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Re-Reading Matthew 1:3–6 in the Light of the Inclusion of Four Non-Israelite Women in Jesus' Genealogy

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Abstract

This article delves into the inclusion of four non-Israelite women in Jesus' genealogy as detailed in Matthew 1:3–6, challenging traditional interpretations that often label these women as notorious sinners. Through a historical-critical and intertextual analysis, the paper reexamines their roles, arguing that their inclusion underscores their resilience, empowerment, and significant contributions, thereby challenging patriarchal norms and offering a broader human experience. The study posits that these women, often viewed through sinfulness or gentile identity, should be recognised for their heroic deeds and profound faith. This reinterpretation reframes their inclusion as a testament to God's divine plan, where individuals, irrespective of their past or nationality, are integral to salvation history. The paper further discusses the contemporary implications of this reinterpretation, emphasising themes of gender equality, cultural inclusivity, and a nuanced understanding of redemption. By highlighting these women's stories, the study advocates societal and theological recognition of women's contributions and potential, encouraging efforts to dismantle gender stereotypes and promote inclusivity. Ultimately, this exploration provides a richer understanding of the genealogy, celebrating diversity within biblical narratives and inspiring a re-evaluation of women's roles, both historically and in modern contexts.

Introduction

The inclusion of four non-Israelite women in Jesus' genealogy in Matthew 1:3–6 has intrigued scholars for centuries, highlighting their complex roles in biblical history. Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, and Bathsheba are celebrated for their resilience and faith, challenging traditional portrayals and emphasising their agency in a patriarchal society. Their presence encourages a re-evaluation of themes like redemption and divine purpose, urging recognition of gender equality and cultural inclusivity in biblical and modern contexts. This study calls for reassessing narratives steeped in patriarchal bias, advocating a more inclusive view of women's contributions. By examining these women's stories, the article inspires a dialogue on the importance of gender equality and the role of women in shaping both sacred and secular realms. It emphasises the need for reinterpretation and to demonstrate the heroic deeds and profound faith of the women to foster a more equitable society globally and in specific regions like South Africa and Ethiopia. Therefore, this article sets the stage for a re-reading of Matthew 1:3–6 that acknowledges the theological significance of including these remarkable women within the lineage of Jesus Christ. By emphasising their critical roles, we can appreciate how these figures not only contributed to the unfolding of salvation history but also serve as symbols of welcome and inclusion for all, thus enriching contemporary discussions on diversity and gender in the context of faith.

Traditional Interpretation of the Four Women in Matthew 1:3–6

Let's begin with the intriguing reasons behind the inclusion of these four women in Jesus' genealogy. The four non-Israelite women play a significant role in Matthew's gospel, intentionally included by the author despite the custom of androcentric genealogies in the ancient Near East (Hill 1972:74). However, it is worth noting that this inclusion of women in a patriarchal lineage poses problems for some biblical scholars (Jones 1994:258).

Some argue that the four women are included in Jesus' genealogy because they were considered notorious sinners. This traditional interpretation suggests that these women engaged in sinful acts and immorality, making them well-known for their notorious behaviour. These scholars suggest that

the purpose of including them in Jesus' genealogy is as a reminder of the sinful nature of humanity and the need for redemption (Boice 2001:15; Brown 1993:71–74; Gibbs 2006:87; Hagner 1993:10; Keener 1999:79; Luz 2007:83; Weren 1997:288). However, Jerome, in the fourth century, claimed that men are the 'least holy', compared to women, in Jesus' genealogy (Bruner 2004:10). The women are thus not the only sinners in Jesus' genealogy.

Another interpretation posits that these women were gentiles included in Jesus' genealogy. Based on this view, the four women should primarily be known as gentiles rather than as possible sinners. Contemporary scholars like Morris (1992:23) and Johnson (1988:152) also say that the four women are gentiles. Furthermore, Heil (1991:541) notes that their inclusion is not due to their sinfulness, as there is no evidence in the biblical tradition that Rahab and Ruth were sinful. On his side, Keener (1997:54) emphasises the purpose of 'missions and racial reconciliation', focusing on the inclusion of gentile women in Jesus' genealogy.

Additionally, Tamar and Bathsheba can be seen as women who acted out of desperation and in difficult circumstances, but their stories also highlight their perseverance and determination to seek justice. Tamar, who disguised herself as a prostitute to trick Judah into fulfilling his familial duty, boldly fought for what was rightfully hers (Genesis 38:12–26). Bathsheba, on the other hand, endured the loss of her husband and the disgraceful actions of King David, but she eventually became the mother of Solomon, who succeeded David as king (2 Samuel 11–12). Nonetheless, the sovereign plan and purpose of God works through the most unexpected women who are receptive to God's will and the unexpected workings of divine providence (Hagner 1993:10; Hanson 1978:53; Johnson 1988:157; Luz 2007:84). Freed (1987:3) notes that the inclusion of the women is to 'counter the Jewish accusation that Jesus was the illegitimate son of Mary' in such a way that it demonstrates that God works in unexpected ways to fulfil his will.

Lastly, another interpretation argues that the inclusion of these women prefigures God's work in an unexpected way to achieve divine purposes. This interpretation sees the four women as agents of God, carrying out God's will to advance his plan of salvation. References to divine will could be drawn from theological texts or biblical passages that depict God's use of such people in

punishing sinners or bringing about justice (Boice 2001:15; Brown 1993:71-74; Gibbs 2006:87; Hagner 1993:10; Keener 1999:79; Luz 2007:83; Weren 1997:288). Boice (2001:15) adds that Jesus' ancestry provides a clue, showing that God chooses servants from a wide spectrum. However, none of the above interpretations are persuasive. Let's see another alternative, as follows.

