

**Exploring Rahab in Hebrews 11:31 as an Example of Faith that Crosses
Religious-Cultural Boundaries: A Personal Journey**

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Abstract

This thesis seeks to explore Hebrews 11:31 where it mentions Rahab the harlot as an example of faith. It is interesting that throughout Hebrews 11 which discusses examples of faith, that Rahab is the only non-Israelite who is mentioned explicitly there. Therefore, I will be using socio-rhetorical criticism to exegete Hebrews 11:31 in order to identify the author's purpose in mentioning Rahab within Hebrews 11. The purpose of this is to seek whether Rahab portrays a particular type of faith that considers important her own personal ethnic and cultural background. The result of the study would evoke some understanding of how to consider foreigners within the EFKS.

Declaration

Declaration of authorship of this thesis/research paper

I, _____ (Manase Manase)

hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge, it contains no material previously published or written by another person nor material which to a substantial extent has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma at Malua Theological College or any other educational institution, except where due acknowledgement is made in the thesis. Any contribution made to the research by colleagues with whom I have worked at Malua Theological College or elsewhere during my candidature is fully acknowledged.

Dedication

In memory of my loving grandmother who sadly passed away in my first few weeks as a student in Malua, Jane Sieni Sasagi Neemia;

also, my uncle, the late Reverend Masitone Sasagi, and also the late Reverend Kolia Tovio FS.

To my mother and father, Taliilagi Fagalepule and Moti Faalai Manase,

To my brothers and sisters and to all my family and friends,

To my spiritual parents here in Malua, Rev. Dr. Imoamaua and Amelia Setefano,

And not forgetting also Rev. Visio and Angharad Saga,

To my spiritual parents Rev. Tenise and Tepora Lokeni and also my church, EFKS Hampton Park,

Thank you all for your never-ending support and for believing in me.

Last but not least, to my beautiful wife Sarah Louise Manase and our two boys Zane Masitone and Elijah Faalai. Thank you for your sacrifices, your unparalleled patience with me, and for pushing through all the obstacles we have had to endure these past four years. Not only have you been my rock, but you were also the inspiration behind this paper.

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Faafetai, faafetai tele!

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INTRODUCTION

Faith is simply to believe in God. Faith motivates actions and it is expressed and lived out according to one's social and cultural situation. In other words, an individual's faith takes shape rather uniquely depending on one's own social and cultural context or realities. In my personal situation, my faith in God finds its roots in my Samoan household context whereby I have been disciplined and taught early at a young age about respecting parents and elders. This is a major emphasis in the Samoan culture, as in other cultures, whereby respect and reverence towards elders marks the signs of a person who has been raised well. Naturally, this crosses over into our religious lives, in the sense that we approach God in the same manner – with respect and reverence – as the one who is more superior than I, and therefore honouring that sacred space between creator and created accordingly. Furthermore, I am a New Zealander with Samoan heritage.

This is how my faith has taken shape, through my cultural roots and social upbringing in a Samoan household within New Zealand. Similarly, I would contend that other individuals also find the roots of their faith through their own unique cultural backgrounds and social upbringing.¹ This understanding of faith is the key point of the purpose of this study. Given that each individual believer has his/her own unique way of understanding faith in God and how to express this faith, I wish to explore biblical and spiritual guidance concerning the situation whereby an individual has found

¹ Judith E. Mckinlay in her article 'Rahab: a Hero/ine?' makes a crucial note in the first few introductory paragraphs of her work where she positions herself as a reader, as someone who must acknowledge that she is from a completely different world and context than that of the narrative itself. As she reads and interprets the story of Rahab, she understands that like Rahab, she has her own unique context and background that has shaped her thought-world and how she observes the biblical narratives. This is thus the foundation as to how she expresses her faith in God. See Judith E. Mckinlay, "Rahab: A Hero/Ine?," *Biblical Interpretation* 7, no. 1 (1999): 44.

himself/herself living and worshipping amongst a culture foreign to his/her own. This is what I have described as the crossing of religious-cultural boundaries.

Crossing Religious-Cultural Boundaries

Crossing religious-cultural boundaries is my personal reflection on my social situation whereby I am married to a non-Samoan Christian. In likely situations, individuals or groups of Christians from different ethnic backgrounds have branched out from their typical cultural norm. They attempt to adapt and assimilate new religious-cultural values through that new culture's traditional worship. For an example, I am married to Sarah Livingstone, who hails from an Italian/Scottish ethnic heritage, but was born and grew up in Australia, worshipping in the Melbourne Life Worship Centre before we met. After we engaged, we have both been active members of the Ekalesia Faapotopotoga Kerisiano Samoa (EFKS) Hampton Park parish, the parish that I worshipped at, since 2015. Having had her own unique upbringing with regards to culture and faith, she manifests this idea of crossing religious-cultural boundaries given her unfamiliarity with the Samoan cultural aspects of the EFKS worship. As a result of this, she has described the difficulty in trying to assimilate given the many barriers she must overcome.² Regardless of this, she continues to commit herself to God in this way, allowing herself the opportunity to identify with Samoan Christians in their traditional ways of expressing their faith.

² These include the difficulties in communications and understanding roles in cultural protocol etc. But this also includes her personal task of breaking down her own traditional way of thinking in regards to faith and how it is expressed.

Dilemma

Through my personal experience, I have come to realize that as a young member of the EFKS, it seems to me that some members of the EFKS have not fully incorporated the idea of religious-cultural boundaries being crossed into their thinking. This presumption has come about through my personal observations and interactions with some members of the ministry and some members of various congregations that I have networked with during field work as an interracial married Samoan. Assuming that an individual's faith takes shape through different contexts and life experiences, and given the response that my wife and I have received, there may still be some members who are finding it difficult to accept the crossing over of religious-cultural boundaries – the allowing of 'outsiders' to become 'insiders.' For many EFKS members, Christianity and culture go hand in hand. The issue may thus be one of exclusivity, in relation to how Samoans view their traditional religious-culture and communal way of life as sacred and of utmost importance. The intricate interweaving of the EFKS worship and Samoan culture suggests that this sacredness of the Samoan way of life must also be the case with the gospel. Therefore, a religious-cultural boundary line is drawn to distinguish the uniqueness of how the EFKS express their faith (insiders), as opposed to foreign methods of worship and faith expression (outsiders). This is the dilemma that I have highlighted and wish to seek biblical guidance to shed light on. Can scripture attest to a situation whereby insiders may be encouraged to allow outsiders to partake freely without prejudice in their unique religious-cultural worship patterns?

Aim

So what is the connection of this research and the dilemma concerning the potential religious-cultural boundary lines that are in place in the EFKS and foreigners who desire to cross this boundary? In an attempt to try and find biblical guidance in relation to the dilemma stated above, Hebrews chapter 11 has caught my attention, especially the use of Rahab in verse 31. It is interesting that Rahab stands out amongst the other characters mentioned in the chapter as being the only non-Israelite. Was there an ulterior motive at play? Could the use of Rahab here help shed light on the dilemma concerning the crossing of religious-cultural boundaries? It is my desire to discern whether Rahab can be read as an expression of one who crossed the religious-cultural boundary lines of her time. Through a socio-rhetorical analysis, I seek to find out whether the intentions of the author of the Letter to the Hebrews in using Rahab in 11:31 was to highlight a situation present within the society of the intended audience, and if so, what are the lessons we are to take from it? Realistically, crossing religious-cultural boundaries in any sense is an extremely difficult concept to comprehend, especially when we are dealing with two cultures completely foreign to each other (in the case of my wife and the EFKS church: Australian/Italian/Scottish – Samoan) – maybe this is why we find it difficult to accept. But it is my contention that faith as a common universal culture in itself, is the bridge in which we can mend and weave the religious-cultural tension between native Samoan EFKS worshippers and foreigners, in order to be more accepting towards the idea of outsiders becoming insiders. Can we draw a conclusion from this case study through the use of Rahab in the Letter to the Hebrews?

