

The Pedigree

An Indescribable Gift, Part 2

Matthew 1:1-17

Some of the fastest growing internet services are those dealing with genealogical research.

Already, millions of people are researching their family tree through a vast network of sites.

According to one institutional analysis, “More than 9 million internet users now describe genealogy as a serious passion or hobby.”

One article I read said that people might be simply putting a multimedia presentation together to share at the next family gathering; or publishing a family history for posterity; many are trying to find living relatives; many are studying their family’s health history in an attempt to get a jump on their own issues – but all of them are basically asking, this reporter wrote, a core question of human nature, “Where do I come from?”

Estimates put the number of visitors to genealogy search engines and sites at a staggering 88 million every single month.

However, it would be highly unusual to expect any of these 88 million people to care about any family tree but their own.

I doubt anybody’s passion or hobby would ever be to study just anybody’s family tree. Most people won’t care who your great uncle was from Idaho; or your great grandfather’s first cousin in Nebraska.

And what if you found someone you were related to you didn’t want to really find out about?

Like the woman who wrote a well-known author and asked him to research her genealogy so that she could publish the findings. And he agreed. And as he began his research, he discovered that one of her distant relatives had been a murderer and was electrocuted at the famous Sing-Sing prison in the State of New York. He came to her and said, “Look, I’m an honest author, I’ve got to include this man in your genealogy.” She begged him to leave the man out of her family tree. He refused to be persuaded.

Finally, she said, “Look, *if* you include what happened to him, at least write it in such a way that people won’t exactly know he was electrocuted to death at Sing-Sing Prison.” And he agreed. The book came out and she rushed to the page where he wrote of her ancestor – and following the entry of his name, it read, “He occupied the chair of applied electricity in one of America’s best known institutions. He was very much attached to his position and he died in the harness.”

More recently, I was sent an email – and it’s probably an e-rumor – as apocryphal as the Sing Sing story.

Judy Wallman, a professional genealogy researcher in southern California, was doing some personal work on her own family tree. She discovered that Senator Harry Reid's great-great uncle, Remus Reid, was hanged for robbing trains in Montana in the late 1880's.

She even found a photograph – I saw it posted – Remus is standing there surrounded by officials – he's on a makeshift wooden gallows – standing on top of that trap door that will eventually open so that he's suspended only by the rope.

On the back of the picture Judy obtained during her research was this actual inscription: "Remus Reid, horse thief, sent to prison in 1883 but escaped and went on to rob the Montana railroad six times.

He was eventually caught in 1887 by the Pinkerton Detective Agency; he was convicted and hanged [the entire town showed up to watch.]"

So, rather mischievously, Judy e-mailed the photograph to Senator Harry Reid of Remus Reid on that wooden platform about to be hung – you know, to show the Senator one of his forefathers.

Sometime later, Harry Reid's staff sent back the following statement – having a little fun of their own – as they put a spin on the story . . .

This was their response; "Remus Reid was a famous cowboy in the Montana Territory. He had several business dealings with the Montana railroad. In 1887, he was a key player in an investigation by the Pinkerton Detective Agency. In 1889, Remus passed away during an important civic function, held in his honor . . . when the platform upon which he was standing suddenly collapsed.

Now that's the way to clean up your family tree.

In our last study together, we took a closer look at one of the prophecies of the Messiah, from Isaiah.

Today I want to look at the pedigree of the Messiah, from Matthew.

If you'll take your Bibles and turn to Matthew chapter 1, you'll discover the family tree of the Messiah . . . and it won't take long before you're left wondering why the Lord didn't clean some of it up before posting it for all the world to see.

Now, before we dive in, these first 17 verses probably cause the average Christian's eyes to almost immediately glaze over . . . it isn't the most exciting reading in the Bible.

In fact, these verses may very well be among the most skipped verses as Christians try to keep up with their through the Bible in a year reading program.

The opening lines begin, *The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ (Matthew 1:1a)*

And immediately you let your eyes glance down the page and you see a bunch of names you don't recognize and the rest of them you can't pronounce.

There's probably nothing much here . . . so let's just skip to the birth of Jesus in verse 18.

Not so fast.

The truth is this is actually a lot more exciting than you might first think.

For the Jewish nation – to whom Matthew is writing primarily – genealogies were critically important. They determined occupation, status, land rights; they established tribal connection, lineage and all the advantages that came with it.

These genealogical records were actually kept by the Sanhedrin, Israel's Supreme Court. They were incredibly valuable.

When Josephus, the famous Jewish historian of the first century, wrote his autobiography, he began it by listing his pedigree.ⁱ

Any Jewish priest in the nation needed to be able to produce an authentic pedigree stretching back to Aaron; even his wife, if he married, had to publically produce her pedigree for at least five generations back.ⁱⁱ

When Ezra returned from exile and rebuilt the worship systems of sacrifice to God, several families would apply to serve as priests but be denied because they didn't have the right pedigree . . . the validating credentials.

Herod the Great, the King who will try to trick the Magi and find and kill Jesus was despised by the pure blooded Jews because he was half Jew and half Edomite; much to his chagrin – because he so desperately wanted Jewish favor – he so desperately

wanted to be deserving of his self-imposed title, The King of the Jews.

