An Unsavory Lineage
Scripture: Matthew 1
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And to Judah were born Perez and Zerah by Tamar; and to Perez was born Hezron; and to Hezron, Ram; and to Ram was born Amminadab; and to Amminadab, Nahshon; and to Nahshon, Salmon; and to Salmon was born Boaz by Rahab; and to Boaz was born Obed by Ruth; and to Obed, Jesse; and to Jesse was born David the king. And to David was born Solomon by her who had been the wife of Uriah. (Matthew 1:3–6)

Matthew's genealogy shows us the work of God's grace in His choosing four former outcasts, each of them women (the only women listed until the mention of Mary), through whom the Messiah and great King would descend. These women are exceptional illustrations of God's grace and are included for that reason in the genealogy that otherwise is all men.

The first outcast was **Tamar**, the Canaanite daughter-in-law of **Judah**. God had taken the lives of her husband, Er, and of his next oldest brother, Onan, because of their wickedness. Judah then promised the young, childless widow that his third son, Shelah, would become her husband and raise up children in his brother's name when he grew up. After Judah failed to keep that promise, Tamar disguised herself as a prostitute and tricked him into having sexual relations with her. From that illicit union were born twin sons, **Perez and Zerah**. The sordid story is found in Genesis 38. As we learn from the genealogy, **Tamar** and **Perez** joined **Judah** in the messianic line. Despite prostitution and incest, God's grace fell on all three of those undeserving persons, including a desperate and deceptive Gentile harlot.

The second outcast also was a woman and a Gentile. She, too, was guilty of prostitution, but for her, unlike Tamar, it was a profession. **Rahab**, an inhabitant of Jericho, protected the two Israelite men Joshua sent to spy out the city. She lied to the messengers of the king of Jericho in order to save the spies; but because of her fear of Him and her kind act toward His people, God spared her life and the lives of her family when Jericho was besieged and destroyed (Josh. 2:1–21; 6:22–25). God's grace not only spared her life but brought her into the messianic line, as the wife of **Salmon** and the mother of the godly **Boaz**, who was David's great-grandfather.

The third outcast was **Ruth**, the wife of **Boaz**. Like Tamar and Rahab, **Ruth** was a Gentile. After her first husband, an Israelite, had died, she returned to Israel with her mother-in-law, Naomi. Ruth was a godly, loving, and sensitive woman who had accepted the Lord as her own God. Her people, the pagan Moabites, were the product of the incestuous relations of Lot with his two unmarried

daughters. In order to preserve the family line, because they had no husbands or brothers, each of the daughters got their father drunk and caused him to unknowingly have sexual relations with them. The son produced by Lot's union with his oldest daughter was Moab, father of a people who became one of Israel's most implacable enemies. Mahlon, the Israelite man who married **Ruth**, did so in violation of the Mosaic law (Deut. 7:3; cf. 23:3; Ezra 9:2; Neh. 13:23) and many Jewish writers say his early death, and that of his brother, were a divine judgment on their disobedience. Though she was a Moabite and former pagan, with no right to marry an Israelite, God's grace not only brought **Ruth** into the family of Israel, but later, through Boaz, into the royal line. She became the grandmother of Israel's great King David.

The fourth outcast was Bathsheba. She is not identified in the genealogy by name, but is mentioned simply as the wife of **David** and the former **wife of Uriah**. As already mentioned, David committed adultery with her, had her husband sent to the battlefront to be killed, and then took her as his own wife. The son produced by the adultery died in infancy, but the next son born to them was **Solomon** (2 Sam. 11:1–27; 12:14, 24), successor to David's throne and continuer of the messianic line. By God's grace, Bathsheba became the wife of David, the mother of Solomon, and an ancestor of the Messiah.

The genealogy of Jesus Christ is immeasurably more than a list of ancient names; it is even more than a list of Jesus' human forebears. It is a beautiful testimony to God's grace and to the ministry of His Son, Jesus Christ, the friend of sinners, who "did not come to call the righteous, but sinners" (Matt. 9:13). If He has called sinners by grace to be His forefathers, should we be surprised when He calls them by grace to be His descendants? The King presented here is truly the King of grace!

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