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The Female Ancestors of Jesus, according to the Gospel of Matthew

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Introduction

Matthew's Genealogy

The Gospel of Matthew begins with the Jewish origin and genealogy of Jesus. Matthew's account of Jesus' roots focuses on Israel's history with Jesus at the climax. Jesus' authority is rooted in His family tree, which is why the genealogy is important. Matthew begins his genealogy by stating: "An account of the genealogy of Jesus, the Messiah, the son of David, the son of Abraham" (Matthew 1:1).¹ He then details a genealogical pattern of three sections, consisting of fourteen generations in each. His first section starts with Abraham and ends with David; the second goes from David to the Babylonian Exile; and the third from the exile to Jesus; each supposedly fourteen generations. "So all the generations from Abraham to David are fourteen generations; and from David to the deportation to Babylon, fourteen generations; and from the deportation to Babylon to the Messiah, fourteen generations" (Matthew 1:17). Regardless of noted discrepancies in Matthew's mathematical calculations, most scholars agree the importance of the genealogy is to affirm that the Messiah is Jesus as the "son of Abraham", "son of David".²

It is not simply His genealogy that defines Him as a messianic descendant. Matthew also uses the genealogy to demonstrate that Jesus has come in the *fullness of time*. As Patrick Reid says: "By placing Jesus' birth at the beginning of the seventh set of seven generations, Matthew

¹ Michael Coogan, ed., *The New Oxford Annotated Bible: Third Edition, New Revised Standard Version with the Apocrypha* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 9 N.T. All further references to this edition will be cited parenthetically in the body of the paper.

² Raymond E. Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah: A Commentary on the Infancy Narratives in Matthew and Luke* (Garden City: Image Books, 1979), 74-75; 81-83; Daniel J. Harrington, S.J., *The Gospel of Matthew* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1991), 30-31.

indicates that Jesus' birth is in the fullness of time because in the biblical tradition the number seven indicates fullness or completion."³ Raymond Brown argued that Matthew's primary purpose of the genealogy was to stress that Jesus was indeed the fulfillment of the long awaited Jewish messiah (Genesis 1-3; 2 Samuel 7).⁴ And, according to James B. Bell, it is a genealogy befitting only the greatest man who ever lived.⁵

The genealogy of Jesus according to Matthew begins with the covenant with Abraham. It asserts God's control of Israel's history and His plan for the future of Israel and universal salvation. We are made aware of the plan in the Lord's initial establishment of the promise to Abraham.

Now the Lord said to Abram, Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed. (Genesis 12:1-3)

"God separates one man to whom he promises the destiny of being the instrument of blessing for all the dispersed families of the earth".⁶ That which has been promised to Abraham is fulfilled in Jesus' commission to the disciples at the end of Matthew's Gospel. "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:19-20).

³ Patrick V. Reid, ed., *Readings in Western Religious Thought: The Ancient World* (Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1987), 309.

⁴ Brown, 67.

⁵ James B. Bell, *The Roots of Jesus: A Genealogical Investigation* (Garden City: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1983), 15.

⁶ Reid, 45.

By asserting that Jesus is the “son of David” Matthew reaffirms the realization of the Jewish messianic hope. In Nathan’s oracle the Lord promises that David’s dynasty will last forever (2 Samuel 7:11-12; 7:16). In establishing Jesus’ link to David, not only does Matthew associate Him with the greatest king of Israel, but confirms the fulfillment of the prophecy of the Messiah in Isaiah.

A shoot shall come out of the stump of Jesse,
and a branch shall grow out of his roots.
The spirit of the Lord shall rest on him,
the spirit of wisdom and understanding,
the spirit of counsel and might,
the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord.
He shall not judge by what his eyes see,
or decide by what his ears hear;
but with righteousness he shall judge the poor,
and decide with equity for the meek of the earth;
he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth,
and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked.
Righteousness shall be the belt around his waist,
and faithfulness shall be the belt around his loins. (Isaiah 11:1-5)

Although the Gospel of Matthew is not the only mention of Jesus’ heritage in the New Testament (Romans 1:3; Galatians 3:16; Luke 3:23-38), Matthew has tied the promise of salvation into a genealogy which would appeal to Jews and Gentiles alike. “Jesus is heir to the promises made to David and kept alive in Judaism; he is also heir to the wider promise of blessings to the Gentiles

made through Abraham.”⁷ In asserting His link to Abraham and David, Matthew is authenticating the evidence of God’s plan and providence.

Matthew’s genealogy of Jesus also anticipates the salvation of Gentiles and outcasts. The genealogy deviates in four places from the traditional biblical patterns of tracing descendents through the fathers by including four women: Tamar (Matthew 1:3), Rahab (1:5), Ruth (1:5), and the wife of Uriah (1:6). Interestingly, they are not the women one would think would be included. With forefathers such as Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, one would expect the women would be the traditional matriarchs: Sarah, Rebekah, Leah and Rachel, who played significant roles in carrying on the Abrahamic line. Instead, the women named in Matthew’s genealogy are not Israelites. Tamar and Rahab were most likely Canaanites, Ruth was a Moabite, and the wife of Uriah (Bathsheba) was possibly a Hittite, like her husband.

Jane Schaberg and Raymond E. Brown both note various, yet similar, explanations as to why these four women were chosen. They are likely included because (1) they are regarded as foreigners; (2) they are sinners; (3) they were each involved in extraordinary sexual unions.⁸ While all of these factors will be revealed in their stories, Matthew is also pointing out that Jesus Himself came from a mixed heritage. Jesus is the Lord of all Nations (Matthew 28:19). The inclusion of these women demonstrates the role non-Jews and societal outcasts play in the history of salvation. Equally important, their inclusion reveals the significant role women play in God’s plan of salvation itself. What would have been clear to both Jews and Gentiles was that the four women mentioned were not Jewish. Matthew intended to bring the promise to Abraham

⁷ Brown, 68.

⁸ Jane Schaberg, *The Illegitimacy of Jesus: A Feminist Theological Interpretation of the Infancy Narratives* (San Francisco: Harper & Row Publishers, 1987), 20-22; Brown 71-74.

to the forefront, “through you all nations will be blessed”, giving a new vision of salvation history to both groups.

In addition to being *outsiders*, Tamar, Rahab and Bathsheba are sinners, by Old Testament standards. Tamar disguised herself to seduce her father-in-law Judah, tricking him into having sexual relations with her. Rahab would have been considered a sinner by her occupation of a harlot/prostitute (*zonâh*). Ruth may not be viewed as a sinner, but the forthrightness she demonstrated with Boaz put her at risk of being shunned and humiliated by him. Lastly, Bathsheba certainly fits the criteria of a sinner as an adulteress, whether or not David was the initiator. Although they are admired in modern Judaism, they must be evaluated in light of their historical context so that we are able to understand why they were included in the genealogy and in God’s chosen family tree. They are the ones who prepare for and ensure the arrival of Jesus as the one who will save **all** from their sins. Matthew’s theme of salvation being open to all is woven throughout his gospel (Matthew 8:5-13; 9:10-13; 9:20-22; 21:28-32; 22:9-10). These women are proof there is no exclusion when it comes to salvation.

There are several factors in the stories of each of these women that reflect Matthew’s teaching about salvation through Jesus. I will argue that each of these women represents a feature of the *new* kingdom of God and salvation and that this *new* kingdom, made possible through the birth and death of Christ, is for all. It is for those who many thought, would have been excluded from the possibility of salvation. This will be demonstrated by highlighting several common themes that are visible in each of these women’s stories. (1) Each of these women is considered an “outsider” to the Israelites. (2) They each demonstrate an initiative unexpected of a woman in their individual historical contexts. (3) The method by which each of these women contributes to the continuance of the covenant and ultimately the Davidic line is unconventional. (4) God’s

providence is evident in each of their stories, although divine intervention is only overt with Mary's virginal conception and birth of the Messiah. A thorough reading of these women's stories will reflect that they are appropriate foremothers to the Messiah.

Prior to starting the birth story of Jesus, Matthew details, through the genealogy and prophecy of a Messiah, how His conception and birth fit into God's plan (Matthew 1:1-25). Furthermore, His conception was not the first unusual one. In fact, exceptional conceptions are important in the continuation of the covenantal promise. Perhaps this is another reason for the inclusion of Tamar, Rahab, Ruth and Bathsheba. These women, with the exception of Rahab, were involved in extraordinary sexual unions. Tamar's conception by the seduction of her father-in-law is unconventional by any standard. Ruth's union with Boaz is also extraordinary simply because she was a Moabite, who should be excluded from membership in Israel (Deuteronomy 23:4-7). The sexual union between Bathsheba and David was a blending of deceit and adultery. These women present an obvious contrast to Mary, who is virginal and sinless. However, it cannot be overlooked that Mary's conception would have been perceived as equally as scandalous as the other women's. "When his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit" (Matt. 1:18). Matthew tells the reader that Mary is pregnant by the Holy Spirit, but it is important to consider what her community's reaction would have been had Joseph not accepted the pregnant Mary as his wife (Deuteronomy 22:20-21). We will later see in the story of Tamar the reaction of a community towards a woman pregnant by what is believed to be harlotry.

The four women mentioned in Matthew's Gospel demonstrate initiative in maintaining the promise, although some more overtly than others. Regardless, they all play an important role in God's plan as well as lay the foundation for Mary's role in bringing forth the Messiah. God's

intervention is more apparent in Mary's conception than the other women, yet they are all clearly a part of His providence just the same. Through a detailed analysis of these women's narratives the common factors in all of their stories - strength of character, resolute actions and faith in God's promise and guiding providence - will be revealed. Furthermore, the *scandal* and manipulation seen in these women's stories, as well as the ignorance of the men involved, will prove to be resolved with the virginal conception of Mary by the Holy Spirit, and Joseph's willingness to abide by what was revealed to him.

Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to dismiss her quietly. But just when he had resolved to do this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit (Matthew 1:19-20).

The accounts of these women and how they relate to the coming of the Messiah would have significantly altered the Jews' understanding of salvation history, as well as the Gentiles' perspective of the possibility of salvation for non-Jews. Matthew uses the theme of overturning conventional expectations, that is demonstrated in the narratives of these four women, to emphasize that salvation through Jesus also reverses expectancy as is evident in the parables of laborers in the vineyard and the wicked tenants as well as his commission to his disciples (Matthew 20:1-16; 21:33-46; 28:16-20).

Matthew's Gospel begins with the genealogy of Jesus in the hopes of making these points. He intends to accomplish this by illuminating "salvation history". Donald Senior offers the following description of Matthew's concept of salvation history.

Salvation history, then, is a faith perspective; the believer looks back at the flow of historical events and detects a pattern which helps shape a religious consciousness of the present. Many of Matthew's fellow Christians may not have been able to see any continuity at all. They were cut off from or at least strained with their Jewish roots and facing an uncertain future, with streams of Gentiles, along with their strange customs and ignorance of Judaism, now flowing into the church. By reflecting on "continuity-within-discontinuity," Matthew intended to give new perspective and therefore new hope to his baffled church.⁹

This analysis of the stories of these four women will confirm that Matthew's inclusion of them in the genealogy calls attention to the work of divine providence. God's message of salvation may not necessarily correlate with societal standards, but it is not the upholding of *societal standards* that is the key to God's mercy or salvation, as Jesus states at the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount.

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the
kingdom of heaven.

⁹ Senior, 40.

Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you. (Matthew 5:3-12)

Tamar

The story of Tamar¹⁰ interrupts the Joseph narrative, placed in between his being sold into slavery by his brother Judah (Genesis 37), and being taken down to Egypt (Genesis 39). Perhaps what happens to Judah and his family in his story with Tamar is recompense for betraying his brother, similar to Cain's suffering for *betraying* his brother Abel (Genesis 4:8-12). Tamar's story begins with Judah going down from his brothers settling "near a certain Adullamite whose name was Hirah. There Judah saw the daughter of a certain Canaanite whose name was Shua; he married her and went in to her" (Genesis 38:1-2). Judah's wife conceived two sons; Er and Onan (38:3-4). Judah's actions clearly violate the proscription of Abraham forbidding Isaac to marry a Canaanite woman (Genesis 24) and Rebekah and Isaac's disapproval of Jacob marrying a Hittite or Canaanite woman (Genesis 27:46 – 28:9). Within this context, Tamar will have a crucial role in continuing the tribe of Judah. The narrative of Tamar establishes a theme seen throughout the story of all four of these women, the role of an outsider. Tamar was likely a Canaanite, like her mother-in-law (Genesis 38:2). Another theme revealed in her story, which continues with the other women, is that of the irregular sexual union.¹¹ Tamar will be the first of the female ancestors of Jesus to conceive in an unconventional manner. Her questionable behavior makes it that much more surprising that she would be not only an ancestress of the Messiah, but play a key role in the continuance of the original covenant.

"Judah took a wife for Er his firstborn; her name was Tamar. But Er, Judah's firstborn, was wicked in the sight of the Lord, and the Lord put him to death" (Genesis 38:6-7). Because she is

¹⁰ The name Tamar meaning "palm tree", cf. *Anchor Bible Dictionary, volume 6*, (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 315

¹¹ Schaberg, 20-21; Ann Belford Ulanov, *The Female Ancestors of Christ*, (Boston: Shambhala Publications, 1993), 84-85.

widowed before bearing any children, Judah's second born, Onan, is ordered to "perform the duty of a brother-in-law to her" (Genesis 38:8). Judah abides by the, later documented, levirate law. Er's brother Onan is obligated to marry the widow of his brother if he dies prior to a son being born.

When brothers reside together, and one of them dies and has no son, the wife of the deceased shall not be married outside the family to a stranger. Her husband's brother shall go in to her, taking her in marriage, and performing the duty of a husband's brother to her, and the firstborn whom she bears shall succeed to the name of the deceased brother, so that his name may not be blotted out of Israel.

(Deuteronomy 25:5-6)

Presumably, to Onan, the levirate law is unfair. Onan knows that any child born to him and Tamar would not be considered his, but his brother's. Because of this, he *wastes* his semen on the ground to avoid bearing a child with Tamar (Genesis 38:9).

Like his brother, Onan's actions anger the Lord, so he also is put to death (Genesis 38:10). There are no details given on how this affects Tamar. As with the matriarchs who preceded Tamar, child bearing is what gave women a sense of worth within their communities. If a woman was barren, there was a risk of family's name being "blotted out of Israel". Tamar's story reminds us that, in Israel, a married woman's primary obligation was to bear children, preferably male children. In Tamar's case, it was not that she could not bear a child; it was that the opportunity to do so was robbed from her. Both Er and Onan were put to death by the Lord for their displeasing behavior, taking any chance of Tamar's having a child away from her. Not only does Onan

disregard his obligation under the levirate law, but by doing so, foils the chance at the continuation of the tribe of Judah.

The levirate law required Judah to give his youngest son Shelah to Tamar in marriage. Judah would have been understandably nervous that Shelah might succumb to the same destiny as his two older brothers. However, Judah does not recognize the irony, that Tamar is not the problem. He sends Tamar back to her father's house and instructs her to live there as a widow until his son Shelah is old enough to take her as a wife (Genesis 39:11). It is unclear how long Tamar remains at her father's house, however, with the passing of Judah's wife (Genesis 38:12), one must assume that it was a long period. Tamar clearly understands that Judah's procrastination can only signify that he has little intention of following through with his obligation to give his son Shelah to her in marriage. Apparently aware of her rights under levirate law, she knows it will be useless to confront Judah.

Without Shelah given to her in marriage, Tamar stands little chance at life outside of her father's house. As a widow, whose first two husbands died, Tamar would have been viewed as not only tainted, but without any children, eventually an outcast. Her place in society and standing in community would rely solely on her role as a wife and mother.¹² Barrenness was a curse, as the plight of Sarah, Rebekah and Rachel clearly illustrated (Genesis 16:1-2; 25:21; 30:1-24). In her current position, there would have been virtually no chance at remarriage for Tamar. We will later see similar circumstances in the story of Ruth and her mother-in-law, Naomi.

Tamar could have accepted what happened to her as the Lord's plan. However, apparently knowing what she is entitled to through the levirate law, she knows that what Judah has done is

¹² Naomi Harris Rosenblatt, *After the Apple; Women of the Bible* (New York: Mirimax Books, 2005), 110.

unfair. She resolves not to be thrown aside, but instead decides to take what she is entitled to: a child from the tribe of Judah.

When Tamar hears that Judah will be going to Timnah to shear his sheep, she devises a plan. Although Tamar's thoughts are not articulated, it is not difficult to presuppose that what she knew of her father-in-law, and what typically goes on during the sheep shearing celebrations. She is aware that men often enjoy the services of prostitutes, which was not something that was condemned. There were restrictions for Israelites in regards to engaging prostitution, which assumes the inevitability of the practice and conditional acceptance (Deuteronomy 23:17-18).¹³ Because Judah is a recent widower, he would likely partake in those services. Tamar's plan is dangerous and courageous. If she does not succeed, her fate is worse than that of a barren widow; it is death. Since she is still considered a part of Judah's family, and *waiting* for Shelah, her actions would be considered adultery, a capital offense (Deuteronomy 22:23-24). Her trickery and risk taking is reminiscent of Rebekah and Jacob's deception with Isaac (Genesis 27). The younger/child is deceiving the older/parent. However, in both cases it is the willingness to take the risk that ultimately ensures the continuance of the covenant.

Dressed in a veil and seated by the entrance to Enaim, on the road to Timnah, she waits as a prostitute or *harlot* (*zonâh*) as she is described, for Judah to approach (Genesis 38:15). Interestingly, the etymology of Enaim is noted as "in an open place" or "at the crossroad".¹⁴ One could argue that Tamar herself was indeed at a *crossroad*. She is confronted with a choice. She can continue to wait at her father's house with the hope her father-in-law will follow through with his promise. Or, she can challenge the patriarchal society she lives in and not wait, but take

¹³ Coogan, 283 H.B.

¹⁴ Adele Berlin & Marc Zvi Brettler, ed., *The Jewish Study Bible*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 77.

matters into her own hands to ensure she is fitting in with that same patriarchal society by accepting her worth is tied to having a son, and accomplish this by alternative means? She decides to take her future, and the future of the covenant, unbeknownst to her, into her own hands.

Tamar disguising herself with a veil reminds us of Rebekah and Jacob's deceit of Isaac by use of disguise (Genesis 27:15-16). It was God's will that Jacob receive Isaac's blessing (Genesis 25:22-23). Because Isaac was unaware of this, Rebekah and Jacob use deceptive means to ensure God's will is done. This would lead the reader to believe that by Tamar disguising herself as well, unaware, she is fulfilling God's will in her attempt to carry on the tribe of Judah.

Robert Alter offers a different interpretation of the etymology of Enaim. He argues the place-name likely means "Twin Wells" alluding to the betrothal type-scene of "the bridegroom encountering his future spouse by a well in a foreign land".¹⁵ This "type-scene" is reminiscent of the servant's discovery of Rebekah as a bride for Isaac (Genesis 24:15:16), Jacob's finding his bride Rachel by a well (Genesis 29:1-12), and Moses meeting Zipporah at the well in Midian (Exodus 2:16-21). Alter offers an additional explanation for the meaning of "Twin-Wells" stating that it might signify her two marriages, or possibly the twins she will bear.¹⁶

The risks are endless. There is a chance that a man, or men, other than Judah approach her. There is the chance that Judah does not take this route at all. If by chance, Judah does take this route and approaches her, there is the possibility that it is not the right time of the month for her to conceive. Should her plan fall into place, there is no guarantee that Judah will admit to what he has done with her. The risks are grave, but she is willing to take them all. Although we are not

¹⁵ Robert Alter, *The Five Books of Moses: A Translation with Commentary* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2004), 216.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 216.

given any insight into her thoughts or feelings, the reader must assume she has thought of every possibility and weighed her chances. Otherwise, she would have been committing suicide.

When Judah saw her, he thought her to be a prostitute (*zonâh*), for she had covered her face. He went over to her at the roadside, and said, “come let me come in to you,” for he did not know that she was his daughter-in-law. She said, “What will you give me, that you may come in to me?” He answered, “I will send you a kid from the flock.” And she said, “Only if you give me a pledge, until you send it.” He said, “What pledge shall I give you?” She replied, “Your signet and your cord, and the staff that is in your hand.” So he gave them to her, and went in to her, and she conceived by him. Then she got up and went away, and taking off her veil she put on the garments of her widowhood. (Genesis 38:15-19)

Judah’s sexual relation with his daughter-in-law is something strictly forbidden later in Israelite law (Leviticus 18:15). He is unaware of her identity, and we are unaware of whether or not Tamar, as a foreigner, knew this was forbidden. If she was aware, this would further support claims of Tamar as a sinner.¹⁷ Regardless of whether or not she was aware, she proceeded with her plan, and it worked perfectly. She conceived by Judah, when she had the opportunity taken from her to conceive by his sons. Again, the reader is reminded of Rebekah and Jacob’s deception of Isaac. With great risk involved, the tricksters are successful in their plans, pointing to the divine providence involved in their outcome, otherwise, the promise of the covenant would have ended there. However, it is not only their success that reveals divine providence, but the conceptions as well. “When the time came for her to give birth, there were twins in her womb!”

¹⁷ Jane Schaberg, “Before Mary: The Ancestresses of Jesus,” *Bible Review* (December 2004): 14; 22-23; Brown, 71-74.

(Genesis 38:27). This reminds us of the story of Jacob and Esau (Genesis 25:19-26) and points to God's plan for Tamar, and her offspring, in the continuance of the covenant.

The story of her conceiving is unconventional by any standards. Widowed by two brothers, she seduces her father-in-law by portraying herself as a prostitute in order to ensure she gets what is rightfully hers, a child by this family.

Tamar's plan is successful in that she conceives a child by Judah. However, there is still great risk involved. She is known as a widow. Therefore, how could she conceive unless through questionable means? Tamar's cleverness and thoroughness are exemplary in her plan. By taking Judah's signet, cord and staff as a pledge that he would return with *payment* for her services with a kid, she ensured her safety when her pregnancy is revealed. Although Judah is initially nervous that his activities with a supposed prostitute will be revealed when Tamar disappears, he quickly puts the matter behind him (Genesis 38:20-23).¹⁸

Months later, Tamar is unable to conceal her pregnancy and the town's people are quick to tell Judah. "Your daughter-in-law Tamar has played the whore; moreover she is pregnant as a result of whoredom" (Genesis 38:24). Just as the town's people rushed to judgment, so does Judah, quickly calling for her punishment. "And Judah said, 'Bring her out and let her be burned.'" In devising her plan, Tamar was aware of what her punishment would be if her plan did not succeed. She does not recoil in shame when confronted by the angry mob or her father-in-law. Instead, she is confident and calm knowing that she was justified in conceiving a child by a man from the family of Judah. She is self-assured in her strategy. But will she be able to safeguard herself from the label of a harlot? Because she has taken Judah's possessions, she is able to prove

¹⁸ Harris Rosenblatt, 111-112.

that he was the man that impregnated her. Confident as she may be, there is still no guarantee that she will not be put to death for what she has done. Although her actions may have been warranted after Judah failed to comply with the levirate law, she did deceive, portray herself as a prostitute and seduce her father-in-law.

