

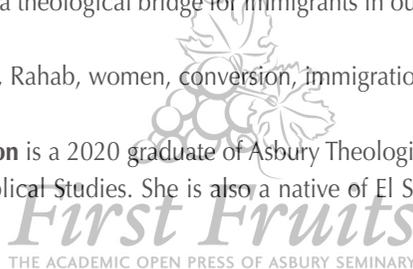
Kelly J. Godoy de Danielson
*Women on the Outside Looking In: Rahab and Ruth
as Foreign Converts to the People of God*

Abstract:

How does an outsider become an insider? This is a question that emerges from considering both the modern immigrant situation and the unique situation of non-Israelite women becoming part of the people of God in the Old Testament. The usual pattern in the Old Testament is to be born into the people of Israel, but for men there is the possibility to become part of the covenantal people through the physical act of circumcision. In this patriarchal society, women usually had no choice but to follow the decisions of their husbands. But what if there was no husband? The Bible tends to take a particularly harsh view on Israelite men marrying non-Israelite women, so even marriage does not seem to be an acceptable pathway for unmarried or widowed women. But two significant women in the Old Testament do successfully navigate the transition from outsider to insider, Rahab and Ruth. This article explores what this means for understanding conversion within the Old Testament context as well as its potential theological implication for the immigrant community in today's world. Understanding the importance of a person's allegiance to YHWH as well as following up this allegiance through actions of loving-kindness (*hesed* חֶסֶד) are the key similarities which bind these two women together and help create a theological bridge for immigrants in our modern context.

Keywords: Ruth, Rahab, women, conversion, immigration, people of God

Kelly J. Danielson is a 2020 graduate of Asbury Theological Seminary with a Masters in Biblical Studies. She is also a native of El Salvador in Central America.



Introduction

How does an outsider become an insider? This is a question that frequently confronts me as an immigrant in a foreign country. When your skin color and accent set you apart, you are almost always seen as an outsider, even after living for 20 years in your current context. This question also emerges at times in the Old Testament. The usual pattern is for one to be born into the people of Israel, but for men there is the possibility to become part of the covenantal people through the physical act of circumcision. In this patriarchal society, women usually had no choice but to follow the decisions of their husbands. But what if there was no husband? The Bible tends to take a particularly harsh view on Israelite men marrying non-Israelite women, so even marriage does not seem to be an acceptable pathway for unmarried or widowed women. But there are two significant women in the Old Testament who successfully navigate the transition from outsider to insider, and become not just members of the people of God, but essential parts of the history of God's salvation plan as ancestors of both King David as well as Jesus in the New Testament. The question this raises for me is how does this happen and what is the implication for the immigrant community?

In addition, the issue of conversion is one that has been an important point for evangelical theology for a long time. How does one become a Christian? Most of this is theologically rooted in New Testament scriptures, but is often overlooked in a theological study of the Old Testament. The only real equivalent for looking at the issue of New Testament conversion is to examine this issue of how people outside the people of Israel became part of the people of God. The same stories of Rahab and Ruth, which answer the first question, help us understand the nature of conversion as well as how women without husbands might have been able to transition from outsiders to insiders in the Old Testament context.

Male Circumcision as a Pathway to the People of God

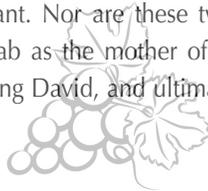
In Genesis 17, God establishes the covenant between God and Abraham and his descendants. Verse seven emphasizes that this will be an "everlasting" covenant for generations. This covenant will include the land of Canaan as well as the act of male circumcision. In verse ten, it is clear that every male must be circumcised to be part of the covenant, and verse twelve makes provision that those bought from foreigners are also to be circumcised. Finally verse fourteen warns that any male who is not

circumcised will be cut off from the covenant. Verses 23-27 indicated that Abraham, Ishmael, and all the men in his household, born or bought, were circumcised that very day.