Re-examining the Traditional Interpretation of the Four Women (Matthew 1:3–6)

Alternative Interpretation

The traditional interpretation of the four women in Jesus' genealogy suggests they are included due to their involvement in significant acts of God towards the salvation of humankind or as symbolic figures (Brown 1993:71–72; Bruner 1987:7–8; Hagner 1993:10; Heffern 1912:77–78; Johnson 1988:154; Luz 2007:83–84; Smith 1989:32). However, an alternative viewpoint emphasises their roles as heroines of faith and courage, challenging the norms of their time. This perspective argues that their inclusion was not simply to highlight notorious acts or gentile status, but to celebrate their resilience and faith, as evidenced in the historical account of Matthew 1. In a patriarchal society, featuring women in a genealogy was unconventional, suggesting Matthew aimed to underline their importance in salvation history.

This alternative interpretation offers a richer understanding, shifting focus from literal actions to broader themes of redemption and breaking societal norms. By looking at these women's stories beyond traditional incidents, we appreciate their contributions to the human story. They were not just participants in historical events but complex individuals overcoming challenges, highlighting the significance of women in salvation history. Their inclusion in the genealogy underscores that God's purpose involves individuals irrespective of societal expectations or past actions.

Additionally, the inclusion of these women serves as a profound testament to God's inclusive nature, showing his work through diverse individuals. Whether due to their pasts or as representatives of a broader community, their stories illustrate faith, courage, and perseverance. This narrative encourages the belief that God can use anyone, regardless of background, to fulfil his redemptive plans. Their presence in the genealogy reflects God's ability to

transform lives and use a variety of experiences to accomplish divine purposes. Consequently, before Johnson, scholars such as Robinson (1951) and Milton (1962) supported Heffern's view that God's salvation plan included Gentiles from the beginning of salvation history (Heffern 1912). Johnson (1988:154–155) also supported Heffern and his proponents. According to these scholars, Matthew mentions the four women to show God's salvation plan for the gentiles from the beginning. David C. Sim (1995:22), however, suggests that the author of the Gospel of Matthew's inclusion of the four women was not because they were non-Jews, saying that

it is not [...] certain that the four women were Gentiles or were thought to be Gentiles in the time of the Evangelist.

It is, for example, uncertain if Tamar was a gentile, even though many scholars contend she was a Canaanite (Harrington 1991:32; Sim 1995:22). It is, however, clear that she was considered a gentile in later Jewish tradition (Brown 1993:73; Johnson 1988:270–272; Philo 1996:221; Sim 1995:22). It is difficult to conclude if Tamar was a gentile or not since later Judaism considers Tamar and other women proselytes (Sim 1995:22). According to Sim (1995:22), the four women were gentiles who were converted to Judaism. Conversely, before this view, Martin Luther held the view that the four women were included because the Messiah had gentiles among his ancestors. But, as discussed, there are objections to this view because the women were converted to the Jewish religion (Freed 1987:4, 7). Thus, it is not clear if the four women were specifically included in the genealogy of Jesus because they were gentile women. Keener (2009:79) notes that 'Not all commentators regard these women as representative Gentiles'.

In conclusion, this study argues that traditional interpretations do not fully explain the inclusion of these women in Jesus' genealogy. Instead, their heroic deeds and profound faith are central to understanding their role in God's plan (see Weren 1997:305). By revisiting historical contexts and shedding light on their personal stories, this interpretation offers a renewed appreciation of their significance. Through this lens, the motivations and lives of these remarkable women are explored, affirming their lasting impact on Jesus' lineage and emphasising the value of diverse experiences in the unfolding of salvation history.

Jesus' Genealogy Breaks Boundaries through the Four Women

The genealogy of Jesus in Matthew shows a diverse range of ancestors, breaking down traditional boundaries between Israelites and non-Israelites. This lineage reveals a mixture of backgrounds, including individuals from different cultures and nations. By including non-Israelites in his lineage, Jesus' genealogy emphasises the universal nature of his message and mission. It underscores the idea that all people, regardless of their background, are valued and part of God's plan. This representation of diversity in Jesus' genealogy serves as a powerful reminder that God's love extends to all, transcending any boundaries or divisions that may exist among different groups of people. These women, Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, and Bathsheba, were not only non-Israelites but also had controversial backgrounds.

Tamar

Tamar is the first woman mentioned in the list of ancestors in Matthew 1. Besides Genesis 38, Tamar is also mentioned in Jubilee 41:1–2 and in the Testament of Judah 10:1–2. Genesis 38 tells the story of Judah, who left his father's house and went down from his brothers to Adullam to marry an Adullamite (Genesis 38:1, 12, 20). He met a Canaanite girl from the Adullamites whose name was Shua (Genesis 38:2) and married her. She gave birth to his children. Then Judah took Tamar for his son Er (Genesis 38:6). Tamar was a non-Israelite woman. Tamar became an ancestor of Judah and David through Perez (Matthew 1:3). Tamar was loyal to Judah's family and was an ancestor of King David. Consequently, Tamar was probably included in the Matthean genealogy because of her faith in God amid the non-Jews, as a representative, to be a blessing in the house of Perez (Ruth 4:12). The story of Ruth is like that of Tamar (Freed 1987:4, 7). Moreover, Ruth 4:12 connects Ruth with Tamar in the genealogy (Weren 1997:297). This issue is clarified by Fisch (1982:427):

Lot is the father of Moab and thus the ancestor of Ruth, while Judah is the father of Perez and thus the ancestor of Boaz. Another way of putting it would be to say that we have here the story of a single clan (that of Abraham and his nephew

Lot) which separates (Gen. xiii 11) at an early stage and is then reunited in the persons of Ruth and Boaz.

