

FOUR WOMEN IN THE GENEALOGY OF JESUS ACCORDING TO THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW

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INTRODUCTORY OBSERVATIONS

The frequency with which genealogies are found in the Bible accentuates their importance. They established a person's lineage – which included one's Jewishness, tribal identity, one's right to the priesthood and one's right to kingship.ⁱ It described who and what you were as illustrated by the event of David and Goliath. After David killed Goliath he was brought before Saul, who asked "Whose son are you, young man?" "The son of your servant Jesse of Bethlehem," David answered (1 Sam 17:58).

With exception of the Jesus lineage in Matthew 1, lineage clearly was always tracked through the males, being the carriers of the seed, throughout most of the Bible. The Talmud states that a mother's family is not to be called family. Over the years, however, a viewpoint of maternal lineage developed in the Jewish environment, but this does not appear to be prominent at least through the days of Jesus.ⁱⁱ Various Israelite leaders married women of other nations/groups. Joseph, for example married an Egyptian, Moses a Midianite and a Kushite. Also, Matthew mentions only five women in the course of his recorded lineage: Tamar, Rahab, Ruth and Bathsheba, with Mary, the mother of Jesus in the final place. This article will focus on the first four and for reasons that will become clear in the course of the discussion.

¹The historical record of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham: ... ³Judah fathered Perez and Zerah by Tamar, ... ⁵Salmon fathered Boaz by Rahab, Boaz fathered Obed by Ruth, ... ⁶And Jesse fathered King David. Then David fathered Solomon by Uriah's wife, ... (Matthew 1:1-6, HCSB)

Deuteronomy 7:1-4 records God's exclusion of marriages between men and women of Israel with the men and women of seven specific nations. **Note that there is a specific reason for this exclusion, the risk that such marriage would turn the sons and daughters of Israel away from God to the worship of other (false) gods:**

¹When the Lord your God brings you into the land you are entering to possess, and He drives out many nations before you – the Hittites, Girgashites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizites, Hivites and Jebusites, seven nations more numerous and powerful than you (...) ³Do not intermarry with them. Do not give your daughters to their sons or take their daughters for your sons, ⁴because they will turn your sons [refers to both men and women] away from Me to worship other gods. Then the Lord's anger will burn against you, and He will swiftly destroy you. (HCSB)

Not all nations they would encounter are mentioned. Other marriage exclusions followed – the *mamzers* and their descendants for all time, as well as the Ammonites and Moabites, and their

descendants for all time (see my article, [*Deuteronomy 23:3-4 Understood Within Proper Context*](#) for a discussion on the *mamzer* topic).

- A *mamzer* was a person born from either an incestuous union, or an adulterous union involving a married woman. It applied to Jews only and not to the people of other nations.

While the mention of Mary is a logical one, the question may be raised of why these other four women were listed by Matthew and not any other maternal persons (such as the matriarchal women, Sarah, Rebekah and Leah, for example). He does not explain, but the fact is that they featured in prominent and specific ways in the history of Israel described in the Scriptures and which are linked to the Davidic and Messianic bloodline, ways that stretched beyond the traditional focus of marrying and bearing children.

This approach by Matthew makes sense in view of the patriarchal system that prevailed in that nation during the Biblical times, as well as the tradition of keeping the Messianic bloodline pure and unpolluted. This purity tradition seems to be at the heart of these women's place in the genealogy presented by Matthew. Sadly, one finds considerable confusion on this matter as various viewpoints and explanations are presented, even in Jewish environments. Fruchtenbaum, for example, in an article I found on the Jews for Jesus website states that they were all Gentiles. He concludes that Bathsheba was guilty of adultery, Rahab was guilty of prostitution, and Tamar was guilty of incest.ⁱⁱⁱ Ruth is described by many as a Moabite, even as a Moabite princess.^{iv}

With this article I try to present a sound discussion, void of all the speculations and philosophies, if that be possible. My primary point of departure will be the text of the relevant Scripture portions. Consulting secondary sources to fill in voids on aspects not clearly stated in Scripture is unavoidable, but here I endeavor to make my acceptance or rejection of information clear.

It is important to note that there were two broad periods or seasons involved in the history as we look at these four women: The pre-Sinai period and the Mosaic dispensation Israel received from God through Moses at Sinai. Tamar is found in the former, while Rahab, Ruth and Bathsheba follow in the latter dispensation.

A last introductory thought: Matthew's Gospel was written somewhere between the years 50 and 65 AD. Although Matthew did not directly mention his audience or intended readership, his focus on showing that Jesus of Nazareth fulfilled the Scriptures points to Jewish believers in Jesus as the promised Messiah. The first 11 chapters of the book of Acts describe a movement of Jesus-followers comprised of Jews. After the execution of Stephen (Acts 6-8) and persecution of Jewish believers many were scattered through the Roman Empire (the known world of New Testament times) and so the Gospel message came to be taken to other nations. The first ethnically mixed community of Jews and Gentiles started to form in Roman Antioch.^v

¹⁹Those who had been scattered as a result of the persecution that started because of Stephen made their way as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch, speaking the message to no one except Jews. ²⁰But there were some of them, Cypriot and Cyrenian men, who came to Antioch and began speaking to the Hellenists [or, Greeks], proclaiming the good news about the Lord Jesus (Acts 11:19-20, HCSB).

In our evaluation of the reasons why Matthew included these four women in his genealogy, we will need to bear this reality in mind.