In Exodus 12, the crucial ritual meal of the Passover is established. In this chapter, Moses instructs the people on the future celebration of this meal, and he notes in verse 48, “A foreigner residing among you who wants to celebrate the LORD’s Passover must have all the males of his household circumcised; then he may take part like one born in the land.” (NIV). This allows for men outside of the Israelite community to become part of the people of God through the physical act of circumcision- aligning themselves and submitting to the covenant of Abraham.

In Joshua, chapter five, Joshua commands the Israelites to be circumcised before the conquest of Canaan. For some reason, the practice seems to have been abandoned in the wilderness, but now the covenant is to be renewed. Joshua often appears in the book as a type of “new Moses” for the people, so the renewal of the covenant at Gilgal (Joshua 5:2-12) should not be surprising. When the covenant is renewed at Mount Ebal in chapter eight, it is clear that foreigners are included among the people of God. Verse 33 notes that, “Both the foreigners living among them and the native-born were there” for the reading of the Book of the Law.

But while foreign men have a way to join the Israelite people through circumcision, such a possibility is denied to women, even through marriage. The prohibitions against Israelite men marrying foreign women is made clear in the story of Dinah in Genesis 34 and Deuteronomy 7:3-4, “Do not intermarry with them. Do not give your daughters to their sons or take their daughters for your sons, for they will turn your children away from following me to serve other gods, and the LORD’s anger will burn against you and will quickly destroy you.” The same prohibitions are repeated by Joshua in Joshua 23:12-13. Other passages repeat this concern including 1 Kings 11:2 and Ezra 9:14. Nevertheless, two women in scripture do enter the people of God as foreigners during the early period of Israel’s history, and they are not insignificant. Nor are these two women unconnected. Matthew 1:5 connects Rahab as the mother of Boaz, who would marry Ruth, the grandmother of King David, and ultimately become ancestors of Jesus.¹



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Rahab: From Foreign Prostitute to One of God's People

The story of Rahab in Joshua chapters two and six is an interesting exception to much of the conquest literature.² Rahab is first shown as a prostitute in the city of Jericho, where she encounters the two spies sent by Joshua to study the city for conquest. She successfully hides the two spies and redirects those sent by the King of Jericho in search of the spies. Before letting the spies go, she gives an interesting speech in verses 9-13 of chapter two,

I know that the LORD has given you this land and that a great fear of you has fallen on us, so that all who live in this country are melting in fear because of you. We have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red sea for you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to Sihon and Og, the two kings of the Amorites east of the Jordan, whom you completely destroyed. When we heard of it our hearts melted in fear and everyone's courage failed because of you, for the LORD your God is God in heaven above and on the earth below.

Now then, please swear to me by the LORD that you will show kindness² to my family, because I have shown kindness (*hesed* חֶסֶד) to you. Give me a sure sign that you will spare the lives of my father and mother, my brothers and sisters, and all who belong to them- and that you will save us from death. (NIV)

The spies leave after swearing an oath and telling her to bring everyone into her house and hang a scarlet cord outside the window as a sign, and they would be spared. In Joshua 6:17, 22-23, 25, Rahab and her family are spared, with verse 25 noting, "But Joshua spared Rahab the prostitute, with her family and all who belonged to her, because she hid the men Joshua had sent as spies to Jericho- and she lives among the Israelites to this day." Ruth 4:18-22, which outlines the genealogy of David notes that Salmon, the father of Boaz (who is her husband according to Matthew 1:5- See footnote 1) is an Israelite going back to Perez, one of the sons of Judah. This marriage solidifies Rahab as an insider and one of the people of God.