The story in Matthew is linked to Tamar's story in Genesis 38 but this story also reappears in Ruth, which interconnects the lineage of Perez, Tamar's son, to include Boaz's role in the same ancestral line (Ruth 4:11–12). In these verses, the Old Testament links Tamar with Ruth, the Moabite woman. Perez is the offspring of Judah. Consequently, Ruth, who was from Moab, became the ancestress of King David, like Tamar. The Book of Ruth ends with the ancestor Perez, Tamar's son, and his offspring, whose generations further include Ruth, Boaz's son Obed, and David.

Most scholars argue that Tamar is a Canaanite woman or from Palestinian Syria (Brown 1993:72; Davies and Allison 2004:5; Hakh 2014:112–113; Keener 1997:54; Konradt 2020:30; Weren 1997:296). However, according to early Jewish tradition, Tamar is 'a daughter of Aram', for example in Jubilee 41:1 and the Testament of Judah 10:1 (Bauckham 1995:314, 317; Johnson 1988:159; Konradt 2014:268–269). In these writings, Tamar is named as the daughter of Abraham's brother Aram (Bauckham 1995:316). She is also mentioned in b. Sotah10b, Targum Pseudo Jonathan, Genesis 38, and Genesis Rabbah 85:10, where she is regarded as a daughter of Aram (Freed 1987:11; Johnson 1988:159, 270). As argued above, I think that Tamar was from Palestinian Syria and thus a Canaanite woman.

Besides the Gospel of Matthew, other early Jewish writers, including Philo, also discuss Tamar in a positive light. Philo, a Hellenistic Jewish philosopher from Alexandria in the first century AD, wrote extensively on various topics, including ethics and virtues. In his work titled *Virtues*, Philo mentions Tamar favourably (Philo 1996:221). Philo may have admired Tamar's resourcefulness, bravery, and dedication in fulfilling her duty. He likely appreciated her ability to navigate challenging circumstances and ensure her place in the ancestral lineage of Jesus. Overall, the Gospel of Matthew acknowledges Tamar's significance in Jesus' lineage, while other early writers like Philo also recognise her value and highlight her virtuous qualities. Bauckham (1995:314) observes that nothing is said about the ancestry of Tamar by Philo; neither does Genesis 38 present Tamar's ancestry, but it simply assumes that she belonged to the people of Canaan. He argues further that 'Tamar is not said to be of Canaanite

origin, she was not' (Bauckham 1995:314). Bauckham (1995:319) shows that Tamar came not from Canaan but from elsewhere (Genesis 38:11). Based on the explanation of tradition, Tamar was not a Canaanite (Heil 1991:539) and not even an Aramean (Bauckham 1995:314, 317).

However, the opinion of Bauckham (1995:319), which is that Tamar is not from Canaan, is not accepted by many scholars, for they believe that she was from Canaan as discussed above. Furthermore, Bauckham deduces that this tradition makes Tamar the only worshipper of the true God, apart from the family of Abraham. Yet, Tamar was punished for prostitution because she was a priest's daughter. Nonetheless, it is difficult to say it is a plausible reason for Tamar's inclusion in the Matthean genealogy (Bauckham 1995:319).

So, scholars are divided into two groups, arguing whether Tamar was from Canaan or from Palestinian Syria/Aram and whether she was a gentile or not. Even though scholars do not agree on this, it is crucial to investigate why Tamar is included in the Matthean genealogy. Bauckham (1995:318) argues that the reason she was included in the genealogy of Jesus was not because she was a non-Jew but because she was a converted proselyte through intermarriage, which may not be convincing due to the story of Judah and Tamar in Genesis 38.

As opposed to this, later Jewish traditions and the majority of scholars support the view that Tamar was a Canaanite and that the four women were non-Jews as discussed earlier (for example, Brown 1993:72; Bruner 1987:7; Davies and Allison 2004:5; France 2007:36–37; Hagner 1993:10; Hanson 1978:53; Johnson 1988:167–170; Keener 1997:54, 2009:79; Konradt 2020:30; Magezi 2020:3–5; Smith 1989:32; Talbert 2010:32; Turner 2006:27). Other scholars, such as Lenski (1964), Morris (1992), Hendriksen (1973), Patte (1987), Howell (1990), Kynes (1991), Carter (1996, 2000), and Evans (2012), are silent about whether Tamar is a Canaanite/gentile or not. Most scholars do not comment on whether Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel, and Leah were non-Jews or not. However, Bauckham (1995:318) states that they were non-Jews. Though the Testament of Judah 10 and Jubilee 41:1–7 say that Tamar was Jewish, Genesis 38 does not give evidence for this (Konradt 2020:30; Talbert 2010:32). It is not plausible to argue that Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel, and Leah were also non-Jews to convince that Tamar was a non-Jew.

Bauckham's view is not credible because Tamar was included in the Matthean genealogy. However, Negewo (2021:108) suggests that Tamar was a Canaanite woman who was the daughter of Melchizedek, who worshipped God without being the family of Abraham. Negewo points out,

The author of the Gospel of Matthew probably included Tamar's name in his genealogical account in line with this Jewish tradition, which did not necessarily link the identity of God's people to the Abrahamic line as its background. (2021:108)

As discussed above, Abraham is considered the father of the nations (Genesis 17:6; Matthew 3:9, 8:11–12; Talbert 2010:31) who constitutes Jews' and non-Jews' genealogies as a common starting point, connecting the ancestors.