Confronted with an angry and judgmental mob, Tamar calmly sends word to her father-in-law. She needs only to convey a short message to make him understand what has happened. “It was the owner of these who made me pregnant.” And she said, “Take note, please, whose these are, the signet and the cord and the staff” (Genesis 38:25). With that, Judah withdraws his quick condemnation of his daughter-in-law. He immediately recognizes the items as his own and confesses his fault. Judah does not chastise Tamar for her trickery and deception, nor is he angry about his public exposure. Instead, he accepts not only what he has done, but what he failed to do for Tamar by acknowledging that he failed to abide by the levirate law by not providing his youngest son to Tamar.

Judah shows humility in his reply and makes no attempt at excuses. “She is more right than I, since I did not give her my son Shelah” (Genesis 38:26). Tamar escapes persecution and punishment, and Judah does the noble thing and welcomes her back into his family. However, we are explicitly told that they are never intimate again. It is through this one sexual exchange that the tribe of Judah is established. The twins born to Tamar and Judah, Perez and Zerah, begin the ancestral line that leads to King David, and eventually to Jesus (Ruth 4:18-22; Matthew 1:3-16).

At the end of Tamar’s story the reader understands that her conception may have been illegitimate by common standards. However, through levirate law and Judah’s admitting he

wronged Tamar and impregnated her, the pregnancy becomes *legitimate* as cited in the Book of 1 Chronicles. Equally important is Judah's claiming responsibility for her pregnancy so as to legitimize her children as the genuine offspring of the house of Judah. "The sons of Judah: Er, Onan, and Shelah; these three the Canaanite woman Bath-shua bore to him. Now Er, Judah's firstborn, was wicked in the sight of the Lord, and he put him to death. His daughter-in-law Tamar also bore him Perez and Zerah" (1 Chronicles 2:3-4). This establishes the rightful connection to Abraham and the covenant.

Tamar's narrative highlights her righteousness. Because the narrative indicates Judah "went down from his brothers", and married the daughter of a Canaanite, it is understood that Tamar too was a Canaanite (Genesis 38:2-6). Though she is an outsider, it is certainly not the focus of the narrative. What is the focus is her faith, as an outsider, in the laws of God, i.e. the levirate law. She demonstrates a knowledge and belief that surpasses that of Judah. Because of this the reader can deduce that, although there is no visible or verbal intervention by the Lord in her conception, her faith and perseverance must have been a part of divine providence. Divine guidance under unconventional circumstances is how her plan succeeded. With Judah's first two sons being struck dead for displeasing the Lord and Judah's fearfully withholding his youngest from Tamar, the tribe of Judah would have ended. Judah's ignorance leaves only Tamar to ensure the continuation of the Lord's plan. Therefore, divine guidance must account for the success of Tamar's risky plan.

With daring, Tamar, unloved and pushed aside, takes the initiative to bring about what she knows as right in Israel's law. She herself set aside conventions imposed

by society in general, by men in particular, in order to arrive at her truth that will be Yahweh's truth.¹⁹

Tamar is reflective of Jesus' message in the Gospels in that she defies convention and societal standards. Judah may have wrongly assumed that as a Canaanite, Tamar did not know about the laws of Israel, such as the levirate law. Regardless of laws, she was willing to risk her safety and reputation to do what she knew was right in the eyes of God. She shows us that one person has the ability to make a significant impact on history. That one person may be seen as insignificant and an "outsider" by her community. In the parable of the wicked tenants Matthew echoes the Lord's admonition of those who are believed to be religious authorities are not in fact the ones who will be the future of the Church (Matthew 21:33-41). Tamar is an example of that future, and of the stone cast aside. "The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; this was the Lord's doing" (Matthew 21:42). Tamar's courage is to be admired, not because she sought to fulfill a personal goal of motherhood, but because her faith perpetuated a greater purpose. Her unusual conception is an appropriate precursor to Mary's conception of Jesus, in that she was the first to reveal that God's plan for the future of the covenant may be unconventional.

¹⁹ Belford Ulanov, 32.

Rahab

Rahab's²⁰ introduction in The Book of Joshua comes at a poignant time for the Israelites. After forty years, they have reached the Promised Land (Genesis 12:1-3; Joshua 1:1-9). However, their wandering, following Moses, to what they are told is the Promised Land, has been full of turmoil and tests of faith. The Israelites repeatedly doubted Moses and what God promised awaited them (Exodus 14; 16-17 & 32; Numbers 11-20). Now, faced with the death of Moses, and having yet to cross over into the Land, Joshua is appointed by the Lord in the Book of Deuteronomy. "Then the Lord commissioned Joshua son of Nun and said, "Be strong and bold, for you shall bring the Israelites into the land that I promised them; I will be with you" (Deuteronomy 31:23). As the Book of Joshua begins Joshua begins, the Lord commissions him a second time. "After the death of Moses the servant of the Lord, the Lord spoke to Joshua son of Nun, Moses' assistant, saying, 'My servant Moses is dead. Now proceed to cross the Jordan, you and all this people, into the land that I am giving to them, to the Israelites'" (Joshua 1:1-2). In order to assess the land, its inhabitants and threats, Joshua decides to send two spies to survey the area. We are reminded of Israel's failure to enter the land when Moses initially sends scouts to survey the land for conquest (Numbers 13 - 14). Once fully aware of what and who lies ahead, Joshua can lead the Israelites in taking possession of the land the Lord has promised (Joshua 2:1).

Rahab's story highlights the role an *outsider* plays in completing the process of the Israelites' journey to receive the gift of the Land. Again, we are introduced to a woman who is a foreigner. Like Tamar, Rahab is a Canaanite. Upon her introduction, she is not only identified as a

²⁰ Rahab's name comes from the root meaning "to be wide or broad", cf. *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, volume 5, 611.

Canaanite, but as a harlot (*zonâh*), or prostitute. Her profession would have put her well outside the acceptable standards of respectability.

Ironically, it is Rahab's profession that would put her in the ideal position to assist the Israelite spies. She likely saw many visitors and locals come and go. Her societal position would make her nonthreatening, and she likely overhears much of what the men of the community do. Perhaps this is why the spies sent by Joshua choose Rahab.

When Rahab is ordered by the king of Jericho to hand over the spies that entered her house, she hides them instead. Not only does she conceal them with the stalks of flax she has laid out on her roof, she lies to the king's men (Joshua 2:2-6). Rahab lying to the king's men is reminiscent of the midwives in Egypt disobeying Pharaoh's orders to kill any Hebrew baby boys born. The midwives fear the Lord and therefore did not do as ordered (Exodus 1:15-17). Rahab's defying the king points to divine guidance as it did in the story of the midwives.

Although she may carry the labels of outsider and harlot, Rahab is not unaware of the favor the Lord shows Israel. Rahab, without provocation, gives an oracle to Joshua's men, that the land is theirs to take. While they are hidden on the roof, and before they have fallen asleep, she comes to them on her own initiative and announces a confession of the Lord's mighty deeds in the style of Deuteronomy (Deuteronomy 1-2).

I know that the Lord has given the country to you, because dread of you has fallen upon us, and all the inhabitants of the land are quaking before you. For we have heard how the Lord dried up the waters of the Sea of Reeds for you when you left Egypt, and what you did to Sihon and Og, the two Amorite kings, across the Jordan, whom you doomed. When we heard about it, we lost

heart, and no man had any more spirit left because of you; for the Lord your God is the only God in heaven above and on earth below. (Joshua 2:9-11)

Rahab recognizes that the Lord is with Israel as did the nations in the Song of the Sea sung by Moses and the Israelites (Exodus 15:14-16). This information alone gives the Israelites a sense of confidence that they did not have when Moses' scouts came back with a contrary report (Numbers 13:31-33). Her acknowledgement of the Lord's power to fulfill the promise of the land to the spies becomes an oracle to take the land. They have been told that the "inhabitants of the land are quaking", signifying that the conquest is theirs to take. The Lord's promise to Abraham of the land will be fulfilled. Rahab's fear of their God prompts her not only to submit to the Israelites, but deceive her own people. Without this encounter, and the quick reaction of Rahab, the fate of Israel would have been altered.

It is only with the assistance of Rahab that Joshua is able to fulfill his mission of destroying Jericho and beginning the conquest of the land. She independently makes a decision to go against her own community and side with the *enemy*. Just as she took the initiative to give the oracle to Joshua's spies, Rahab again is assertive in approaching Joshua's men in asking that her family be spared.

"Now then, since I have dealt kindly with you, swear to me by the Lord that you in turn will deal kindly with my family. Give me a sign of good faith that you will spare my father and mother, my brothers and sisters, and all who belong to them, and deliver our lives from death." The men said to her, "Our life for yours! If you do not tell this business of ours, then we will deal kindly and faithfully with you when the Lord gives us the land." (Joshua 2:12-14)

Rahab plays a pivotal role in the fall of Jericho. It is her obedience and acknowledgement of God that ultimately saves her. Rahab risks her own life to protect the invading spies, based solely on what she had heard the Lord has done for the Israelites. Her knowledge is not necessarily that of a spiritual experience, but one of faith and believing without seeing. Rahab's awareness of the Israelite exodus and the consequences that have come upon Israel's enemies is enough to motivate self-preservation. The decision she makes is based solely on the fear the Canaanites have derived from hearing what Yahweh has done for Israel's warriors (Numbers 21:21-35; Deuteronomy 2:26 – 3:11). Without the faith to believe that the Lord was as powerful as she heard, powerful enough to save her and her family, she would not be willing to side with the Israelites. She clearly knows the calamity that has been brought upon those that resisted Israel. Rahab is forthcoming about her motive for helping the Israelites; she wants to save herself and her family.

Rahab is willing to trust the spies unconditionally as she hides them, and lies to the king of Jericho prior to knowing whether or not they will heed her plea. She asks them to swear to her by the Lord, the Lord she has only heard of, yet in whom she is putting her faith. Ironically, it is the Israelites who make the deal conditional upon her keeping their business a secret. Though their pledge to save her and her family is conditional, Rahab directs them where to hide in the hill country, and to stay for three days so that they will not be found (Joshua 2:16).²¹

In its historical context, Rahab's behavior is atypical of a woman, especially of one in her societal position. She knows what she wants and she does not delay in going after it. Her choices are motivated by concern for the preservation of her family. Rahab will save herself and her

²¹ Coogan, 319 H.B.

family at the cost of her kinsmen. She does not demonstrate any remorse or hesitation in her deception.

Rahab's unsighted acceptance of the Lord's power is evidence of the innate understanding of God Himself. The integrity of the Israelites as well as God's mercy are exemplified in what follows. The spies agree to spare Rahab and her family only if she ties the crimson cord (*tikvat ha shani*; "cord of hope") she used to help them escape, to her window. This will signify to them that she has kept her promise (Joshua 2:17-21).

