

## **Chapter 3 Backstory**

### **3 Matthew's Good News Chapter 1, verses 3-6**

#### **Are marginalized people overlooked by God?**

(Matthew divides the story of God's people into three time periods of fourteen generations each. The first period includes the generations from Abraham to David.)

The genealogy from Abraham to David is a story of God's surprising grace to one marginalized person after another. We don't get far into the generations from Abraham to Jesus before our attention is called to the names of four remarkable women. Their mention in this list is not a small matter. They stand out because women are not otherwise mentioned in this list at all. And they stand out because each is a story of God's love and grace for downtrodden people.

Judah fathered Perez and Zamar. Their mother was Tamar. She is the first of several women of special significance in this list. Genesis 38 tells Tamar's story. Her first husband, Judah's son Er, died as an evil man. Tamar was passed to Judah's next son Onan, but he rejected her as a mother for his children, and he died also. Judah also rejected Tamar from his family and sent her away. She had to pose as a prostitute to get pregnant through Judah, who finally admitted he had been wrong to mistreat her. This thrice-rejected wife is listed in the family tree of Jesus. If Jesus hated people like Tamar (or like Judah!) would he claim them as his family?

The story continues through Tamar's son Perez, and his son Hezron, followed by the generations of Ram, Amminadab, Nahshon, Salmon, and Boaz, whose mother was Rahab. Her story is told in Joshua 2. Rahab was a prostitute in the city of Jericho when Hebrew spies came to her for help. The spies were sons of slaves whom God had delivered from Egypt. God led the first generation of his free people into the land of Canaan. The great walled city of Jericho blocked the way. Hebrew spies entered the city--and might have died there if Rahab had not saved them. Rahab knew what God she wanted to serve. This Canaanite former prostitute is in the family of Jesus.

Rahab's son Boaz fathered Obed, whose mother was Ruth. An entire Old Testament book records Ruth's story of death, grief, famine, and alienation--and that is only the beginning of the story! Ruth, like Tamar and Rahab, was not a Hebrew. Ruth was a Moabite widow. She chose to leave her homeland to live with her mother-in-law Naomi. She chose Naomi and Naomi's God. God showed His amazing grace in her story, and Jesus is not ashamed to include this Moabite widow in his family.

Ruth's son Obed fathered Jesse, Jesse fathered David, and David fathered Solomon, whose mother had been the wife of Uriah. This gut-wrenching story is in 2 Samuel 11-12. Uriah was a faithful warrior for King David. But while Uriah was away fighting David's battles, David took Uriah's wife Bathsheba and got her pregnant. To avoid scandal, David tried to bring Uriah home to sleep with his wife. But Uriah refused to do so while his comrades were faithfully fighting. So David gave secret orders to have Uriah abandoned to the enemy, who killed him. David then married Bathsheba. When the prophet Nathan confronted David and foretold the death of the baby, David confessed his crime. He mourned and wrote a prayer of lament that is still prayed by sinners today (Psalm 51). Sinners, victims, and shamed, grieved women like Bathsheba are included in the story of the Savior.

From a human point of view, there is more pain than honor in the stories of Tamar, Rahab, Ruth and Bathsheba. And as far as we know, none of these women were descendants of Abraham. Yet each of them was ultimately honored. They are honored not for success in the eyes of mortals, but because God saves rejected, dishonored, alienated, grieving people of all nations. We get to read their stories from God's perspective, which is fair, accurate, and eternal. We see them included in the family of Jesus. They are in the cloud of witnesses calling our attention to the Savior. The Savior redeems our painful stories. He makes them parts of his salvation story.

There is nothing trivial about the suffering of women such as these. But there is something eternal at work when God knows them, saves them, and includes them in his family.

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