TAMAR

Both the Genesis Rabbah, a collection of rabbinical interpretations of the Book of Genesis from Judaism's classical period, and the Jewish Talmud state that Tamar was an Israelite.^{vi} From my own study of the literature I conclude that she was not an Israelite by birth (i.e. a descendant of Jacob), but became one when she was taken in marriage by Er, the firstborn son of Judah. She actually came from the lineage of Noah's son, Shem (Melchizedek).^{vii} The *Book Of Jasher*, referred to in the books of Joshua and Second Samuel, Chapter 45:23 states:

And in those days Judah went to the house of Shem and took Tamar the daughter of Elam, the son of Shem, for a wife for his first born Er.

To place the events surrounding Judah and Tamar in correct time perspective, it is important to note that it played out in the time-frame when Joseph was still imprisoned in Egypt. After Joseph was sold to a group of Midianite (Ishmaelite) traders by his brothers, Judah left them and settled elsewhere. He married the daughter of Canaanite Shua and they had three sons (Er, Onan and Shelah).

Er was evil in the sight of the Lord by outwardly spilling his seed when he came to Tamar, his wife, because he allegedly feared having children would spoil her beauty, and he died without a descendant.^{viii} In terms of the reigning custom, the next son, Onan, was instructed by Judah to sleep with Tamar (in marriage therefore) to produce offspring for his brother. Because the offspring would not be his, Onan too, released his seed on the ground whenever he slept with his brother's widow. That was evil in the sight of the Lord and he too died. Judah sent Tamar back to her father's house with the excuse that his remaining son still needed to grow up, as he feared to let Shelah fulfil the custom with her, lest he too should die.

When Tamar saw that Shelah reached maturity, but did not marry her, she disguised herself and met Judah (whose wife had also died) on his way to Timnath. She took off her widow's clothes, veiled her face and sat at the entrance to Enaim on the way to Timnath. Supposing her to be a woman of questionable virtue, Judah approached her and had sexual relations with her that resulted in her pregnancy. As a pledge of payment, he left his staff, signet ring, and belt with her at the time.

- One may question how it was possible that Judah did not recognise Tamar, if not at their meeting, then during their sexual intercourse? According to Rabbinical literature Tamar was extremely virtuous and timid in the house of her father-in-law, and used to keep her face constantly covered with a veil, so that Judah failed to recognize her when he saw her sitting by the roadside.^{ix} Tamar prayed to God that she might not go barren from Judah's house, and resolved upon the course which she subsequently pursued.^x

When Tamar's condition was discovered, and she was about to be burned to death in punishment for unchastity, she confronted Judah (officially her father-in-law) with the tokens he had left with her, declaring that she was with child by the man to whom they belonged. He confessed his role and declared that she was indeed more righteous than him since he did not give her to his son, Shelah. She bore him the twins Perez and Zerah (Gen 38).

Perez appears in Matthew's genealogy as the one through whom the Davidic and Messianic lineage was continued.

When Jacob called his sons together before his death – which clearly happened long after the above events – he blessed each one with a suitable (prophetic) blessing showing what would happen in the future. In the case of Judah, it included a clear prophetic pronouncement of the Messianic lineage:

The scepter will not depart from Judah, or the staff from between his feet, until He whose right it is comes and the obedience of the peoples belongs to Him (Gen 49:10, HCSB).

The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, Nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, as long as men come to Shiloh; and unto him shall the obedience of the peoples be (Gen 49:10, Tanakh).

Did Tamar commit incest with Judah?

Leviticus 18 addresses a number of prohibited pagan incestuous practices the Israelites were acquainted with from the land of Egypt. One of these is sexual intercourse between a man and his daughter-in-law. Consequently, the question arises whether Judah's intercourse with Tamar, even though he did not recognise her at the time, amounted to such a prohibited incestuous act?

The answer lies in the Levirate marriage tradition that is confirmed in Deuteronomy 25:5-10, requiring a brother to produce offspring with the wife of his deceased brother if the latter died without a descendant son. It was all about preserving the family name, as well as providing for the widow. This responsibility had become extended to other males in the family, in this case the son's father. The extension most likely reflected the old tribal institution of *go'el* (which is found also in the Book of Ruth). According to *go'el*, and owing to the solidarity of the family and clan in ancient Israel, any duty which a man could not perform by himself had to be taken up by his next of kin. Such a person became known as a **kinsman redeemer**.^{xi}

In terms of the Old Testament law a woman was legally bound to her husband while he lived. His death, however, released her from the law regarding the husband (Rom 7:2). Because both Tamar's husbands had died, she was released from the law pertaining to them. The principle of incest no longer applied in the sexual union between her and Judah. She ensured the continuation of the Davidic and Messianic lineage according to Jacob's eventual blessing upon Judah (even if unbeknown to her). This was something which Judah's sons by his marriage to a Canaanite could not do.

Concluding observations

The small portion of Israelite history in Genesis 38 is not clear on Tamar's biological descent and has unfortunately given rise to various speculations in Judeo-Christian circles. Some present her as Gentile, while others use the more specific designation of Canaanite.

Classical Rabbinical and ancient literature, however, show her to be from the lineage of Noah's son Shem, who also appears in the Bible as Melchizedek, king of Salem and priest of the most high God (Gen 14:18; Ps 110:4; Heb 7:1-3).^{xii} According to the Talmud, Judah's confession of guilt atoned for his prior faults, which were taking a Canaanite as his wife and not one of their own clan as the

reigning custom required. Tamar's actions, on the other hand, are seen as being for the purpose of avoiding the humiliation of Judah.^{xiii}

Given the place of the committed oral passing on by parents to their children of their traditions, that characterized the Israelite society, it is highly questionable to think that, in Jewish tradition in the time of Matthew, Tamar, the acknowledged granddaughter of Shem, would even have been thought of as a Gentile.