In summary, Tamar was probably included in the Matthean genealogy because of her faith in God amid the non-Jews, as a representative, to be a blessing in the house of Perez (Ruth 4:12). The story of Ruth is like that of Tamar. The author of Matthew's gospel, therefore, establishes that, if Tamar was a true God-worshipper, God's salvation plan for all nations was long prepared. In later Judaism, it is said that the women were led by the Holy Spirit to be included in the genealogy of Jesus (Freed 1987:4, 7). Thus, Genesis 38 does not suggest that Tamar's act of deception to have relations with her father-in-law caused God to overlook her inclusion in the redemptive lineage that leads to Jesus Christ.

Rahab

According to Matthew's gospel, Rahab was one of the women included in the genealogy of Jesus. Surprisingly, she is not mentioned in the Apocrypha, Pseudepigrapha, or in the writings of Philo. However, Josephus (in *Antiquities* 5.8–15) mentions her in 'a favourable light as the keeper of an inn', but does not describe her as a harlot. Joshua 2:9 presents Rahab as a woman of faith. Furthermore, in the New Testament, she is mentioned in James 2:25 with Abraham as someone who is justified by her work and in Hebrews 11:31 and Matthew 1:5 as a good example of a person of faith (Talbert 2010:32). This

suggests that Rahab was a non-Jew but a woman of faith (Bruner 1987:7; Konradt 2020:30).

In Matthew 1:5, her name in Greek is given as Ραχάβ. This term creates a problem for Matthean scholars because the spelling of the name has different variants. Bauckham (1995:320) states that, in the Septuagint (the LXX), it is transliterated as 'Raab' (in Joshua 2:1, 2:3, 6:23, and 6:25) which differs from Matthew 1:5. In the New International Version she is named 'Rahab', equivalent to 'Ρααβ (Hebrews 11:31; James 2:25), which also differs from Ραχαβ in Matthew 1:5 (Brown 1993:60; Weren 1997:298–299). In Josephus' *Antiquities of the Jews*, "Ραχαβη" is used, which is translated as 'Rachab' in English. As Bauckham (1995:320) explains,

Since Josephus' transliterations of biblical names are often independent of and differ from the LXX, the former is more likely to be original, the latter an assimilation to the LXX and Christian usage.

Therefore, the name *Rahab* is used in this article.

In Joshua 2, the story of Rahab is recounted. Clement of Rome, a prominent early Christian leader, further elaborates and retells Rahab's story in a letter he wrote to the Corinthians. This indicates that the story of Rahab was considered important in the early Christian community, and this significance has been recognised throughout the centuries, even up to the present day. Clement of Rome's letter, known as 1 Clement, delves into the details of Rahab's story, offering a reinterpretation of the original passage in Joshua. While not included in the canonical scriptures, 1 Clement is a valuable historical document that sheds light on the beliefs and practices of early Christians. Clement of Rome's elaboration of Rahab's story in 1 Clement 12 expands upon the themes present in the biblical passage (Joshua 2:1–24). He emphasises Rahab's faith and portrays her as a righteous woman who acts by God's will. Clement suggests that Rahab's actions were motivated by her faith in the Israelite God and her recognition of his power. By assisting the spies, she aligns herself with the Israelites and, in turn, becomes part of God's chosen people.

This retelling of Rahab's story by Clement of Rome likely served several purposes. First, it reinforced the idea that God's chosen people were not limited to the Israelites alone. Rahab, a Canaanite woman, demonstrates that faith and righteousness are not bound by nationality or background. This message would have resonated with the early Christian community, which was comprised of people from various ethnic and cultural backgrounds. Additionally, Clement's interpretation of Rahab's story highlights the importance of faith and action in the lives of believers. Rahab's efforts to protect the spies and her trust in God's promise of salvation are seen as exemplary. Her story serves as an inspiration to early Christians.

Rahab is called 'πόρνῃ' meaning 'prostitute' in Hebrews 11:31. 1 Clement 12 elaborates that, while Rahab was a harlot, she had faith and practised hospitality. She was thus saved because of her faith. Clement further says, 'You see, beloved, that there was not only faith, but prophecy, in this woman' (1 Clement 12:8). While some may argue that Clement's approach could be seen as distorting the original message, it is worth considering how his elaboration sheds light on the inclusion of Rahab in the genealogy mentioned in Matthew 1. By examining the contemporaneous views expressed by Matthew, we can gain a deeper understanding of the possible significance of Rahab's presence in the lineage.

There are several questions about the inclusion of Rahab in the tribe of Judah, the ancestry of David, and the genealogy of Jesus. Did sources from the Old Testament or later Jewish traditions describe Rahab for Matthew's purpose? Did they connect Rahab to the tribe of Judah and the ancestry of David? If not, why did the author of Matthew include Rahab in the tribe of Judah, the ancestry of David, and the genealogy of Jesus? These and similar questions need answers.

Johnson (1988:162–165) points out that later rabbis suggest that (1) Rahab became the ancestress of several priestly prophets; (2) she drew near to God so that she gained acceptance before God; and (3) she was represented as a proselyte. Joshua 2 mentions that it is a sign of faith that Rahab believes in the mighty act of God – that he brought Israel from Egypt and helped them to cross the Red Sea.

Indeed, there are possible grounds for Matthew to include Rahab in the account of the tribe of Judah and the ancestry of David. Even though it is not convincing, she was considered a proselyte in the tribe of Judah (Johnson 1988:164; Weren 1997:299). Moreover, Johnson (1988:165) states,

We conclude that the compiler of the Matthean genealogy included Rahab in the ancestry of David based on an old Rabbinic tradition according to which Rahab belonged, as a proselyte, to the tribe of Judah. Whether this tradition showed Rahab as the mother of Boaz, we cannot say.

Since Matthew follows 1 Chronicles' genealogy, it indicates that she was from the tribe of Judah through Salmon, the father of Boaz (1 Chronicles 2:10–13; see also Ruth 4:18–22).