Research Questions

- 1) What is the intended agenda of the author of the Letter to the Hebrews regarding faith and the possible understandings attained from the use of examples of faith in chapter 11?
- 2) Who is Rahab, and how does her marginal character in the book of Joshua reflect the overall purpose of the Letter to the Hebrews?
- 3) Are we living out the teachings of the Letter to the Hebrews in regards to acceptance of crossing cultural boundaries?

Thesis Outline

This thesis shall thus begin by discussing socio-rhetorical criticism as the reading methodology in chapter 1. Within this chapter I shall highlight clearly what particular textures of the socio-rhetorical criticism I will be using in the exegesis section of this study and the reasons why I have chosen them. Chapter 2 of this thesis will be dedicated to the exegesis of Hebrews 11:31. This will be broken down into 3 sections: inner texture analysis, intertexture analysis, and the social and cultural analysis. Chapter 3 will then focus on the integration of the analyses of the 3 textures discussed in chapter 2, in an attempt to try and highlight why Rahab is employed in Hebrews 11:31 by the author. Finally, I will conclude this study with an analysis of the relevancy of the socio-rhetorical reading methodology within the purposes of this study and what information I was able to gather as a result of this. The conclusion shall also feature suggestions for the development of the EFKS church and its members.

CHAPTER 1: Reading Methodology: Socio-Rhetorical Criticism

This thesis employs the socio-rhetorical method of interpretation³ to study the Letter to the Hebrews, especially chapter 11:31. It is a method of interpretation which has been widely attributed to Vernon K. Robbins, which invites a single interpreter to engage the text from a number of different approaches, so that the interpreter may uncover how literary, rhetorical, social, cultural, intertextual and ideological dimensions of the text work together.⁴ The method itself pursues a “richly textured exegesis of scripture by co-ordinating multiple methods of reading and investigating texts.”⁵ Robbins has organized contexts for reading under 4 different categories – inner texture, intertexture, social and cultural texture, and ideological texture.⁶ Given that the crux of this research involves how the author of the Letter to the Hebrews has employed an Old Testament figure, I will be focussing on inner texture and intertexture first, as a basis for interpreting the role Rahab plays within the purpose of the author of the Letter to the Hebrews. Furthermore, I will also be looking at the social and cultural texture, given that the dilemma that this research paper seeks to address concerns the crossing over of religious-cultural boundaries. It is my contention that the social setting and the context of the intended original audience of the letter is crucial in the attempt to understand the author’s deliberate use of Rahab in the letter’s famous ‘faith’ chapter.

³ Vernon K. Robbins, *The Tapestry of Early Christian Discourse: Rhetoric, Society and Ideology* (London: Routledge, 1996), 18-43.

⁴ Ibid., 42.

⁵ David A. DeSilva, "Hebrews 6:4-8: A Socio-Rhetorical Investigation (Part 1)," *Tyndale Bulletin*, no. 50.1 (1999): 33.

⁶ Robbins, *The Tapestry of Early Christian Discourse: Rhetoric, Society and Ideology* 24.

1.1 – Inner Texture

According to Robbins, the inner texture refers to the various ways the text employs language to communicate. The inner texture has been summed up by Seumaninoa Puaina as “looking inside the selected text and the world of the text extracting meaning.”⁷ The inner texture includes various types of linguistic patterns within a text (**progressive** and **repetitive textures**), structural elements of a text (**narrational** and **opening-middle-closing textures**), the specific manner a text attempts to persuade its reader (**argumentative texture**) and the way the language of a text evokes feelings, emotions, or senses that are located in different parts of the body (**sensory-aesthetic texture**).⁸

I will apply this interpretative texture in the second chapter to exegete Hebrews 11:31. I will focus on the progressive-repetitive aspect, specifically the literary and rhetorical features of Hebrews 11:31. The purpose is to highlight the rhetoric of the author – or the world of the text – in an attempt to ascertain the context of this chapter of the letter and how Rahab fits in it. I also seek to situate myself within the text as an interpreter. This is an important aspect of socio-rhetorical criticism – the interactive element between the “world of the author, the world of the text, and the world of the interpreter.”⁹ These elements combined are what make the inner texture analysis interesting.

⁷ Seumaninoa Puaina, "The Feeding of the 5000 (Matthew 14:13-21): A New Missionary Paradigm for the Congregational Christian Church Samoa" (BD Thesis, Malua Theological College, 2012), 3.

⁸ Robbins, *The Tapestry of Early Christian Discourse: Rhetoric, Society and Ideology* 44-95.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 30.

1.2 – Intertexture

According to Robbins, this interpretive method encourages the reader to consult other ‘texts’ which are at work in the primary text.¹⁰ It is a “text’s representation of, reference to, and use of phenomena in the ‘world’ outside the text being interpreted.”¹¹ Robbins indicates that the intertexture in a text covers a field that includes **oral-scribal intertexture** (other texts), **cultural intertexture** (other cultures), **social intertexture** (social roles, institutions, and relationships), and **historical intertexture** (historical events or places).¹² In light of this, I will be looking specifically at oral-scribal intertexture, focussing specifically on Joshua 2, given that Rahab is first mentioned in the bible there. DeSilva makes note of Robbins’ notion of recontextualization – one of the 5 ways in which language in a text uses language that exists in another text¹³ – which focuses on “using verbal echoes from a traditional text in a new setting without indicating a quotation.”¹⁴ This aspect of Robbins’ inter-textual analysis is what I wish to emphasize following the inner texture analysis, as it opens up the scope on the character of Rahab in the book of Joshua. In conducting this intertextual investigation, I am inclined to investigate in depth the context of Rahab’s story as it is told in the Book of Joshua using a narrative-critical approach.¹⁵ It is my intention that a context in which to compare

¹⁰ Ibid. In relation to what Robbins has described as a horizontal axis (a rhetorical axis of communication between the author and the reader [see *ibid.*, 29.]), he has highlighted the impact that other texts have on the text in scope. A vertical axis therefore must be present, and it represents the dialogue between the text itself and other texts.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 96.

¹² *Ibid.*, 96-120.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 97.

¹⁴ DeSilva, "Hebrews 6:4-8: A Socio-Rhetorical Investigation (Part 1)," 36.

¹⁵ Narrative criticism is a type of literary analysis that focuses on the text as a story, which has a plot and moves from a beginning to an end. The aim is to take heed between the story and the discourse. The story asks the ‘what’ and the discourse asks the ‘how’ question. Together, they are integrated to give the

Hebrews 11:31 and Joshua 2 must be distinguished. In doing this, it helps determine who Rahab was and how the audience of the Letter to the Hebrews might have perceived her.

1.3 – Social and Cultural Texture

This context or texture as defined by Robbins¹⁶ leads the investigator to focus on the social world of the text as a text. Timoteo Tapelu in his socio-rhetorical reading of 2 Corinthians 9:6-15 describes Paul's understanding of the social and cultural values of Corinth in first-century Mediterranean world as vital when Paul wrote his second letter as they all influenced his writings.¹⁷ Similarly, I presume that the author of the Letter to the Hebrews was familiar with the social and cultural values of the intended audience. Therefore, what I am focussing on here is the community of the intended audience of the Letter to the Hebrews and their social and cultural values. I will also look at the social and cultural values of Rahab in the Old Testament as it "illuminates our understandings of the contexts to which people respond to texts."¹⁸ This is important, because it then provides hints towards how and why she is mentioned in Hebrews 11:31. I will then focus on my own social and cultural values as an interracial married Samoan.

content of a narrative. See Mark Allan Powell, "Narrative Criticism," in *Hearing the New Testament: Strategies for Interpretation*, ed. Joel B. Green (Grand Rapids: Paternoster Press, 1995), 239.