It must be noted that it was a scarlet string (*shani*) that was tied to Zerah, Tamar's son, to mark the elder of the twins (Genesis 38:28-30). This red cord will also serve as the identifier to the Israelites to "pass over" Rahab's house, and spare her family. Just as the Israelites were spared from the affliction of the death of the first born child by marking their doors with crimson blood, so will she be spared (Exodus 12:12-13).²² These correlations point to divine providence in Rahab's story.

She is trusting and fearful of the Lord's wrath and subsequently is rewarded with her life. When the city of Jericho and all who were in it are destroyed, Joshua honored the promise made to Rahab. When he gives the command to destroy Jericho, Joshua is explicit in his direction to spare Rahab and all who are in her house because she hid the spies (Joshua 6:17). There is an obvious emphasis placed on the sparing of Rahab and her family as it is mentioned repeatedly in the second half of chapter 6 of Joshua (Joshua 6:17; 22; 25).

They burned down the city and everything in it. But the silver and gold and the objects of copper and iron were deposited in the treasury of the House of the

²² Berlin & Brettler ed., 467.

Lord. Only Rahab the harlot and her father's family were spared by Joshua, along with all that belonged to her, and she dwelt among the Israelites – as is still the case. For she had hidden the messengers that Joshua sent to spy out Jericho. (Joshua 6:24-25)

Although, Rahab's actions may have been motivated by a desire to ensure her safety and that of her family, a fear for her safety that comes from knowing what the God of Israel is capable of, without her faith and courage, Israel surely would not have been successful in the destruction of Jericho. Ultimately, without Rahab, the Israelites would not have conquered Jericho, and taken the land promised to them through Abraham and Moses. Like Tamar's story, without the intervention of a woman, the Israelites' taking of the Promised Land would have failed.

Rahab is a survivor among the unfaithful of her own people. Like Tamar, Rahab's story does not include a tangible intervention of the Lord in the miraculous taking of Jericho. It is her faith in a God that has not been revealed to her first hand that exhibits His control. Also reflective of Tamar's tale, Rahab's choices may bring her character into question. She does not resort to trickery in the same manner as Tamar did, but does indulge in deception by lying to the king's men who come looking for the spies (Joshua 2:2-7; Exodus 1:15-17). Yet her faith in and fear of the Lord ultimately saves her and her family. This testament of faith expounded by a non-Israelite provides a clear message of God's power, as well as His mercy.

Because of Rahab's faith in the Lord, not only was she spared, but also her family who "dwell among the Israelites". The Lord saves those who heed Him, even if they are not of His "chosen" people. Ultimately, it is her faith that saved her and for this she is admired. As

Schaberg says; “Rabbinic tradition emphasized Rahab’s extreme generosity in order to emphasize her repentance and conversion to Israel’s god.”²³

Rahab is a perfect example of Jesus’ teaching in Matthew: “The last will be the first, and the first will be the last” (Matthew 20:16). A Canaanite prostitute, marginalized by her own community proves to be pivotal in carrying out God’s plan for the Israelites and the continuance of the covenant.

Rahab is included with the greatest heroes and heroines of faith in the New Testament. Her faith is compared to that of Abraham and Moses, among others.²⁴ Yet, it is noted that it is not just her faith that is admirable, but the actions that resulted from her faith.

Thus the scripture was fulfilled that says, ‘Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness,’ and he was called the friend of God. You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone. Likewise, was not Rahab the prostitute also justified by works when she welcomed the messengers and sent them out by another road? (James 2:23-25)

She is venerated for what she did as much as she is for her *new founded* faith. “By faith Rahab the prostitute did not perish with those who were disobedient, because she had received the spies in peace” (Hebrews 11:31). As Jesus taught, there is no person that is more deserving of God’s love and grace than another (Matthew 9:10-13; 9:20-22; 21:28-32). This is not something that we earn based on worth; it is a gift, free to all who are willing to accept Him and his love and grace. Rahab is a perfect example of this. Although society may have considered her undeserving, her faith alone made her the most deserving. As Belford Ulanov states:

²³ Schaberg, *Before Mary: The Ancestresses of Jesus*, 16.

²⁴ Shaberg, *The Illegitimacy of Jesus*, 26.

We do not earn God's love and protection; God gives it to us, well beyond our merits, and we receive it, quickly, thankfully, all the more because we know how little we deserve it. That is what Rahab teaches us, as Jesus does. She shows us that it is God who acts, beyond us, for us, in us, and that when we respond as we should respond, we become blessed.²⁵

Rahab's story does not detail how she enters into the ancestry of the Davidic lineage. However, Matthew states that Rahab is the mother to Boaz by Salmon (Matthew 1:5) and it has been speculated that she married Joshua and was given the gift of prophecy.²⁶ Regardless of how she enters into the ancestry, there is a noteworthy motive as to why Matthew's Gospel mentions her as only one of four women in the genealogy. She unmistakably represents Jesus' message of "the last shall be first" (Matthew 20:16). Rahab is a representation of the person(s) Jesus has come to advocate for e.g. the societal outcast who will inherit the kingdom. She also demonstrates that salvation is not exclusive; it is for all who have faith. Ann Belfor Ulanov states that the *Midrash Rabbah* says Rahab clove to Israel and accepted Torah.²⁷

What is evident in Rahab's narrative is Israel became her people, her country (Joshua 6:25), and we can safely assume, her faith. We may not know details of her future e.g. family and children, aside from what Matthew has stated, but we do know her role in Israel's taking of the Promised Land thus ensuring the continuance of the covenant.

²⁵ Belford Ulanov, 45.

²⁶ Schaberg, *The Illegitimacy of Jesus*, 26.

²⁷ Belford Ulanov, 39.

Ruth

Although the story of Ruth²⁸ is one of the shortest books in the Old Testament²⁹, it is an inspiring and artistic tale of conversion and courage. It begins during a time of famine in Judah. The severe conditions force Elimelech, his wife Naomi and their two sons, Mahlon and Chilion to leave their home in Bethlehem and go to Moab. When Naomi's husband dies, her two sons marry Moabite women, Orpah and Ruth. After the deaths of Mahlon and Chilion, the women are left to fend for themselves (Ruth 1:1-5).

Immediately the reader is aware that the three women are surrounded by extreme circumstances. In a time when marriage was supposed to provide security for a woman's future, Naomi, Ruth and Orpah find themselves in a situation where this simply had not worked out for them. With no men to care for them, these women are potentially fated to poverty and starvation. Striking similarities are seen between Ruth's and Tamar's situations. There are few ways for single or widowed women to honorably support themselves; their options are limited. Like Tamar, Ruth does not simply succumb to her desperate circumstances, nor does she permit Naomi to either. Throughout the narrative, Ruth and her mother-in-law are willing to take bold chances to change their destinies.

After the death of her husband and two sons, Naomi, believing there is no chance of her survival in the foreign land of Moab, decides to return to her native land of Judah. Naomi has no other sons to offer in marriage. The fact that this is mentioned in the narrative indicates that if Naomi

²⁸ Ruth's name, Rwt, traditionally is associated with Rwt, "friend or companion", but a deviation of wh accounts better for the Hebrew spelling of the name from Rwh, "be satisfied", *Anchor Bible Dictionary, volume 4*, 131.

²⁹ Jewish tradition puts the Book of Ruth in the writings among the Five Megillot or the writings of the Kethuvim and is to be read on the feast of Shavuot; The Septuagint places the Book of Ruth between the Book of Judges and 1 Samuel as it begins with "in the days when the judges ruled".

had more sons, she would have heeded the levirate law having her sons marry her daughters-in-law.

With no means of supporting her daughters-in-law, she encourages them both to return to their homes. Both Ruth and Orpah, being natives of Moab, would likely have a greater chance of survival, and an honorable life, if they return home.³⁰

But Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, ‘Turn back, each of you to her mother’s house. May the Lord deal kindly with you, as you have dealt with the dead and with me! May the Lord grant that each of you find security in the house of a husband!’ And she kissed them farewell. They broke into weeping and said to her, ‘No, we will return with you to your people.’(Ruth 1:8-9)

Naomi is aware that she cannot provide for her daughters-in-law and their only hope for a future is in re-marriage. This is not something she is able to offer. She also knows that her only chance of survival is in returning to her homeland in the hopes of finding mercy among her own people and kin.³¹ Even though Ruth and Orpah were not Israelite women, it is evident, Naomi feels love for them and would have kept them in her family. The affection between the women is palpable. The women, through tears, resist Naomi’s command for them to return to their families. Both Ruth and Orpah wish to stay with Naomi, but Orpah eventually relents. “They broke into weeping again, and Orpah kissed her mother-in-law farewell” (Ruth 1:14).

“But Ruth clung to her” (1:14). Ruth had not only come to deeply love Naomi, but the Jewish ways as well. Although being repeatedly turned away and discouraged by Naomi, she loves her, and refuses to separate. Ruth has evidently adopted not only the faith of her late husband, but her

³⁰ Belford Ulanov, 46.

³¹ Harris Rosenblatt, 226.

decision to do so binds herself to her late husband's and his people. She insists on following her mother-in-law into a foreign land where Moabites are traditionally not welcome.

No Ammonite or Moabite shall be admitted into the congregation of the Lord; none of their descendants, even in the tenth generation, shall ever be admitted into the congregation of the Lord, because they did not meet you with food and water on your journey after you left Egypt, and because they hired Balaam son of Beor, from Pethor of Aram-naharaim, to curse you. You shall never concern yourself with their welfare or benefit as long as you live. (Deuteronomy 23:4-7)

Whether or not Ruth was aware of this prohibition against Moabites does not seem relevant. What is poignant is she turned away from worshiping the god of the Moabites and put her trust in the One God of her husband's family. "But Ruth replied, 'Do not urge me to leave you, to turn back and not follow you. For wherever you go, I will go; wherever you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God my God'" (Ruth 1:16). It is logical to assume that it is the *new* faith in the Lord that motivates her to follow Naomi, rather than return to her mother's house. What is equally as demonstrative of her character is that she does not dwell on the death of her husband, brother-in-law, and father-in-law. Rather, she devotes herself to the needs of her mother-in-law. Ruth readily forgoes any chance of remarrying a Moabite and securing a future for herself. Instead she chooses an unknown future in a land foreign to her. By committing herself to her elderly mother-in-law, who would otherwise be alone, Ruth shows us a glimpse of why she is an appropriate ancestress of Christ.

As the two women return to Naomi's native Israel, they are welcomed by her kinsmen but still required to be self-reliant. Naomi is bitter that she left her kinsmen with a husband and two sons,

and has now returned with none of them (Ruth 1:19-21). They are two widowed women with no means of supporting themselves. However, the women return to Bethlehem at the beginning of the barley harvest which implies there is hope in their emptiness (Ruth 1:22).³² Currently, they are without home, without food and without protection of a male in the family. What they are not without, however, is God. It is Ruth who exhibits faith in the Lord and thus faith in a future.