Scholars debate whether Rahab was Boaz's mother, given the two-hundred-year chronological gap between them (Bauckham 1995:321; Evans 2012:35; France 2007:36; Johnson 1988:165; Turner 2008:59–60), while Matthean scholars highlight this inconsistency (Brown 1993:60; Davies and Allison 2004:6). Bauckham (1995:322), however, argues against this, noting that Old Testament genealogies, like David's from Judah (Ruth 4:18–22; 1 Chronicles 2:1–15; see Morris 1992:24), often include too few generations. He suggests that Salma, Boaz's father, was Rahab's contemporary but admits there is no evidence in the Old Testament or Jewish literature of Rahab's marriage to Salma or her being Boaz's parent (Bauckham 1995:322, 2002:18). Rahab, therefore, is identified as a proselyte, raising questions about her inclusion in Matthew's genealogy of Jesus (Bauckham 1995:324).

Nevertheless, Hebrews 11:31, James 2:25, 1 Clement 12:1–8, and *Antiquities* 5.11–14 show that Rahab was a woman of faith in the God of Israel and that her faith plus her work is praised (Bauckham 1995:324; Nowel 2008:5; Smith 1989:32). Furthermore, according to Rabbinic tradition and Jewish literature, it is assumed that Rahab was married to one of the Israelites, likely Joshua, and became the mother of many prophets (Brown 1993:60, 594; Freed 1987:8; Hagner 1993:11; Hanson 1978:58), and that Salma was probably a member of the tribe of Judah (1 Chronicles 2:11; Ruth 4:20–21; Bauckham 1995:324, 2002:35; Heil 1991:541; Hendriksen 1973:116; Magezi 2020:6).

As mentioned above, later Rabbinic traditions propose two views. First, she was married to Joshua, who cannot be related to the Davidic genealogical line. Second, Rahab was married to Salma, the descendant of David (Bauckham 1995:324–329, 2002:37; Robinson 2009:258). Despite these views, Johnson notes that the later rabbis believed that Rahab drew near to God, so God drew her to himself (Johnson 1988:163; see 1 Chronicles 4:21; Robinson 2009:258). Furthermore, she is owned by the Spirit of God and considered a prophetess (Hanson 1978:58). Thus, Rahab, who was from non-Jewish descent, is included in the genealogy of Jesus ‘as ancestresses of prominent OT figures as adhering to the tribe of Judah’ (Johnson 1988:164).

As discussed above, there are different views among scholars concerning whether Rahab is part of the Abrahamic and Davidic genealogy or not. Heil (1991:540) argues that Rahab advanced Abrahamic and Davidic genealogies. Many other scholars argue that Rahab was included in the tribe of Judah through intermarriage even before the genealogy of David (Bauckham 1995:322). If this is so, the author of Matthew’s gospel mentions Rahab as the wife of Salmon/Salma and the mother of Boaz, which differs from rabbinic tradition (Hanson 1978:54).

By and large, considering the various views of scholars, this study contends that Rahab fulfilled the purpose of God before Israel invaded Canaan (Heffern 1912:72). Despite being a harlot, Rahab recognised that the God of Israel is the God of heaven and earth; hence, she gained favour before God (Joshua 2:11). Her faith in God was significant; as Josephus says, God revealed himself, saying ‘for of this (she said) she knew through certain signs which God had given her’ (*Antiquities*). Furthermore, Clement of Rome (1 Clement 12:1) says ‘For her faith and hospitality Rahab the harlot was saved’. Clement (1 Clement 12:1–8) compares her hospitality with that of Abraham (Nowell 2008:6).

The issue of the sign given to Rahab in Joshua 2:18, which shows the faith of Rahab, is also important to consider. Translations vary: the Revised Standard Version reads ‘you shall bind this scarlet cord in the window through which you let us down’; the Septuagint reads ‘you do not tie this crimson cord in the window through which you let us down’; and Masoretic Text reads ‘you will also deal kindly with my father’s house and give me a sure sign’ (verse 12, not verse 18). Some scholars note that Clement believed there is a Christological

redemption plan in the narrative (Freed 1987:14; Hanson 1978:56). He (1 Clement 12:7) clearly says

And moreover they gave her a sign, that she should hang out from her house a scarlet thread, thereby showing beforehand that through the blood of the Lord there shall be redemption unto all of them that believe and hope on God.

Clement makes it clear that not only faith but also prophecy play a role in Rahab's inclusion (1 Clement 12:8; Hanson 1978:58).

Therefore, her presence in the Matthean genealogy is based on her faith in God rather than being included in the tribe of Judah through intermarriage, as clearly shown in Joshua 2:9–11, Joshua 18, and Antiquities 5:9–13 (Freed 1987:8; Heil 1991:540). This leads us to see the universal salvation plan of God through this genealogical account as being not only related to the Abrahamic and Davidic genealogical account but as divine fulfilment of the Abrahamic promise in Genesis 12:3 and Genesis 17:5, which God made to Abraham as the father of many nations (Heil 1991:540). Brown (1993:592) concludes that the Canaanite Rahab is included in Jesus' genealogy to fulfil the universal promise of God to Abraham: that all the people of the earth would be blessed through Abraham. Moreover, this promise points to a divine genealogical account because Jesus is the son of God, who is anticipated in the origin of the genealogy. Genesis 1:26 and Luke 3:38 give a biological and theological salvific meaning to Jesus' genealogy.