Moberly (2013: 71) discusses how Rahab is compared with Achan in Joshua. Rahab as the ultimate outsider- a Canaanite woman and a prostitute who becomes an insider, while Achan, an insider with a pedigree becomes the ultimate outsider, as he and his entire family are stoned for disobedience. In the same way, Moberly points out how Rahab shows the quality of *hesed* חֶסֶד (steadfast love or kindness) and because of her words

and actions, “she is exempted from *herem* תָּרַם, despite the lack of exemption clauses in Deuteronomy, and enabled (with her family) to become part of Israel.”³

Ruth: The Moabite Who Became One of the People of God

In the book of Ruth, we see another exceptional case of a woman who becomes part of the people of God. Naomi and her husband, Elimelek had gone into the land of Moab with their sons, Mahlon and Kilion, and both of them married women of Moab, Orpah and Ruth. When her sons and husband die, Naomi decides to return to her own people. In Ruth 1:8, Naomi releases both Orpah and Ruth from their obligations to her and praises them for their kindness (*hesed* חֶסֶד), but encourages them to go home to their families and remarry. The two young women at first refuse, but Naomi lays out the reality that she will have no more children to provide as husbands. Orpah finally leaves, but Ruth still stays. Naomi again tries to get Ruth to leave her, but Ruth responds in Ruth 1:16-17,

Don't urge me to leave you or to turn back from you.
Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay.
Your people will be my people and your God my God.
Where you die I will die, and there I will be buried. May
the LORD deal with me, be it ever so severely, if even
death separates you and me. (NIV)

Ruth continues to show her faithfulness in supporting Naomi while gleaning the fields of Boaz, a close relative of Naomi. Ultimately, Boaz becomes the ideal kinsman-redeemer and redeems the rights to the land of Naomi's family and thus the right to marry Ruth, who becomes the grandmother of the future King David. When Boaz redeems his rights to Ruth, the elders say in Ruth 4:11-12, “We are witnesses. May the LORD make the woman who is coming into your home like Rachel and Leah, who together built up the family of Israel. May you have standing in Ephrathah and be famous in Bethlehem. Through the offspring the LORD gives you by this young woman, may your family be like that of Perez, whom Tamar bore to Judah.” Once again, a foreign woman enters the people of God, which is solidified by her marriage to one of the people of God.

While most commentaries focus on the themes of kindness (*hesed* חֶסֶד), loyalty, protecting the weak in society, and the book's support for

Davidic kingship, some point out other possible uses of the book. Fleenor and Ziese (2008: 320) note the possible implications of the book as protest,

As literature of protest, it is argued that the text contains a message directed to those seeking to narrowly define the “people of God.” As such, the text deliberately undermines (or subverts) a so-called “purity position” seeking to expel “good” aliens (like Ruth) from the Jewish community. A variation of this view considers the message of the book to be an encouragement directed toward the gentile wives of Jewish husbands. In this, Ruth is the poster child: a model proselyte for all foreigners to imitate.

Only some writers tend to develop the outsider nature of Ruth in this story, even though the text itself refers to Ruth as the “Moabite” specifically in a number of places (Ruth 1:22, 2:2, 2:21, 4:5, and 4:10), highlighting her status as a stranger or outsider in the community. In this sense, identity also becomes a theme, as Matthews (2004: 207) writes, “Ruth, who has become a liminal or socially undefined figure by her decisions and actions, must establish a new identity within a strange community. In essence, she must ‘find her place.’ Both physically and socially, in Bethlehem.”

The Conversion of Rahab and Ruth

There are a number of similarities in the stories of Rahab and Ruth, although on the surface they are very different kinds of women. Rahab is a prostitute, while Ruth is an unfortunately childless widow. First and foremost, they are women who do not have husbands who will decide their spiritual direction. However, both make oaths tying themselves to the God of Israel. These oaths are closely tied to concepts of kindness and loyalty. Both also exhibit faithful obedience in carrying out these oaths. Finally, because of their faithful obedience, each is permitted to enter the people of God, and this is ultimately sealed through marriage, despite previous prohibitions against this practice.

