

The Genealogy Of Christ



“He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David. And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end” (Luke 1:32-33)

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Introduction

- I. When most people read the Bible they skip the over sections that deal with the genealogies of Bible characters.
 - A. However, the Bible places great emphasis upon the ancestry and genealogy of Jesus Christ (Rom. 1:3–4; Heb. 7:14).
 - B. The genealogy of Christ is often neglected, and yet it is of vital importance to those concerned about salvation.
 - C. “The Gospel according to Matthew opens with Christ’s family tree. Today, by many readers such a list of names is probably considered sufficiently uninteresting to be skipped. We should bear in mind, however, that Matthew was writing primarily for Jews, as has been shown. This also accounts for the fact that he begins the line of descent with Abraham, and does not trace it back to Adam as Luke does. Now, for the Jews genealogy had never been lacking in significance. After the conquest of Canaan it was important in determining a family’s place of residence; for, by divine law, the occupation of the land was according to tribes, families, and fathers’ houses (Num. 26:52–56; 33:54). If one settled in a territory other than his own he might be called a *deserter* (Judg. 12:4). Under certain circumstances transfer of property required accurate knowledge of pedigree (Ruth 3:9, 12, 13; 4:1–10). Later, in Judah, royal succession was linked with Davidic lineage (I Kings 11:36; 15:4). At the return from Babylon a person who claimed priestly prerogatives was required to prove priestly descent. Otherwise he was excluded from office (Ezra 2:62).” (William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary: Exposition of the Gospel According to Matthew*, p. 106).
 - D. “God’s blessings were often passed on in the family line and these genealogies express the covenant connections of ancient Israel. Military duty was by families. Certain offices such as the priesthood, the Levitical work, and the kingship, were hereditary, and genealogies trace the perpetuation of these offices. Also, land tenure in Israel was carried on chiefly through male descent. Genealogies therefore certified the title to ancestral holdings. Finally, in a tribal or semi-tribal community, a man’s genealogy was his identification and means of location. It is roughly equal to the addresses of modern houses. People are located by country, state, city, and street. In a similar way, Achan, for example, was identified as of the tribe of Judah, the family of Zerah, the household of Zabdi, the son of Carmi (Josh 7:17, 18). Such a brief genealogy gave only the first two or three and the last two or three links of the man’s ancestry.” (Merrill C. Tenney, *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*).
- II. The Jews kept extensive genealogies, available in the public records, to establish a person’s heritage, inheritance, legitimacy, and rights.
 - A. When Flavius Josephus, the great Jewish historian, wrote his autobiography, he began by giving his pedigree, and says, “Thus have I set down the genealogy of my family as I have found in the public records.” (Flavius Josephus, *The Life of Flavius Josephus*, p. 1).

