

WOMEN IN CHRIST'S ANCESTRY (PART 1)

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Matthew 1:1-16 records the genealogy of Jesus Christ. It is not a comprehensive genealogy, meaning it does not include every male ancestor of the Lord. It includes 14 generations from Abraham to David, 14 generations from David until the carrying away into Babylon, and 14 generations from the carrying away into Babylon unto Christ (Matt 1:17). The purpose of this genealogy is not to provide a complete record of Christ's paternal ancestry. Its purpose is established in the very first verse of the Gospel of Matthew: "The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham." The genealogy of Christ in Matthew establishes that Jesus is that promised seed of Abraham, the legitimate heir to the throne of David, to reign eternally over his spiritual kingdom of Israel, the church (see also Matt 16:13-19; Luke 1:26-33; Acts 3:18-26; Gal 3:18-26). An interesting feature of this genealogy is its inclusion of five women. They are: 1) Tamar: "and Judah begat Pharez and Zerah of Tamar" (Matt 1:3); 2) Rahab: "and Salmon begat Boaz of Rahab" (Matt 1:5); 3) Ruth: "and Boaz begat Obed of Ruth" (Matt 1:5); 4) Bathsheba: "and David the king begat Solomon of her that had been the wife of Uriah" (Matt 1:6); and Mary: "and Jacob begat Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ" (Matt 1:16). It is interesting that two of the women (Tamar and Bathsheba) became ancestors of Christ as a direct result of situations involving sin, whereas the other three (Rahab, Ruth, and Mary) became the Lord's ancestors directly due to their righteousness.

Tamar

The first woman mentioned in Christ's lineage in Matthew chapter one was Tamar. Tamar was a woman who became daughter-in-law to Jacob's son Judah, and then eventually became the mother of twins by Judah himself. Genesis 38:6-7 says, "And Judah took a wife for Er his firstborn, whose name was Tamar. And Er, Judah's firstborn, was wicked in the sight of the Lord; and the Lord slew him." After Er died, Judah gave Tamar to his son Onan to raise up seed to his brother, but Onan did not cooperate, and God slew Onan (Gen 38:8-10). Judah then sent Tamar to her father's house to remain a widow there until Judah's son Shelah was grown (Gen 38:11). Shelah became grown, but Judah did not give Tamar to him as his wife per his promise (Gen 38:14). After this Judah's own wife died (Gen 38:12). Judah then went to his sheepshearers in Timnath, and Tamar was informed that Judah was going there (Gen 38:12-13). Tamar disguised herself and sat in an open place (Gen 38:14). Judah saw her and thought she was a harlot, and went to her, giving her his signet, bracelets, and staff as a pledge (Gen 38:15-18). Tamar became pregnant, Judah found out three months later, and determined to have her put to death for harlotry (Gen 38:18-24). At that time, she produced Judah's signet, bracelets, and staff (Gen 28:25). "*And Judah acknowledged them, and said, She hath been more righteous than I; because that I gave her not to Shelah my son. And he knew her again no more*" (Gen 38:26). Tamar bore twins to Judah: "And it came to pass in the time of her travail, that, behold, twins were in her womb. And it came to pass, when she travailed, that the one put out his hand: and the midwife took and bound upon his hand a scarlet thread, saying, This came out first. And it came to pass, as he drew back his hand, that, behold, his brother came out: and she said, How hast thou broken forth? this breach be upon thee:

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therefore his name was called Pharez. And afterward came out his brother, that had the scarlet thread upon his hand: and his name was called Zarah” (Gen 28:27-30). Pharez is the one through whom Christ descended. Tamar used deception and was willing to commit fornication with her father-in-law. Judah also committed fornication, though he did not know it was with his daughter-in-law. Judah acknowledged his own responsibility in the matter by not being faithful to keep his promise to bring Tamar’s widowhood to an end by his son Shelah. The sins of four different people (Er, Onan, Judah, and Tamar herself) had a role in Tamar becoming a part of Christ’s ancestry. The portion of Christ’s ancestry that includes Judah, Tamar, and Pharez is also mentioned in Ruth 4:12, and 1 Chronicles 2:3-4.

Rahab

The second woman mentioned in Christ’s genealogy in Matthew chapter one is Rahab. Rahab was a harlot of the city of Jericho, the first city that fell to the Israelites under Joshua after they crossed the Jordan River and entered the land of Canaan. Had Rahab remained a sinner, and had she been loyal to her earthly city rather than becoming a believer in Jehovah, she would have perished with all the other inhabitants of Jericho, and we would not know her name today, as we do not know the names of any of the other people of that city. Joshua sent two spies into Jericho, and Rahab lodged them at her house (Josh 2:1). When her king and countrymen searched for the spies, Rahab hid them on her roof (Josh 2:2-7). She told the spies the exact reason she protected them: “And she said unto the men, I know that the Lord hath given you the land, and that your terror is fallen upon us, and that all the inhabitants of the land faint because of you. For we have heard how the Lord dried up the water of the Red sea for you, when ye came out of Egypt; and what ye did unto the two kings of the Amorites, that were on the other side Jordan, Sihon and Og, whom ye utterly destroyed. And as soon as we had heard these things, our hearts did melt, neither did there remain any more courage in any man, because of you: *for the Lord your God, he is God in heaven above, and in earth beneath*” (Josh 2:9-11). She pled with the spies to save her and her family when Jericho fell to the Israelites, and they swore to do so if she remained silent about their business (Josh 2:12-14). She then enabled the spies to escape through the city wall (Josh 2:15-16). Rahab and her family were indeed saved from the destruction that befell Jericho (Josh 6:16-17,22-24). “*And Joshua saved Rahab the harlot alive, and her father's household, and all that she had; and she dwelleth in Israel even unto this day; because she hid the messengers, which Joshua sent to spy out Jericho*” (Josh 6:25). Rahab and her family became part of the Israelite nation. She later married into the tribe of Judah and became one of Christ’s ancestors (Matt 1:5). Her example of faith and obedience is mentioned twice in the New Testament. Hebrews 11:31 says, “*By faith the harlot Rahab perished not with them that believed not, when she had received the spies with peace.*” And James 2:24-26 says, “*Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only. Likewise also was not Rahab the harlot justified by works, when she had received the messengers, and had sent them out another way?* For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.” Rahab’s living, obedient faith in God made it possible for this Gentile woman and former harlot to become an ancestor of Jesus Christ the Son of God.