

THE MOTHERS IN JESUS' GENEALOGY

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By Pastor Stan
Matthew 1:1-17

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INTRO.

-- We are going through the Gospel of Matthew, a journey that we started last June. As we saw then, Matthew starts this Gospel with a genealogy that traces Jesus' ancestry back to Abraham, the patriarchal father of the Jewish people. On several occasions in the book of Genesis God promised Abraham that the Messiah would come through Abraham's line, and Matthew's genealogy shows how God kept that promise. -- Today, for this Mother's Day, I want to return to the genealogy in the first chapter of Matthew to take a closer look at something that I briefly noted when we looked at Jesus' genealogy. Matthew does something almost never seen in ancient Jewish genealogies - he includes 4 women, four mothers.

Cf., 1:1-3a, 5-6, 16

Finding these women here in Jesus' genealogy is extremely unusual for 2 reasons:

1. Hebrew culture was patrilineal. Ancestry was traced through fathers. Women were never mentioned. Look at the genealogies in the book of Genesis. They are all men; you won't find any women included. But including women isn't the most unusual thing about Matthew's genealogy.

2. The most unusual aspect of Matthew's genealogy is the women that Matthew chose to include. You would expect that if Matthew was going to include any women that it would have been the great matriarchs of Judaism - women like Sarah, Rebecca and Leah - women who were held in high esteem as the mothers of God's people. But Matthew doesn't mention them; instead, he includes very different women. Each of the women that Matthew mentions has something irregular, even shameful, associated with them. They are the kind of ancestor that you would try to hide if you discovered them in your family tree.

-- So, this morning I want to take a closer look at each of these women and to try to figure out why Matthew includes them.

I. The Women

A. Tamar (v. 3a)

-- The story of Tamar is in Genesis 38. It's a story of deception and incest that involves Judah, one of Jacob's 12 sons. In Genesis 38 Judah left home and married a Canaanite woman, and they had 3 sons - Er, Onan and Shelah. When the sons grew up, Judah arranged for the oldest to marry a woman named Tamar (possibly also a Canaanite woman). The Bible says that because Er was a wicked man that God caused him to die before he had any sons.

Then we read about a practice that sounds strange to us but was common in the ancient Middle East.

Genesis 38:8 Then Judah said to Onan, "Go in to your brother's wife and perform the duty of a brother-in-law to her, and raise up offspring for your brother."

-- The ancient custom was that a dead man's brother would marry the widow and that any sons born would inherit the dead brother's property. So, the second son, Onan, married Tamar, but he refused to father any children with her, hoping to get his deceased brother's property for himself. God was angry with Onan for this rebellious and selfish attitude and caused Onan also to die.

At this point Judah had just one son, Shelah, left alive. Judah told Tamar that he would give her Shelah to be her husband as soon as he was old enough to marry. The truth was that Judah was afraid that being married to Tamar was the kiss of death and never intended to let his last son marry her.

After several years passed and Shelah was past the age to marry, Tamar realized that Judah had lied to her. Unwilling to accept the fate of being a childless widow, Tamar disguised herself as a prostitute and set up a tent near a road that Judah travelled. Judah, whose wife had recently died, didn't

recognize Tamar because she had her face covered; so, he had sex with her. Tamar got pregnant and gave birth to twin boys, one of whom was named Perez and became an ancestor of Jesus.

B. Rahab (v. 5a / Joshua 2)

-- The second woman in the genealogy in Matthew 1 didn't just pretend to be a prostitute; she was one. Her story is in the second chapter of the OT book of Joshua and took place just as Joshua was preparing to launch the invasion of Canaan. The first objective in that campaign was to take Jericho, a city near the Jordan River that was protected by well-fortified walls.

Joshua decided to send spies into Jericho to gather information about the city's defenses. The 2 spies stayed at the house of a well-known prostitute named Rahab, probably thinking that strange men staying there wasn't that unusual and wouldn't attract attention. The spies, however, were discovered. When the authorities came to arrest the men, Rahab hid them and later helped them to escape. Why would she have done something that was essentially being a traitor to her own people? Because she had become convinced that the God of Israel was the true God.

Joshua 2:9-11 <sup>[Rahab] said to the men, "I know that the Lord has given you the land, and that the fear of you has fallen upon us, and that all the inhabitants of the land melt away before you. **¹⁰**For we have heard how the Lord dried up the water of the Red Sea before you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to the two kings of the Amorites who were beyond the Jordan, to Sihon and Og, whom you devoted to destruction. **¹¹**And as soon as we heard it, our hearts melted, and there was no spirit left in any man because of you, for the Lord your God, he is God in the heavens above and on the earth beneath.