William Barrick (2000) argues that conversion is modeled in the Old Testament by stories such as Rahab, Ruth, Naaman, and the sailors and Ninevites in Jonah as a way of understanding the concept of the circumcision of the heart (Deuteronomy 10:16 and 30:6) as opposed to physical circumcision as a way to enter the people of God. As such Barrick also sees the covenant and covenant renewal as a “recommitment to the changed life that had been entered at conversion” (Barrick 2000: 23). Barrick sees Rahab

as acknowledging a formal relationship to YHWH in her confession of YHWH's ultimate authority in Joshua 2:11. He also points out her changed life by showing *hesed* חֶסֶד (for the first time in the book of Joshua) (Barrick 2000: 28-29). For Ruth as well, Barrick sees her "oath of allegiance" to Naomi as a confession, which is then lived out by a changed life dominated by *hesed* חֶסֶד (Barrick 2000: 29). As Barrick writes,

Conversion may be summed up in the Hebrew term *sub* (he turns). Repentance and faith are its primary elements. Faith 'achieves in practice the acknowledgement by the individual of the sole sovereignty of Yahweh.' Such acknowledgement is inseparable from conversion which includes penitent humility. Confession of the sovereignty of Yahweh is clearly evident in the cases of Rahab, Ruth, Naaman, the sailors, and the Ninevites. (Barrick 2000: 35)

Ultimately in a final chart, Barrick looks at a number of themes and the ones which he sees as in common for Rahab and Ruth are: a confession of faith (Joshua 2:11, and Ruth 1:16-17), and a change or commitment (Joshua 2:12, Ruth 1:8 and Ruth 3:10).

While Ruth is not mentioned in the New Testament except in Matthew 1:5, Rahab is reflected on in two other passages. In Hebrews 11, the famous chapter on the faithful, verse 31 reads, "By faith the prostitute Rahab, because she welcomed the spies, was not killed with those who were disobedient." In James 2, where James discusses the importance of faith and works, the writer compares Rahab with Abraham in verse 25 and 26 he writes, "In the same way, was not even Rahab the prostitute considered righteous for what she did when she gave lodging to the spies and sent them off in a different direction? As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead." Biddle and Jackson (2017: 232) make a similar distinction in their assessment of the two spies in the story of Rahab, when they write, "Who saves whom in this story, then? In this striking text, Israel learns that a Deuteronomistic-sermon-preaching Canaanite prostitute can deliver them, even as they make plans for her future deliverance. All expectation is upended. There is no longer a distinction between who is savior and who is saved." The faithful righteous Rahab is held up as a model according to Biddle and Jackson, while the "spies" seem to bring back limited intelligence (and if they are "messengers" as mentioned elsewhere they do not seem to deliver any message).

As faithfulness and good works are the characteristics pointed out in Hebrews and James in the New Testament for Rahab, it is possible to see how she reflects on a Christian understanding of living a Christian life following conversion. It seems to come close to Jesus' understanding of the greatest commandment in Matthew 22:37-39, "Jesus replied, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind." This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: "Love your neighbor as yourself." All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.'" Rahab and Ruth make a commitment to God through an oath and follow up on this oath through a sacrificial love of others. There is also a close connection between issues of justice, kindness, and humility, As Smit and Fowl (2018: 220) point out,

In Mic. 6:8 the Israelites are told that all God requires of them is "to do justice, and to love kindness [*hesed* *חֶסֶד*], and to walk humbly with your God." This text from Micah raises the prospect that justice, *hesed* *חֶסֶד*, and humility before God are connected. This would lead one to think that success in cultivating one of these virtues leads to and may presume some measure of success in cultivating the other two. If justice requires one to give to others what they are due in God, and if humility is based on rightly knowing one's own state relative to God and others, then *hesed* *חֶסֶד* would be that grace which recognizes but is not constrained or limited merely by what is due to others and by where one stands relative to others and God. This would seem to fit Ruth quite well. She goes well beyond justice in her dealings with Naomi and acts with both grace and boldness toward Boaz without ever seeking to aggrandize herself.

