as soon as we had heard these things, our hearts did melt, neither did there remain any more courage in any man, because of you: for the LORD your God, he is God in heaven above, and in earth beneath. Now therefore, I pray you, swear unto me by the LORD, since I have shewed you kindness, that ye will also shew kindness unto my father's house, and give me a true token: And that ye will save alive my father, and my mother, and my brethren, and my sisters, and all that they have, and deliver our lives from death.”

She was acting to preserve herself and her family, as she recognized that God was on the side of the people of Israel, and that she needed to make an agreement with them. The spies then took an oath to protect Rachab and her family (Joshua 2:14):

“And the men answered her, Our life for yours, if ye utter not this our business. And it shall be, when the LORD hath given us the land, that we will deal kindly and truly with thee.”

The spies advised her to place a line of scarlet thread in the window of her home, and that all her family should remain inside the home.

After Joshua and the Israelites had crossed the Jordan River and defeated Jericho, they destroyed the people and animals of the city, but kept their oath and spared Rachab and her family (Joshua 6:20-25):

“So the people shouted when the priests blew with the trumpets: and it came to pass, when the people heard the sound of the trumpet, and the people shouted with a great shout, that the wall fell down flat, so that the people went up into the city, every man straight before him, and they took the city. And they utterly destroyed all that was in the city, both man and woman, young and old, and ox, and sheep, and ass, with the edge of the sword. But Joshua had said unto the two men that had spied out the country, Go into the harlot's house, and bring out thence the woman, and all that she hath, as ye sware unto her. And the young men that were spies went in, and brought out Rahab, and her father, and her mother, and her brethren, and all that she had; and they brought out all her kindred, and left them without the camp of Israel. And they burnt the city with fire, and all that was therein: only the silver, and the gold, and the vessels of brass and of iron, they put into the treasury of the house of the LORD. And Joshua saved Rahab the harlot alive, and her father's household, and all that she had; and she dwelleth in Israel even unto this day; because she hid the messengers, which Joshua sent to spy out Jericho.”

This passage reveals to us that God favored Rachab because of the oath that was made by the two spies. It is also important to note, however, that Rachab and her family were one of the few families of the Canaanites that survived the conquest of the land of Canaan by Joshua and the Israelites. We know from Numbers 1:7 that Nahshon the son of Amminadab was one of the princes of the tribe of Judah

chosen to conduct the first census of his tribe. Since only two men, Joshua and Caleb, were allowed to enter into the land of Canaan from those who were counted in this census, it is evident that Nahshon did not enter into the land of Canaan with Joshua, but his son Salmon did. Salmon appears in the genealogy of Christ in Matthew 1:4-5, where it is recorded that he fathered Boaz by Rachab. Therefore from the above considerations, it is highly probable that this is the same Rachab who protected the spies.. So God did even more to bless Rachab and her family than the oath required, allowing her to be in the direct blood line of Yeshua. As the book of Ruth attests, she was also the mother-in-law of Ruth the Moabitess who married Boaz. So we see that in the blood line of Yeshua was a Canaanite and a Moabite.

In 2 Kings we are given an account of a miraculous healing through the prophet Elisha (2 Kings 5:1-15):

“Now Naaman, captain of the host of the king of Syria, was a great man with his master, and honourable, because by him the LORD had given deliverance unto Syria: he was also a mighty man in valour, but he was a leper. And the Syrians had gone out by companies, and had brought away captive out of the land of Israel a little maid; and she waited on Naaman's wife. And she said unto her mistress, Would God my lord were with the prophet that is in Samaria! for he would recover him of his leprosy. And one went in, and told his lord, saying, Thus and thus said the maid that is of the land of Israel. And the king of Syria said, Go to, go, and I will send a letter unto the king of Israel. And he departed, and took with him ten talents of silver, and six thousand pieces of gold, and ten changes of raiment. And he brought the letter to the king of Israel, saying, Now when this letter

is come unto thee, behold, I have therewith sent Naaman my servant to thee, that thou mayest recover him of his leprosy. And it came to pass, when the king of Israel had read the letter, that he rent his clothes, and said, Am I God, to kill and to make alive, that this man doth send unto me to recover a man of his leprosy? wherefore consider, I pray you, and see how he seeketh a quarrel against me. And it was so, when Elisha the man of God had heard that the king of Israel had rent his clothes, that he sent to the king, saying, Wherefore hast thou rent thy clothes? let him come now to me, and he shall know that there is a prophet in Israel. So Naaman came with his horses and with his chariot, and stood at the door of the house of Elisha. And Elisha sent a messenger unto him, saying, Go and wash in Jordan seven times, and thy flesh shall come again to thee, and thou shalt be clean. But Naaman was wroth, and went away, and said, Behold, I thought, He will surely come out to me, and stand, and call on the name of the LORD his God, and strike his hand over the place, and recover the leper. Are not Abana and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? may I not wash in them, and be clean? So he turned and went away in a rage. And his servants came near, and spake unto him, and said, My father, if the prophet had bid thee do some great thing, wouldest thou not have done it? how much rather then, when he saith to thee, Wash, and be clean? Then went he down, and dipped himself seven times in Jordan, according to the saying of the man of God: and his flesh came again like unto the flesh of a little child, and he was clean. And he returned to the man of God, he and all his company, and came, and stood before him: and he said, Behold, now I know that there is no God in all the earth, but in Israel: now therefore, I pray thee, take a blessing of thy servant.”

Leper in Hebrew is tsara (צָרַע, tsah-RAH). Naaman had acted as God's agent in bringing an unspecified deliverance to Syria, and now God was showing favor to him in turn. So we see that God's blessings are not exclusively for the descendants of Israel, but available to all. In fact, Yeshua refers to this episode in the following passage (Luke 4:27):

“And many lepers were in Israel in the time of Eliseus the prophet; and none of them was cleansed, saving Naaman the Syrian.”

Perhaps the greatest display of God's love and care for people outside of Israel is found in the book of Jonah. Jonah reluctantly gave a message of God's impending judgment to the city of Nineveh, who were known for the cruel treatment of the people that they conquered. After Jonah delivered the message, the following took place (Jonah 3:5-10):

“So the people of Nineveh believed God, and proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them even to the least of them. For word came unto the king of Nineveh, and he arose from his throne, and he laid his robe from him, and covered him with sackcloth, and sat in ashes. And he caused it to be proclaimed and published through Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles, saying, Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste any thing: let them not feed, nor drink water: But let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and cry mightily unto God: yea, let them turn every one from his evil way, and from the violence that is in their hands. Who can tell if God will turn and repent, and turn away from his fierce anger, that we perish not? And God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God repented of the evil, that he

had said that he would do unto them; and he did it not.”

The Ninevites, including their king, believed God, repented of their wicked acts, put on sackcloth, and fasted. Fast in Hebrew is tsom (צום, TSOHM). God wanted to give this people a change to turn to him, because he is a God of mercy, and there were more than 120,000 people that were in danger of perishing in the judgment.

God loves you so much that he sacrificed his son for you, regardless of your nationality or race, and he wants you to accept that sacrifice and turn to him. May you reach out now, if you have not already done this, and turn your life to Yeshua.

Have a blessed month, and much shalom to you.