¹⁶ Robbins, *The Tapestry of Early Christian Discourse: Rhetoric, Society and Ideology* 35, 144.

¹⁷ Timoteo Tapelu, "A Socio-Rhetorical Reading of 2 Corinthians 9:6-15 from a Tautua Perspective in the C.C.C.S Magiagi" (BD Thesis, Malua Theological College, 2016), 38.

¹⁸ Puaina, "The Feeding of the 5000 (Matthew 14:13-21): A New Missionary Paradigm for the Congregational Christian Church Samoa", 12.

CHAPTER 2: Socio-Rhetorical Exegesis of Hebrews 11:31

Introduction

Chapter 11 of the Letter to the Hebrews discusses faith and examples of faith. It is obvious that faith is the primary concern or subject matter of the author in this chapter. This fact is revealed in the consistent use of the noun, ‘πίστις’- faith.¹⁹

2.1 – Inner Texture

This first aspect of the inner texture analysis seeks to identify through an opening-middle-closing texture analysis²⁰ how the author has arrived at this part of the argument, and also seeks to point out what the subject matter is at hand. I also wish to discuss the placement of 11:31 within the argument through an analysis of the surface structure²¹ of chapter 11, in order to show how the author has sought to use Rahab here as an example of faith. The rhetorical-critical exegesis that follows should further open up the interpretation regarding the type of faith that Rahab exemplifies, giving us a foundation to which we can identify the author’s use of Rahab in chapter 11.

¹⁹ It is used in Heb 11:1; 2; 3; 4; 5; 6; 7; 8; 9; 11; 13; 17; 20; 21; 22; 23; 24; 27; 28; 29; 30; 31; 33; 39.

²⁰ Opening and closing textures are a subtexture of inner texture. They represent in nature a beginning, body, and conclusion of a particular section of discourse. The conducting of this particular analysis helps in identifying the relationship between the opening of a unit to its closure – what Robbins describes as “exhibiting the span of a rhetorical unit.” This subunit plays an important role in understanding the rhetoric of the larger unit, meaning that the interpreter must make connections between the subunit and the overall unit in order to identify the function of the subunit. See Robbins, *The Tapestry of Early Christian Discourse: Rhetoric, Society and Ideology* 50-53.

²¹ In his use of 1 Corinthians 9 as an example of an inner texture analysis, Robbins identifies the link between the opening-middle-closing textures and the rhetoric of the author. There, Robbins highlights the rhetorical emphasis in how Paul had structured his argument within the middle texture. It reveals the author’s movements through the opening-middle-closing textures in a way that highlights opening statements, followed by a series of arguments, that “create a bridge to final statements to explain the goals and purposes of the author,” *ibid.*, 70-73.

2.1.1 – Opening-Middle-Closing Textures

Using the socio-rhetorical method to find out what the author may have been discussing at this particular section of the letter, I have identified 10:36 – 12:12 as a single rhetorical unit.²² Here we are introduced to the idea of faith that requires both perseverance and endurance, that was introduced in 10:36-39. This same idea is raised again at 12:1-12 – therefore serving as an opening and closing texture for the chapter in focus. In 10:19-39, the author rounds off the argument beginning at chapter 10:1-18 by calling the believers to persevere in faith, and makes clear of the consequences which result from failing to do so. It is clear in 10:32-34 that the audience had suffered from persecutions, public abuse, and even loss of possession. But the author gives a dire warning in 10:26-31 to those who have been enlightened and who have been sanctified by the blood of the covenant, that wilfully persisting in sin after having received the knowledge of truth shall result in judgment and a fury of fire. And so he encourages the audience to endure in faith in the face of adversity in 10:36-39, in order to receive what God has promised them.

In 12:1-12, the author emphasizes the pioneer and perfecter of faith to be Jesus. He describes the perseverance and endurance of Jesus through the hostility he faced and even through the shame of the cross, until he received the joy that was set before him. This is the example to whom the author encourages the audience to be inspired by. The rhetoric of the author concerning faith and endurance is hinted to here – the call to endure in faith, is the call to endure as Christ did. Having faith meant preparing themselves for

²² Similarly, Vaitusi Lealaiauloto Nofoaiga identifies Matthew 4:12-25 and 7:24-8:22 as rhetorical and narrative units that tell and show's Jesus' ministry in Galilee. See Vaitusi Lealaiauloto Nofoaiga, *Towards a Samoan Postcolonial Reading of Discipleship in the Matthean Gospel* (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2017), PhD Philosophy, 23.

trials, tribulations, hostility and persecution – because faith as it seems according to the author, is an imitation of the faith that is represented in Christ himself. The reward should thus be of similar value also, in that God gives what He has promised. Thus, the middle texture – chapter 11 – discusses the particular actions of exemplars of faith from the Old Testament, which serve as witnesses of enduring in faith before receiving what God had promised them.²³

2.1.2 – Surface structure: Placement

A closer look at the chapter as a whole and the author's presentation of examples of faith shows a distinct chronological emphasis,²⁴ meaning that the characters employed by the author are discussed exactly how they are presented to us through the Old Testament. We are given hints of the author's background of thought here – he was very well versed in the Old Testament scriptures.

The author begins chapter 11 by describing the nature of faith. It is 'having the confidence or assurance that things unseen and yet future will surely happen'. The term ὑποστασις (assurance) has been used already in 1:3 and 3:14. The former is used to describe the nature of the Son as the very image of God's ὑποστασις, and the latter being used as a call to the believers who have become partners of Christ to hold their ὑποστασις (confidence) firm to the end. In the case of 11:1, it would be natural to take it in the same sense that it is used in the latter, seeing as faith is not a real being or being of substantial nature, but rather it is the "firm grasp of faith on unseen fact."²⁵ It seems the author has

²³ Harold W. Attridge, "The Epistle to the Hebrews," in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary: Volume 3 H-J*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 97-103.

²⁴ This is to be understood in a strictly literal sense. What is meant regarding 'chronological emphasis,' concerns how the bible narrative is presented to us in its present protestant canon form.

²⁵ Marvin R. Vincent, *Word Studies in the New Testament*, vol. IV (Charleston: Nabu Press, 2010), 510.

in mind the harsh reality that the audience are dealing with, and thus once again emphasizes and stresses the absolute necessity of enduring in faith, for what was promised will come in to fruition.

Having provided a description of faith in 11:1, the author then seeks to appeal to the audience's emotions²⁶ by cataloguing Old Testament exemplars who embody what has been described in 11:1. We may categorize them as follows – 1) From creation to Noah (11:3-7); 2) The Patriarchs (11:8-22); 3) Moses to the conquest of Jericho (11:23-31); 4) Triumphs over opposing powers (11:32-35a); 5) Sufferings in life and death (11:35b-38); and 6) the importance of faith (11:39-40).²⁷ The character of Rahab is introduced in 11:31, within category 3 mentioned above. It is within this category that the author begins to focus specifically on the way faith deals with hostility, adversity and persecution.

2.1.3 – Hebrews 11:31-Rahab as an Example of Faith

As we have just identified, Rahab's function at this point of the chapter serves as an example of faith that deals with hostility and confrontation. As was the case with Moses in the verses which precede it (Hebrews 11:23-28), Rahab's example describes a

²⁶ The art of persuasion in ancient rhetoric required 3 components as detailed by David DeSilva: 1) the hearers had to know that they could trust the speaker, 2) rational proofs, and 3) the hearers themselves had to be put in a certain frame of mind that would make them more likely to act in a way. See "exegetical skill" in David A. DeSilva, *An Introduction to the New Testament: Contexts, Methods & Ministry Formation* (IVP Academic: Downers Grove, 2004), 781-82.