The synagogue in the lifetime of Jesus (and Matthew) was not only a place where the adult people gathered to worship on the Sabbath. It was also the place where the Hebrew children were educated. Here they would learn all the 'subjects' from the Torah, or first five books of the Old Testament. As there were a limited number of scrolls and children could not take them home as they would from a library today, they had to memorise portions, so they could answer any question from such Scripture. The Hebrew child would eventually memorise the whole Torah within three years. This implied that the mere mention of a small portion of a Scripture would bring to mind the whole (Smith, 2002)^{xiv}.

In terms of being instrumental in her role of continuing the Messianic lineage, Tamar was not disqualified biologically and neither was she disqualified in any other way. This reality shows that the bloodline purity tradition of their culture was preserved and not compromised by Tamar. The Jewish concept of levirate marriage, of the Kinsman Redeemer, provided the legal foundation for her actions.

But why would Matthew specifically include her by name in his lineage record? Why not just mention Judah as the father of Perez? In my view, the following lies at the heart of it:

- Firstly, as Tamar's story is found in the Torah, the mention of her name would immediately bring her role in continuing the Davidic (and Messianic) bloodline to mind of the Israelites hearing (or reading) the message.
- Secondly, Tamar endangered her own life to conceive children who would become the mainstay of the tribe of Judah. She came from Shem's lineage, with Perez deemed in the Israelite tradition to be Judah's first-born and heir above his older son, Shelah, by his deceased Canaanite wife. Their clan gained prominence above that of Shelah. **Had it not been for her actions, the Davidic (and Messianic) lineage would have come to an abrupt end with Judah.**

The ancestral position of Shem (ancestor even to their patriarch Jacob) and also his acclamation as Melchizedek, priest of the most high God in the pre-Levitical (pre-Mosaic) priesthood era, certainly support the first viewpoint. The Psalmist accentuated this importance in his Messianic Psalm:

The Lord has sworn an oath and will not take it back: "Forever, You are a priest like Melchizedek." (Ps 110:4, HCSB).

The Lord hath sworn, and will not repent: 'Thou art a priest forever after the manner of Melchizedek.' (Ps 110:4, Tanakh).

RAHAB

The story of Rahab, the so-called harlot (or prostitute) of Jericho, is probably one of the best-known stories from the Old Testament. We meet her in the second chapter of the Book of Joshua. Sadly, my study of the topic has shown it to be one of the most widely misrepresented stories of the Old Testament, not only through historical error in preaching, teaching and Christian literature, but by inaccurate translation of who she really was. In the course of my study in a wide variety of sources which included information from ancient Jewish literature, I was surprised to find such mistranslation even in the Jewish Publication Society's 1917 English version of the Tanakh, as well as in David Stern's Complete Jewish Bible of 1998.

But let us take the Rahab account from the beginning.

Joshua had shortly before taken over the leadership mantle from Moses. Israel was preparing to conquer the promised land of Canaan. The Bible narrative tells us that Joshua sent two spies, Pinchas and Caleb, to scout the land, especially the city of Jericho. Mindel, in an article about Rahab on the Chabad.org website, states that the two spies were sent to obtain firsthand information as to how the Canaanites were viewing the coming invasion (for which an ultimatum had been issued to them).^{xv} This is in harmony with Rahab's knowledge of the impending invasion of their land by the Israelites (Jos 2:8-11).

The narrative of the Bible then states the two men came to the house of a harlot (prostitute, whore) named Rahab and stayed there (Jos 2:1). (Of the 28 Bible versions I checked, the word *harlot* is used by 15, *whore* by 6 and *prostitute* also by 6. The Orthodox Jewish Bible, however, does not translate the expression, but retains the Hebrew *isha zonah*).

In my exploration of a wide range of literature, including literature from the Jewish environment, it was clear that the word *zonah* could have both positive and negative denotations. I found two broad positions: one presents an accord with the translation of the word as prostitute (or harlot; whore), while the other accepts it as an innkeeper. *Isha zonah* is therefore explained as "female innkeeper." Shlomo Yitzchaki (generally known as Rashi) quoted the *Targum Yonatan* to explain that application of the word *zonah* in the story of Rahab means someone who sells food, which can mean either a grocer or an innkeeper. Rozenberg points out that when the word *zonah* is used throughout the *Navi* (the Prophets) it is mostly not used in reference to a prostitute at all.^{xvi} Kohn describes the meaning in this context as "a female innkeeper, who provided food for people."

- Josephus Flavius' *Antiquities Of The Jews - Book 5*, was written in c.94 AD and translated into English from the Greek by William Whiston in 1732. He wrote that the two spies were in an inn kept by Rahab. The book does not record who Rahab married.
- *The Samaritan Chronicle: The Book Of Joshua* of which the oldest extant manuscript dates to 1362 AD. The origin is likely much older. This book also describes Rahab as an innkeeper. It too does not record who Rahab married.

Of course, there are those who insist holding on to the negative explanation. To provide a fully representative account of all argumentations and viewpoints would require a considerable academic dissertation, which would not serve the purpose of this writing. I therefore settle with my conclusion that Rahab was an innkeeper and not a prostitute. The position of her house as one that was built into the wall of the city provides further support. It was a known position for an inn in ancient times.

