*Fools say in their hearts: “There is no God.” They are corrupt; they do abominable deeds; there is no one who does good. The Lord looks down from heaven on humankind to see if there are any who are wise, who seek after God. They have all gone astray; they are all alike perverse; there is no one who does good, no, not one. Have they no knowledge, all the evildoers who eat up my people as they eat bread and do not call upon the Lord? There they shall be in great terror, for God is with the company of the righteous. You would confound the plans of the poor, but the Lord is their refuge. O that deliverance for Israel would come from Zion! When the Lord restores the fortunes of His people, Jacob will rejoice; Israel will be glad.*

Psalm 14

*And after the deportation to Babylon: Jeconiah was the father of Salathiel, and Salathiel the father of Zerubbabel, and Zerubbabel the father of Abiud, and Abiud the father of Eliakim, and Eliakim the father of Azor, and Azor the father of Zadok, and Zadok the father of Achim, and Achim the father of Eliud, and Eliud the father of Eleazar, and Eleazar the father of Matthan, and Matthan the father of Jacob, and Jacob the father of Joseph the husband of Mary, who bore Jesus, who is called the* Messiah.

Matthew 1:12-16

*Adam and the Lord were walking together in the Garden of Eden. Adam said: "Lord, Eve is amazing! She's so kind and her voice is like music, her hair is so shiny and lovely*

*And the Lord said, "I made her that way so you'll love her."*

*After a moment of silence Adam said: "But, Lord, she's...she's so, you know, um...stupid!"*

*"That," said the Lord, "is so she'll love you."*

The Genealogy of Jesus.

1. Once upon a time I wondered, why do the first sixteen verses of the first chapter of the Gospel of Matthew, are found in the New Testament. For an occasional, or an average reader, the repeated statement *“the father of”* does not make too much appeal, unless one is interested in genealogy and the likes to study the family trees. Then I remembered hearing a preacher, who in his message, as a sermon illustration, recalled an experience of a man who, for a very long time, tried to invite his Jewish friend to come and join him in the church service. On a Sunday when his Jewish friend agreed to come, to a horror of this man, a pastor read this exact passage from the Gospel of Matthew 1:1-16: *“the genealogy of Jesus Christ.”* Little did the horrified man know that for his Jewish friend to hear the genealogy of Jesus was an eye-opener. That Sunday this man accepted Jesus as the Messiah. We, westerners might not find too much value in studying the genealogy tree of someone, but in many cultures, especially within the Middle East traditions, this is extremely important.

2. The genealogy of Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew is not a usual family tree, however. A careful reader will find there, among all listed names, the names of five women: Rahab, Tamar, Bethsheba, Ruth and of course Mary, Jesus’ mother. Why is it important? We must realize that these are the times of the patriarchal society where women were not regarded as equal to men, therefore their presence in the genealogical list was not considered important either, it was through the father than the name was passed on and the family line continued, not mother. And yet, Matthew includes these five women in that list. The Middle Eastern societies are still ruled by the Patriarchal tradition where women do not have a voice, so, to understand Matthew’s message, we must first consider who these women were, and what role they played in Jesus’ lineage, if we are to find the reason why Matthew differs from Jesus’ genealogy listed by Luke. So, let’s examine this briefly:

- Rahab, the Scriptures bluntly calls her: *“a harlot,”* a prostitute. Yet, by lying to the Canaanite guards searching for the Hebrew spies, Rahab helped Joshua and his people, to prepare for, and to successfully carry on the battle of Jericho. There is more, as a Canaanite, she obviously was a foreigner for the Hebrews and a traitor to her own people. Speared, alongside her family from death after the conquest of Jericho, she must have felt as an alien in their midst. Still, she has found her place in the history of the Israelites conquest of the Promised Land and creation of their homeland. Without Rahab’s involvement, the conquest would have had a slightly different outcome. For some reason she believed in God and she was willing to accept her destiny as a woman chosen by God, has incorporated herself and her family among the Israelites, and eventually as a mother of Boaz, she found her place in Jesus’ genealogy.