²⁷ William L. Lane, *Hebrews: A Call to Commitment* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1985), 148-49.

faith that came face-to-face with adversity, but in the end enjoyed the benefits of committed faith after difficult trials.²⁸

Rahab as an example is reasonably straight-forward and self-explanatory. She is identified as Rahab, ἡ πόρνη (the prostitute), who by faith, did not perish with those who were disobedient, because she had received the spies in peace. A closer study of the verbs οὐ συναπώλετό²⁹ translated as ‘did not perish’ and δεξαμένη³⁰ translated ‘to receive’ show that they are both verbs in the middle voice. They indicate that the actions of Rahab were reflexive in that they were performed by her own initiation. It is an example of a faith that took initiative from something that stirred up within herself, in the face of adversity and impending peril.

The story of Rahab and her interaction with the Israelites and their God is detailed in the Book of Joshua 2:1-21 and 6:22-25. Using the socio-rhetorical interpretation, I was able to identify that 11:31 is an attempt to recontextualize the character of Rahab. However, there is one aspect of the use of Rahab in this instance that I would like to highlight: Rahab is not an Israelite. In the course of the author’s argument thus far regarding faith, Rahab must thus portray a type of faith that dealt with hostility – but in contrast to the examples discussed before she is mentioned, it is hostility from God’s chosen people, rather than an enemy. As opposed to all the other examples of faith presented thus far in the chapter, it seems Rahab represents a minority – possibly a very small group within the audience of believers – whose faith is similar to Moses’ in terms

²⁸ Graham Hughes, *Hebrews and Hermeneutics: The Epistle to the Hebrews as a New Testament Example of Biblical Interpretation*, ed. R. McL. Wilson, Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 80.

²⁹ Verb – indicative aorist middle 3rd person singular/ negated by the adverb οὐ translated as no/not.

³⁰ Verb – participle aorist middle nominative feminine singular.

of hardship, but very unique otherwise in terms of its own shape and identity. It seems the author has deliberately used Rahab here as an example of a non-Israelite's faith in order to grab the attention of those in the audience who may also identify themselves as outsiders within the community of believers – as those who are suffering hostility and persecution, albeit with the added pressure of being foreign to the history of faith and the faith movement. She is commended on her faith and so was spared, when all others who were disobedient were destroyed.

2.1.4 – Function of Rahab in Chapter 11

As the only non-Israelite character mentioned throughout the chapter, Rahab serves the explicit function of representing those in the audience who identify themselves as outsiders as well. Outsiders, not only in the sense of ethnic background, but culturally as well.

If we look at the arguments presented regarding faith, the author has taken care in articulating his idea of what faith should mean. Having introduced the concept of faith and endurance in 10:36 as a requirement in order to fulfil the will of God and receive what He has promised, he proceeds to describe it as having the confidence that things not seen and yet still future will happen. He then rounds off this section with the exhortation of 12:1-3 – that the audience must look to Jesus the perfecter and pioneer of faith, as he is the imitation of faith, and they are to endure as he did. The emphasis is thus that faith requires endurance just as Jesus endured through the hostility and shame – in order to receive what God has promised them. As we discussed in the section dedicated to the placement of Rahab in chapter 11, we can identify that she serves as an example of faith dealing with hostility and hardships. In the broader scope of chapter 11, Rahab joins the

great cloud of witnesses who embodied a faith that endured difficulties for the sake of disciplining, and in order to receive the promises of God.

As a member of the great cloud of witnesses however, Rahab, represents much more than we expect. She represents the minority of believers who identify themselves as ‘foreigners’ in the community. It is interesting that in this chapter and also throughout the letter, the author has taken care in persuading the audience through facts and appealing to the audience’s emotions.³¹ In 11:31 however, the author seems to be acknowledging those who are unaccustomed to Jewish traditions and their culture. She thus represents those in the audience whose faith has taken shape in a different way, as opposed to those in the audience who are either Jewish Christians, or gentiles who are well versed in the Jewish scriptures. But the emphasis of appeal is not solely towards the minority group (as words of encouragement), but for those in the intended audience also who have picked up on the point that the author is trying to make here – that although there may be religious-cultural boundaries amongst the believers, Christ is pioneer and perfecter of all faith.

2.2 – Intertexture

This section of the chapter seeks to interpret the world that lies outside the text, taking into consideration the fact that the character Rahab finds her roots in the book of Joshua from the Old Testament. Given that Hebrews 11:31 may be seen as a recontextualization of the narrative of Joshua 2, the aim of this part of the research is to further elaborate on the character of Rahab as she is portrayed in the narrative of Joshua

³¹ This is regarding the special emphasis on the Jewish cult, its scriptures and customs.

2. Here, I seek to paint a clear image of her faith in relation to how it is described by the author of the Letter to the Hebrews. In Hebrews 11 she is described as ‘having faith, by receiving the spies in peace.’ Therefore, I am inclined to look into what is meant by this. In doing so, I have decided to use a narrative-critical approach to analyse the story found in Joshua 2, paying close attention to the interactions between Rahab and the Israelite spies that she encounters, and her actions in response to the situation she finds herself in. At the same time, I wish to consider a grammatical-critical approach in reading Joshua 2 – looking at the language of the text as employed by the author of the book of Joshua – as a way of further assisting me in drawing out a sound interpretation of the character of Rahab.

I shall proceed by providing a brief overview of the book of Joshua first, before conducting a narrative-critical exegesis of Joshua 2. Throughout this narrative-critical analysis, I shall also make comments on the language and the grammar employed by the author.

2.2.1 – Overview of the Book of Joshua

The narrative of the book of Joshua begins with Joshua, son of Nun, taking over Moses as leader of the people of Israel after the death of Moses. Immediately, in verse 2 of chapter 1 we are given insight into what the book will focus on primarily, namely – the conquest of Canaan. Some commentators have voiced their opinions on the tensions regarding the theological issue of how God could command the people of Israel to commit mass genocide against the people of Canaan. An example of this line of thought can be

found in the work of Nasili Vakauta.³² He suggests that the narrative of Joshua 2 portrays a ‘crossing of borders,’ and suggests that the use of native women as harlots or seductresses is a figurative or metaphorical instrument employed by biblical authors in order to justify the invasion or occupation of foreign lands.³³ Vakauta argues that the role of Rahab in the narrative of Joshua 2 explicitly portrays imperial colonialism. Similarly, Judith E. McKinlay argues that the story of Joshua 2 expresses the exploitation of Rahab as a “tool of its own political theology” regarding Rahab’s Deuteronomistic language in 2:9-11.³⁴ Richard Hess however disagrees, and suggests that the story may well be read without these presumptions, as the narrative of the book of Joshua in its entirety does not explicitly provide evidence of mass genocide.³⁵ He proposes that the Canaanite sites that the Israelites occupied may have not been populated by civilians as such, but were rather military forts, in which case the story of Israel’s conquests may well have been depictions of their will to survive, rather than a slaughtering of helpless foreign nations in order to occupy their lands. In light of these views, an evident thematic point presents itself – the book of Joshua tells of the hostile interactions between Israel and foreign nations under the guidance of the Lord.

³² Nasili Vaka'uta, "Border Crossing/Body Whoring: Rereading Rahab of Jericho with Native Women," in *Bible, Borders, Belongings: Engaging Rereadings from Oceania* ed. Jione Havea (Atlanta: SBL, 2014), 143-55.

³³ Ibid., 144.

³⁴ Judith E. McKinlay, *Reframing Her: Biblical Women in Postcolonial Focus* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2004), 44.

³⁵ Richard Hess, "Joshua," in *The New Interpreter's Bible: One Volume Commentary*, ed. Beverly Roberts Gaventa and David Petersen (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2010), 243-45.