When the king of Jericho demanded she bring out the men, for they came to investigate the land, Rahab kept them hidden on her roof among stalks of flax and answered that they had been there, but she didn't know where they were from. They had left before the city gate was closed at nightfall. In

reality she eventually let them down by a rope through the window during the night, after they promised that her and her family's lives would be spared when the Israelites conquered the city. This promise was honoured when Jericho fell to the Israelites and her whole family was settled outside the camp of Israel. According to Joshua 6:25 she was given land in Israel for risking her own life in hiding the two spies sent to Jericho.

The Book of Joshua does not state that Salmon married Rahab. Neither the *Antiquities Of The Jews* by Josephus, nor *The Samaritan Chronicle: The Book Of Joshua* relate who Rahab married. The Jewish Midrash (as do various other Jewish sources), however, attests that Rahab converted to the Israelite faith and married Joshua. They did not have any sons, only daughters, but their descendants included several prophets, Jeremiah being one of them.^{xvii}

Who did Salmon marry?

Salmon is recorded as the sixth generation after Judah. Matthew's genealogy in most of our English Bibles states that Salmon fathered Boaz by Rahab. This is commonly regarded to be Rahab of Jericho in Western Christianity. But is it?

Inconsistency in the 26 English translations I checked certainly does not help. The name of the woman mentioned in Matthew 1:5 (Strong's no. 4477) is translated as Rahab in 18, Rachav in 2 and Rachab in 6. Looking at Hebrews 11:31 (Strong's no. 4460), Rahab is used 22 times, Rachav 2 times, Rachab and Raab both once.

Interestingly, the Geneva Bible of 1587 and the Authorised King James Version (1611) use the translated name Rachab in Matthew 1:5, but Rahab in Hebrews 11:31 and James 2:25.^{xviii} This is in harmony with the two name variations found in the Greek manuscripts:

And Säl'mön begat Bō'öz of Rā'chăb (...) (Mat 1:5)

By faith the harlot Rā'hăb perished not with them (...) (Heb 11:31)

Likewise also was not Rā'hăb the harlot justified by works, (...) (Jas 2:25) (All KJV translation, format of SRSB)

While Zodhiates indicates pronunciation variations for the two Greek name variations involved in his Word Study, he follows the all too common pattern and narrows it down to Rahab in both cases.

The Greek name in Matthew 1:5 is 'Ραχάβ (hrakh-ab, Strong no. G4477), while the name in Hebrews 11:31 and James 2:25 is 'Ραάβ (hrah-ab, Strong no. 4460). Both names are rooted in the Hebrew *Rāchāv* (Strong no. H7343).

Variations of names having a single root has been and still is a common phenomenon. Take the Hebrew name Aaron, the very first name in Dorothy Astoria's *The Name Book*, for example. Eight variations are given – Aaran, Aaren, Aarin, Aaronn, Aarron, Aron, Arran and Arron. This implies that one could have nine different people whose names evolved from the same Hebrew root and all have the same inherent meaning, which is Light Bringer.^{xix} I could not find any plausible evidence or justification for consolidating the two variations in the New Testament into a single person – not in the Bible and neither in extra-Biblical literature.

Consequently, I conclude that the New Testament has two name variations because two different women are being referred to.

Why then did Matthew mention *Rā'chāb* in his Davidic/Messianic genealogy?

This is certainly a justified question seeing that Matthew gives no explanation and also no distinguishing appellation (negative or otherwise) as he did in the case of Bathsheba. I believe the reason once again lies in the oral tradition of the Jewish culture. The difference in the name's spelling would have indicated to the readers (or audience) that Salmon's wife (Boaz's mother) was not Rahab of Jericho, thereby preventing any misconception. Sadly, religious translators and commentators – through error or subjective agenda – have mistakenly transliterated or translated Salmon's wife as Rahab, and therefore the innkeeper (or alleged prostitute) of Jericho.

Concluding observations

As I mentioned in my introductory paragraph to this section, my study of the topic has shown it to be one of the most widely misrepresented stories of the Old Testament, not only through historical error in preaching, teaching and Christian literature, but essentially by inaccurate translation of who she really was.

To summarise the Biblical historical position then:

- The heroin Rahab of Jericho was not a prostitute, but a female innkeeper.
- The Greek name in the manuscripts of the books of Hebrews and James is Ῥαάβ (hrah-ab) and is transliterated as Rahab in most English Bible versions.
- Rahab was given land among the Israelites, converted to the Jewish faith (or religion) and married Joshua according to ancient Jewish sources. They had no sons, daughters only, and their ancestors included a number of prophets. One of these prophets was Jeremiah.
- The wife of Salmon was not Rahab of Jericho but a woman with a different although closely related name. The Geneva Bible and the King James Version more logically transliterated the Greek name Ῥαχάβ (hrakh-ab) as Rachab. The majority of English versions unfortunately and in error use the same transliteration for the wife of Salmon's name in Matthew 1:5 as well.
- Matthew's inclusion of the name of Salmon's wife was in all probability to prevent possible misunderstanding that might have existed among his audience and readers, who were raised in the Jewish culture and oral tradition. The didactic principle involved was that **any portion of a portion represented the whole**. Because of the educational approach to the Jewish children, the Jewish people were therefore expected to know the whole from the mention of just a limited portion.