Ruth

In the Matthean genealogy, Ruth is the third woman identified as an ancestress of Jesus. There is a close connection between Rahab and Ruth in that Rahab marries Salmon and she gives birth to Boaz, and Boaz marries Ruth and she gives birth to Obed, the father of Jesse (Magezi 2020:6). Jesse became the father of David and Jesus the son of David. It is clearly shown in the Old Testament and Jewish sources that Ruth is non-Jewish, a Moabitess (Ruth 1:4, 2:1–2; see Hakh 2014:114–5; Konradt 2020:30). Furthermore, Allison (2004:7) notes that Rabbinic tradition recognises Ruth as a proselyte, the king's mother, and the ancestress of the Messiah. Bruner (1987:5) points out that Ruth is not

questioned morally, although she is a 'descendant of the incestuous Lot (Gen 19)'. Bruner (1987:5) concludes, 'Nevertheless, this gentile became the literal great-grandmother of David and so a distant great-grandmother of our Lord'.

Ruth's background is linked to the story of a family from Bethlehem, Judah. The family included Elimelek, his wife, Naomi, and their two sons, Mahlon and Kilion. Due to famine, they moved to the land of Moab to survive. Their sons married two Moabite women, Orpah and Ruth, but Elimelek and his two sons died in Moab, and Naomi and the two Moabite women became husbandless (Ruth 1:1–5). This is according to sources telling the story of Ruth, such as the Book of Ruth and Ruth Rabbah. Morris (1992:24) comments that there is no story about Ruth in 1 Chronicles. Apart from the Book of Ruth in the Old Testament, there are no other biblical books that provide comprehensive details about the life of Ruth.

The Book of Ruth Rabbah can be viewed as interpretive; however, as it was written 600 years after the Gospel of Matthew, its historical-cultural aspect tells us the life of Ruth. It is valuable for this study as evidence of how the early church accepted Ruth. In the above quotation, it is told that Ehud said to Eglon, the king of Moab, that God will establish a son 'who will sit on the throne of God'. According to Ruth 4:18–22, this refers to the throne of David and, through him, a long-awaited Messiah to be fulfilled in Jesus. Thus, 'I will establish a son from you', promised to Eglon, probably refers to this prophecy coming true through Ruth. Hakh (2014:115) explains that

In the Rabbinic tradition, she is also mentioned as the grandmother of Eglon, the king of Moab and grandchild of Balak (b Hor 10b).

But Ruth Rabbah 2:9 does not refer to this. Rather, it states 'I will establish a son from you who will sit on the throne of God'. Based on the tradition, Ruth was probably the daughter of King Eglon.

After the famine, Naomi wanted to return to Bethlehem, Judah, alone. Her daughters-in-law accompanied her on her way (Ruth 1:6–10). Orpah said goodbye to her mother-in-law and turned back, according to the meaning of her name. There are three places where the turning back is mentioned (Ruth

1:8, 11, 12). Ruth Rabbah 2:16 discusses the concept of turning back in three different instances mentioned in the Book of Ruth. These instances correspond with the rejection of a convert. However, if the convert persists, they are eventually accepted. Rabbi Yitzhak adds that it is important to reject with a gentle approach, while acceptance should be done with strength. Despite Orpah's return, Ruth did not turn back as her sister did; instead, she insisted on staying with her mother-in-law (Ruth 1:16). In Ruth Rabbah 2:22, it is explained that,

Ruth said: 'Do not entreat me to leave you, to return from following you.' What is 'do not entreat me'? She said to her: 'Do not sin to me, do not impose your reservations upon me.' 'To leave you, to return from following you' – in any case, my intention is to convert. It is preferable through you, and not through another. When Naomi heard this, she began arranging the laws of converts for her. She said to her: 'My daughter, it is not the way of Israelite women to go to theaters and circuses of the gentiles.' [Ruth] said to her: 'Where you go, I will go.' [Naomi] said to her: 'My daughter, it is not the way of Israel to reside in a house where there is no mezuzah.' [Ruth] said to her: 'And where you lodge, I will lodge.' 'Your people is my people – these are punishments and prohibitions.' 'Your God is my God' – [these are] the rest of the mitzvot.

This is where Ehud's words to King Eglon, the king of Moab, that the prophecy is going to be fulfilled through his daughter, Ruth, come to fruition. Based on this prophecy, Ruth becomes a true God worshipper (Ruth 1:16). Her mother-in-law recommends that she wash and anoint herself, or put on perfume, and put on her garments (Ruth 3:3).

Ruth washing and anointing herself refers to her submission to God, turning away from her idol worship. However, the question is whether she began to worship God at this point or when she was married to Mahlon, the son of Elimelech (*Ruth Rabbah* 6:2). In Ruth 3:3 (NASB), Naomi also instructs Ruth, saying 'Go down to the threshing floor', which she does in 3:6–7. This phrase refers to lying down with Boaz for sexual intercourse (Ruth 3:8). The rabbis

explain that the conception or lying with Boaz is not sinful, but ‘for the sake of Heaven’. The phrase, ‘For the sake of Heaven’ probably means ‘for a divine purpose,’ that is, God’s universal redemption plan through Ruth and others (Adelman 2012:101; Fisch 1982:436).