2.2.2 – Narrative Critical Analysis

As the narrative in Joshua 2 is presented, Joshua initiates the occupation of Rahab's homeland Jericho, by instructing two men to go from 'Shittim'³⁶ and חֲרִשׁ³⁷ view the land,³⁸ and Jericho specifically. The two men obliged and went, and arrived at a house which was inhabited by a harlot woman named Rahab 'רַחַב'.³⁹ It is unclear in the text as to how the contents of the dialogue in verse 2 came about, but somehow, the king of Jericho was informed of the two men's presence in Jericho. Their intentions however, are not clear according to the text. Initially, they were instructed by Joshua to simply go and רָא⁴⁰ the land. The report that was given to the king of Jericho however, describes the reason of their presence as חָפַר⁴¹. Though Joshua's purposes for sending the two

³⁶ Shittim is mentioned explicitly elsewhere in Numbers 25, in which it is described there that Israel began to have sexual relations with the women of Moab. Immediately, the reader is reminded of the subject regarding the sexual immorality of Israel in their affairs with foreign women, and of God's disapproval of such affairs. This is interesting, as it sets the scene for the reader, whom might read the initial encounter between Rahab and the two men in this light, seeing their interaction as an allusion to interracial affairs of which God had condemned.

³⁷ Noun common masculine singular absolute, translated as 'secretly,' or 'in quiet.'

³⁸ There are mixed opinions amongst scholars regarding the Hebrew syntax here. The relationship between the adverb translated as 'secretly' and the participle translated as 'spying' is called into question, seeing as the adverb may modify either the participle 'spying' or the imperfect verb translated as 'he sent' found earlier in the verse. Ken Mansfield has conducted an exegetical analysis on the phrase in question, consulting the translations of the NKJV, NRSV, NIV and the NASB. 3 of the 4 translations consulted, have agreed that the verb 'secretly' modifies the imperfect verb rendered 'he sent.' Only the NKJV has translated the adverb as modifying the participle. Mansfield agrees with the NKJV translation, given the characterization of Joshua as a doubtful leader does not coincide with Joshua's portrayal throughout the book. Dr. Thomas Constable agrees also, suggesting that Joshua understood well and clear of the consequences of having spy reports heard by the Israelite camp. In Numbers 13 and 14 the people of Israel rebelled against the Lord after having heard the discouraging report of the spies. See Ken Mansfield, "Rahab and the Spies: An Exegetical Evaluation of Joshua 2," *IIM Magazine Online* 2(2000)., 1-4; and see also Dr. Thomas Constable, "Notes on Joshua," *Sonic Light*, <http://www.soniclight.com/>, 16.

³⁹ From the root word רָחַב meaning "to be wide" or "to be broad." Francis Brown, *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon: With an Appendix Containing the Biblical Aramaic*. (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 2015), 931-32.

⁴⁰ Verb qal imperative masculine plural, from the root word רָאָה 'to see.'

⁴¹ Verb qal infinitive construct, from the root word חָפַר 'to dig' or 'to scout out land.'

men to secretly view the land may not have been scandalous initially, it seems that the natives of the land perceived their arrival as such, given the report that was relayed to the king of Jericho. But given the specificity of Joshua's instructions, it is surprising how indiscreet the two men were. Instead of simply viewing the land, they wound up entering the house of a harlot.⁴² Whether this is a reflection of their incompetence, or their inability to follow instructions is unclear. What is clear, however, is that the introduction of Rahab into the narrative of Israel's history was not by mistake. As Obiorah Mary Jerome puts it, "it is significant for the narrator that this first possession of Israel was through Rahab's encouragement."⁴³

The king then sends a message to Rahab to bring out the men who have come to her. But Rahab had taken the two men and hidden them on her rooftop under some flax that she had laid out there. She responds to the messengers, telling them that the men came to her but she was unsure of where they came from. She advises the king's men to pursue them to which they oblige, and the two Israelites are left within the walls of Jericho under the sole care of Rahab, as the gates were shut behind the king's men.

Rahab's actions are intriguing to say the least. According to the text, there is no verbal exchange between Rahab and the two Israelite men, rather, the reader is left to ponder what conversations may have taken place. Regardless of this ambiguity, Rahab the harlot is portrayed as the ideal hostess by first providing shelter for the two Israelites,

⁴² Some scholars have suggested that this was in fact a very strategically thought out move on the two Israelites' behalf, given that the house was in fact the house of a 'prostitute.' In essence, the lodging of unfamiliar foreign men at the house of a prostitute may not have been so suspect, given the purposes of such establishments. Therefore, their presence at Jericho may not have been as suspect to the natives as we may presume. See Phyllis A. Bird, "The Harlot as Heroine: Narrative Art and Social Presupposition in Three Old Testament Texts," *Semeia: Narrative Research on the Hebrew Bible* 46(1989): 128.

⁴³ Obiorah Mary Jerome, "Rahab in the Book of Joshua and Other Texts of the Bible ", 19, no. 3 (2014), www.iosrjournals.org, 23.

before saving them from danger. Furthermore, she lies on their behalf, telling the messengers that the Israelites had left at dark when it was time to shut the gate, and she did not know of where they were headed. Rahab tells the messengers of the king of Jericho to pursue them quickly, for they may be able to catch them. Her response in hiding the two men from imminent danger and her interceding on their behalf seems to be what the author of the Letter to the Hebrews identifies as faith, describing her actions as δεξαμένη⁴⁴ the spies in peace. The Greek word translated as ‘to receive’ is defined as “to receive by deliberate and ready reception of what is offered.”⁴⁵ The receiving of the two Israelites by Rahab was thus an illustration of a genuine and conscious decision to receive the spies into her home, knowing well of the potential danger that awaited her in the consequences of her hospitality. Rahab’s ‘חֶסֶד’⁴⁶ therefore, in relation to her ‘δεξαμένη’ of the spies in peace’ as described in Hebrews 11:31, was a willed response made by a woman who was standing face to face with covert foreigners who had arrived at her house. In the face of imminent danger, Rahab chose to dwell on morals rather than think of her own health and safety – in hiding the two Israelites from the king’s men and by taking precautions through her deceit – in order for the two men to escape safely.

There is a dilemma present here, however, found in Rahab’s disregard of her own identity as a Jericho native. Rahab is seen here deliberately disobeying the orders of the king – someone who she obviously identifies with as is evident in the 1st person common

⁴⁴ Verb participle aorist middle nominative feminine singular, from the root word δέχομαι ‘to receive.’

⁴⁵ W. E. Vine, *Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words: With Topical Index* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1996), 511.

⁴⁶ Noun common masculine singular defined as ‘kindness; faithfulness; and loyalty’ by Brown, *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon: With an Appendix Containing the Biblical Aramaic.*, 358.

plural 'us' in verse 9. She, along with all the other inhabitants of the land, are in fear of Israel because of what they had heard of the Lord. Rahab tells the two Israelites that news of God's sovereignty over Israel's welfare had reached the city of Jericho. They had heard of God's miracle in drying up the Red Sea when they came out of Egypt, and they had heard of God's hand in destroying Sihon and Og. And because of these things, Rahab, and all the other people of Jericho's hearts had melted. And yet, Rahab chooses to betray those of whom she identifies with. In choosing to side with the two strangers, she has 'hung her own people out to dry.' Her moral decision in sheltering the two Israelites, has ironically become immoral through the deceiving of her own people. Furthermore, Rahab, as a result of her lie, has put herself in danger, risking her own life for the sake of the two Israelites and their purpose. So we now have a dichotomy of images of the character of Rahab. On the one hand, she can be seen as the perfect host, having taken in a pair of strangers and interceding on their behalf in order to save them from harm. But on the other hand, she can be seen as a cunning deceiver with no sense of dignity in the way that she turns her back on Jericho, essentially opening the door for the Israelites to take over their land. Regarding her identity, there is a shift in perspective. On the surface, Rahab's actions in protecting the two Israelites seems like nothing more than the lending of a hand to a pair of strangers who were being pursued. But in hindsight, a deeper glance at the consequences of her lies shows that had she handed them over, the two men were sure to be in trouble. Yet, her lying on their behalf had not only endangered them, but it also puts her in danger as well. Rahab, through her deceit, had incidentally aligned her identity with theirs. At that point in time, the spies were not the only foreigners in Jericho – Rahab

was now included in their team. The question that begs here then is how we are to read Rahab's רָחָב in this light?