RUTH

The presence of Ruth in Matthews genealogy has also become a complicated story in view of the limited information one has from the Bible. The fact that there is a Bible book by her name and that apart from Mary, to whom Jesus was born, she is one of only four women specifically mentioned in Matthew's Davidic and Messianic lineage, clearly indicates a person who deserved special attention within the Jewish culture. We need to bear in mind that Matthew does not explain her inclusion within a cultural mindset where lineage in those days was traditionally tracked through the males. This reality can be seen in the many lineages recorded in the Bible.

In my re-focused Bible study of the past twelve years (as if for the first time) I have learned a number of important truths. One is that incorrect interpretation of a Scripture portion may provide an easily acceptable explanation of one problem area, but it will unavoidably lead to problems in

other areas. I have also found that all the theological philosophies and philosophical theologies have led to many kinds of doctrines and systems that have moved far, far away from the communal Kingdom of God ecclesiae that Jesus of Nazareth and his apostles promoted. My study of a wide array of literature on Ruth has once again accentuated these sad realities. This same kind of situation is reflected in Jewish rabbinical literature.

Introducing Ruth

The Book of Ruth, one of the shortest books in the Bible, does not provide specific traces of who the author was or when it was written. One Jewish tradition makes the prophet Samuel the author and recounts events in the neighbouring land of Moab shortly after the death of Joshua, original conqueror of what became the land of Israel.

In the early part of the Judges' rule over Israel, there came a famine. Elimelech, a wealthy man who is called the prince of the Tribe of Yehuda (Judah) in rabbinic literature, left Bethlehem with his wife and two sons to live in the land of Moab for a while. It is alleged that he did not want to support the endless queues of beggars. He consequently abdicated leadership responsibilities to selfishly protect his wealth.^{xx}

Elimelech died in Moab and his two sons took them wives of the women of Moab (Ruth 1:3-4, 2017 translation of The Jewish Publication Society). The Holman's Christian Standard Bible uses the expression 'Moabite women'. The one was Ruth and the other Orpah. The two sons also died – with no descendants – and the family also lost their wealth (Ruth 1:21).

Having heard that the famine had ended in her homeland, Naomi prepared with her two daughters-in-law to leave for Bethlehem where she owned a field inherited from her father and where her extended family lived.^{xxi} **Along the road Naomi tried to persuade the two women to return to their mother's home and their gods.** She reasoned that she was too old to have another husband and they should not restrain from remarrying. In her view the Lord's hand had turned against her. Orpah eventually turned back, but Ruth refused, saying:

¹⁶...Do not persuade me to leave you or go back and not follow you. For wherever you go, I will go, and wherever you live, I will live; your people will be my people, and your God will be my God. ¹⁷Where you die, I will die, and there I will be buried. May the Lord do this for me, and even more, if anything but death separates you and me. (...) ²²So Naomi came back from the land of Moab with her daughter-in-law Ruth the Moabitess. They arrived in Bethlehem at the beginning of the barley harvest. (Ruth 1:16-17, 22, HCSB).

The whole town was excited about their arrival (Ruth 1:19). Although Naomi responded bitterly about her position, there can be no doubt her return and Ruth's presence with her was generally known and welcomed in the community. It was the start of the harvest season and as destitute people they were allowed to follow farmhands harvesting grains and to collect some for themselves as prescribed in Leviticus 23:22.

When you reap the harvest of your land, you are not to reap all the way to the edge of your field or gather the gleanings of your harvest. Leave them for the poor and foreign resident; I am the Lord your God. (HCSB)

Ruth went out to the fields alone, probably to spare Naomi public humiliation from her poor circumstances. In this process Ruth chanced upon the fields of Boaz and he encouraged her to spend the harvest season in his fields.

Boaz in the role of Kinsman Redeemer.

According to rabbinical literature, Boaz had become the leader in the generation that Elimelech, Naomi's husband, had relinquished when he relocated his family to the land of Moab.^{xxii} Naomi realised that as a relative, Boaz might be willing to take up the responsibilities of kinsman redeemer (*goel*) (Ruth 3:1-2).

- The Hebrew Bible and rabbinical tradition denoted kinsman redeemer as a person who, being the nearest relative of another was charged with the responsibility (or duty) of restoring the rights of his relative and avenging such person's wrongs. These obligations included the duty to redeem the relative from slavery (Lev 25:48-49); to repurchase property the relative had to sell because of poverty; to avenge the blood of his relative; to marry his deceased brother's widow in order to have a son for his brother if there had not been one (Deut 25:5-6) and to receive the restitution if the injured relative had died (Numbers 5:8).^{xxiii}
- It was considered a curse to have one's name cease. The first to consider would be a living brother. If there was no living brother, the duty passed on to the next nearest relative by a distinct order of procession.^{xxiv}
- To be a kinsman redeemer, the person had to be a man; an Israelite; of the self-same tribe; and of the same family.^{xxv}
- The Bible narrative shows how Boaz honoured this order of procession (Ruth 3:12).

Naomi sought to find security for Ruth, that she would be taken care of. At the end of the harvest season she had Ruth relay to Boaz that she (Naomi) wanted to sell her land – following Torah guidelines it had to be to a family member. Naomi included the provision that whoever wished to buy the land also had to take Ruth as wife and so secured Ruth's future. Boaz noted there was a family redeemer closer than himself, but undertook to resolve the situation (Ruth 3:8-18).

