**Jesus’ Genealogy in Matthew**

In this list of Jesus’ ancestors through Jesus’ adoptive earthly father, Joseph, Matthew begins with Abraham and moves down to Jesus. He traces the genealogy through King David’s son Solomon. **Matthew** includes four women: Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, and Bathsheba (**Matthew** calls her “the wife of Uriah”). Strictly speaking, there was no need for **Matthew** to name these four women. For instance, Luke's **genealogy** of Jesus lists only his male ancestors (Luke 3:23-28).

**A Tale of Four Women**

The story of **Tamar** is told in [Genesis 38](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=genesis+38&version=NRSV). Tamar is a Canaanite woman married to Judah’s firstborn son Er. When Er dies without having a son, [the Torah commands](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=deut+25%3A5-10&version=NRSV) that one of his brothers should father a child with Tamar to carry on the dead man’s name. Judah first gives Tamar to his second son Onan, who also dies. Judah refuses to give her to his third son Shelah, for fear he would die, too. In order to fulfill the law for her husband Er, Tamar dresses as a prostitute in order to sleep with her father-in-law Judah, producing a son for her dead husband. In this way Tamar becomes an ancestor of the great King David, and 28 generations later, to Jesus.

**Rahab**’s story appears in the book of Joshua (chapters [2](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=joshua+2&version=NRSV) and [6](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=joshua+6&version=NRSV)). Rahab is a Canaanite prostitute living in the city of Jericho in the time of Joshua. The Israelites have escaped from Egypt and have been wandering in the wilderness for 40 years. As they prepare to invade the land of Canaan, the Israelites send spies to Jericho. When the spies find their lives in danger, Rahab helps them escape. In return, the Israelites’ spare her family when they attack the city.

Finally, [2 Samuel 11](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1+samuel+11&version=NRSV) and [1 Kings 1-2](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=2+kings+1-2&version=NRSV) tell the story of **Bathsheba**, the mother of King Solomon. When we first meet Bathsheba, she is married to Uriah the Hittite, one of David’s soldiers. While Uriah is at the front fighting, King David rapes Bathsheba and impregnates her. David calls Uriah back from the front hoping that he will sleep with his wife and think the baby is his. When that fails, David sends Uriah back to the front and instructs his general Joab to abandon him on the field, where Uriah is killed in battle. After their baby dies, David marries Bathsheba, who becomes the mother of Solomon, in biblical memory one of the greatest kings of Israel. (When Nathan the prophet confronts David, he repents of his horrible sin.)

**Celebrating the Past**

The four women listed by Matthew all make foundational contributions to the greatness of ancient Israel. Tamar and Ruth navigate Israelite law and custom in order to continue the lineage of their husbands. Had it been left to the men in the story, King David would never have been born. Israel would never have been great.

Rahab and Bathsheba likewise play strategic roles in the history of Israel. Rahab makes possible the Israelite invasion of Jericho. Bathsheba intervenes in a dispute about succession to ensure her son Solomon received the throne instead of David’s older son Adonijah.

Together, these four women fundamentally shaped the history of ancient Israel. By including them in Jesus’s genealogy, Matthew reminds us of the essential role of women in the story of ancient Israel and in the advent of Jesus Christ.

**Jesus’ Genealogy through Luke**

This genealogy follows Jesus’ earthly ancestors through his earthly mother, Mary. Luke begins with Jesus and moves back through Abraham to Adam. Instead of including Solomon in his genealogy, he includes another of David’s sons…Nathan.

What is important about the genealogy is the way in which it locates Jesus firmly within the history of God's relationships with the people of Israel. This Gospel makes its readers aware that Jesus stands within the same story as the ancestors Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and David. It is important to note that Luke extends Jesus' genealogy all the way back to Adam, God's first human creation. (By contrast, the genealogy in Matthew's Gospel links Jesus only as far back as Abraham.) This is consistent with Luke's outlook on the entire world and Luke's insistence that Jesus has relevance for all humanity, not merely for the Jewish people alone.

Included in this list is Boaz (husband of Ruth, see Matthew genealogy) and Judah (a son of Jacob whose name changed to Israel).