In this sense, both Ruth and Rahab go beyond the confines of what is just, and both of them act with kindness while simultaneously exhibiting humility before God.

It is interesting that even in Jewish tradition, there is no question that the story of Ruth is an account of conversion. Brady (2013: 135) writes, "While modern scholars debate whether or not Ruth 1:16-17 actually describes Ruth's conversion to the Israelite religion, within Rabbinic tradition there was no question that Ruth is the proselyte par excellence. The first chapter of Ruth provides for the Rabbinic exegete the prototypical framework for conversion, including Naomi's rejection of the would-be proselyte." It is apparently tradition that a would-be Jewish convert should be turned back three times, and if they still persist, it should be permitted

(and this is modeled in Naomi's rejection of Ruth three times). The Jewish writers of the Targum Ruth have added to Ruth 1:16-17 to turn it into a dialogue for conversion. Brady (2013: 137) lays it out like this (with the scripture in regular script and the additions in italics),

Ruth said, "Do not urge me to leave you, to go back from after you, *for I desire to be a proselyte.*"

Naomi said, "We are commanded to keep Sabbaths and holy days such that we may not walk more than two thousand cubits."

Ruth said, "Wherever you go, I will go."

Naomi said, "We are commanded not to lodge with Gentiles."

Ruth said, "Where you lodge, I will lodge."

Naomi said, "We are commanded to keep six hundred and thirteen commandments."

Ruth said, "What your people keep I will keep as if they were my people from before this."

Naomi said, "We are commanded not to worship foreign gods."

Ruth said, "Your god is my god."

Naomi said, "We have four death penalties for guilty: stoning with stones, burning with fire, execution by the sword and hanging on a tree."

Ruth said, "How you die, I shall die."

Naomi said, "We have a cemetery."

Ruth said, "And there I will be buried. *And do not say any more.* May the Lord do thus to me and more *against me* if even death shall separate me from you."

So, even in the Jewish tradition, Ruth is seen as a text dealing with conversion.

Uriah Kim (2011) brings the additional insight of a biblical scholar who is Korean living as an immigrant in the U.S. He examines both Rahab and Ruth alongside the "man from Luz" (Judges 1:22-26) as examples of the *hesed* חֶסֶד relationship based on loyalty to YHWH. However, his reading as a Korean immigrant is a bit different. He argues that Rahab and Ruth might be insiders in one sense, but this sense of belonging is not complete. While Rahab is allowed to live among Israel, she is also sent to live "outside the camp of Israel" in Joshua 6:23, so that she is not recognized as a real Israelite (Kim 2011: 257-258). I can see his point in this interpretation, but I disagree, since her ultimate marriage to an ultimate insider demonstrates a complete inclusion, but such inclusion may take time. His reading on Ruth however is quite interesting. His focus is not on Ruth, who through *hesed* חֶסֶד becomes an insider, but rather on Orpah, who also demonstrates

the same type of *hesed* הֶסֶד as Ruth, but “her loyalty to her people disqualifies her from being a part of Israel” (Kim 2011: 260). Ruth becomes a model minority (in the same way as Pocahontas in U.S. myth) because she rejects her own people. Kim ends his article with a powerful conclusion, relevant to the immigrant community today,

When we practice *hesed* הֶסֶד with others, can we expect God to honor our *hesed* הֶסֶד when the other party does not fulfill their responsibility? We need to remember that Jesus Christ, who is a bicultural being par excellence, fully God and fully human, used *hesed* הֶסֶד to cross the divine-human divide in order to build the relationship between God and humans. Jesus Christ is the assurance that when we practice *hesed* הֶסֶד with others, God will surely honor our *hesed* הֶסֶד. Perhaps home is where *hesed* הֶסֶד is practiced for the sake of human solidarity and for God’s kingdom. (Kim 2011: 262)