-- When the walls of Jericho fell, and Joshua's army conquered the city, Rahab and the relatives gathered in her house were the only ones spared. Rahab continued to live with the Jews and later married a Jewish man, and they had a son named Salmon, who was the father of a man named Boaz. And that brings us to the story of the third woman in Matthew's genealogy.

C. Ruth (v. 5b / Book of Ruth)

-- Ruth is one of just two women who have a book of the Bible bearing their name. Ruth's story, then, is in the OT book of Ruth. The book starts with a Jewish man named Elimelech taking his wife, Naomi, and their two sons and leaving Israel to escape a severe famine and moving to a neighboring country called Moab. Although the Moabites were pagans and long-standing enemies of Israel, at least there was food there.

After moving to Moab, however, Elimelech died, leaving Naomi a widow with two sons to raise in a foreign land. When they became adults, Naomi's sons both married Moabite women; but before they had any children both sons died. Naomi then decided to return to Israel. Her daughter-in-law Ruth decided to leave her homeland and to accompany her mother-in-law, making what has become a classic statement of love and loyalty.

Ruth 1:16-17 But Ruth said, "Do not urge me to leave you or to return from following you. For where you go I will go, and where you lodge I will lodge. Your people shall be my people, and your God my God. **¹⁷**Where you die I will die, and there will I be buried. May the Lord do so to me and more also if anything but death parts me from you."

-- This was all part of God's sovereign plan, which God continued to unfold in Israel, where Ruth eventually married a Jewish man named Boaz; and together they had a son named Obed, who became the father of a son named Jesse, who became the father of a son that we all know - a son named David.

And that brings us to the fourth woman in Matthew's genealogy.

D. "The Wife of Uriah" (Bathsheba) (v. 6b)

-- Interestingly, Matthew doesn't name the fourth woman but refers to her as "the wife of Uriah," even though technically she was David's wife when Solomon was born. Matthew, however, wants the readers to recall the sordid moral failure described in 2 Samuel 11.

-- King David was looking out on Jerusalem from the palace's commanding view and saw Bathsheba bathing. David already had several wives, and Bathsheba was the wife of Uriah, one of David's most loyal army officers. Knowing Uriah was away on a military campaign, David sent for Bathsheba and engaged in sex with her. When Bathsheba later informed David that she was pregnant, he arranged for Uriah to be killed in battle and then took Bathsheba to be his wife. That baby died shortly after birth, but God gave the repentant king another child by Bathsheba - a son named Solomon, who along with David established the Golden Years of Israel's Monarchy.

II. The Reasons

-- So why did Matthew make this seemingly odd decision to include these 4 women in Jesus' genealogical record? I believe that the reason must be connected to Matthew's theme - that Jesus is the Sovereign King. Including these women tells us at least 2 things about this King.

A. Jesus is the king who identifies with our brokenness.

1. Each of these 4 women has some brokenness in their lives.
 - a. Tamar was a desperate woman who resorted to deception and incest to obtain what she considered to be her rights.
 - b. Rahab was a prostitute.
 - c. Ruth experienced the death of her husband while she was still a young woman. She then had to deal with the hardship of leaving her homeland and living in a foreign country. Her situation was complicated by the fact that she was a Moabite, a people under God's condemnation.
 - d. Bathsheba's life was broken by adultery, the death of her husband and of her baby.

2. Jesus is the King who came to identify with us in our brokenness and then to deliver us from it.

Hebrews 2:17-18 Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. **¹⁸**For because he himself has suffered when tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.

B. Jesus is the king who came to be Lord and Savior for all people.

-- By including the 4 women we've discussed Matthew shows that Jesus is more than a Messiah for the Jews; Matthew shows that Jesus is the Savior and King for all people - Jews and Gentiles.

-- All of the fathers in the genealogy were, of course, Jews. But not the women, the mothers. At least some of them and possibly all of them were Gentiles. We don't know for sure about Tamar and Bathsheba. They may have been Jews, but many consider it to be more likely that they were Gentiles. We do know, however, that Rahab and Ruth were definitely not Jews.

CONCLUSION

So, in Tamar, Rahab, Ruth and Bathsheba, God chose women who were broken and looked down upon to fill a special role - to be mothers whose descendants would form the line through whom God would send the Savior of the world.