This closer kinsman declined when told he would have to take Ruth as well and offered his right of redemption to Boaz. The Bible gives his reason that he was afraid of ruining his own inheritance (Ruth 4:6). Some sources state it was due to Ruth's Moabite roots and that the Torah forbade a marriage between an Israelite and a Moabite convert. Josephus detailed a different reason in his *Antiquities Of The Jews*. In his version the man declined on the basis that he had a wife already, and children also.^{xxvi}

Boaz agreed to buy the land and marry Ruth, which was accepted by the Israelites according to their traditional understanding that the Torah only forbade marriage between Jewish women and male Moabite converts, but not between Israelite men and Moabite female converts. The reaction of the elders and people clearly support this tradition, as they even spoke a special blessing over Ruth, that the Lord would make her like Rachel and Leah, who together built the house of Israel. Boaz was blessed too as the people declared the expectation that his house would become like the house of Perez, the son Tamar bore to Judah, because of the offspring the Lord would give him by this young woman (Ruth 4:11-12). And how true those blessings would eventually turn out!

A son was born to them and much joy was expressed by the women:

¹³ (...) the Lord enabled her to conceive, and she gave birth to a son. ¹⁴Then the women said to Naomi, "Praise the Lord, who has not left you without a family redeemer today. May his name be famous in Israel. ¹⁵He will renew your life and sustain you in your old age. Indeed, your daughter-in-law, who loves you and is better to you than seven sons, has given birth to him." ¹⁶Naomi took the child, placed him on her lap, and took care of him. ¹⁷The neighbour women said, "A son has been born to Naomi," and they named him Obed. He was the father of Jesse, the father of David. (Ruth 4:13-17, HCSB)

Was Ruth actually a Moabitess?

I include this question in view of the various argumentations offered to side-step an apparent prohibition of a marriage between a Moabite woman and an Israelite that implied serious consequences down the line. One such consequence was allegedly that David erected a tent that became known as the Tabernacle of David in Jerusalem for the Ark of the Covenant. He was supposedly barred from entering the Tabernacle of Moses because he was the great-grandson of a Moabite woman and consequently not allowed in the congregation of the Lord (Deut 23:3). Does this not shout against the very fact that David was selected by God to be king of the whole Israel? It is important to realise in this regard that the prohibition to enter the congregation of the Lord did not refer to presence in meetings, but to marriage!

A prominent approach is to refer back to Israel's original invasion of the land. Based on Deuteronomy 29:8 (and other Scripture portions) it is reasoned that the land which included Moab was now inhabited by the tribes of Reuben, Gad and Manasseh. The land kept the name Moab for centuries after all Moabites were gone from it and people who lived in Moab were therefore Israelites. Ruth, it is argued, therefore had to be from an Israelite tribe.^{xxvii}

According to the Book of Judges (11:18), however, the Israelites did not pass through the land of the Moabites, but travelled around Edom and Moab. After their conquest of Canaan, the Israelites had varying relations with Moab. These were peaceful at times and warlike at other times. A search of the Old Testament presented numerous interesting references to Moab as an active nation. I do not intend to go into all the geographical and historical detail as the following four examples provide more than enough proof from the Bible that Moab had remained as a nation:

⁷At that time, Solomon built a high place for Chemosh, the detestable idol of Moab, and for Milcom, the detestable idol of the Ammonites on the hill across from Jerusalem. (1 Kings 11:7, all HCSB)

My search through various Bible versions found Ruth being called a Moabitess – including the Jewish Tanakh and The Orthodox Jewish Bible.^{xxviii} This, with the discussion thus far, leaves me in no doubt that all the efforts of commentators to suggest otherwise are philosophical and not Scriptural. The Biblical truth is: **Ruth was a Moabite.**

Did Torah not forbid Boaz from marrying a Moabitess?

To wind up this subsection, I accentuate Jewish tradition which regarded the limitation on marriage between an Israelite and Moabite as prohibition only of an Israelite woman of marrying a Moabite (or Ammonite) male convert. This interpretation was eventually canonised in *Mishna Yebamot* (8:3).^{xxix} We need to bear in mind that lineage was always tracked through the males, being the carriers of the seed, throughout the Bible. The Talmud states that a mother's family is not to be called family. Marriage of an Israelite woman to a Moabite convert would introduce prohibited seed into the lineage, which was not so in the case of an Israelite male producing offspring through marriage with a Moabite female convert.

The focus in this regard on the position of the male Israelite versus the female is reflected in Deuteronomy 21:10-14, for example, which allowed marriage to a foreign woman captured in war.

Ruth was a Moabite convert to faith in the Israelite God (Ruth 1:16). Her life and loyalty to Naomi is proof that her conversion was not a superficial ritual. There was consequently no limitation of marriage to Boaz.

What about Nehemiah and Ezra's anger towards Israelite men who married foreign women?

The events recorded in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah (deemed to have been one composition originally) took place in the era of the return of the exiles from Babylon, that started during the Persian emperor Cyrus' rule. The second temple was dedicated ca. 516 B.C. The next wave of exile return (with Ezra the priest) occurred some 80 years later. These events therefore played out approximately 700 years after those recorded in the Boaz-Ruth story.^{xxx}

¹After these things had been done, the leaders approached me and said: "The people of Israel, the priests, and the Levites have not separated themselves from the surrounding peoples whose detestable practices are like those of the Canaanites, Hittites, Perizzites, Jebusites, Ammonites, Moabites, Egyptians, and Amorites. ²Indeed, they have taken some of their daughters as wives for themselves and their sons, so that the holy people has become mixed with the surrounding peoples. The leaders and officials have taken the lead in this unfaithfulness!" (Ezra 9:1-2, HCSB)

Ezra was dealing with a remnant of Israel and the way in which it was taking place threatened the nation's very survival (Ezra 9:8, 15). Nehemiah provides more information. His main concern was not the women as such (for the marriages would have carried on the Israelite seed) but the fact that the offspring from those marriages were clearly not being raised as Israelites – to large extent a spiritual concern.