What follows in the narrative is Rahab's confession to the two Israelites found in verses 8-13. As we shall see, these verses play a key role here in determining how we are to read this portrayal of Rahab's character. After the king's men had left, Rahab joins the two men upstairs on her rooftop. She initiates the dialogue, and interestingly, it is the first conversation between the two parties recorded in the book. Her first words here display a sharp contrast with what she had spoken to the king's men – her own people.⁴⁷ There, in verse 4, she declares that לֹא יָדַעְתִּי⁴⁸ in regards to where the spies were. In 2:9 however, she positively declares what 'she does know,' and that is knowledge of God's gifting of the land to Israel, and the Lord's great deeds for Israel in the past.

Hess and David Merling have both highlighted the chiasm within the dialogue here between Rahab and the two Israelites.⁴⁹ The frame of the chiasm here is her acknowledgment of God's gifting of the land to the Israelites (2:9), and God's sovereignty over heaven and earth (2:11). The central point and heart of the chiasm here is 2:10, in which Rahab speaks on behalf of the people of Jericho. She describes the fear that fell upon them as a result of hearing of God's deeds performed for the people of Israel. According to Merling and Hess, Rahab's confession here is significant in that it tells of the fulfillment of what the Lord had promised.⁵⁰ From a biblical perspective, Rahab serves

⁴⁷ Jerome, "Rahab in the Book of Joshua and Other Texts of the Bible ". 24., and Hess, "Joshua," 244.

⁴⁸ A phrase primarily centered on יָדַעְתִּי – verb qal perfect 1st person common singular, from the root יָדַע 'to know.' It is accompanied by the particle negative, rendering the translation, 'I do not know.'

⁴⁹ Hess, "Joshua," 244., and David Merling, "Rahab: The Woman Who Fulfilled the Word of Yhwh," *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 41, no. 1 (2003): 41.

⁵⁰ "Rahab: The Woman Who Fulfilled the Word of Yhwh," 37., and Hess, "Joshua.", 244.

as a mouthpiece which voices the fulfillment of God's declarations as mentioned elsewhere. Not only does she play a crucial role in helping fulfill God's promise in giving Israel the land in Joshua 2, but she also "serves as evidence that even those who were outside of the Israelite family were aware that the power of YHWH was with the Israelites."⁵¹ So was fear the root of her δειλαμένη the spies in peace? Did her רָחַב only surface as a reaction to having her life put in jeopardy? I am inclined to disagree, solely on the premise that she was in no better position immediately after displaying moral conviction towards the two Israelites than she was before – she was still in danger. The notion that she possibly represents a paradigm of faith that spurs out of fear is thus void.⁵² But rather, it was her genuine acknowledgment of the power and sovereignty of God as displayed throughout Israel's history that caused her to respond as she did. It was a display of honest and sincere belief in the God of Israel who fulfills what He promises. And it was this God for whom Rahab of Jericho had now identified with. Through her confession that she 'knows' of God and the power He possesses, and her actions in saving the two spies from imminent danger, she portrays exactly what God seeks from Israel as is mentioned in Deuteronomy 4:39 – and because of this, Rahab could now be identified as an Israelite, in a strictly religious sense.

⁵¹ Merling, "Rahab: The Woman Who Fulfilled the Word of Yhwh," 37.

⁵² There is a common train of thought that supposes that Rahab responded in faith the way she did as an expression of survival instinct. Having heard of the victories of Israel of other Canaanite lands through God's favour, Rahab fears the worst. And in fear of her own life, she chooses to side with the two Israelite men in order to save herself. But through my own analysis, we see that her priority is not her own life, as we see in the pact that she establishes between herself and the two men. She asks them to show the same kindness she showed them in saving their lives. But she does not mention herself in the list of people that she wishes to be spared in 2:13. Although the concluding common 1st person plural personal pronoun in the verse suggests otherwise, we can identify her immediate family members safety as her priority here rather than her own. See Jacob L. Wright, "Rahab's Valor and the Gibeonites' Cowardice," in *Worship, Women, and War: Essays in Honor of Susan Niditch* (Rhode Island: Brown Judaic Studies, 2015).

Having said all of this, Rahab then asks the two men to show reciprocity. She resorts to her own **חֶסֶד** as shown towards them, as a cause for them to express the same **חֶסֶד** to her father's house. She asks that her family be spared from impending death, and for the two men to 'give her a sign of good faith.' The word translated as 'faith' here in Hebrew is **אֱמוּנָה**. It is the first time it has been mentioned in the narrative thus far, and this striking with regards to this research as it is the 'faith' of Rahab that is celebrated in Hebrews 11:31. But if we look at the verse structure, we can assume that **אֱמוּנָה** and **חֶסֶד** could quite possibly mean one in the same thing here. Rahab asks the two men to show the same kindness she showed them, and asks them to give a sign of good faith. This sign of good faith then, may refer to them showing kindness to her family. If this is so, then her actions thus far in the narrative are an expression of good faith not necessarily in the two Israelites, but in the God that they represent and identify with here. The two men oblige under one condition – that Rahab keeps their ordeal a secret. As the conquest plays out in Joshua 6, the two Israelite men keep to their word and Rahab and her family are spared.

There is a tension with the interpretation of Israel's sparing of Rahab and her family here. Rachel Billings points out that the story of Rahab highlights an anomaly of some sort with regards to Israel's covenantal relationship with the Lord and the way in which they upheld their obedience to God's commands.⁵³ Precisely, Billings argues that the oath sworn by the two Israelite men is a violation of the Deuteronomic law found in

⁵³ Rachel M. Billings, *Israel Served the Lord: The Book of Joshua as Paradoxical Portrait of Faithful Israel* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2013), 34-37.

Deut 7, in which God forbids Israel to make any covenants or show any mercy to the Canaanites. But she maintains that this particular situation ‘fits into the gaps’ of the Deuteronomic law in that nowhere does it explicitly mention how to deal with a Canaanite who has pledged allegiance to the God of Israel. Rahab is an exception, and Billings suggests that the tension itself is only in the readers expectations, thus serving as way of illuminating God’s surprising activity through Rahab.

2.3 – Social and Cultural Texture

2.3.1 – Social and Cultural Texture in Hebrews 11

The general consensus among scholars regarding the social and cultural setting of the audience of the Letter to the Hebrews is that they were primarily Jewish-Christians, but not exclusively.⁵⁴ The evidence of this can be seen in the heavy emphasis on the Jewish cult and the author’s use of rabbinic methods of exegesis as proof.⁵⁵ DeSilva disagrees with this. He argues that the title itself, “To the Hebrews,” is a second-century conjecture about the audience based on the content of the letter. He also argues that the many references to the Old Testament in the letters like Galatians and 1 Peter illustrate that the Gentile audience to whom Paul and the author of 1 Peter had written to were well versed in the Old Testament scripture.⁵⁶ It is thus crucial to acknowledge that the audience were not primarily of Jewish-Christian backgrounds, but rather consisted of both Jewish-

⁵⁴ Daniel J. Harrington, "Hebrews," in *The New Interpreter's Bible: One Volume Commentary*, ed. Beverly Roberts Gaventa and David Petersen (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2010), 1293. DeSilva, "Hebrews 6:4-8: A Socio-Rhetorical Investigation (Part 1)," 40.

⁵⁵ Paul Ellingworth, *The New International Greek Testament Commentary: The Epistle to the Hebrews, a Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 25.

⁵⁶ DeSilva, *An Introduction to the New Testament: Contexts, Methods & Ministry Formation*, 776-78.

Christian and Gentile-Christians, who were both very well scripted in arguments regarding Old Testament scripture.