- B. "The reason for this interest in pedigrees was that the Jews set the greatest possible store on purity of lineage. If in any man there was the slightest admixture of foreign blood, he lost his right to be called a Jew, and a member of the people of God. A priest, for instance, was bound to produce an unbroken record of his pedigree stretching back to Aaron; and, if he married, the woman he married must produce her pedigree for at least five generations back. When Ezra was reorganizing the worship of God, after the people returned from exile, and was setting the priesthood to function again, the children of Habaiah, the children of Koz, and the children of Barzillai were debarred from office, and were labeled as polluted because 'These sought their registration among those enrolled in the genealogies, but they were not found there' (Ezra 2:62). These genealogical records were actually kept by the Sanhedrin. Herod the Great was always despised by the pure blooded Jews because he was half an Edomite; and we can see the importance that even Herod attached to these genealogies from the fact that he had the official registers destroyed, so that no one could prove a purer pedigree than his own. This may seem to us an uninteresting passage, but to the Jew it would be a most impressive matter that the pedigree of Jesus could be traced back to Abraham." (William Barclay, *The Gospel of Matthew*, Vol. 1, p. 12).
- C. "When it especially lay upon the Sanhedrin, settled at Jerusalem to preserve pure families, as much as in them lay, pure still; and when they prescribed canons of preserving the legitimation of the people (which you may see in those things that follow at the place alleged), there was some necessity to lay up public records of pedigrees with them: whence it might be known what family was pure, and what defiled. Hence that of Simon Ben Azzai deserves our notice: 'I saw (saith he) a genealogical scroll in Jerusalem, in which it was thus written; 'N., a bastard of a strange wife.' Observe, that even a bastard was written in their public books of genealogy, that he might be known to be a bastard, and that the purer families might take heed of the defilement of his seed ... It is, therefore, easy to guess whence Matthew took the last fourteen generations of this genealogy, and Luke the first forty names of his; namely, from the genealogical scrolls at that time well enough known, and laid up in the public *κειμηλια*, *repositories*, and in the private also. And it was necessary, indeed, so noble and sublime subject, and a thing that would be so much inquired into by the Jewish people as the lineage of the Messiah would be, that the evangelists should deliver a truth, not only that could not be gainsaid, but also that might be proved and established from certain and undoubted rolls of ancestors." (John Lightfoot, *A Commentary on the New Testament from the Talmud and Hebraica*, Vol. 2, pp. 8–9).
- III. Both Matthew and Luke record the genealogy of Christ, though not in the same order (Matt. 1:1–17; Luke 3:23–38).
- A. "Apparently in Matthew we have the actual genealogy of Joseph which would be the legal pedigree of Jesus according to Jewish custom. In Luke we apparently have the actual genealogy of Mary which would be the real line of Jesus which Luke naturally gives as he is writing for the Gentiles." (A.T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, Vol. 1).

- B. “Matthew’s chief aims in including the genealogy are hinted at in the first verse—viz., to show that Jesus Messiah is truly in the kingly line of David, heir to the messianic promises, the one who brings divine blessings to all nations. Therefore the genealogy focuses on King David (1:6) on the one hand, yet on the other hand includes Gentile women...” (Frank E. Gaebelien, *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*).
 - C. “Matthew is interested in exhibiting symmetry, and so lists 14 individuals between Abraham, David, and the Babylonian Exile; thus a number of Judahite kings are omitted from the list to preserve the symmetry. Moreover, Luke and Matthew have a different list after David (except for two names). The lists likely serve different functions and should not be interpreted as contradictory. Departing from the tradition of tracing only male descents, Matthew’s genealogy contains four women, most of whom were not Israelites. These do not appear in Luke’s list.” (David Noel Freedman, *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible*).
- IV. In this study we will notice what the genealogy of Christ proves.

Discussion

I. God Fulfilled His Promise To Abraham

- A. Matthew begins the genealogy of Christ by declaring Jesus to be a descendant of Abraham (Matt. 1:1).
- B. God promised Abraham that through his seed “all the families of the earth shall be blessed” (Gen. 12:1–3; 17:4–8; 22:16–18).
- C. Abraham looked forward to the birth of Christ (John 8:56).
- D. “Concerning this genealogy of our Savior, observe the chief intention. It is not a needless genealogy. It is not a vain-glorious one, as those of great men often are. It proves that our Lord Jesus is of the nation and family out of which the Messiah was to arise. The promise of the blessing was made to Abraham and his seed; of the dominion, to David and his seed. It was promised to Abraham that Christ should descend from him (Gen. 12:3; 22:18) and to David that he should descend from him (2 Sam. 7:12; Psa. 89:3; 132:11) and, therefore, unless Jesus is a son of David, and a son of Abraham, he is not the Messiah.” (Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry’s Commentary*, Vol. 5, p. 3).

II. Christ’s Right To Be King On David’s Throne

- A. Matthew reminds us that Jesus is also a descendent of David (Matt. 1:1, 6).
- B. “At the very beginning Matthew establishes the two most significant points about Jesus’ family history: he was **the son of David** (therefore of royal lineage) and also a descendant **of Abraham** (he belonged to the people of God who had their origin with the great patriarch who moved out of ancient Ur and by faith followed the leading of God to a new land.) The title **son of David** occurs frequently in Matthew and stems from God’s promise to King David in 2 Samuel 7:12: ‘I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, ... and I will establish his kingdom.’ In Jewish usage the title was messianic; that is, it pointed ahead to the coming of the long-awaited Messiah.” (Robert Mounce, *New International Biblical Commentary*, Vol. 1).

