

ANCESTRAL VALIDATION MATTHEW 1:1-17

I'm guessing that few of us can identify our relatives who preceded us by more than four or five generations. We might be able to name our great grandparents, or even our great-great grandparents. But beyond that the family tree is shrouded in fog for most of us.

But I doubt if any of us worry about it, because in our day and in our culture just about anyone can be or do just about anything, regardless of their pedigree. You can rise from abject poverty to become a multi-billionaire. You can rise from having no political experience whatsoever, to become the most powerful politician on the planet.

Here I am, a pastor of a church, and I'm just a couple of generations removed from pure white trash. As I was poking around a bit in my family tree I did get kind of excited when I found out that I have a great, great, great grandfather who was a general in the civil war. That excitement was short-lived, however, when I discovered he was on the side with which I want no association.

But, as I said, my family heritage doesn't disqualify me from being a pastor. Because, at least in America, just about anyone can be or do just about anything, regardless of their pedigree.

But that wasn't true in the ancient world, and especially for Jews. For most of its history as a nation Jews have kept meticulous ancestral records, not only to keep track of family descendants, but for practical and legal purposes, including establishing one's heritage, inheritance, legitimacy, and rights.

For example, not just any Jew could aspire to be a priest. He had to be from the tribe of Levi and he had to be able to prove it. Furthermore there was only one legitimate royal bloodline in Jewish ancestry. It came from the tribe of Judah in general, and the family of David in particular.

Which explains why genealogies take up a lot of space in the Old Testament. It also explains why Matthew's Gospel, the first book of the New Testament, begins with a genealogy—an extensive, detailed list of Jesus' ancestors.

We read all those difficult to pronounce names and think to ourselves, "Is this really necessary? Is this *wise*?" It seems to us that beginning an important story like this with something so repetitive, monotonous, and unimaginative risks losing one's audience. It violates all the rules of good storytelling where the author tries to capture the audience's attention in the first few paragraphs.

But ancient Jewish writers who had something important to say were not as concerned about piquing the interest of their audience as they were about establishing the veracity of their story. They knew there were skeptics in the audience that were not going to be won over by style or rhetoric, but by cold hard facts. So Matthew, writing to Jews who had heard about Jesus and knew that some claimed he was God's promised Messiah, needed to have some things clarified from the start. In fact, if he didn't establish these things from the very beginning, his audience might not even read past the first page.

Jews needed to know if Jesus was legitimate. Does he have the credentials, based on his ancestry, to be the Messiah and sit on the throne of David?

And that's why Matthew begins his Gospel with a genealogy. That's also one of the reasons why the Gospel of Matthew was placed first in the canon of the New Testament, going back to earliest records of the early church. After a period of four hundred years in

which God was silent, Matthew's genealogy serves as a bridge between the Old Testament and the New. In the genealogy, Matthew demonstrates that Old Testament hopes, prophecies, and promises have now been fulfilled in the person and work of Jesus.

Thus, he begins his Gospel with this assertion in **verse 1**: *"A record of the genealogy of Jesus Christ the son of David, the son of Abraham..."*

The word "genealogy" is literally the word "genesis," or beginnings, which, as you know, is the title of the first book of the Old Testament. Just as the book of Genesis gave the story of beginnings with creation and God's covenants, so Matthew gives the story of a *new* beginning—the arrival of Jesus the Messiah and the kingdom of God. Once again, Matthew is intentionally seeking to bridge the story between the Old and the New.

The name, *Jesus Christ*, in verse 1 is not, as many surmise, a first and last name like Stan Myers or Brad Dettwyler. In the ancient world a person had a single personal name, which often had a special meaning. Matthew's Gospel is the story about *Jesus*, which means "Yahweh saves." We will find out next week that this was a divinely chosen name, and that Jesus lived up to that name in His life and ministry.

Christ is a title, derived from the Hebrew word "Messiah", which means "anointed." It was a frequently used title in the first century when referring to the anticipated Deliverer God had promised to send for Israel, but it is a title that has its origins in Samuel's anointing of David as the king of Israel. After David's reign, "anointed" became a noun, associated with the promise of a great Savior and Emancipator who would sit on David's throne.

Both "son of David" and "son of Abraham" were terms that had special significance to the Jews, who traced their ancestry to the covenants God made with both of these men. King David, a conquering warrior who brought peace and prosperity to Israel, was and is a revered figure among the people of Israel. God also promised through Nathan the prophet that David's house would endure forever, and that His throne would be established forever (2 Sam. 7:16).

There are numerous prophetic references in the Old Testament to a "Son of David" who would arrive on the scene as God's anointed one. Jews understood Him to be a mighty, conquering warrior like David who would destroy Israel's enemies and reestablish David's throne in Jerusalem, just like in the glory days of David. Matthew is asserting in the very first verse of his Gospel that Jesus *is* this "Son of David."