Rahab and Ruth as Models of Conversion

Rahab was supposed to be subject to the *herem* הָרֵם announced against Canaan- the idea that the Israelites should “utterly destroy” the Canaanites they found in the conquest. Yet, in the very first battle for the conquest, her family alone is spared because Rahab showed *hesed* הֶסֶד, or kindness to the spies and makes an oath acknowledging the authority of YHWH. In the same way, Ruth shows *hesed* הֶסֶד to Naomi, even after she is freed from her responsibilities, and likewise makes an oath to accept YHWH as her God. Both women end up having their faithfulness to their oaths rewarded by marriage to Israelites for full inclusion into the people of God. In addition, they both become ancestors of King David and Jesus as part of God’s model plan of salvation.

Clearly the concept of *hesed* הֶסֶד is vitally important to both accounts and to the process of conversion as seen in the Old Testament. Edward F. Campbell (1990) points out that *hesed* הֶסֶד is used to describe both human relationships and divine action. Basing some of his work off of the book, *The Meanings of Hesed in the Hebrew Bible: A New Inquiry* (1978) by Katherine Doob Sakenfield, Campbell (1990, 67-68) summarizes *hesed* הֶסֶד in five different ways:

- First, *hesed* הֶסֶד is not just a “special favor” but is essential for deliverance from serious danger.

- *Hesed* חֶסֶד is done by a situationally stronger person toward a weaker person.
- The more powerful person has other options and so *hesed* חֶסֶד is not forced.
- A prior relationship is usually involved for *hesed* חֶסֶד to be done, so there is a moral or ethical responsibility to act as opposed to doing nothing.
- The one showing *hesed* חֶסֶד is usually the only one who can preform the action.

So *hesed* חֶסֶד is more than just a simple act of kindness. It is steadfast kindness, or loving kindness, but it is acting in the same way that God acts with human beings from a position of power to one who is in extreme need. Campbell (1990: 69) writes, “To put it another way, the impact of the book of Ruth is to portray at least Orpah and Ruth, and especially Ruth, acting towards others in the manner in which YHWH acts- living out the imitation of God.” Ultimately this act of *hesed* חֶסֶד can be most completely seen in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross.

Baruch Levine (2013: 6) adds to this understanding by noting that *hesed* חֶסֶד “is an act of kindness and love undertaken without expectation of reward or reciprocity.” By acting with *hesed* חֶסֶד toward others, God in turn shows *hesed* חֶסֶד in return.⁴ For Rahab and Ruth, the first act of conversion is to act as God would have acted. It is part of their nature to show kindness when it was not necessary to do so for someone who was in a vulnerable position. In the middle of these acts of *hesed* חֶסֶד, both Rahab and Ruth make an oath recognizing the power and authority of the God of Israel over their own lives. Finally, Rahab and Ruth are faithful to their oaths, and in response YHWH shows *hesed* חֶסֶד on them by incorporating them into the people of God, ultimately validating this through marriage. As L. Daniel Hawk (2015: 20) puts it, “Finally, like Rahab, Ruth confesses the God of Israel (Joshua 2:11; Ruth 1:16), displays faithfulness (*hesed* חֶסֶד) to Israelites (Joshua 2:12-14; Ruth 1:8; 3:10) and receives a place for herself and her descendants among the people of God.”

Conclusion

So, how does one become a part of the people of God in the Old Testament? It seems to differ in some ways from the New Testament understanding, which tends to place repentance for sins before a confession

of faith and finally a changed life.⁵ In the case of Rahab and Ruth, there is no repentance of sin.⁶ This is especially obvious in the life of Rahab, a prostitute, in which we might expect to see some kind of judgment passed on her profession. In both cases, we see women who have a deep commitment to YHWH and a willingness to recognize YHWH's authority. But this is more than a doctrinal statement of faith. In both cases, this willingness to submit to YHWH is accompanied by concrete actions of *hesed* חֶסֶד. Both Rahab and Ruth act in the way that God would act.