Boaz and Ruth are remembered in the blessing of the elders of the city (Ruth 4:11). Based on the blessing, Ruth gives birth to a child and becomes the ancestress of David and Jesus (Ruth 4:13). So, Boaz married Ruth and she became his wife (Ruth 4:13; see Freed 1987:13–14). As discussed above, this is clearly shown by the term ‘redeemer’ (Ruth 4:13–15 NASB), which the New Revised Standard Version reads as ‘restorer of life’. This may point to a legal and cultural concept known as kinsman-redeemer (*go-el* in Hebrew). In the context of the story of Ruth, the redeemer is a male relative who has a legal responsibility and the right to redeem or restore property, possessions, or rights that have been lost or forfeited by family members (Ruth 4:13–15; see Freed 1987:13–14). However, Ruth’s story of redemption has a further application – to God’s mighty redemption plan as seen in the whole story of Ruth. This form of redemption applies to the category of genealogies, clearly including the four women of whom Ruth is one (Farmer 2015:262, 304; Keener 1997:54–55). This redeeming process begins with Rahab in Joshua 2 and 6: Salmon begot Boaz through Rahab; Boaz begot Obed through Ruth; and Obed became the father of Jesse; and Jesse became the father of King David (Matthew 1:5–6). Thus, in Ruth’s context, redemption and genealogy are closely related in God’s redemptive plan. Furthermore, Ruth is praised by the later, Rabbinic tradition as the ancestress of David despite her Moabite ancestry (Johnson 1988:165). On her own initiative, Ruth accepted the God of Israel and finally was redeemed by Boaz (Evans 2012:35; Hakh 2014:114). Therefore, there is a close connection between Rahab and Ruth in the chain of genealogies, above all through their faith in God (compare Joshua 2:11 with Ruth 1:16). Furthermore, Heil (1991:541) points out that ‘according to Matthew, she was the mother of Boaz, who eventually became the husband of Ruth’. Thus, Rahab was probably the mother-in-law of Ruth.

As suggested above, Matthew 1:3–6 reveals a possible connection that emerges from the intricately woven genealogy of Tamar, Rahab, and Ruth. Matthew includes Rahab and Ruth in the genealogy of the Messiah (Turner 2008:60). Consequently, Ruth 4:12 shows the continuation of the Davidic line,

which began with Lot and Judah and is fulfilled by Jesus in Matthew's gospel (Heil 1991:541). Moreover, Ruth 4:12 connects Ruth with Tamar in the genealogy (Weren 1997:297). This issue is clarified by Fisch (1982:427):

Lot is the father of Moab and thus the ancestor of Ruth, whilst Judah is the father of Perez and thus the ancestor of Boaz. Another way of putting it would be to say that we have here the story of a single clan (that of Abraham and his nephew Lot) which separates (Gen. xiii 11) at an early stage and is then reunited in the persons of Ruth and Boaz.

Hakh (2014:114) mentions that Matthew includes Ruth in the family of David by presenting her as the ancestress of Jesus. Jewish tradition shows that Ruth is a 'model proselyte' (*Antiquities* 5.9.4); however, some scholars do not agree with Hakh or Jewish tradition because they believe that Ruth became the ancestress of Jesus through faith in God, even though 'No Ammonite or Moabite shall enter the assembly of the Lord' (Deuteronomy 23:3 NASB; see also Johnson 1988:167). Thus, by the plan of God, Ruth became an ancestress of the Messiah.

Conversely, some scholars argue that Ruth is the model proselyte of the Old Testament according to Rabbinic tradition (Allison 2004:7; Jackson 2003:786; Konradt 2020:30; Sim 1995:22; Smit 2010:204). In contrast, the Book of Ruth in 1:22, 2:2, 2:6, 2:21, 4:5, and 4:10 mentions that Ruth is recognised as continuing to be a Moabitess and did not become a proselyte even though later Jewish traditions consider her as a proselyte (Johnson 1988:165; Negewo 2021:110). She persisted in her ethnicity and background, but she believed in God, the God of Israel. Freed (1987:8) points out that

Ruth, the great-grandmother of David, was an ancestress of the Messiah even though she was a Moabite. She was destined for that role according to God's plan.

Her faith in God led to her being the great-grandmother of David and the ancestress of Jesus, included in the genealogy of the Messiah. Ruth was destined to be part of the royal house of David through which the Messiah would come (Freed 1987:9) even though Deuteronomy 23:3–4 states that,

No Ammonite or Moabite shall enter the assembly of the Lord; none of their descendants, even to the tenth generation, shall ever enter the assembly of the Lord, because they did not meet you with food and water on the way when you came out of Egypt, and because they hired against you Balaam the son of Beor from Pethor of Mesopotamia, to curse you.

One way of understanding this prohibition is that it was meant for men and not females (Hakh 2014:115). That is why Ruth was accepted before God, to have faith in him. According to Campbell (2008:80), Ruth's acceptance before God implies a conversion of her identity from a religious perspective, as she put her faith in God, although she retained her ethnicity as a Moabitess (Ruth 1:16; see LaCocque 2004:52). Her religious identity is expressed in Ruth 1:16 as 'your people shall be my people, and your God my God' (NRSV). This identity of religion reflects God's activity that binds the relationship of human beings through the story of Ruth in this context (Campbell 1975:80). In Ruth 1:16, Ruth shows her interest in entering the community of God's people. Neil Glover (2009:302–303) notes that Ruth joined the community after her desire was fulfilled by the community (Ruth 4:13). Ananda Geyser-Fouche and Carli Fourie (2017:5) see the Book of Ruth as an inclusive text. The author of this book underscores the exclusivity of Israel after the post-exilic period and concludes that this is the book of inclusion (de Villiers and le Roux 2016:1–6; Viljoen 2006:251). These commentators argue for inclusivity and point out that the book is opposed to the community of the law, as mentioned in Deuteronomy 23:3–4 above.