Ruth takes the initiative in suggesting that she follow the gleaners in the fields to collect any grain dropped by the harvesters. “Ruth the Moabite said to Naomi, ‘I would like to go to the fields and glean among the ears of grain, behind someone who may show me kindness’” (Ruth 2:2). With this statement, it is possible Ruth is aware of the chairtable laws which allot harvest cleaning to the poor (Leviticus 19:9-10; 23:22). “When you reap your harvest in your field and forget a sheaf in the field, you shall not go back to get it; it shall be left for the alien, the orphan, and the widow, so that the Lord our God may bless you in all your undertakings” (Deuteronomy 24:19). Even though this was customary for the poor to do, it is notable that Ruth is seeking an honest way to sustain herself and Naomi. Again, she chooses the apparently more difficult path, rather than return to a possible easier life at her mother’s house. Had she returned to her mother’s house, the path would have undoubtedly led her away from the One God she has come to know. For this, she prefers to glean amongst the poor. She had already made a courageous choice by choosing to follow Naomi. Now, her selflessness is reflected in her willingness to do what she must to survive.

The field that Ruth gleans in happens to belong to Boaz, a kinsman to Naomi, from the family of Elimelech. It cannot be assumed that this was a matter of luck or chance. Undoubtedly, divine

³² Coogan, 393 H.B.

providence brings Ruth to Boaz's field. Like Tamar's story, there is not an obvious intervention of the Lord in the story. His involvement is not visible, yet is clearly there.

Ruth, unaware of who Boaz is, hopes that someone may show her kindness. The kindness she seeks is realized in Boaz. Again, this can only be attributed to divine providence.

Boaz said to Ruth, 'Listen to me, daughter. Don't go to glean in another field. Don't go elsewhere, but stay here close to my girls. Keep your eyes on the field they are reaping, and follow them. I have ordered the men not to molest you. And when you are thirsty, go to the jars and drink some of [the water] that the men have drawn.'

She prostrated herself with her face to the ground and said to him, "Why are you so kind as to single me out, when I am a foreigner?" (Ruth 2:8-10)

Boaz is aware that Ruth is a Moabite, and we must assume that he is aware of the Deuteronomic law forbidding admission of Moabites in Israel's community. However, he shows Ruth compassion, by allowing her to glean. His actions towards Ruth are a foretaste of his character still to be revealed. The Lord's directives about care for the poor gleaners supersede the Deuteronomic law against the Moabites in this case. "And when you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap all the way to the edges of your field, or gather the gleanings of your harvest; you shall leave them for the poor and the stranger" (Leviticus 23:22).

Boaz's response to Ruth when she questions his kindness points to the mercy of the Lord for those who seek Him. Boaz acknowledges the sacrifice she made in leaving her home and family as well as her dedication to her mother-in-law. He commends her for her courage and praises her loyalty.

Boaz said in reply, ‘I have been told of all that you did for your mother-in-law after the death of your husband, how you left your father and mother and the land of your birth and came to a people you had not known before. May the Lord reward your deeds. May you have a full recompense from the Lord, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have sought refuge.’ (Ruth 2:11-12)

Boaz’s awareness of Ruth, singling her out from the other gleaners, stirs a consciousness in the reader of God’s unrevealed plan. Ruth responds to Boaz’s kindness and generosity with great modesty. “Then she said, ‘May I continue to find favor in your sight, my lord, for you have comforted me and spoken kindly to your servant, even though I am not one of your servant’” (Ruth 2:13). Boaz’s further generosity is demonstrated in his invitation to Ruth to eat and drink with the reapers (Ruth 2:14-16). Ruth’s dedication to Naomi is further exemplified in her kindness with her mother-in-law. Not only does she bring her what she has gleaned, but what remains of her meal as well (Ruth 2:18). Ruth is a woman who is not deterred by hard work, and does not appear to expect much in return. Instead, she puts all of her trust in Naomi to guide her both morally and spiritually. Her confidence in Naomi and faith in her God are evident, not only because she takes great risks in following her, but because she does as Naomi instructs without question. More than the love for a mother-in-law, or mother as it seems in this case, we must suppose that Ruth has faith in the God of her mother-in-law.

Naomi, surprised by the volume of Ruth’s take in the field, inquires as to who was so kind to her. “Blessed be he who took such generous notice of you!” (Ruth 2:19). In a place where Ruth typically would have been treated as a stranger, she was instead treated as a kinswoman. The reader can only reason that this is God’s indirect intervention. Naomi quickly remarks on the family relation to Boaz (Ruth 2:20). She knows that Ruth’s remarrying would solve their

problems and ensure their future. Naomi instructs Ruth to stay close to her kinsman. “Naomi said to Ruth, her daughter-in-law, ‘It is better, my daughter, that you go out with his young women, otherwise you might be bothered in another field’” (Ruth 2:21). Ruth follows her mother-in-law’s specific instruction and continues in Boaz’s field until the end of the barley and wheat harvest (Ruth 2:23).

Boaz is the ideal kinsman. He is a childless widower himself, and well off enough to adequately support them both.³³ As a relative of Naomi’s through her husband, there is a legal obligation to assist Naomi. As with Tamar, we see the importance of the levirate law.

Just as Ruth took the initiative to glean in the fields, Naomi takes the initiative to put this plan in motion. She sees an opportunity for Ruth, as well as herself. Her widowed daughter-in-law is still young enough to marry their sympathetic kinsman and both women can begin a new life. This new life for both would be one of dignity and prosperity. Equally as important, it would mean that the name of Naomi’s son would not disappear. Ruth has already taken Naomi as a sort of spiritual and moral guide, it should follow that she agrees to comply with Naomi’s plan without question.

Naomi, her mother-in-law, said to her, “Daughter, I must seek a home for you, where you may be happy. Now there is our kinsman Boaz, whose girls you were close to. He will be winnowing barley on the threshing floor tonight. So bathe, anoint yourself, dress up, and go down to the threshing floor. But do not disclose yourself to the man until he has finished eating and drinking. When he lies down, know the place where he lies down, and go over and uncover his feet and lie

³³ Harris Rosenblatt, 229-230.

down. He will tell you what you are to do.” She replied, “I will do everything you tell me.” (Ruth 3:1-5)

Ruth obeys Naomi’s command without hesitation. Regardless of whether or not “uncovering his feet” is a sexual euphemism, Ruth is putting her reputation at stake by being so bold. One must consider the courage it took for Ruth to do such a thing. She is a foreign woman, going alone to a sleeping man who is a stranger to her, after he has been drinking. She not only is putting her reputation at stake, but her safety as well. It is a testament to her faith in Naomi, and presumably her God as well, to take such a risk. However, in light of the risk Ruth was willing to take by following Naomi after the death of her husband, it is not entirely surprising that she should follow her guidance.

Boaz’s reaction is equally as commendable as Ruth’s deed itself. He does not take advantage of her, nor does he shun her and make a mockery of her forwardness. He sees the sincerity of her character and virtue, and instead becomes her protector. Even though she comes from the land of an enemy, because of her reference to him being next-of kin, appealing to him as a *redeeming kinsman*, Boaz recognizes that she observes the covenant (Deuteronomy 25:5-10). “He said, ‘Who are you?’ And she answered, ‘I am Ruth, your servant, for you are next-of-kin’” (Ruth 3:9). Boaz finds Ruth to be a worthy woman (*eshet chayil*) and as a result, finds her worthy of being a wife. “A capable wife who can find? She is far more precious than jewels” (Proverbs 31:10). He is clearly aware how precious it is to find a woman as righteous as Ruth.

He exclaimed, ‘Be blessed of the Lord, daughter! Your latest deed of loyalty is greater than the first, in that you have not turned to younger men, whether poor or

rich. And now, daughter, have no fear. I will do on your behalf whatever you ask,
for all the elders of my town know what a fine woman you are.’ (Ruth 3:10-11)

While Boaz contentedly agrees with Ruth’s plan, he is a man of his faith and the laws that are a part of it. He points out to Ruth that there is another kinsman, a closer relative, who has the right of next of kin, before he (Ruth 3:12). True to his character, until the matter can be settled, he shows concern for Ruth’s reputation. He sends her home before dawn, before anyone can see her, and sends barley with her as well (Ruth 3:13-14). He seems a befitting man to marry a woman of conviction. Precisely what Judah tried so desperately to avoid with Tamar, Boaz will willingly do for Ruth. By adhering to the duty of levirate marriage Boaz is saving a family from extinction as well as maintaining the communal nature of Israel. When Ruth returns home to Naomi, she not only has the news of her plan’s outcome, but a shawl full of barley (Ruth 3:15-18).

In fidelity to his promise, Boaz approaches the kinsman that is closer than he to Naomi, and brings ten elders to the conversation at the city gate (Ruth 4:1-2). He clearly wants the matter to be legally recognized, as in Israel, legal matters were typically settled at the city gate by elders who were influential in the community (Deuteronomy 22:15; 25:7-9). When the kinsman declines to redeem the land of his kinsmen Elimelech and thus acquire Ruth as a wife, Boaz gladly accepts. He announces his intentions before the witnesses to solidify the transaction (Ruth 4:3-8). According to tradition, this was perfectly acceptable (Leviticus 25:25).

And Boaz said to the elders and to the rest of the people, “You are witnesses today that I am acquiring from Naomi all that belonged to Elimelech and all that belonged to Chilion and Mahlon. I am also acquiring Ruth the **Moabite**, the wife

of Mahlon, as my wife, so as to perpetuate the name of the deceased upon his estate, that the name of the deceased may not disappear from among his kinsmen and from the gate of his home town. You are witnesses.” (Ruth 4:9-10)

It should not be ignored that Boaz acknowledges Ruth as a Moabite publicly. This does not seem to be a concern for the elders regardless of the Deuteronomic law which forbids integrating with Moabites. Ruth is seen as a virtuous and loyal woman, even if she is considered a convert. This is clear with the response of all of the people who were at the gate, including the elders.

May the Lord make the woman who is coming into your house like Rachel and Leah, both of whom built up the House of Israel. May you produce children in Ephrathah and bestow a name in Bethlehem; and, through the children that the Lord will give you by this young woman, may your house be like the house of Perez, whom Tamar bore to Judah. (Ruth 4:11-12)

Tamar is also recognized as a woman who built up the House of Israel. Tamar and Ruth came from similar circumstances. Both women would have been typically cast aside in the patriarchal societies they lived in. Yet, they are included in this blessing as they both build up the House of Israel, and compared to women such as Rachel and Leah.³⁴

Not surprisingly, this blessing is precisely what will happen. Because Boaz marries Ruth, the family line of Elimelech is restored. It is a foreign woman who ensures the continuance of the covenant through their offspring. Ruth and Boaz marry, and she bears a son, Obed. Eventually, Ruth becomes the grandmother to Jesse and the great grandmother to King David (Ruth 4:13-

³⁴ Schaberg, *The Illegitimacy of Jesus*, 28.

22). The irony is not in that Ruth bears a son as Rachel and Leah did, but that she, a Moabite, will be a mother in the line that leads to David (2 Samuel 7:16) and Jesus (Matthew 1:5).

Ruth could have easily thought of only herself. There was no reason that she had to go to a foreign land with her mother-in-law. She could have returned home, possibly remarried a Moabite and gone on with her life. What is remarkable is that she chooses the more challenging route, the unknown. There was no guarantee that either she or Naomi would survive. Both of these women are daring in their gambles. Their willingness to take the risks they did can only be attributed to a deep seeded, unspoken faith. The reality that their risks not only worked in their favor, but ultimately resulted in Ruth becoming an integral part of the covenant can only be attributed to divine providence.³⁵

Ruth, like Tamar and Rahab, is not only a foreigner, but a savvy woman who essentially uses her sexuality to get what she wants. She cannot be described as a trickster as Tamar, and certainly not a harlot as Rahab. However, she shows initiative based on faith in the God of Israel. This is a moving commonality of all three of these women. The conception of Ruth's son Obed appears to be legitimate when compared to Tamar's conception story. However, it should not be overlooked that the conception is none the less, unconventional. In light of the Deuteronomic law, Boaz should not have married Ruth let alone have children.³⁶ The fact that she is a Moabite is unconventional by historic standards. Yet, her method of engaging Boaz and exhibiting her modesty, and more importantly, lying at the threshing floor, can be viewed as her using her sexuality to manipulate. This also, historically, is a most unconventional method of obtaining a husband and starting a family.