- Another woman on that list is Tamar, who did something that even today would be considered inappropriate, if not even sinful and in many traditions undoubtedly legally incestuous. She tricks Judah, her *“father-in-law,”* to bear his children, Perez and Zerah. But as the Scripture points out, Tamar was not the one who was wrong. According to the tradition and cultural customs, Juda was the one at fault, for he barred Tamar from carrying the legacy of her husband name. Judah was the one who did not fulfill his duties as Tamar’s *“father-in-law.”* Without Tamar’s deception, Perez would not have been born, and since he was an ancestor of David, the entire line would have been affected. Influenced by the western culture we might have some moral and ethical problems with the actions of Tamar and Judah, however, in the end, she was highly regarded by her people for what she did and not only found a prominent place in the Scriptures but has also become an ancestor of Jesus.

- Then there is Ruth, a Moabite. Although the Moabites were ethnically related to the Israelites since their ancestor was Moab, a son of Lot, she was of an alien origin for Naomi and for the people of Bethlehem, including her future husband, Boaz. Ruth became a great-grandmother of king David, following her marriage to Boaz and giving birth to Jessie, king David’s father. Ruth’s devotion to Naomi, her mother-in-law, brought her to Bethlehem even when Orpah, the wife of Naomi’s another son, went back to Moab. Thus, without Ruth, David’s line would have not existed the way it does, and so Jesus’ genealogy would have been different as well.

- Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah, whose death was ordered by David, is another of the women listed in Jesus’ genealogy. Originally, according to the Scriptures, after becoming pregnant through the adulterous relationship with king David, she loses her first child, but then, eventually forgiven by God, she gives birth to David’s son, king Solomon. Bathsheba might have made a mistake allowing to have the relationship with David, but because of God’s grace she has found her place in God’s plan of salvation.

- Finaly there is Mary, the mother of Jesus.

3. Matthew, whose Gospel was primarily directed to the Jewish audience, wanted to make sure that they had a proper understanding of where Jesus comes from. Since genealogy plays an important role in the Jewish tradition, Matthew clearly indicates Jesus’ lineage as it was revealed to the Hebrews by the Prophets over the centuries. Albeit somewhat simplified, Jesus’ *“Family Tree”* served also another important and powerful purpose. It was to show that God’s people might come from many different social, ethnical, cultural, religious, and even gender backgrounds but, by accepting Jesus as their Savior, they become the inseparable part of the *“Family of God.”* It is not by chance that Apostle Paul would write in his letter to the Romans 8:17: *“we are Jesus’ heirs,”* *(…if we are children of God, then we are heirs, heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ…)*. Nevertheless, for most of us, raised and educated in the *“western culture,”* tradition, unless we are truly the *“genealogy buffs,”* the first sixteen verses of the first chapter of the Matthew’s Gospel, (or verses twenty-three to thirty-eight of the third chapter of the Gospel of Luke), are usually to be skipped or just glanced over, while reading the Scriptures.

4. In my experience, only the biblical scholars, and occasional pastors would diligently study these passages. And yet, this is an important passage, as a renown Roman Catholic theologian and priest, Dr. Raymond E. Brown in his monumental commentary on the birth of Jesus wrote: *“The genealogy of Jesus plays a prominent role in both Matthew and Luke. Matthew, written by a Jew for a Jewish audience, functions like a swinging door between the Old and New Testaments, swinging backward into the Old, drawing up threads of prophecy, and pulling them up into the New. Luke begins his genealogy by saying: “Now Jesus Himself was about thirty years old when He began His ministry. He was the son, so it was thought, of Joseph….” and He ends it with “…the son of Adam, the son of God.” Matthew traces Jesus’ genealogy to Abraham, emphasizing his Jewish roots; Luke traces his genealogy through Abraham, back to Adam, and finally to God, emphasizing Jesus’ humanity and His relationship to the entire human family.”* What both Evangelists indicate in their respective Gospels is that when Jesus was born, He was born into the *“family relationship”* and He was not alone, not a *“lonely hero,”* but He grew up with the same experiences we all face in life. He was born to experience and to witness all the difficult circumstances, and all the different situations that anyone, or any family would.