- C. God promised to establish David's throne forever (2 Sam. 7:12–16).
- D. The Jewish leaders constantly questioned our Lord's Davidic origin and even His legitimate birth (John 7:27, 40–41; 8:41, 48).
 - 1. By providing the actual genealogy of Christ, Matthew was able to prove that Jesus was the legitimate seed of David.
 - 2. "After the temple was destroyed in 70, anyone could have claimed to be of Davidic descent, but the claim for Jesus was made before 70, when it still could have been checked (Rom 1:3). Even after 70, the evidence for his Davidic descent was still sufficient to provoke trouble for some of Jesus' relatives with the Roman government." (Craig S. Keener, *IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament*).
 - 3. Eusebius (*Ecclesiastical History*, 3. 19–20) cites Hegesippus to the effect that Emperor Domitian (81–96 A.D.) ordered all descendants of David slain.
- E. Gabriel promised Mary that Jesus "reign over the house of Jacob forever and of His kingdom there will be no end" (Luke 1:32–33).
- F. Christ fulfilled the prophecy of Zechariah as He entered the city of Jerusalem just prior to His death (Zech. 9:9 cf. Matt. 21:1–11).
- G. Jacob promised that the "scepter" would not depart from Judah until "Shiloh" would come (Gen. 49:8–10).
 - 1. The "scepter" was a tribal staff that denoted tribal identity.
 - 2. As long as the scepter was in place, the Jews could govern themselves.
 - 3. The scepter remained in place even while the Jews were in subjection to the Babylonians, the Medes and Persians, and the Romans.
 - 4. First-century Jews saw the departure of the scepter around 11 A.D. when the Romans took away the Jews' right to administer capital punishment.
 - 5. One Jewish teacher, Rabbi Rachmon, said: "When the members of the Sanhedrin found themselves deprived of their right over life and death, a general consternation took possession of them; they covered their heads with ashes, and their bodies with sackcloth, exclaiming: 'Woe unto us, for the scepter has departed from Judah, and the Messiah has not come.'" (as quoted in McDowell, *The New Evidence that Demands a Verdict*, p. 195).
 - a) If Jesus had been born a generation earlier, He would have met His death by stoning instead of a Roman crucifixion!
 - b) If He had born a generation later, the Temple would have already been destroyed (along with the official birth records of the Jews).
 - 6. "Jacob prophesied that the power of kingship should not depart from Judah's lineage 'until Shiloh come.' This phrase is admittedly difficult, but the general meaning of 'shiloh' is 'rest, condition of peace.' Therefore, until there should come one whose dominion should be one of peace, the rulership would not depart from the tribe of Judah. In a personal sense it refers to the Messiah, the Prince of Peace, who should come to establish a kingdom of peace. Hence, the promise to Judah was that from his seed should come that Prince of Peace who would be the great ruler of God's kingdom. In later years Judah became the leading and ruling tribe of the nation, and through him came David, Solomon, and finally Jesus of the family of David." (Homer Hailey, *From Creation to the Day of Eternity*, pp. 34–35).
- H. At this very moment Jesus Christ is reigning on David's throne in heaven (Acts 2:29–36; cf. Rev. 3:21).

III. Christ's Throne Is Not On This Earth

- A. Christ is a descendant of Jeconiah (Matt. 1:12).
- B. Jeremiah promised that Jeconiah would never have a descendant "sitting on the throne of David, and ruling anymore in Judah" (Jer. 22:24–30; 1 Chron. 3:16–17; Luke 3:27).
- C. Christ was to "be a priest on His throne" (Zech. 6:13).
 - 1. However, He could not be a priest while on this earth (Heb. 8:4).
 - 2. He is a priest while on His throne in heaven (Rev. 3:21).