Furthermore, DeSilva also points out that the community in which the author addresses may well have been of mixed ethnic backgrounds.⁵⁷ DeSilva argues on the basis of Gentiles being ‘heirs of the promise’ and ‘children of Abraham,’ that they were well aware of the Jewish Scriptures being the ‘oracles of God’ and were taught to read those oracles as divine revelation which shaped the Christian hope and character. Therefore, the letter should not be read with limitations in the sense that it was addressed primarily to a Jewish-Christian audience, or primarily to Gentile-Christians for that matter, but rather it was a letter addressed to any and all believers who identified themselves into the same Christocentric reading of the same scriptures.⁵⁸

Therefore, it is important to consider how the letter may have appealed to the individual believer, each having a unique context and background – essentially meaning that they each had unique cultural backgrounds – regarding their faith and how it took shape. This is especially vital when discussing the hostility towards the audience, and the authors subsequent call to remain steadfast in faith and to not fall back from believing in Christ. It is possible that if not one, but all of the ethnicities present in the audience had been victims of society’s attempts to bring them back in line with its values. It is also possible that there may have been different understandings between the different ethnicities within the community, but regardless of social and cultural differences present,

⁵⁷ DeSilva, *Perseverance in Gratitude: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on the Epistle "to the Hebrews"* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 2-7.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

the author emphasizes the fact that the anchor of the Christian hope for all believers is Jesus Christ.

My argument revolves around this aspect of finding common ground between different ethnicities. In our EFKS church today, we find ourselves in the same scenario – we have non-Samoan people joining us in worship from time to time, and we also have full-time members of the church who are mostly married into a Samoan family. These other ethnicities range from those of our neighbouring pacific islands, to those who are not so familiar with Pacific Island customs, such as Europeans and Indians. If we are to take the situation regarding the use of Rahab as an example of faith into consideration, remembering that she is being used as part of a letter being delivered, then we find a connection here between Rahab and the minority of non-Samoan EFKS worshippers. She represents those who find themselves at odds sometimes, when they do not understand the cultural aspect that is intertwined with EFKS worship. As that representation, she serves to encourage this minority, but also serves as a lesson to the more dominant culture(s) in the community – that there is no need to draw religious-cultural boundaries in the scheme of salvation that Christ prepared for the world.

2.3.2 – Social and Cultural Texture in Joshua 2

Rahab is identified as a harlot woman of Jericho who lived on the outskirts of the city with her family. As a harlot, her profession can be seen as the reason she is not located in a better location within the city. Harlotry or prostitution in the Ancient Near East at

that time, constituted someone who was on the margins of society.⁵⁹ Often, these people were the less fortunate ones who were living in poverty. In the case of Rahab, R. B. Coote has suggested that it was the poverty of her family which actually forced her into prostitution.⁶⁰ The poverty-stricken were people who were disregarded and looked down upon. This point further defines her identity as a native of Jericho – she was a part of the lower class in her society.⁶¹ As a socially marginal character, Rahab thus represents these people in society. But as a lower-class Canaanite, her story as portrayed in the Book of Joshua highlights an aspect of God that is interesting – the use of unexpected agents in the purpose of salvation.⁶² Another important social aspect of Rahab is her devotion to her family. As mentioned earlier, Rahab could possibly have been the sole income earner of their family household. Furthermore, the prioritizing of her family's welfare in her plea to the two Israelites suggests that Rahab considered the safety her family to be of importance.

Culturally, Rahab's story is a paradigm for non-Israelite allegiance to God. Her acknowledgment of God as 'your God' in 2:11 suggests that she and the rest of the people of Jericho worshipped something or someone different to the God of Israel. Her way of life must also have been presumably different to that of the Israelites. Yet she willingly

⁵⁹ R. B. Coote, "The Book of Joshua," in *The New Interpreter's Bible. General Articles & Introduction, Commentary, & Reflections for Each Book of the Bible, Including the Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books. Vol. 2: The Book of Numbers; the Book of Deuteronomy; Introduction to Narrative Literature; the Book of Joshua; the Book of Judges; the Book of Ruth; the First and Second Books of Samuel*, ed. L. E. Keck (Nashville: Abingdon, 1998), 592.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Bird, "The Harlot as Heroine: Narrative Art and Social Presupposition in Three Old Testament Texts," 120.

⁶² Merling, "Rahab: The Woman Who Fulfilled the Word of Yhwh," 34.

sacrifices all that she was familiar with in life, as she pledged faithfulness to the God of Israel.

CHAPTER 3: Integration

3.1 – Rahab as an Example of Faith that Crosses Religious-Cultural Boundaries

This chapter integrates the inner texture analysis, the intertexture analysis and the social and cultural texture analysis in an attempt to make sense of the use of Rahab by the author of the Letter to the Hebrews in Chapter 11. Through the analysis of the inner texture, in collaboration with the social and cultural textures, I have highlighted that the author's subject matter being discussed in chapter 11 concerns persevering in faith with endurance. Rahab is drafted in the Letter to the Hebrews as an example which I will elaborate on later in the chapter.

In the analysis of the intertexture, in collaboration with the social and cultural textures of Joshua 2, I was also able to highlight the character of Rahab as she is presented in the Old Testament – she is a non-Israelite woman who declared her faith in the God of Israel through the hostile situation that she was facing. It provides me the meaning to discern Rahab's character which, I surmise, the original readers of the Letter to the Hebrews might have understood it. What follows are the main outcomes of the study I have undertaken. These outcomes illustrate the author's likely intentions regarding the use of Rahab, though strange, as one of the examples of faith stalwarts of the Old Testament listed in Hebrews 11.

3.2 – Rahab as an Example of Persevering in Faith with Endurance.

This is what I have identified as the overall subject matter in chapter 11 that the author intended the readers of the letter to grasp. The author states that Jesus is the ultimate example of persevering in faith with endurance of which they can be encouraged to follow. Christ is the image of which they are called to mimic, calling the believers to persevere through the hostility and humiliation they were facing. Though Christ suffered and had to endure the cross, He disregarded its shame and was elevated and seated at the right hand of the throne of God. Jesus is the ultimate example that the believers are encouraged to follow. Through the narrative/grammatical critical analysis of Joshua 2, I was able to identify that Rahab does indeed express these particular faith characteristics there. Having found herself staring face-to-face with danger (regarding both the run-in with the two Israelite strangers and the consequent deceiving of her fellow Canaanites) she ultimately comes to faith through her testimony (יָדַעְתִּי כִּי־נָתַן יְהוָה – ‘I know the Lord has given’ Joshua 2:9) and endures the trials set before her resulting in her family being spared.

3.3 – Rahab as an Example of One who Expressed Confidence that Things Future and Unseen were Sure to Happen.

This is the author’s description of faith in Hebrews 11:1 that sets the foundation for all the examples that are listed. In Rahab’s case as is evident through the intertexture analysis, her encounter with the two Israelite spies clarifies that she does personify these aspects. Following her personal testimony in Joshua 2:9, she declares in 2:10 that she,

along with the other natives of Jericho had heard (שָׁמְעוּ)⁶³ of the God of Israel and all His deeds He has performed on behalf of Israel. Yet although they had all heard of the deeds of Israel's God, Rahab is the only Jericho native that responds in accordance with how faith should be expressed. Her faith or belief in the God of Israel thus comes through her response in having heard of the Lord. But even though it is not until after she had interceded for the two Israelite spies that she is given an assurance by the two men that her family will be spared, it is her belief and declaration that she is aware that God will indeed hand Jericho over to the Israelites that helps her fit into Hebrews 11.

3.3 – Rahab as a Paradigm for Non-Israelite Allegiance to God.