5. According to what John writes in chapter seven of his Gospel, there might have been some animosity in Jesus’ family though. *(“So, His brothers said to Him: “Leave here and go to Judea so that Your disciples also may see the works You are doing, for no one who wants to be widely known acts in secret. If you do these things, show Yourself to the world.” For not even His brothers believed in Him.”)* John’s words indicate that the family problems were not foreign to Jesus either. He perfectly well understood the difficult experiences we all may face in our family relationships. I believe that Jesus understands much better the problems of many of our *“modern days’”* families than we can even imagine. We do not know for certain why Jesus’ family did *“not believe in Him.”* Were they ashamed of Him? Were they afraid for Him, for His own good? We may only speculate on the reasons, by assessing how we or how others would act in similar circumstances today, but what is important in all of this is that Jesus was a part of a *“family”* and witnessed and experienced all sorts of the family dynamics. Because He is the Son of God, His family however is not only the *“physical”* family of Mary and Joseph’s household. In Matthew’s Gospel Jesus asks: *“Who is my family?”* then answers: *“whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my family.”* His family, was always true and real for Him, therefore He says: *“I am with you until the end of the age.”* (Matthew 28:20)

6. Matthew’s genealogy of Jesus tells the story of people’s hope, hope for justice, hope for peace, hope for the future. All the names in this genealogy indicate the people who had a powerful influence on the lives of others, but most of all who remained faithful to God in all the circumstances life has thrown at them. All of the people in Jesus’ genealogy are there for a purpose of bringing the world and all of the families, including modern Church into the community where as the prophet says: *“the wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid, the calf, the calf and the lion will feed together, and a little child shall lead them.”* (Isaiah 11:6) We are Christ’s Church, we are a bunch of imperfect people, but God has chosen us to be His family. Now, when I look at the genealogy of Jesus, I see something I haven’t seen in the past. I see the bunch of imperfect people, a bunch of people who by our modern, *“Christian”* standards should not be there, probably with only one exception, and yet they are.

7. Rahab was a prostitute, yet, not only in the Book of Exodus, but also in the letter to the Hebrews chapter eleven, she is listed as one of the great examples of faith. The trickster Tamar, disguised as a prostitute, conned Judah into having his children, and yet, she is referred to, not only in the Scriptures but in the Jewish tradition, as righteous. Bathsheba committed adultery with David, and yet God chose her to be the mother of Solomon. Only Ruth was the one who we would be considered beyond reproach, loyal and a model of compassion. And yet all these women are singled out in Jesus’ genealogy. I haven’t even touched any of the men listed there, but many of them were also not beyond reproach. What they all have in common is God’s grace demonstrated in their lives. Apostle Paul will often refer to *“God’s grace”* as an inseparable trait of God’s love for us. None of the people in Jesus’ genealogy can take credit for what they did, however each one of them played their role in leading to Jesus’ birth in Bethlehem, for they were who they were, because of God’s grace. Just as we are.

8. William Barclay commenting on Matthew’s opening verses, said: *“Here at the very beginning of the Gospel we are given a hint of the all-embracing width of the love of God. God can find His servants amongst those from whom the respectable orthodox would shudder away in horror.”* In the context of Jesus’ genealogy, we may indeed agree that we are all *“one in Christ”* and belong to Him as true children of Abraham, because we are God’s heirs and co-heirs with Christ. John will eventually express this in a “prologue” to his Gospel, while saying: *“But to all who believed Him and accepted Him, He gave the right to become children of God.”* (John 1:12)