Rahab is not a person with any power in Jericho. Yet, for one brief moment, she is given the power of life and death over the Israelite spies. We do not know what her thoughts may have been at this time, but she could have sought favor with the king of Jericho by turning over the spies, or she could have exacted revenge on the men who she so often had to serve and please in her business. Yet, in that moment, she chose to act with *hesed* חֶסֶד, without any real thought of getting something back for herself, she chose to protect and hide these helpless men. This is compatible with the way God acts towards human beings. However, she does not just do this act of *hesed* חֶסֶד, but she continues to keep the secret- to remain faithful to her promise, even after the spies have left. Because of this, God gives her a second chance at life, along with her family, and gives them a chance to live among the people of God. Ultimately, she will be validated in her actions and marry a descendant of the tribe of Judah, and she will be honored as King David's great-grandmother.

Ruth was also a person without power. She was a widow, and even worse, one without children or land. She shows *hesed* חֶסֶד to Naomi, by refusing to leave her widowed mother-in-law in a difficult situation. Naomi had freed her from her familial responsibilities, and so for perhaps the first time in her life, Ruth was in a position of power. She could choose to go back to her people, to seek a new husband, and build a new family. We can only imagine how dangerous life must have been for Naomi as a widow, alone, with no one to protect her in a foreign land. Ruth's act of *hesed* חֶסֶד probably saved Naomi's life in multiple ways. Not only did she accompany her on what was probably a dangerous journey back to her hometown, but also she gleaned from the fields to feed them both, and cared for the elderly Naomi. Ruth makes an oath to accept YHWH as her God before she really begins her action of *hesed* חֶסֶד. But Ruth is also faithful to her action and carries out ongoing *hesed* חֶסֶד for Naomi. As with

Rahab, she will ultimately be validated for her actions and marry a descendent of the tribe of Judah and become the grandmother of King David. As one thinks about the connection between Rahab and Ruth, one is left wondering if Boaz was open to seeing the positive aspects of Ruth because of the influence of his own mother, Rahab, who had gone through the same process of becoming an insider.

These acts of *hesed* חֶסֶד by Rahab and Ruth are perhaps connected to King David for a reason. He is also a person who is shown as invoking the idea of *hesed* חֶסֶד as well. This can be seen in 2 Samuel 2:6 when he asks God to show *hesed* חֶסֶד to the men of Jabesh Gilead who had buried Saul. It can also be seen earlier in the relationship between David and Jonathan in 1 Samuel 20: 14-15 when they make an oath of *hesed* חֶסֶד between David and Jonathan and his descendants. The faithfulness of this oath is lived out in how David treats Mephibosheth in 2 Samuel 9, after Jonathan and Saul are killed in battle. This entire theme of God showing *hesed* חֶסֶד to those who show *hesed* חֶסֶד may also be reflected in 2 Samuel 7, when God blesses David and says in verses 15-16, “But my love will never be taken away from him, as I took it away from Saul, whom I removed from before you. Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me: your throne will be established forever.” Rahab and Ruth as spiritual ancestors of David are a link to the importance of *hesed* חֶסֶד, and may be a source for David’s *hesed* חֶסֶד to others which results in God’s favor on his kingship. Jesus Christ in turn fulfills this *hesed* חֶסֶד in the ultimate act of *hesed* חֶסֶד on the cross. Certainly this is part of the spiritual connection we are to draw from the genealogical inclusion of Rahab and Ruth in the family of Jesus presented in the opening of the Gospel of Matthew.