As the research has helped to identify, Rahab, as the only non-Israelite that is mentioned in Hebrews 11, is significant for the audience. Rahab serves as a representative of those who also identify as outsiders within the community of believers who find their ethnic and cultural roots in Judaism. The recontextualization of this aspect of her character in Hebrews 11:31 follows closely the context in which she is presented to us in the Old Testament. In the latter, she is described exclusively as the only Jericho native who expressed belief in the stories that she had heard of, resulting in her assistance in bringing God's will into fruition. Her 'receiving' of the spies was a conscious decision made through faith in response to what she had heard of Israel's God, and her consequent assistance and hospitality can be seen as fruits of believing and trusting in this God. The

⁶³ Verb qal perfect, 1st person common plural. Root word: שָׁמַע translated – 'to hear.'

deliberate use of her by the author of the Letter to the Hebrews can thus be seen as an attempt to appeal to those of different ethnic and cultural backgrounds who may have become disheartened as a result of the religious-cultural boundaries drawn amongst the believers. These ‘outsiders’ however, may be encouraged by the example set by Rahab. The religious-cultural boundary within the community of believers serves not as an obstacle to the gospel, but rather renders them unique in the scheme of salvation found in the person and work of Jesus Christ.

There also seems to be an underlying ploy here to appeal to all those who are also marginalized within society. As I discovered through the social and cultural analysis of Rahab in the book of Joshua, she also represents the minority who have been socially marginalized for whatever reasons, as she herself can be identified as one who not only physically lived on the outskirts of society, but was also treated as such through her occupation. Thus, she becomes a voice for those who find themselves at odds with the social structures in place within their own societies, further highlighting aspects of the author of the letter to the Hebrew’s use of Rahab that may be overlooked by a present-day reader.

CONCLUSION

Through this research I have been able to shed light on the deliberate use of Rahab in 11:31 by the author of the Letter to the Hebrews using the socio-rhetorical method of reading. Given that the strength of this particular discipline of biblical reading is the value of reading any text through multiple textures, the exegetical section of this research provided crucial hints in relation to the aim of this study. Through the literary and rhetorical analysis of the inner texture, I was able to:

- 1) Highlight two ideas as the subject matter of Hebrews chapter 11; i) persevering in faith with endurance; and ii) having the confidence that things unseen yet future will surely happen.
- 2) Identify how Rahab fits into the flow of the author's argument of the subject matter in chapter 11,
- 3) Detect a possible function of Rahab within the rhetoric of the author.

This function suggests that Rahab was deliberately used as a ruse to appeal to a specific group within the letter's audience who identified themselves in the same way, as people who found their faith to have been brought about within unique and different cultural backgrounds to the majority. In this way, Rahab serves as a source of encouragement for those who may have considered themselves as 'outsiders' within the community of believers. Having Rahab mentioned in Hebrews 11 amongst the Israelites who are mentioned as members of the cloud of witnesses of faith, these 'outsiders' were to be assured that there was a place for them within the salvation that Christ achieved for the world. Furthermore, not only were they to be encouraged by Rahab's example, but in

Hebrews 12:1-2 they were to be heartened by the example set by Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of faith, and the redemption He achieved.

After conducting the narrative analysis of the intertexture, I was able to highlight how the author of the Letter to the Hebrews and its intended audience may have possibly perceived Rahab through how she is portrayed in Joshua 2. As a result of this, I was able to make a connection between the author's recontextualization of Rahab's faith (as embodying the aspects highlighted in the inner texture analysis) and her portrayal in the narrative of Israel's conquest of Canaan. The socio-rhetorical method of reading allowed me to combine both the inner texture and the intertexture analyses of Hebrews 11:31 to see that Rahab – having received the Israelite spies in Joshua 2 – indeed manifested a persevering and enduring faith against the hostile situation she found herself in. Not only that, but she expressed a confidence that God was sure to hand Jericho over to the Israelites.

Through the social and cultural texture analysis, I was able to identify through the work of various scholars that although the letter itself has traditionally been considered often to be addressed primarily to a Jewish-Christian audience, this was most probably not the case. Through the findings in my research, I have been able to make the connection that there was a good chance that there were Gentile-Christians present within the audience: Gentile-Christians who may have been struggling to express their faiths openly in and amongst both non-believers and Jewish Christians. What is most significant, is the model that Rahab represents here for those who identify with her. With the chance that the Gentile-Christians of different ethnic backgrounds were at odds in trying to remain relevant within the community of believers, Rahab sets the perfect example for them to

be encouraged by in that she flourished within the Israelite community of her day. Through the religious-cultural boundaries that must have surely created tension between the Israelites and the natives of Jericho, Rahab branches out of this and crosses over the religious-cultural border and decides to believe and have faith in this God of Israel. In turn she is well received by her former Israelite counterparts, who are now comrades through faith in God. Within the context of the audience that Rahab's character appeals to in the Letter to the Hebrews, her character serves as a two-fold source of encouragement: 1) as an example of a case within scripture that fits the situation that the Gentile-Christians might have been facing at the time, in that she had the courage to cross over the religious-cultural boundaries in faith, in order to serve the Lord; and 2) as a source of encouragement regarding the acceptance of Rahab within the Israelite community as one of their own, after having professed her faith and allegiance to God. Rahab thus serves as a prime archetype of faith that crosses religious-cultural boundaries successfully and with good reception.

What is also interesting is the name Rahab itself – defined as 'to be wide' or 'to be broad'. With this definition in mind, it gives a sense that her prime purpose may well have been to branch out and push boundaries whether she intended to or not. And in this situation, she does in fact push through the religious-cultural boundary markers set by society, culminating in her being praised as a stalwart of persevering in faith with endurance. Yet also in response to the idea of boundaries being pushed, typically, there is always a counter-reaction. Wherever there is a push, naturally there is a force pushing back. This could well be the case within the context of the Letter to the Hebrews. The Gentile-Christians may well have been seen as a threat in the scheme of salvation that

Christ achieved for the world – but this is highly due to misunderstanding. And so Rahab is mentioned intentionally here to also help further clarify for the Jewish Christians and those Gentile-Christians who were well versed in scripture that there is room for those who are culturally foreign to the history of Israel and to the faith; they must not be discriminated against for any reason because Christ has achieved salvation for all people.

So the question is, are we implementing these teachings within society today? How about us as a church, are we as an EFKS being diligent in accepting believers of different cultural and ethnic backgrounds into our worship? What this study has identified is that it was Rahab's faith in the God of Israel rather than Israel's acceptance of her Jericho roots, that resulted in her being well received. It was the actions of Rahab in an attempt to branch out and assimilate foreign Israel through faith that occasioned her to come into favour with God's people, as opposed to Israel being considerate of her own ethnic and cultural convictions. So of utmost importance was Rahab's faith in God, that caused her to be praised by the author of the Letter to the Hebrews. The EFKS, as the most dominant Christian denomination in Samoa, has been privileged to have many interracial married members of many different cultures and ethnicities. Many of whom have become accepting of our unique Samoan way of worship and our Samoan protocols regarding the church and its cultural affairs. If we are to consider the example that the author of the Letter to the Hebrews has tried to achieve in the use of Rahab in 11:31, then we must be wholeheartedly accepting of those foreigners of whom we have the privilege of sharing the gospel with week in and week out. But where the example of Rahab fails to highlight a reciprocating acceptance on behalf of the Israelites and the Jewish-Christians, we may suffice to accommodate in an attempt to go above and beyond our

call as Christians to be united in Christ. Accommodate by means of implementing bilingual worship practices as exercised here in Malua, but also by continuing to seek new and transformative ways in which we may become more culturally diverse when occasioned. The message that Rahab presents for the world in the Letter to the Hebrews is timeless and ever present whatever the context. Religious-cultural boundaries will never cease to exist in the world we live in today – but Rahab stands as a pillar against the discrimination of cultures and the marginalizing of certain social groups. She presents an ideal image of faith that bridges social and cultural indifferences – and a united allegiance and faithfulness to the one and only God.

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