²³In those days I also saw Jews who had married women from Ashdod, Ammon, and Moab. ²⁴Half of their children spoke the language of Ashdod or of one of the other peoples but could not speak Hebrew. (Neh 13:23-24, HCSB)

The expression *y^ehūdiyt* (pronounced *yeh-hoo-deeth*') seems to have referred to more than just the Hebrew language as it has been translated in the Holman Christian Standard Bible, but included the cultural expression. Had the women been fully integrated (become true proselytes of the Israelite faith) this problem would not have existed. Nehemiah's reference to the sins of Solomon leaves no doubt that the men had been following the abominable religious practices and gods of the women

they married.

Unlike this remnant of Israel, Judah was an established society in the era of Boaz and Ruth. The marriage with a woman who wished to integrate herself fully into the Judahite society did not pose a problem.^{xxxii}

Why did Matthew include Ruth in his Davidic and Messianic genealogy?

The inclusion of Ruth in Matthew's genealogy has interesting and important similarities with that of Tamar. Like Tamar, Ruth played a critical role to continue the Davidic and Messianic lineage. The blessing spoken by the elders and people over Boaz after the birth of their son, Obed, was rooted in the house of Perez, the son Tamar bore to Judah. I believe that this explains Ruth's presence in Matthew's genealogy.

The women of the city celebrated Naomi's joy and explained that Naomi had found a redeemer for her family name. The implication also, is that the Davidic and Messianic lineage would have come to an end, had it not been for Ruth's role.

Concluding observations

After working through the applicable Bible text as well as considerable literature, I have come to understand that the issue of intermarriage between an Israelite man and foreign woman was not based on ethnic grounds, but on spiritual grounds. To me it rings clear once more that the reason God chose Israel as his people at the time, was that the world would know Him through them. He placed them physically in what was regarded as the centre of the known world (Ezek 5:5).

God did not forbid certain marriages because the women was from another nation per se, but for specific reasons, of which the foreigners' commitment to pagan religions was a primary one. It was to prevent God's people of being led into idolatry and the worship of false gods. See Deuteronomy 7:1-5, for example. The Bible leaves no doubt about the reality of this danger to the stiff-necked Israelite people.

Matthew's genealogy includes Rehoboam who was fathered by Solomon, for example. What it does not state, is that Solomon fathered Rehoboam by Naamah the Ammonite (1 Kings 14:21 & 31). If Ruth's Moabite origin was the problem, it would have applied to Rehoboam as well. Speaking of Solomon: He was, of course, also a descendant of Ruth and yet he was appointed of God to build the temple in Jerusalem – another refutation of the misinterpretation that Deuteronomy 23:3 deals with physical presence in religious meetings of Israel or entry to the Temple or Tabernacle. Solomon stood before the altar of the Lord at the dedication of the temple in front of the entire congregation, praying to God on their behalf (1 Kings 8:22-53). I find this reality another example supporting the view that the marriage limitations were on Israelite woman, and not the men, even if the foreign male had been a convert to the Israelite faith.

BATHSHEBA

⁵(...) Boaz fathered Obed by Ruth, Obed fathered Jesse, ⁶and Jesse fathered King David. Then David fathered Solomon by Uriah's wife (Matthew 1:5-6, HCSB).

David's wide prominence in the Biblical history makes him one of the Bible's best-known characters. His various accomplishments include slaying Goliath the giant and writing many of the psalms in our Bible. What is less prominent, though, is his many marriages. Some of these were politically motivated, something not uncommon for rulers of nations in those times. His marriage to

Bathsheba is probably the one known by most people. She was one of at least two widows David married after the death of their husbands – the other being Abigail, widow of Nabal the Carmelite. Although the circumstances differed, David knew them both from before they became widows.

Saul, the first king of all Israel, ruled from his home in Gibeah (1 Sam 10:26). Some time after Saul's death David settled in Hebron with his then two wives, one of which was Abigail. The men who had been with him settled with their households in towns near Hebron. At Hebron David acquired more wives – 2 Samuel 3:2-5 lists four more – and several sons were born to him there. Jerusalem was not yet part of the Israelite land.

After Saul's death David was anointed their king by the men of the house of Judah (2 Sam 2:4). He ruled from Hebron for 7½ years. At David's demand and to stop the warring between them, Ishbosheth, Saul's son and ruler of the other Israelite tribes also sent Michal, daughter of Saul, to him (2 Sam 3:14-15). Following the assassination of Ishbosheth, all the elders of Israel came to David at Hebron and anointed him king over Israel (2 Sam 5:1-3).

Soon after becoming king over all Israel, David and his men marched to Jerusalem against the Jebusites, a Canaanite tribe who still inhabited it. The descendants of Judah had been unable to drive out the Jebusites who lived in Jerusalem when the land was given them (Joshua 15:63). Now, under David they conquered the heavily fortified Jerusalem, after which he took up residence there, renaming it the city of David. He became more and more powerful. When king Hiram of Tyre sent materials and workmen to build a palace for David in Jerusalem, he knew the Lord had established him as king over Israel and had exalted his kingdom for the sake of His people Israel (2 Sam 5:6-12). David reigned 33 years over all Israel in Jerusalem.

