

December 2006—Jesus' Family Tree

*“The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham. Abraham begat Isaac; and Isaac begat Jacob; and Jacob begat Judas and his brethren; And Judas begat Phares and Zara of **Thamar**; and Phares begat Esrom; and Esrom begat Aram; And Aram begat Aminadab; and Aminadab begat Naasson; and Naasson begat Salmon; And Salmon begat Boaz of **Rachab**; and Boaz begat Obed of **Ruth**; and Obed begat Jesse; And Jesse begat David the king; and David the king begat Solomon of **her that had been the wife of Uriah**;” (Matt 1:1-6)*

A number of years ago I studied this passage in a quest for fresh Christmas sermons; I saw this passage in a new light. Although we may be tempted to skip over this part of the Christmas story, I'm thrilled in its richness, because virtually every name in verses 1-17 reveals something about God's Grace.

Biblically, genealogies were important for many reasons. They were used to establish royal lineage. They were used to validate the sale of property, because land could not be bought and sold across tribal lines. The Priesthood depended on genealogies; you may remember that Ezra used them after the Babylonian captivity to determine who could serve as priests after being confirmed as descendants of Levi.

In the genealogy of Jesus, we see a striking abnormality: four women are named. Hebrew genealogies omit women. Now look again: none of these women fit the stereotype that we might expect to find in the royal lineage of the King of Kings—*all were outcasts!* For your edification (and possible sermon ideas, since the copyright belongs to the Holy Spirit) consider these women:

Tamar. In Genesis 38 we find rebellion, incest, prostitution, and deception. Judah's firstborn son was Er; God struck him dead, and we don't even know what he did—but it was bad (how's that for basic teaching?). Onan married Er's wife Tamar, but refused to *generate* children for his dead brother—so God struck him dead too. Frustrated at being childless (children were the OT version of an IRA), Tamar devised an evil scheme to become pregnant. She disguised herself as a prostitute, covered her face, seduced Judah, and mothered twin sons Perez and Zerah.

Rahab is more familiar to us. She is called Rahab the Harlot in Joshua 6:17, 25. Her name itself means "arrogance, disrespect, savagery." She was a Canaanite—a mortal enemy of God's people. She was an idolater, an outcast Gentile woman, a professional prostitute. Her most memorable act was telling a lie to protect the spies that scouted out Jericho. She bargained with the spies to save her family, abandoned the gods of the Canaanites for Jehovah, and became not only a convert to the true God, but also a part of the Messianic line. She was the great-great grandmother of David.

Ruth was the mother of Boaz. Ruth was not a prostitute or fornicator, but she was a Moabite whose entire race was a product of the incest chronicled in Genesis 19:30-38. Lot was living in a cave with his two daughters after the decimation of Sodom and Gomorrah. His daughters feared that they would have no one to marry and continue the family. So on two consecutive nights they got their father drunk and lured him into incest, which resulted in the Ammonites and Moabites. So Ruth is from a tribe of people who were the product of incest; their very existence was repugnant to the Jewish people. Like Rahab, she converted to the truth. Her great grandson was David.

Bathsheba was on a rooftop taking a bath when David saw her, lusted after her, and took her (2 Samuel 11). When David became aware that she was pregnant, he brought back her husband Uriah from the front lines in an attempt to cover his sin. But Uriah was too loyal to his men to enjoy his

wife while on leave. So David sent Uriah back to the front lines to be killed in battle, then he took Bathsheba as his wife. The first baby died, and David repented when Nathan confronted him with his sin. David and Bathsheba later had Solomon. So Bathsheba, though guilty of the act of fornication, became part of the lineage of Jesus Christ.

What a genealogy! Here are two harlots, a cursed Moabitess, and an adulteress. Throw in some of the evil kings of Judah and we realize that sinners pack the royal lineage! It's a wonderful Christmas story, because we realize that self-righteousness or religion is not on display: God's grace is! God forgave these people. Be encouraged, missionary, and go tell others the wonderful Christmas story.

Bill