To sum up, even though there are various discussions on the inclusion of Ruth in the genealogy of Matthew, it is plausible to accept that the reason for this was her faith in God. This is clearly expressed in Ruth 1:16. It can be argued that her intermarriage was the result of her faith in God. Ruth expressed her loyalty to Naomi before the intermarriage.&&&

The Wife of Uriah (Bathsheba)

In Matthew's genealogy, Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, and 'the wife of Uriah' (Bathsheba) are listed as the mother of King David's son. Bathsheba, daughter

of Eliam and wife of Uriah, is not named directly but referred to as ‘the wife of Uriah’ (Matthew 1:6). This has puzzled many scholars. Hagner (1993:10–11) suggests Bathsheba’s name is deliberately avoided, while Luz (1995:26) argues she is identified this way because she became a non-Israelite through marriage to Uriah, the Hittite, highlighting genealogical diversity. Davies and Allison (2004:174) suggest this emphasises the gentiles present in Jesus’ lineage. Heil (1991:541) argues it underscores David’s sinfulness and the murder of Uriah, a view Brown (1993) finds inadequate because it overlooks Matthew’s genealogical focus.

Bowen (2001:592) notes Bathsheba’s significant role as the queen mother of King Solomon, indicating her influence during the monarchic period. Nowell (2008:7) emphasises her foundational status in the lineage of kings’ mothers. The scholarly debate on Bathsheba’s ethnicity remains unresolved, with some asserting she was an Israelite while others contend she was non-Jewish due to her marriage to Uriah. Keener (1997:54–45, 2009:79) and Allison (2004:5) support the view of Bathsheba as a gentile through her marriage.

Bathsheba’s narrative is complex, beginning with her encounter with David under troubling circumstances (2 Samuel 11:1–4). Despite the controversial elements of her story, the focus here is not on why she is unnamed but why her inclusion as ‘the wife of Uriah’ is critical in Jesus’ genealogy. This highlights the inclusion of gentiles and complex histories within the lineage of Jesus, adding to the rich tapestry of his ancestral story.

Scholars provide different reasons why she is included in Jesus’ genealogy. For example, Doane (2019:100) notes that

Two very contrasting images of David’s masculinity are put forth in the biblical narratives about him. Matthew’s genealogy points to his failings. The text could have said that David begat Salomon, or that David begat Salomon with Bathsheba, but Matthew 1:6 specifies that ‘David was the father of Solomon by the wife of Uriah.’ This occurs in the narrative even though Bathsheba was likely David’s lawful wife at the time Salomon was conceived. The wording of the genealogy alludes to David at his worst moment.

According to France (2007:37), Bathsheba was included in the genealogy because ‘the four “foreign” women prepare the reader for the coming of non-Israelites to follow Israel’s Messiah’. Likewise, Turner (2008:60) notes that Bathsheba is included in the genealogy of Jesus because she was a non-Jew. Considering the Gospel of Matthew’s intention, this shows divine intervention in Jesus’ genealogy through these women (Brown 1993:74). Bauckham (2002:22–23) argues that the inclusion of Bathsheba in the genealogy of Jesus is because she was a gentile. However, Brown (1993:73–74) points out that

In post-biblical Jewish piety these extraordinary unions and initiatives were seen as the work of the Holy Spirit. These women were held up as examples of how God uses the unexpected to triumph over human obstacles and intervenes on behalf of His planned Messiah.

As discussed above, these different views of the Gospel of Matthew create a quandary. On the one hand, some scholars say the wife of Uriah (Bathsheba) was an Israelite. On the other hand, others say the wife of Uriah was a gentile. From these arguments we recognise that it is difficult to conclude why Bathsheba is included in the genealogy of Jesus. It appears that Matthew purposely included the wife of Uriah in the genealogy of Jesus either (1) because Uriah was a gentile and Bathsheba needs to be seen as having a non-Jewish background to show God’s universal plan of salvation for the whole world or (2) to indicate the divine intervention of God in Jesus’ genealogy through the wife of Uriah. Nonetheless, the wife of Uriah was intentionally included in the genealogy of Jesus to show God’s divine intervention for the salvation of the world in God’s universal plan through the genealogical account of whole nations.

By connecting the narratives of these women to current discussions on gender and cultural inclusivity, the study offers a relevant theological reflection that bridges ancient texts with modern societal issues. Generally, the genealogy in Matthew 1:3–6, especially the inclusion of Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, and Bathsheba, stands as a testament to the rich diversity and complexity of biblical narratives. These women, rather than being mere participants in scandal, are revealed as key figures whose faith and actions played pivotal roles in the unfolding of salvation history. By challenging traditional

interpretations, this study opens up new avenues for appreciating the contributions of women within scriptural contexts and beyond, fostering a dialogue that celebrates diversity and promotes equality in various aspects of life.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the inclusion of Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, and Bathsheba in the genealogy of Jesus as presented in Matthew 1:3–6 challenges traditional interpretations that have often cast these women in the light of sinfulness or as mere gentile outliers. Instead, a reinterpretation focusing on their heroic deeds and profound faith reveals a more profound narrative at play. These women, through their resilience and faith, play pivotal roles in the unfolding of salvation history, challenging societal norms and extending the message of inclusivity and redemption beyond the confines of nationality or past actions.

Tamar's determination to secure her place within Judah's lineage through unconventional means, Rahab's courageous faith in the God of Israel, Ruth's devotion and integration into the Israelite community, and Bathsheba's complex journey from scandal to significant royal influence all contribute to a tapestry that reflects God's inclusive nature and divine plan. Their stories, marked by faith and courage, serve as enduring testimonies of God's ability to use diverse individuals to fulfil divine purposes.

This alternative view offers a richer understanding of the biblical genealogy, celebrating the diversity of the experiences that contribute to the lineage of Jesus. By embracing the complexity and depth of these women's stories, modern discussions on gender equality and cultural inclusivity are enriched. These narratives encourage contemporary society to reconsider the roles and contributions of women, both historically and in present contexts, fostering an environment where diversity is not only acknowledged but celebrated. Such reflection advocates for greater gender equality and challenges cultural prejudices, aligning with the broader human experience and opening new pathways for theological discourse and societal growth.

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