Enter Bathsheba

Bathsheba first enters the Biblical narrative in an incident where she was seen from his roof by king David. While I do not claim to have all the answers, I will try to discern some rationality to help us determine from a Biblical foundation why Matthew decided to refer to her in his Messianic genealogy, albeit not by her name.

Bathsheba was the daughter of Eliam (2 Sam 11:3), also called Ammiel in 1 Chronicles 3:5. Eliam is identified in 2 Samuel 23:34 as the son of Ahithophel, a Gilonite. A Gilonite was someone from the Judean town of Giloh.^{xxxii} Having been a member of David's inner council before joining Absalom in his rebellion against his father, he was clearly an Israelite. Bear in mind that we are dealing here with a time frame some 300 years after Israel conquered and settled in the land Canaan. Bathsheba too, was therefore a woman of Israelite descent although she was married to Uriah the Hittite.^{xxxiii}

Gaps in the Biblical texts have given rise to various interpretations ranging from a passive victim to actual seductress. The incident where King David sees Bathsheba bathing (2 Sam 11) doesn't mention whether she was naked or clothed, alone or with others, innocently or inappropriately on display. The text (verse 4) does specify she was undertaking a known ritual of purification. The second verse also shows it was not Bathsheba who had been on the roof of her home, but David who had been on the roof of his dwelling from where he saw her.

After David sent messengers to get her, the text of verse 4 indicates that he slept with her. In the early Greek translation of the Bible, the statement in this verse reads "he came to her," which indicates David pushed a sexual encounter.^{xxxiv} If Bathsheba had deliberately been trying to entice David, the text would undoubtedly have stated thus (see the examples of Potiphar's wife, Lot's daughters and Tamar). Bathsheba became pregnant, eventually followed by David's manoeuvres to have Uriah killed in battle, after which he took her as his wife when her time of mourning ended (which was traditionally seven days).

Nathan the prophet is sent by God to confront David, who acknowledges that he had sinned against the Lord. The boy that was born died after seven days. The text does not indicate that God required repentance from Bathsheba or punishment for the adultery, but only from David.

- Although it is not mentioned as relevant in the text, it is interesting to note that this boy had been conceived in an adulterous act between an Israelite man and a married Israelite woman and was therefore a *mamzer* in terms of Deuteronomy 23:2. ([Ctrl/click to see my article in this regard](#)).

Bathsheba becomes the only one of David's wives to be mentioned throughout the Old Testament from this point onwards. They had four more sons, of which Solomon was the last (1 Chron 3:5). He was consequently far removed from being the firstborn in any sense. In David's old age Bathsheba, with the help of the prophet Nathan, secured Solomon's succession to the throne instead of older sons by David's other wives (1 Kgs 1:11-39).

Why did Matthew include Bathsheba in his Messianic genealogy?

The Bible record shows that Bathsheba was prominent during the reign of both David and Solomon. David, of course, was the first king of reunited Israel. It has been suggested that Proverbs 31 was essentially Solomon's eulogy to his mother. Be that as it may and based on the Biblical history of the era, until I find information proving otherwise, my understanding is that Matthew included her in the genealogy because of her profound role during the reign of David and also into Solomon's reign, and thereby in the continuation of the Messianic bloodline through Solomon. Had it not been for her, David's seemingly living first-born, Adonijah, would have ascended the throne (which indeed he not only tried to do, but prematurely so – 1 Kgs 1:5-11).

- Adonijah was David's fourth son. The first-born was Amnon who was killed by Absalom for raping his sister Tamar. The second was Kileab (or Daniel), followed by Absalom and then Adonijah, son of Haggith. The second may also have died young since the Bible does not present any record of his life.

But why did Matthew refer to her as Uriah's wife and not by her name? The Bible does not provide us with a direct answer. After reading a note in the *Lexham English Bible* that pointed out the word 'wife' was not in the Greek text, but implied idiomatically, I checked a number of other versions. The *King James Version* reads that David begat Solomon of her that had been the wife of Urias. *Young's Literal Version* has a similar rendering, but omitting the word 'wife.' *The Literal Translation of the Holy Bible* presents the portion as 'David the king fathered Solomon out of her who had been the wife of Uriah.'

However, Matthew's usage (or reference to her position before becoming David's wife) is not an exception in this regard, as Bathsheba is also referred to as Uriah's wife (or wife of Uriah) in the second book of Samuel, even after Uriah's death (2 Sam 11:26) and again after she had been taken by king David as his wife (2 Sam 12:10, 15).

Concluding observations

My study and discussion of Tamar, Rahab and Ruth showed various presentations of the persona and circumstances surrounding each of them. The conclusion in each case had nothing to do with immorality or ancestry. All three lived before the era of Israelite kings. In terms of speculations, assumptions, and story lines, Bathsheba is clearly ahead of them all. It is truly a pity so many variations of who and what a person had been were created in literature, as it certainly does not help to firmly establish the truth at hand in the specific context.

After the manipulated death of her husband, Uriah, Bathsheba became the wife of David, the first king of reunited Israel. The Biblical narrative presents a woman who played a far more prominent role than the normal cultural role of wife and mother. Whereas the Hebrew concept of *ab* (*father*)

indicated one who was the strength of the house, the concept of *eym (mother)* portrayed her as the “glue” of the family, the one who binds the family together.^{xxxv} Bathsheba’s story certainly extends far beyond this description.

See endnotes on next page

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Bible Versions

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