³⁵ Harris Rosenblatt, 232.

³⁶ Schaberg, *The Illegitimacy of Jesus*, 28.

Matthew mentions Ruth in the genealogy for a reason. She can be considered the first convert to Judaism. She is yet another example, like Tamar and Rahab, that an outsider (a Moabite), and apparently a useless member of society (a widow) can and will be chosen by God, to be the *first*. The Lord has shown, and Matthew confirms, those considered worthless but who demonstrate faith will be blessed (Matthew 9:20-22). Regardless of her nationality and regardless of her methods in obtaining a husband, her faith in the Lord of Israel makes her worthy as an ancestress of Christ. Her actions affirm her allegiance to the Lord and kinship to His people (Ruth 1:16-17). Also, the love she shows for her mother-in-law reminds us of the love Christ represents. She was unwilling to abandon what she knew to be right, which was to follow the God of her husband's family. Ruth reminds us of Christ in that as an outsider and a widow, her status would have placed her at the bottom of society; a place Christ considered the starting point of salvation. Instead of abandoning Naomi and seeking self-preservation, Ruth not only partners herself with a widowed elderly woman, but holds that woman in such esteem that she is willing to risk her own well-being for the sake of Naomi's. "Ruth does what she does for love of another woman. This is the animating strength of Ruth as redeemer. It is what makes her a Christ figure."³⁷

³⁷ Belford Ulanov, 59.

Bathsheba (wife of Uriah)

Bathsheba's³⁸ introduction in Second Samuel comes at the height of David's power. After generations of turmoil and oppression, David unites the Northern and Southern tribes and makes Jerusalem their spiritual capital by bringing the Ark there (2 Samuel 5-6). David has proven himself to be a more righteous and humble king than Saul. God had abandoned Saul, "and David became greater and greater, for the Lord, the God of hosts, was with him" (2 Samuel 5:10). David is aware that it is the Lord that has blessed him. David tells Nathan, the prophet, of his desire to honor Him by building a "house" (i.e. temple) for the ark. But, the Lord reveals to Nathan that He will make a *house (bayit)*, i.e. dynasty for David instead. The Lord's promise of this dynasty, affirms that his descendants will rule over Israel without end.³⁹ The Lord comes to Nathan, with a message for David: "Your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me, your throne shall be established forever" (2 Samuel 7:16). David is promised a dynasty as reward for his dedication to the Lord, and his righteousness.

David has already married Abigail (1 Samuel 25:39-40), Ahinoam from Jezreel (1 Samuel 25:43), and Michal, Saul's daughter (1 Sam. 18:21). In addition to his three wives, David has several concubines. He is a well-loved and decorated king and appears to have everything a man could want: power, prestige and women.

The story of David and Bathsheba begins at a leisurely pace. During the spring time, when kings are usually fighting battles, David decides to remain in Jerusalem. Remaining in Jerusalem while his soldiers are out fighting his battles is a sign of decadence. His officers are sent out to fight the

³⁸ Bath-sheba meaning "daughter of abundance", cf. *Anchor Bible Dictionary, Volume 1*, 366.

³⁹ Bell, 91.

Ammonites while he, presumably, is enjoying the relaxation of the season and his position. This David is a stark contrast to the vigorous warrior who killed the giant Goliath and routed the enemy Philistines (1 Samuel 17) as well as the loyal and righteous man who twice spared Saul's life (1 Samuel 24; 26).

David sees a woman bathing, purifying herself after her period (Leviticus 15:19-30). This bathing woman is mentioned for her beauty before she is named. David does not know who she is, only that she is beautiful, and wants to know more. He sends someone to inquire for him regarding the beautiful women. "It is reported, 'This is Bathsheba daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite'" (2 Samuel 11:3). The short response David receives is informative. Most importantly, she is a married woman. Not only is she married, but she is married to Uriah the Hittite, one of David's most loyal soldiers, as will be demonstrated later. Additionally, by identifying Uriah as the Hittite, one can assume that Bathsheba herself is also likely a Hittite. Robert Alter points out that some believe that because Uriah has a pious Israelite name, ("the Lord is my light") he may in fact be a native or a naturalized Israelite of Hittite descent. What will prove to be sadly ironic is "that the man of foreign origins is the perfect Good Soldier of Israel" who is ultimately betrayed.⁴⁰

Being an outsider, possibly a non-Israelite, is Bathsheba's first link to the women in the genealogy who precede her. Matthew also refers to her as the wife of Uriah in the genealogy (Matthew 1:6). There is an apparent emphasis on her not only being foreign, but the wife of another man.

⁴⁰ Robert Alter, *The David Story: A Translation with Commentary of 1 and 2 Samuel* (New York: Norton & Company, Inc., 1999), 250.

Knowing what he has been told does not deter David. Immediately, “David sent messengers to get her, and she came to him, and he lay with her” (2 Samuel 11:4). The difficulty with this blunt phrase is the narrator does not comment on Bathsheba’s reaction to David’s command. In not detailing Bathsheba’s feelings, the narrative instead focuses on David. We see a weakened king falling into a further state of weakness and lust. The reader can merely speculate whether or not she willingly complied. Was there a wave of excitement in the request to be with the strong and handsome king, while her husband is off at war? Or, was there a shamefulness she felt in doing so? There is a possibility she knows to deny the king anything he asked for is not an option.

When Bathsheba returns home, she finds she has conceived. It is important to note that David is the only possible father to this child. Because the narrator clearly states that she was purifying herself after her period (2 Samuel 11:4), Uriah could not possibly be the father.⁴¹ Again, we are told nothing of Bathsheba’s reaction to the pregnancy. She sends a direct message to David, “I am pregnant” (2 Samuel 11:5). The directness of her statement is simple and to the point. The reader must wonder if there is an underlying question to David, inquiring what he plans to do about it. Again, the author has provided no inkling of Bathsheba’s feelings. This is most likely because the point of the story is the sin of David and how his choices affect his future and the future of the Davidic dynasty. The narrative was not intended to give the reader a synopsis of a Hittite adulteress and the turmoil she endured as a result of her poor behavior.

Regardless of what her feelings may or may not have been, Bathsheba and David conceived a child through adultery. The unconventional conceptions of Tamar and Ruth seem modest compared to that of Bathsheba. Tamar used trickery but was motivated by her sense of entitlement according to the levirate law. Ruth was forward with Boaz, unconventional for the

⁴¹ Schaberg, *The Illegitimacy of Jesus*, 29-30.

time but not immodest. But, Bathsheba, whether willingly or pressured, committed adultery, and conceived a child under deceptive and shameful circumstances.

In an effort to mask the affair and subsequent pregnancy, David summons Uriah the Hittite to return home. It was unusual for a soldier to be called back from war, especially for no apparent reason. Uriah may have thought his loyalty was being tested when “David said to Uriah, ‘Go down to your house, and wash your feet’” (2 Samuel 11:8). Washing his feet was a likely euphemism for having intercourse with his wife. Whether or not Uriah thought it was a test, his loyalty proves to supersede his desires. Uriah said to David, “The ark and Israel and Judah remain in booths; and my lord Joab and the servants of my lord are camping in the open field; shall I then go to my house, to eat and to drink, and to lie with my wife? As you live, and as your soul lives, I will not do such a thing” (2 Samuel 11:11).⁴² Uriah sleeps at the door of the king’s house along with the other servants. Made aware that Uriah spent the night with the other servants, David does not relent in his plan to cover up what he has done. In an attempt to get Uriah to lay with Bathsheba, David tries to get him drunk. But, Uriah’s loyalty proves to be too strong to succumb to David’s plan (2 Samuel 11:13).

Uriah’s loyalty is used by David in his final plan to conceal what he and Bathsheba have done. Uriah is trusted to carry his own death sentence (2 Samuel 11:14-15). This is the irony, pointed out by Alter, that the soldier of foreign origins is the perfect soldier to Israel, and its chosen king murders him.⁴³

The choices that David makes in taking the wife of Uriah (Bathsheba) for his own desires and his subsequent plan to mask the affair will change his life, as well as Bathsheba’s, forever. The

⁴² Alter, 252.

⁴³ Alter, 251-252.

youngest son of Jesse, chosen to be anointed as the king of Israel, mighty as a warrior and righteous as a man has become greedy and self-gratifying. David sees no alternative but to send Uriah to his death. His confidence in Uriah's loyalty is evident in the fact that he has Uriah bring the orders to ensure his death in battle, to the chief commander, Joab. "In the morning David wrote a letter to Joab, and sent it by the hand of Uriah. In the letter he wrote, 'Set Uriah in the forefront of the hardest fighting, and then draw back from him, so that he may be struck down and die'" (2 Samuel 11:14-15). Interestingly, this is not the first murder Joab has committed. He had earlier killed Abner in revenge for Asahel's death (2 Samuel 3:30). However, in Uriah's murder, Joab was instructed to do so by David. Regardless, the man the king chooses to trust, Joab, is one of questionable character. This is a direct reflection of who David has become.

The reader is not let in on David's feelings about his plot to kill Uriah. One must only imagine the guilt this previously righteous leader must have felt, especially in light of Uriah's repeated demonstrations of allegiance.

David is successful in his plan, and Uriah is killed. However, it is at the cost of not only Uriah, but the lives of several of his soldiers (2 Samuel 11:17-18). Again, the character of this previously righteous king is diminishing. David could have dismissed Bathsheba and left her to her own fate as a widowed mother. With Uriah gone, no one needed to know that her husband did not father the child. He did not demonstrate any guilt in taking his soldier's wife to satisfy his own desires, nor for sending that soldier to his death. However, David does what could be called the *admirable* thing under detestable circumstances, and takes Bathsheba as his wife.

We are told that Bathsheba mourns for the loss of her husband. However, again we are not given any insight to her feelings. The following passage is abrupt and leaves the reader to wonder

whether her mourning was heartfelt and sincere, or merely a formality. “When the wife of Uriah heard that her husband was dead, she made lamentation for him. When the mourning was over, David sent and brought her to his house, and she became his wife, and bore him a son” (2 Samuel 11:26-27).

Regardless of what Bathsheba may have felt about the death of her husband, there are several things to be noted. The author does not refer to her as Bathsheba but as the wife of Uriah. She is referred to as the wife of Uriah three times (2 Samuel 11:3; 11:26; 12:10). There is an obvious emphasis placed on the fact that she was not David’s to take, she was the wife of another man. This is how she is identified in Matthew’s genealogy as well (Matthew 1:6). Bathsheba’s situation, reminds us of both Tamar and Ruth who are widowed. However, the way Bathsheba is widowed is highly irregular, compared to these two other women. Bathsheba undoubtedly continues the theme of unconventional conceptions, but again, in a very different way from these other women.