IV. The Importance Of Gentiles And Women

- A. "By far the most amazing thing about this pedigree is the names of the women who appear in it. It is not normal to find the names of women in Jewish pedigrees at all. The woman had no legal rights; she was regarded, not as a person, but as a thing. She was merely the possession of her father or of her husband, and in his disposal to do with as he liked. In the regular form of morning prayer the Jew thanked God that he had not made him a Gentile, a slave, or a woman. The very existence of these names in any pedigree at all is a most surprising and extraordinary phenomenon." (Barclay, *The Gospel of Matthew*, Vol. 1, pp. 16–17).
- B. "Women did not need to be recorded in ancient genealogies, but Matthew includes four women (1:3, 5–6), three of them Gentiles (Gen 38:6; Josh 2:1; Ruth 1:4) and the other also a Gentile or at least the wife of a Gentile (2 Sam 11:3)—even though he omits the matriarchs prominent in Jewish tradition, Sarah, Rebekah, Leah and Rachel. Thus he hints from the Old Testament that God has always planned missions to all peoples (Mt 28:19)." (Keener, *IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament*).
- C. "The inclusion of five women in Jesus' genealogy—Tamar, Rahab (v. 5), Ruth (v. 5), Bathsheba ('the wife of Uriah,' v. 6), and Mary (v. 16)—is unusual, since descent was usually traced through men as the head of the family. Rahab and Ruth were Gentiles, and Tamar, Rahab, and Bathsheba were women of questionable character. The lineage is comprised of men, women, adulterers, prostitutes, heroes, and Gentiles—and Jesus will be Savior of all." (*English Standard Version Study Bible*).
- D. Christ was a descendant of **Rahab**.
 - 1. "Salmon begot Boaz by Rahab" (Matt. 1:5).
 - 2. Rahab had been a prostitute in Jericho (Josh. 2:1–7).
- E. Christ was a descendant of **Ruth**.
 - 1. "Boaz begot Obed by Ruth" (Matt. 1:5).
 - 2. Ruth was a heathen woman from the land of Moab (Ruth 1:4), who became an ancestor of King David and Jesus.
 - 3. Ruth belonged to an alien and hated people (Deut. 23:3).
- F. Christ was a descendant of **Tamar**.
 - 1. "Judah begot Perez and Zerah by Tamar" (Matt. 1:3).
 - 2. Tamar was a deliberate seducer and an adulteress (Gen. 38:12–26).
- G. Christ was a descendant of **Bathsheba**.
 - 1. "David ... begot Solomon by ... the wife of Uriah" (Matt. 1:6).
 - 2. Bathsheba was seduced from Uriah by David (2 Sam. 11–12).

- H. "If Matthew had ransacked the pages of the Old Testament for improbable candidates he could not have discovered four more incredible ancestors for Jesus Christ." (Barclay, *The Gospel of Matthew*, Vol. 1, p. 17).
1. Why were these people mentioned?
 2. Probably to show that in Christ "there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:28).
 3. Jesus is the Savior of men and women, Jews and Gentiles!
 4. "Women, especially those born Gentiles, were rarely included in biblical genealogies. The first four were Gentile women whom God honored by including them among the recorded ancestors of Yeshua the Jewish Messiah—through whom Gentiles, women and slaves are saved equally with Jews, men and free." (David Stern, *Jewish New Testament Commentary*, p. 1).