But Jesus is also the "Son of Abraham." In tracing Jesus' ancestry not only to David but to Abraham, Matthew asserts that this Messiah is not just for the Jews, but for the whole world. The covenant God made with Abraham established Israel as His chosen people, but declared that through his offspring *all* the nations of the earth would be blessed (Gen 12:1-3; 22:18).

So Jesus' ministry brought both the fulfillment of God's promise to Israel, and the fulfillment of God's promise to bless all nations. We're going to see that this latter theme rises to a crescendo in the Gospel and culminates in Jesus' post resurrection instructions to *"Go into all the world and preach the Gospel, making disciples of all nations..."* (28:19-20).

We're going to spend the rest of our time this morning looking at the genealogy. Don't worry, we are not going to focus on every character or even every verse. But I do want us to pay attention to some striking features about it that I believe will prove at least three things: One, our God is sovereign. Two, our God is incredibly gracious. And three, our God keeps His promises.

Verses 2-6a.

- ² *Abraham was the father of Isaac,
Isaac the father of Jacob,
Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers,*
- ³ *Judah the father of Perez and Zerah, whose mother was Tamar,
Perez the father of Hezron,
Hezron the father of Ram,*
- ⁴ *Ram the father of Amminadab,
Amminadab the father of Nahshon,
Nahshon the father of Salmon,*
- ⁵ *Salmon the father of Boaz, whose mother was Rahab,
Boaz the father of Obed, whose mother was Ruth,
Obed the father of Jesse,*
- ⁶ *and Jesse the father of King David.*

A couple of things about these names. First, women were usually not included in Old Testament genealogies, because descent was traced through men as the head of the family. When women were included there was usually some reason, and that is certainly the case in Matthew's genealogy. Tamar is the first woman mentioned. She was Judah's widowed daughter-in-law, whose rights were neglected by Judah. He was supposed to give her a husband after two of his sons died while married to Tamar, but he didn't. Consequently, she took matters into her own hands, disguised herself as a prostitute, and tricked Judah into sleeping with her so that she might bear his child. It's a story of treachery, adultery, and deception. But God, in His sovereignty, used a scandalous situation like this to demonstrate His marvelous grace, for Tamar's son Perez became the ancestor of Jesus Christ.

Likewise, Rahab was both a Gentile and a prostitute in Jericho. She was the woman who hid the two spies sent by Joshua on a reconnaissance mission. But God, in His sovereignty, not only used this woman of ill repute to save the lives of Hebrews during her day, but also to be an ancestor of His anointed Savior, Jesus Christ.

And then there was Ruth. As far as we know, Ruth was a woman of impeccable moral character. She was loving, loyal, and faithful. But she was a Gentile. And that meant she was an outsider. She was not a natural heir of God's promises. Yet God, in His sovereign grace, chose her to be the ancestor of his anointed One, Jesus Christ.

Look now at **verses 6b-11**. *David was the father of Solomon, whose mother had been Uriah's wife,*

- ⁷ *Solomon the father of Rehoboam,
Rehoboam the father of Abijah,
Abijah the father of Asa,*
- ⁸ *Asa the father of Jehoshaphat,
Jehoshaphat the father of Jehoram,
Jehoram the father of Uzziah,*
- ⁹ *Uzziah the father of Jotham,
Jotham the father of Ahaz,
Ahaz the father of Hezekiah,*
- ¹⁰ *Hezekiah the father of Manasseh,
Manasseh the father of Amon,
Amon the father of Josiah,*

¹¹ *and Josiah the father of Jeconiah and his brothers at the time of the exile to Babylon.*

In this section of Jesus' genealogy which covers King David to the Babylonian exile, there is mention of another woman of questionable character—Bathsheba, though she is referred to only as Uriah's wife. As you know, David saw Bathsheba bathing from the roof of his palace, and then sent for her and slept with her. She became pregnant through that illicit union, and David, in trying to cover his tracks, ended up having Uriah killed in battle. God punished David by taking the life of the child born to Bathsheba, but in His sovereignty, in His grace and mercy, she became pregnant again and gave birth to Solomon, who succeeded David as king of Israel, and was also an ancestor of the Messiah, Jesus Christ.

Another notable thing about this list is that there is no pattern of righteousness among the kings who are identified as Messiah's ancestors. Some of the kings were good, but some of them were treacherous and evil. Good kings fathered wicked kings, and wicked kings fathered good kings, and there is not necessarily any rhyme nor reason. All of this to say, Jesus came from a dysfunctional family. He had people in His family tree who had been murderers, adulterers, child abusers, and perverts.