Both Tamar and Ruth take the initiative in their conceptions. They are women faced with challenging futures and decide to take control of their destiny in the only way they know will work. They play on their sexuality. Although we do not know the conception story of Rahab, we do know, like Tamar and Ruth, it is Rahab who takes control of her destiny. Being a harlot, her sexuality is not absent from her story. The difference we see with Bathsheba is that her future was not at stake when she is introduced. We know that she is beautiful (2 Samuel 11:2). We know that she is young as she is still menstruating (2 Samuel 11:4). We know that she is married to a soldier highly regarded by his king (2 Samuel 11:3). Bathsheba’s circumstances are vastly different from those of the other women. Her sexuality, like these other women, does however, play a role. David is captivated by her beauty and disregards the laws of God forbidding adultery

and coveting another's wife (Exodus 20:14; 20:17; Deuteronomy 5:18; 5:21). As a result of David's disregard for these laws and succumbing to lust, Bathsheba conceives. The story of her conception mirrors that of Tamar and Ruth. It is not an identical reflection, but an opposite mirror image. The content is the same, yet the arrangement is different. Tamar and Ruth both initiated their conceptions. Bathsheba, however, is a passive figure. Both Schaberg and Belford Ulanov compare her to a pawn in a chess game ⁴⁴

The conception of Bathsheba's child takes place prior to her being widowed. She is not the initiator of the plan to conceive, nor is she a voice in the story. Whereas the other women take control, Bathsheba is taken control of. She is sent for by the king and she obeys her king's orders. In both Tamar and Ruth's stories, the future of their offspring, is disclosed. Tamar has ensured the continuance of the tribe of Judah, the future of Israel. Ruth has given birth to Obed, the father of Jesse. Rahab guarantees the success in the promise of the land to Israel and thus the future of the covenant. Bathsheba pays the ultimate price for David's callousness.

Although Bathsheba is an integral part of the story up to this point, it is David's behavior that provokes God's anger and He sends Nathan to condemn him (2 Samuel 11:27-12:1-6). David's lack of regard for Mosaic Law results in devastating consequences for both him and Bathsheba, and well as the dynasty and people. But, he does repent when confronted with Nathan's parable and harsh judgment. "David said to Nathan, 'I have sinned against the Lord'" (2 Samuel 12:13). For this, David is spared his life, but is not spared punishment. The Lord asserts that David deserves to die for taking the wife and life of another, but He does not kill him. Instead, he transfers his punishment to his unborn child. "Nevertheless, because by this deed you have utterly scorned the Lord, the child that is born to you shall die" (2 Samuel 12:14). Seven days

⁴⁴ Schaberg, *The Illegitimacy of Jesus*, 31. & Belford Ulanov, 69.

after the child is born, he dies. Throughout all of this, Bathsheba's voice is all but silent. This is perhaps the most shocking difference in the narratives of these four women. We are told the future of Tamar and Ruth's children. Now, Bathsheba has lost hers. The reader must wonder how this affects Nathan's oracle of the Davidic dynasty (2 Samuel 7).

This is not the end, however, of Bathsheba and David. Matthew includes her in the genealogy for a reason. She clearly has another role in the continuing the covenant promise and the Messiah.

Then David consoled his wife Bathsheba, and went to her, and lay with her; and she bore a son, and he named him Solomon. The Lord loved him, and sent a message by the prophet Nathan, so he named him Jedidiah, (*Beloved of the Lord*), because of the Lord. (2 Samuel 12:24-25)⁴⁵

The story of Bathsheba is similar to that of Tamar and Ruth not only because of their unconventional conceptions. All of these women are probably foreigners, including Rahab. Some scholars, including Alter, assume that Bathsheba is a Hittite like her husband Uriah.⁴⁶ However, it is not just her nationality that makes her an outsider. The absence of her voice in the narrative makes her a foreigner to the reader. In this sense, she is more of an outsider than the other women. The reader is told virtually nothing of her feelings, or her participation for that matter. The analogy in Nathan's parable compares her to that of a baby lamb, taken from its poor owner (2 Samuel 12:1-6). This leads the reader to believe that she had little choice in the matter. But, because she is voiceless, her actions and feelings are unknown. She is truly a foreign figure in the genealogy.

⁴⁵ Coogan, 463 H.B.

⁴⁶ Alter, 250.

Bathsheba does not appear again until David is well advanced in age (1 Kings 1). She is mentioned as Solomon's mother (1 Kings 1:11). Her identity is always stated in relation to others. She is identified as the wife of Uriah or the mother of Solomon. She is rarely referred to by her name, or any other identifying characteristics. Yet, as the mother of Solomon, she will be the key to the continuation of the covenant, the Davidic dynasty, and the roots of Jesus.

The narrator does not elaborate on the Lord's future plan for Solomon in His message to Nathan. However, David was warned that turmoil and punishment within his house would ensue as a result of what he had done. Throughout the next generation, David's older children succumb to divine punishment. Because of David's sin, Nathan announces:

You have struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword, and have taken his wife to be your wife, and have killed him with the sword of the Ammonites. Now therefore the sword shall never depart from your house, for you have despised me, and have taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your wife. (2 Samuel 12:9-10)

David's sons, Amnon and Absalom die as a result of Nathan's oracle (2 Samuel 14; 18). It should follow that God's promise to raise up one of David's sons and establish his kingdom forever would fall to one of his remaining sons (2 Samuel 7:12). When David's successor comes into question, competition arises. As 1 Kings begins, David is old and advanced in years and has made no provision for succession. Adonijah is the eldest surviving son and certainly saw himself as the likely successor to his father's throne. He begins acting as king by equipping himself with horses, chariots and other royal accessories (1 Kings 1:5). He confers with Joab, which immediately brings into question his character (1 Kings 1:7). The reader, aware of Joab's murderous past, immediately connects Adonijah's affiliation with him as a questionable

judgment. However, Bathsheba's reintroduction in 1 Kings implies that Solomon's future was in fact revealed to Nathan, and possibly Bathsheba as well. Whether or not this was revealed to David is unknown. It is also unknown if anointing Solomon king was something David promised Bathsheba, perhaps as recompense for the loss of their first child. Regardless of whether or not Solomon's kingship was revealed to any of them, we know that he is "beloved of Yahweh", hinting at his succession. Nathan then takes the lead in getting Bathsheba to approach David regarding his succession.

Then Nathan said to Bathsheba, Solomon's mother, "Have you not heard that Adonijah son of Haggith has become king and now our lord David does not know it? Now therefore come, let me give you advice, so that you may save your own life and the life of your son Solomon. Go in at once to King David, and say to him, 'Did you not, my lord the king, swear to your servant, saying: Your son Solomon shall succeed me as king, and he shall sit on my throne? Why then is Adonijah king?' Then while you are still there speaking with the king, I will come in after you and confirm your words. (1 Kings 1:11-14)

When Bathsheba is approached by Nathan regarding her son's succession, she is clearly attentive. Her strength and a new voice emerge in a way not previously seen or heard. She does not hesitate to do as Nathan instructed. She approaches David with an assertiveness that was only eluded to when she advised David of her pregnancy. "I am pregnant." She *reminds* David of his promise to her that their son Solomon would succeed him on the throne. Again, it is unknown whether or not such a promise took place. However, Bathsheba now emerges as a woman who is unafraid to take control of her future and that of her son. She is aware that the stakes are high. With violence and chaos erupting within the royal family, she realizes when David is gone, any

other successor will see Solomon and his mother as a threat to power. With Bathsheba's newly exposed boldness, a closer similarity between her and the three women preceding her in the genealogy surfaces. Like them, she emerges as a woman thinking on her own.

She answered him (David), "My lord, you yourself swore to your maidservant by the Lord your God: 'Your son Solomon shall succeed me as king, and he shall sit upon my throne. Yet now Adonijah has become king, and you, my lord the king, know nothing about it. He has prepared a sacrificial feast of a great many oxen, fatlings, and sheep, and he has invited all the king's sons and Abiathar the priest and Joab commander of the army; but he has not invited your servant Solomon. And so the eyes of all Israel are upon you, O lord king, to tell them who shall succeed my lord the king on the throne. Otherwise when my lord the king lies down with his fathers, my son Solomon and I will be regarded as traitors.'" (1 Kings 1:17-21)

Bathsheba, previously compared to a baby lamb, has now told the king that his kingship has been taken from him, festivities are being planned, and "all of Israel" is watching; while he is unaware it is all happening. Again, Nathan's oracle of destruction within the Davidic dynasty has come to fruition (2 Samuel 12:10).

When Nathan confirms Bathsheba's assertion of Solomon as the rightful successor (1 Kings 1:22-27), David cannot disagree. David is all too familiar with the Lord's plan for him and his dynasty, as previously revealed by Nathan (2 Samuel 7 & 12). David suddenly becomes decisive and gives order for the anointing of Solomon. He summons Bathsheba, and in her presence makes a formal oath that her son Solomon will succeed him as king.

King David answered, “Summon Bathsheba to me.” So she came into the king’s presence, and stood before the king. The king swore, saying, “As the Lord lives, who has saved my life from every adversity, as I swore to you by the Lord, the God of Israel, ‘Your son Solomon shall succeed me as king, and he shall sit on my throne in my place,’ so will I do this day.” Then Bathsheba bowed with her face to the ground, and did obeisance to the king, and said, “May my lord King David live forever!” (1 Kings 1:28-31).

Bathsheba has ensured the future of the Davidic dynasty. She reminds us of other mothers, Sarah with Isaac (Genesis 21) and Rebekah with Jacob (Genesis 27), who strive to secure the future of their sons. With the transition of who sits on the throne comes a transition in the kingship itself. The once righteous, energetic and commanding David came to be complacent, arrogant and ruthless. “Because of Bathsheba, a major reorientation in consciousness occurs, from ego-king to Self-king, from king preoccupied with himself and his kingdom to king occupied with God first and last.”⁴⁷ With Solomon, the kingship is initially ruled with wisdom, humility and the guidance of the Lord (1 Kings 3). However, eventually Solomon will become corrupt as well (1 Kings 11:1-10) which echoes God’s promise that the sword shall never depart from David’s *house* for what he has done to Uriah (2 Samuel 12:10).

After David’s death, Bathsheba’s newly exposed confidence is unmistakable in her exchange with Adonijah over his request to be given Abishag the Shunammite, David’s former attendant, as his wife (1 Kings 1:1-4). She demonstrates assertiveness in typical Bathsheba fashion, abrupt statements. Just as she told David hastily, “I am pregnant”, she responds to Adonijah’s request to speak with her; repeating several times, “Speak up” (1 Kings 2:13-16). Although she does her

⁴⁷ Belford Ulanov, 83.

best to ensure he comes with *friendly intent* when she asks Adonijah, “Do you come peaceably?” she may or may not be aware of his ulterior motives. In asking for Abishag the Shunammite as a wife, he intends to ally himself with a woman who shared the king’s bed. The ultimate goal would be, through the alignments he has already made with Abiathar and Joab, and Abishag as a wife, to put himself in a position to take over the kingship. This attempt is similar to Abner’s taking of Rizpah, Saul’s concubine in an effort to gain power within the house of Saul (2 Samuel 3:6-7). Bathsheba agrees to go speak with Solomon on his behalf (1 Kings 2:19-22).

There is no explanation for her motive. But given the shrewdness with which Bathsheba has acted in the previous episode, it is entirely plausible that she immediately agrees to do this favor for Adonijah because she quickly realizes what escapes him – that it will prove to be his death sentence, and thus a threat to her son’s throne will be permanently eliminated.⁴⁸

Adonijah’s request for Abishag gives Solomon the excuse to execute his brother and banish the priest Abiathar from the royal court (1 Kings 2:22-25). With this, we see the fulfillment of both the Lord’s promise that the “sword shall never depart” from David’s house (2 Samuel 12:10) and what the Lord had said concerning the house of Eli in Shiloh (1 Samuel 2:27-36).