V. The End Of The Levitical Priesthood

- A. At the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. the official birth records of the Jewish people were destroyed.
- B. "Matthew most likely draws on some of the genealogies found in the Old Testament and uses similar wording (cf. 1:2 with 2 Chron. 1:34). For the listing of the individuals after Zerubbabel, when the Old Testament ceases, he probably uses records that have since been lost. Other sources indicate that extensive genealogical records were extant during the first century, with some of the more important political and priestly families' records kept in the temple. The official extra-biblical genealogies were lost with the destruction of the temple and Jerusalem in A.D. 70, yet private genealogies were retained elsewhere." (Clinton, *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary*, Vol. 1, pp. 9–10).
- C. Jewish priests had to be able to *prove* that they belonged to the tribe of Levi (Num. 18:1–7; Ezra 2:59–62; Neh. 7:5, 61–64).
- D. "The search for accurate and convincing genealogical connection is a theme throughout Ezra–Nehemiah, reflecting the growing concern for preserving hierarchy and lineage that persisted throughout the exilic and postexilic periods." (*The Jewish Study Bible*, p. 1673).
- E. "For our forefathers did not only appoint the best of these priests, and those that attended upon divine worship, for that design from the beginning, but made provision that the stock of the priests should continue unmixed and pure; for he who is partaker of the priesthood must propagate of a wife of the same nation, without having any regard to money, or any other dignities; but he is to make a scrutiny, and take his wife's genealogy from the ancient tables, and procure many witnesses to it; and this is our practice not only in Judea, but wheresoever any body of men of our nation do live; and even there, an exact catalogue of our priests' marriages is kept; ... but what is the strongest argument of our exact management in this matter is what I am now going to say, that we have the names of our high priests, from father to son, set down in our records, for the interval of two thousand years..." (Josephus, *Flavius Josephus Against Apion*, Book 1, Chap. 1, Sec. 7).
- F. Since 70 A.D., when the Roman General Titus destroyed the birth records of the Jews, no man has been able to prove his right to be a priest.

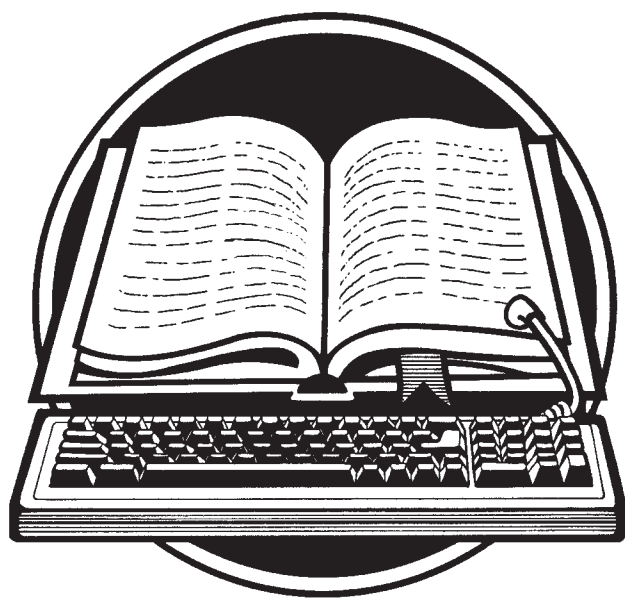
- G. After the Jews inside the city of Jerusalem refused an offer made by Titus, he declared “that he would henceforth spare nobody, but fight them with his whole army; and that they must save themselves as well as they could; for that he would from henceforth treat them according to the laws of war. So he gave orders to the soldiers both to burn and to plunder the city; who did nothing indeed that day; but on the next day they set fire to the repository of the archives, to Acra, to the council house, and to the place called Ophlas...” (Josephus, *The Wars of the Jews*, Book 6, Chap. 6, Sec. 3).
- H. The priesthood of Jesus Christ is not based upon an earthly genealogy, but upon “the power of an endless life” (Heb. 7:11–25).

Conclusion

- I. “The genuineness, and unlikeliness, of this genealogy must have stunned Matthew’s readers. Jesus’ ancestors were humans with all of the foibles, yet potentials, of everyday people. God worked through them to bring about his salvation. There is no pattern of righteousness in the lineage of Jesus. We find adulterers, harlots, heroes, and Gentiles. Wicked Rehoboam was the father of wicked Abijah, who was the father of good King Asa. Asa was the father of the good King Jehoshaphat, who was the father of wicked King Joram. God was working throughout the generations, both good and evil, to bring about his purposes. Matthew shows that God can use anyone—however marginalized or despised—to bring about his purposes. These are the very types of people Jesus came to save.” (Clinton, *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary*, Vol. 1, p. 9).
- II. As Simeon held the Child Jesus in his arms, he blessed God and said, “Lord, now You are letting Your servant depart in peace, according to Your word; for my eyes have seen Your salvation which You have prepared before the face of all peoples, a light to bring revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of Your people Israel” (Luke 2:25–32).

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