Did that disqualify Him from being the Messiah? No it did not. And for a reason that will become plain in the passage we are going to look at next week. Look now at **verses 12-16**. ¹² *After the exile to Babylon:*

Jeconiah was the father of Shealtiel,

Shealtiel the father of Zerubbabel,

¹³ *Zerubbabel the father of Abiud,*

Abiud the father of Eliakim,

Eliakim the father of Azor,

¹⁴ *Azor the father of Zadok,*

Zadok the father of Akim,

Akim the father of Eliud,

¹⁵ *Eliud the father of Eleazar,*

Eleazar the father of Matthan,

Matthan the father of Jacob,

¹⁶ *and Jacob the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ.*

This is the culmination of Jesus' genealogy. He is a true son of David and the rightful heir to the covenant promises linked to David's throne. He is likewise a true son of Abraham, a rightful legal heir to the covenant promises linked to Abraham's seed. But Jesus' birth is not like any other in the line of David.

In verse 16 Matthew is very careful to use language in order to highlight some truths that are essential to our understanding of God's anointed One. He writes, *Jacob the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ.*

The English obscures two important points that Matthew makes about Jesus in the Greek text. First, behind the English words, "of whom" stands the Greek relative pronoun, *hes*. What we do not see in the English is that this relative pronoun is in the feminine gender, so it points specifically to Mary as the one from whom Jesus Christ was born. The genealogy has, up until now, emphasized the *male* who fathers a child, but Matthew delivers a precise and carefully worded statement about the relationship of Jesus to Joseph *and* Mary.

While the genealogy establishes Joseph as the *legal* father of Jesus, Matthew emphasizes that Mary is the biological parent of whom Jesus was born, preparing the reader for the following passage that describes the virgin birth.

Second, the expression, “was born,” translates the verb *gennao* in a passive voice, which gives further clarification of the origin of Jesus. In verses 2-16 there are forty occurrences of this same verb, all of which are in the *active* voice, emphasizing the human action in giving birth to a child. But when used about the birth of Jesus the verb is in the passive voice, where the subject, Mary, receives the action or is acted upon. Again, Matthew is preparing his readers for the angelic announcement that Jesus would be conceived by the Holy Spirit. And so, implicit in this statement is that Jesus is not only the son of David and the son of Abraham (proven by the genealogy), but He is also the Son of God.

Verse 17. *¹⁷ Thus there were fourteen generations in all from Abraham to David, fourteen from David to the exile to Babylon, and fourteen from the exile to the Christ” (Matt. 1:1-17 NIV).*

You should be aware that Matthew omits several names that are found in Luke’s account and in Old Testament genealogies. Such omissions were common in the ancient world, primarily to make a genealogy symmetrical and easy to memorize.

Which raises the question: Why would someone want to memorize this genealogy? Why would someone want to spend a whole Sunday preaching on this genealogy? When I told a few people that I was preaching on the genealogy of Jesus this morning almost all of them were in disbelief, and asked me why.

It has to do with historical validation. God’s Messiah did not show up in this world in a vacuum. Everything about His entry into this world has an historical context replete with divine prophecies and promises that give specific detail about His ancestry and His identity.

Matthew’s genealogy is about the ancestral legitimacy of Jesus. He has the credentials, based on His ancestry, to be the Messiah and sit on the throne of David. Once that is established, we can now move on to the more personal things about Jesus’ life and ministry.

We are in for a treat in these next several months. We get to explore, in depth and detail, some wonderful things about our Savior and Lord, Jesus Christ, that are going to enable us to know Him better and love Him more. And that is what life is all about.

Ancestral Validation Matthew 1:1-17

Main Idea: Jesus' carefully documented ancestry validates His qualifications to be God's promised Messiah, and provides a foundation for faith that is both solid and credible.

The Arrival in History of Jesus the Messiah (1-16)

Jesus is the fulfillment of God's plans and promises (1)

He is the "Anointed One"

He is the "Son of David"

He is the "Son of Abraham"

Jesus' ancestry validates his qualifications (2-16)

From Abraham to King David (2-6)

From King David to the exile (6-11)

From the exile to Jesus' arrival (12-16)

The uniqueness of Jesus' Birth (16)

The Significance of Matthew's symmetry (17)

Family Life Groups

Matthew 1:1-17

In this detailed genealogy, Matthew not only emphasizes Jesus' legal qualifications to be the promised Messiah, but he demonstrates God's relentless commitment to fulfill this promise through people, many of whom were treacherous and miserable failures. What does this reveal about God?

Name some of God's promises that have yet to be fulfilled. What are these promises dependent upon for their fulfillment? How does knowing this (and "resting" in this) affect you?

Associated with some of the names in Jesus' genealogy are such things as sex scandals, murder, deception, child abuse, and cowardice. By including these names Matthew shows that God can use anyone, however marginalized or despised, to bring about his purposes. Why does God do this? Can you think of a circumstance in which he has done this in your life or family?