

## The Women in the Genealogies of Jesus

*Transcript of a sisters' class by Sis. Robin Jones [Hurstville, Australia]*

These are the 5 women in the genealogies of Jesus (*show on board*)

Does anyone know why these five women are linked together?

They are the only women mentioned in the genealogy of Jesus that is recorded in Matthew.

It's interesting that they are there at all because Jews didn't normally include women in their genealogies.

So the fact that they are there at all is really interesting.

... is going to quickly read the genealogy in Matt 1 that mentions these women, skipping a few of the names.

Originally I was just going to talk about these 5 women in Matthew, but I found out how interesting all the genealogies in the gospels are. So we're going to have a look at those as well..

Does anyone know why history records were really important to the Jews? (*because anyone who couldn't trace their family had no inheritance and you were treated as a dispossessed foreigner*). So this made genealogies important... so they could claim their inheritance.

### SHOW LIST

COMPARE Matthew and Lukes list - completely different till we get to David.

MATTHEW the genealogy only goes back Abraham. Any theories why?

I think it's aimed at the Jews... that's what all the commentaries say and Matthew seems to put a lot of emphasis on proving to the Jewish readers that Jesus is their Messiah... especially refers to Old Testament quotations about Jesus being the fulfillment of the prophecies.

Normally the information about these women would be hidden, but they are specially included there I think to emphasise that God shows grace...and that He works through the most unlikely people. I think He wanted to emphasize this. The 4 women, not counting Mary, all had unacceptable qualities to the devout keeper of the law. At least 3 were Gentiles. Today that might not mean much, but back then people were obsessed with racial purity. Having a Gentile in your family tree was like having your worst enemy for a grandmother. You could be looked down on in your social standing if you were descended from a mixed marriage.

The Jews liked to trace their ancestry back to Abraham, they were very proud of this. I think this list is a reminder to them that although they liked to think of themselves as righteous, their own past history was full of sin... especially with the mention of Bathsheba as Uriah the Hittite's wife.

Just a few pages over in Matthew 3 v 9 ... John the Baptist says to the Jews *"Do not presume to say to yourselves 'We have Abraham as our father' for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham"*

So its quite strange to have a list of names that traces the natural descendants back to Abraham, and then God says a couple of pages later, that if all He was concerned about were natural descendants, He could use a pile of stones. Its really not children of Abraham by the

flesh God wants, but children of Abraham by faith. I think that the list in Matt. is designed to remind the Jews of their past, and to show it was a history full of imperfect people and sinners... and there were some God had blessed who weren't even Jewish...and He had shown them grace.

LUKE The genealogy in Luke does not have any mention of women... the commentaries say it was more aimed at Gentiles. It fulfilled the prophecy to David that Jesus would sit on His throne...he was descended from David through Bathsheba's other son Nathan who was born after Solomon. Its amazing that these 2 lines go through 2 of Bathsheba's sons.

MARK simply says Jesus Christ the Son of God... so that makes the list of names a whole lot more simple... He just looks at Jesus as being the one who had been promised by Isaiah the prophet... the Son of God.

JOHN doesn't have a list of the blood line of Jesus, it makes the point that if we are God's children, then who we are naturally descended from doesn't matter. The gospel of John places the importance, on being children of Abraham through faith, not on being descended from him naturally.

Would ... read [John 1 v11- 13](#)

So John's gospel really emphasizes what God wants, children of faith, not those who happen to be born Jewish.

JOHN has the genealogy that I like the best ...

So that's a brief look at the 4 gospel genealogies ... now I'd like us to think a bit more about the women that Matthew included.

All these five women have lessons for us. They weren't all perfect, some of them made really big mistakes, BUT we can learn from their mistakes, and we can learn from their courage, and the things they got right. God used them all as part of His plan to bring Jesus into the world. The fact that Jesus came from such a line of mixed people, really emphasizes that it is a lineage of grace that Jesus was born into. These women would have been 'disqualified' if God's calling depended on righteousness of the Law. The mention of them here also shows that Jesus identifies with sinners even in His genealogy, just as in His birth, baptism, life, and death on the cross.

I'd like to make two lists on the board about these women.

1. Why they were unlikely choices to be in a Jewish royal line?

and then

2. what the challenges in their lives would have been... and maybe we can think about what we would have done in the same situation.

They women really were faced with some of the most difficult circumstances that you ever read about, and a lot of those circumstances were beyond their control, ... some of them found themselves in a situations that were not of their own making, and some made bad mistakes ...and got themselves into a mess. But God still showed grace to them, when the law would have condemned them.

We'll start with **Tamar**. Which is really not a nice story. Just to get the setting for Tamar's story... it was after Judah and his brothers sold Joseph to the Ishmaelites. Joseph was stuck down in Egypt and Judah left home and went and married a Canaanite ... probably feeling very guilty about Joseph.

I'll just get ... to read a few verses to remind us of what happened to Tamar. *READ [Gen 38 v 6-7](#)*. ok we know the rest of the story how God slew Tamar's second husband as well . Judah sent Tamar back home to live with her own family again , he was scared his next son would die if Tamar married him too. Then Tamar concealed who she was and met Judah on the road, and she ended up becoming pregnant to Judah... it's not a nice story at all, and I'd never given much thought to the plight of Tamar until I began to re-think things from Tamar's perspective.