Conversion for Rahab and Ruth speak louder than the physical conversion of male circumcision. Their conversion came from the heart and not just physical identification with the people of God. Their changed lives as women who were a part of the Israelite community was possible because they submitted to YHWH as God and acted on that commitment by living out *hesed* חֶסֶד in their actions with others. Their faithfulness was rewarded as God showed *hesed* חֶסֶד in return by including them into the people of God as insiders. In many ways, the lives of Rahab and Ruth reflect the teaching of Deuteronomy 7:9, “Know therefore that the Lord your God is God; he is the faithful God, keeping his covenant of love to a thousand generations of those who love him and keep his commandments.” By

recognizing the authority of God and faithfully keeping his commandments by living in *hesed* חֶסֶד, we experience conversion and a changed life, and can rely on God to show us *hesed* חֶסֶד in return.

So, what are the lessons to be learned for the immigrant community, living as outsiders in a different culture? We cannot define our lives based on what the insiders expect, because we may never become accepted as insiders. God sees and knows our allegiance based on our testimony and faith. By living out *hesed* חֶסֶד in our lives and community, we are living as God would have us live, not as the insider society or culture would have us live. God alone decides who are included within the people of God, even if congregations and churches do not extend this inclusion in turn to the outsiders among them. Nevertheless, immigrants should strive to advocate and fight for equal treatment and inclusion within the community. Justice and *hesed* חֶסֶד are connected, along with humility. There seems to be no expectation that Rahab would reject her Canaanite identity or Ruth her Moabite identity as part of the conversion process, except in terms of their allegiance to the God of Israel over their traditional gods. Ruth binds herself to Naomi and her community based on family relationships, but Rahab has no such obligation. In neither case are legal requirements, citizenship, or official recognition required. Being included in the people of God is based on no other requirements than allegiance to God and acting with *hesed* חֶסֶד. This is true for both insiders and outsiders in any community. The focus is no longer on hoping others will allow you into their circle, but rather on trusting that God will include you among God's people if you live a life aligned to God and act accordingly in loving-kindness to others, in spite of how they might treat you in return.

End Notes

¹ There are some issues here, but I will not go into detail due to the scope of this paper. Richard Bauckham (1995) does a good job looking into the questions of the relationship between Rahab and Ruth. The only account that connects Rahab to the father of Boaz is in Matthew, it is not found in the Old Testament. Bauckham indicates that this was probably accepted Jewish tradition at the time Matthew was written, even though the time between Rahab and Ruth should be much greater than one generation. Some rabbinic traditions hold that Rahab married Joshua. Other traditions connect Nahshon (the father of Salmon) as one of the spies Rahab rescued. For purposes of this paper, it is enough that Rahab and Ruth are connected in the passage in Matthew, which shows a theological or spiritual connection, even if a real genealogical connection is impossible or unlikely. Scholars

often connect the stories of Rahab and Ruth, since their similarities are quite striking. See also Hawk (2015: 19-20).

² It is such an exception that it seems some scholars try to read more into the story than I think the text validates, such as Nicholas Lunn (2014) who uses the story as an example of “intertextuality” as a parallel for the Exodus. There are definite parallels between Joshua and Moses, but I think reinterpreting the story of Rahab in light of the Exodus is a bit of a stretch.

³ Rahab can be and has been interpreted in many different ways, some good and some bad. For other interpretations of Rahab see Lockwood (2010).

⁴ One could argue that Rahab was expecting her and her family to be saved as a result of her kindness, but keep in mind that she really had no guarantee that the spies would keep their word, or that she and her family would not be killed by others during the attack to come.

⁵ This is especially interesting in the case of Rahab, who was both a prostitute and likely a person who worshipped the Canaanite gods. Yet, her oath and acts of *hesed* חֶסֶד seem sufficient for her conversion. This may be because her sinful life was led before she made her oath to YHWH. In the Old Testament the focus on repentance seems to be often aimed at the people of Israel, those who are already insiders.

⁶ Although Hawk (2015: 50) does note that the use of the Hebrew word *sub* (turning or returning) is frequently an illusion to repentance or turning back to YHWH, so Ruth as “the one who returned” in 1:22b can carry the idea of repentance.

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