There is a great paradox in the story of Bathsheba. She was instrumental in the downfall of God’s anointed one, David. The weakness he displayed in his affair with her, and the subsequent choices he made in dealing with the repercussions, signified the beginning of the end of David as the mighty and righteous king of Israel. While Bathsheba may have been the occasion of David’s weakness, she was also the beginning of his successor, his son, Solomon. She gave life to the

⁴⁸ Alter, 378.

king who initially seeks wisdom and justice, rather than prestige and glory. It is her son who has sought understanding from the Lord in the shadow of his father's penitence (1 Kings 3). Bathsheba's lack of a voice or our lack of insight into her feelings does not diminish the significance of her role in God's providence. Although different from Tamar, Rahab and Ruth, her role is necessary in the continuance of the covenant. Bathsheba is the link between the *death* and the *birth* of the new kingdom of Israel.

Conclusion

Prior to examination, one might assume because the female ancestors of Jesus are noted, they must demonstrate piety and humility. However, as we have seen, that is not quite the case. Instead, we have examined the interwoven, and often shocking, stories of four fascinating women: a foreign widow who resorts to cunning manipulation using her sexuality in order to survive and carry on the line of Judah through her father-in-law; a harlot who lives under enemy rule; a Moabite (i.e. an outsider); and an adulteress. The descriptions of these women barely touch on who they truly are, or the significance of their roles. It is easy to label them as they would have been during their historical context. They were outcasts, outsiders, the unworthy of society. They were possibly considered unworthy of God's grace, by Deuteronomic standards, for that matter.

Yet, we have learned that they are critical to the perpetuation of the covenant, Israel's taking of the land of promise and the continuance of the Davidic line. How did these women prove to be worthy of being the foremothers of Jesus? Who has the authority to determine whether or not they were worthy? Clearly, it is something that can only be determined by the Lord himself. He has specifically chosen these women to play a significant part in His divine providence. Upon closer inspection and reflection, it becomes clear that it is not only reasonable, but appropriate, that these women are in the lineage of the savior. Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, and Bathsheba are most appropriate predecessors of our Lord and Savior, precisely because of their unconventional character, as well as their unconventional conceptions. These women have broken the perceived mold of women in many respects. The women in Jesus' genealogy set the stage for Jesus' conception, who He is as a person, and what He has come to preach.

The differences in lives lived by the Matriarchs and the female ancestors of Jesus mentioned in Matthew's Gospel are clear. What may not be as clear is how the stories of these women relate to the conception story of Mary.

“Those born of an illicit union shall not be admitted to the assembly of the Lord. Even to the tenth generation, none of their descendants shall be admitted to the assembly of the Lord” (Deut. 23:2). We see that it is not merely the women who have broken these perceived molds, but more likely the Lord Himself that has done so. In choosing these women as the ones to continue the covenantal promise and bring forth the Davidic line, He has altered the rules. Not only have three of the four women in the genealogy borne children of illicit unions but, Ruth has also shattered the rule regarding Moabites in Deuteronomy.

No Ammonite or Moabite shall be admitted to the assembly of the Lord. Even to the tenth generation, none of their descendants shall be admitted to the assembly of the Lord, because they did not meet you with food and water on your journey out of Egypt, and because they hired against you Balaam son of Beor, from Pethor of Mesopotamia, to curse you. (Yet the Lord your God refused to heed Balaam; the Lord your God turned the curse into a blessing for you, because the Lord your God loved you.) You shall never promote their welfare or their prosperity as long as you live. (Deuteronomy 23:3-6)

The combination of their illicit unions and the part each of them plays in carrying on the covenantal promise sets the stage for Mary's conception. Mary also breaks the mold, but in a grander and even more *unconventional* way than these four women. While her conception in fact

differs greatly from the others, it is supported by the historical importance of previous unusual conceptions.

One could easily argue that the conceptions of all of these women were untraditional according to society, and illicit according to Deuteronomic law. What has been revealed in these accounts not only supports the unlikely conception of Mary, but reveals a shift in the mode of God's intervention. We know that Mary conceived prior to living with Joseph. The scandal of being with child prior to being married would have caused Mary to be a societal outcast and would be understood as a breach of her marital contract (Deuteronomy 22:13-21).

If, however, this charge is true (infidelity prior to marriage), that evidence of the young woman's virginity was not found, then they shall bring the young woman out to the entrance of her father's house and the men of her town shall stone her to death, because she committed a disgraceful act in Israel by prostituting herself in her father's house. So you shall purge the evil from your midst. (Deuteronomy 22:20-21)

However, Matthew tells us that Joseph, "being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to dismiss her quietly" (Matthew 1:19). Without evidence, false accusations would also have been a breach of the marital contract (Deuteronomy 22:13-19). Joseph's character proves not only to be virtuous, as he does not wish to shame Mary, but also, unquestionably, part of God's providence. It is Joseph who is rooted in the Davidic line (Matthew 1:16). His acceptance of Mary and her unborn child, once God's plan is revealed to him, is what links Jesus to "the son of David, and son of Abraham" (Matthew 1:20-25). "Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Look, the young woman (*almah*) is with child

and will bear a son, and shall name him Immanuel” (Isaiah 7:14). It must be noted that Matthew uses the Greek text in this case, in which young woman, is translated as *parthenos*, *virgin*, and Immanuel is *God is with us*.⁴⁹ Mary’s unconventional conception, her virginal conception, has fulfilled the Isaiah prophecy of Immanuel. Joseph’s willingness to be His earthly father has fulfilled yet another promise.

The days are surely coming, says the Lord,
when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch,
and he shall reign as king and deal wisely,
and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land.

In his days Judah will be saved
and Israel will live in safety. And this is the name by which he will be called:
“The Lord is our righteousness.” (Jeremiah 23:5-6; also see Isaiah 11:1-9)

The unconventional unions are not the only commonality between these women. The conception story of each, or the method in which each ensures the carrying of the lineage, is under extraordinary circumstances. Additionally, there is clear divine intervention, whether direct or indirect, in each story. It is precisely these common threads that connect each of these women to each other as well as to Mary, and ultimately to Matthew’s theology of Jesus’ mission.

The societal standards by which Tamar, Rahab, Ruth and Bathsheba lived were really no different than those of Mary. A woman’s position in the community depended heavily on her role as a wife and a mother.⁵⁰ Their communities would have reacted to their illegitimate

⁴⁹ Coogan, 988 H.B.

⁵⁰ Harris Rosenblatt, 110.

pregnancies with the same judgment and wrath, as when Tamar's pregnancy was revealed (Genesis 38:24-26). What is vastly different in these stories of illegitimate pregnancies, however, is the women's own involvement in their individual conceptions, and what they meant to the progression of the covenant. There is almost a regression in the involvement these women have in their stories. Tamar is cunning and deceptive, manipulating her sexuality to get what she is entitled to. Rahab is slightly less brash. Although her occupation, which involves using her sexuality, is not used as a tool, it likely plays a role as to why the spies sought out her house. Rahab is direct in asking for what she wants, and offers protection in exchange for protection. Ruth displays even less forwardness, vocally, than Rahab. She is a woman of faith and humility. She is forward in her actions with Boaz but not promiscuous. Bathsheba's story initially has her simply submitting to the king's request then she becomes quite active in getting Solomon to be the heir.

Mary's conception marks a stark contrast with that of the other women. However, there is not just the contrast in conceptions but in the fact of an unconventional conception signifying something extraordinary in God's plan. The distinction between the other women's stories and hers is God's unconcealed involvement. The Lord has quietly guided providence throughout the generations ensuring that His covenantal promise be carried out.⁵¹ With Mary, He makes it clear that this is the arrival of the promise that He Himself brought forth.

The unconventional conceptions of these women illuminate God's providence as well as a path leading to the virginal conception of Mary. Matthew's description of Jesus' lineage and the conception narrative are crucial to his audience. The history of His genealogy highlights Jesus' inclusion of all people and his own link to the *unaccepted*. The account of Mary's conception

⁵¹ Schaberg, *The Illegitimacy of Jesus*, 33.

continues the theme of unconventional conceptions, but in a new and extraordinary manner. If Matthew is to justly convey the Gospel, he must establish Jesus' authority, by authenticating his lineage. By doing so, His message commands attention. It is not enough however, to establish His lineage through the Davidic line. The awesomeness of Mary's virginal conception exceeds the awareness of exceptional things happening through unconventional conceptions, an idea supported by the stories of these four women.⁵² Not only was Mary's conception unconventional by procreation standards, but it was by the power of God Himself. Therefore, the offspring of her conception is the son of God Himself.

By establishing Jesus' lineage, which includes these four women, the Good News now appears applicable to all.

Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age. (Matthew 26:16-20)

A primary message of the Gospels is in fact that salvation is for all, not just a select few (Matthew 8:5-13; 9:10-13; 9:20-22; 20:1-16; 21:28-32; 21:33-46; 28:16-20). Just as important, the least will be the first. It is precisely the stereotypical outcasts of society that will be the first to enter God's kingdom. Matthew presents a challenge to the orthodox understandings of reward

⁵² Belford Ulanov, 84.

and condemnation. The accounts of these four women support his statement. “So the last will be first, and the first will be last” (Matthew 20:16). Schaberg asserts that many scholars believe that these women are included in the genealogy because they are *sinner*s, something both Brown and Senior support as well.⁵³ Whether or not they are classified as sinners, they can certainly be viewed as prime examples of societal outcasts. Jesus comes from a line of women who represent exactly the person for whom He has come to advocate. However, one must not simply judge these women based on their societal labels. Although initially they may not seem to live up to model of righteousness established by the more revered matriarchs, they prove to be more significant for carrying on the covenant. It is these women who not only bring forth the actual bloodline of the promise, but are representations of the main message of the Gospel.

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the
kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of
evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is

⁵³ Schaberg, *Before Mary: The Ancestresses of Jesus*, 22.

great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were
before you. (Matthew 5:3-12)

The actions of these women demonstrate perhaps a greater strength and faith than that of the more prominent women of Old Testament history. Not only were the societal outcasts the ones chosen by God to carry forth the covenant, but likely foreigners as well. What the Jews of Matthew's time knew, and Gentiles undoubtedly heard, was that the "true Israel" was made up of the lineage starting with Abraham. Marriages and subsequent offspring that were *diluted* by other nations and tribes would bring into question the authenticity of the heritage.⁵⁴ Tracing Jesus' lineage back to the Davidic line would have been equally as important to the Jews Matthew was preaching to, as the *outsiders* or foreigners connected to that line, would have been to the Gentiles. Matthew tells his audience, and us, that salvation, through Jesus, was/is for everyone (Matthew 28:16-20). These women not only perpetuated the ancestry, but this *new* notion of salvation as not being exclusive.

The history, as well as the make-up of the Davidic line would have been fundamental to Matthew's audience in convincing them of Jesus as Messiah, as well as His message. However, they are equally effective today. For those who doubt God's grace and providence, they need only hear the story of these four women. Their stories, their roles in the covenant are proof not only that we are all God's people, but, "the stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; this was the Lord's doing" (Matthew 21:42).

⁵⁴ Bell, 17.

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