I think it's really likely that when Tamar found herself in such miserable marriages, that she may well have done a lot of thinking and even had the opportunity from Judah , with whom she was now in contact, to find out about the true God... we are not told this, it's only speculation, but it's possible.

It's worth pointing out what the law said about what Judah and Tamar had done, Lev 20 v 12 says *"If a man sleeps with his daughter-in-law, both of them must be put to death."* So according to the law... both Judah and Tamar should have been stoned. the Law made no allowance for the intention of the heart and could only judge the situation by what had actually taken place.

Let's think about Tamar and her life.

Can anyone suggest what challenges she faced? E.g. Judah GOT a wife for his eldest son Er....2 wicked husbands... did she have any choice ... sent back to her parents in disgrace...All these bad things had happened to Tamar, and they were all out of her control... as far as I can see she had no say in any of these things, they were circumstances that just happened to her, so up to this point she had a really bad life, and it probably last for quite some years... because the youngest son had time to grow up... so she'd had probably years of a miserable life.

Obviously she didn't do the right thing by deceiving Judah, but he had not done the right thing by her either. So in a way it was perhaps Judah's wrong actions that had caused Tamar to do the wrong thing, and the lesson is that we can be the cause of making other people stumble like Jesus warns us of in Matt. 18 where he says "if anyone causes one of these little ones to sin." We can't entirely blame Judah for Tamar's sin, because we are all responsible for our own actions, but if Judah had done the right thing to start with, then Tamar wouldn't have been in the situation she was.

So what can we put on the board about Tamar?

Next in the list is **Rahab**. This is someone its easier to talk about because we know definitely that she was good. She is listed in the chapter of the faithful, Heb 11 and I'll ask ... to read out [verse 31](#).

Thanks , so we see that her faith was in welcoming the spies...I'll ask ... to read [Joshua 2 v 10-11](#).

So Rahab recognized that the God of the Israelites was the one true God... and God would have seen this faith that Rahab had.... In fact maybe the whole purpose of the spies going into Jericho was really for Rahab's benefit. When you think about it..they went into Jericho, heard Rahab's

report, and went home again... did they really need to be told that the inhabitants of the land were afraid, or was it God's way of saving Rahab because of her faith? ... any thoughts?

So why was Rahab an unlikely choice for a royal line from a human perspective?

She had been a harlot ... she wasn't Jewish.

Now I'll ask ... to read [Joshua 6 v22-25](#)

Can anyone detect in these verses an indication of some challenges for Rahab after she was rescued?

V 23... set them outside the camp. How welcome would most of the Israelites have made an outsider? They would have known she was a harlot, and they set her and her family outside the camp.

What challenges did she face?

(overcome the prejudice of not being Jewish, the prejudice of having been a harlot, maybe having to leave her family... we don't hear of them as joining also).

I think that there would always have been some Israelites who looked down on Rahab and thought of her as an outsider because of her past... especially as they placed so much importance on their roots and background of being Jewish. I think there are lessons here for us today, to be welcoming of people who don't come from our backgrounds ... . We are told that Rahab married Salmon, and they had a son called Boaz. We know that Boaz married Ruth ... they had a son Obed who had a son Jesse, who was the father of David. So that makes Rahab David's great great grandmother. And Ruth was David's great grandmother ...no doubt it's from where David inherited some of his good qualities.

## **RUTH**

we all know her story really well. She lived in the time of the book of Judges ... a time when God really did use some of the strangest means from a human point of view to achieve His purpose. The whole of the book of Judges is full of stories of people winning battles with no weapons, when all the odds were stacked against them. Stories like Shamgar beating 600 Philistines with an oxgoad (which was just a pointed stick) and Deborah and Barak fighting Sisera with virtually no weapons except for their faith in God ... and Gideon using jars and torches to beat an army. They were times of reliance and faith in God ... and it was around this time that Ruth lived.

Would ... read [Deut 23 v 3-6](#). These were pretty harsh words for the Moabites, and that's what Ruth was. So again under the Jewish laws, Ruth would not have been welcome, even though she had a wonderful character ... . The Law wouldn't have taken Ruth as a person into account, law just sees things from the legal perspective ... and she shouldn't have been in the congregation of Israel, but she was.

What challenges did Ruth face?

Death of her husband, leaving family, going to where she would be resented. Not having money.

## **BATHSHEBA**

Unlikely choice ... she may have been a Gentile. Committed adultery. What she had to live with ... resentment of other widows. Death of her first baby. Guilt of her husband's murder. YET 2 of her sons were chosen for a special purpose ... surely God showing grace to Bathsheba as He had to David.

## **MARY**

... she had an uncertain future ... I don't think that things turned out at all like Mary would have expected. What challenges did she face?

She would have had people looking down on her for being pregnant before she was married. It seems that Joseph died. Jesus didn't become king straight away ... He was killed.

I'll end by reading out a paragraph I found on the internet:

*"If the genealogy of Jesus comes as a stinging rebuke to human pride, it can also come to us as a gentle solace to whatever we have experienced at the hands of human devastation and dysfunction. The stories of Matthew's five women are the stories of widowhood, second and third marriages, incest, prostitution, lying, murder, adultery, economic hardship, foreign exclusion, and geographic dislocation. He reminds us that there is nothing that can separate us from God's love ([Romans 8:39](#)), and that there is nothing of life's bitterness that cannot be woven into God's providential, redemptive history for us. Our Stories are not over; there are more chapters to be written, may we hear, above all, the sound of God's voice in our lives as we remember their lives".*