In fact, Herod had official records destroyed so that a pure pedigree of Jewish blood couldn't be disproven.

Everybody still knew he was lying. And he didn't have an official genealogical record to validate his claim.

So as you enter the genealogical record of Jesus, you need to know that there are several critical reasons it was provided. Let me give you at least three reasons:

1. First, to validate the pedigree of Jesus, the Messiah

Look at the opening line again – *The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.*

For every Jewish reader and especially every Jewish leader – this opening line would have made them suck in their breath and come off their chair and say to themselves and each other . . . Matthew is about to validate the family line of Jesus, taking you all the way back to his ancestors, David and Abraham.

And this genealogy is actually giving the Jewish nation the name of the Messiah.

His name – was *Jesus*. Yeshu'a, Yahweh – which meant, the one through whom is salvation [Jehovah saves].ⁱⁱⁱ

Notice further, *Jesus Christ*. Just so there isn't any confusion about the man validated here – it's Jesus, the anointed one – Jesus Christ.

And that isn't all . . . He's even claiming to a descendant – the *son of David*.

Since royalty depended on heredity, Jesus was tracking his family tree back to David himself, in order to legitimately claim David's throne.^{iv}

And that's exactly what this genealogy will do.

This is stunning reading . . . this is shocking, life altering revelation.

You could paraphrase this genealogy to say, "Here is the King! Jesus, is the Messiah, the son of David, the legal heir to the throne of Israel. Here – look at the records – inspect them – evaluate them – his pedigree is indisputable."^v

Now what Matthew does next is arrange this genealogy into three sections – and each of the sections are based on the three primary stages in Jewish history.

Each stage will include 14 names as well – in fact, some names will be left out – inconsequential to this validation – and some comments will be added to further surprise to the Jewish nation.

Most evangelical scholars believe these 3 sections of 14 names each were arranged for easy memorization. Very few people in the early church would own an actual copy of the Gospels; and so, if they wished to possess them, they would be compelled to memorize them and write them down.

The first section of Christ's genealogy follows the history of Israel, from Abraham all the way to David the King in *verse 6*.

The second section takes you from David all the way to the captivity of Israel in Babylon – and *verse 11* ends with the tragic historical reminder of the nation's deportation to Babylon.

The third section takes you from captivity to the birth of Jesus in *verse 16* – who is, the ultimate Deliverer.

Now in case you missed any of those three divisions, don't worry about it – all you have to do is read *verse 17, So all the generations from Abraham to David were fourteen generations, and from David to the deportation to Babylon fourteen generations, and from the deportation to Babylon to the Messiah, fourteen generations.*

So now you know where I got my outline – thank you, Matthew.

So, first and foremost, this genealogy validated the royalty of Jesus Christ – this humble, adopted son of a carpenter, the miracle boy born of a virgin is actually the heir to the throne.

2. Secondly, this genealogy served not only to validate the pedigree of Jesus, it also served to demonstrate the providence of God.

Something devastating occurred in Jewish history some 1900 years ago. When Titus, the Roman general marched into Jerusalem in AD 70, he completely destroyed the city and with it the Temple. It hasn't been rebuilt since.

And with the destruction of the temple, all the genealogical records were destroyed as well.

To this day, no genealogies exist that can trace the ancestry of any Jew now living, back to their tribal roots – no Jew can prove he's from the priestly line or the royal line.

There's only one genealogy still available that traces a first century Jew back to his tribe – and back to royal lines.

And here's where it gets even more interesting. For those Jews still looking for the Messiah to come today – that Messiah would be unable to establish his lineage back to David because the official records were destroyed.

But by the providence of God, Matthew the converted tax collector, with his penchant for record keeping, was inspired by God to record the lineage of Jesus.

Which means Jesus can validate His tribal connections and His royal pedigree because His genealogy escaped the destruction of Israel via inspired scripture . . . you're holding a copy of it in your hands.

Which means that Jesus is the last verifiable claimant to the throne of David.^{vi}

There's another factor in God's providence, found tucked inside this genealogy.

In *verse 12* we discover the troubling news that Joseph is in the line of Jeconiah. If you travel back to Old Testament records, you find that because of Jeconiah's wickedness, God declared that *no*

descendant of his would sit upon the throne of David or rule in Judah (Jeremiah 22:30).

That means a descendant of Joseph can't actually claim the throne. But the Messiah will reign on David's throne.

So now what?

Well, if you compare Matthew's genealogy with Luke's genealogy (Luke 3) – they both track back to David, but through different descendants. That's because Luke is tracing Mary's natural father, Eli, all the way back to David, through another son of David named Nathan.

Matthew is tracing Jesus' adoptive father, Joseph, all the way back to David through his son, Solomon.

This is going to be a little tedious, but stay with me, the result is wonderful.

And by the way, it's interesting to consider the fact that both Mary and Joseph can trace their lineage all the way back to King David – this migrant carpenter and his teenage bride have royal blood coursing through their veins.

Now here's where the providence of God shines so brilliantly. If Jesus had been the natural born son of Joseph, He would have been disqualified from David's throne because Joseph was in the bloodline of Jeconiah – and no blood descendant of Jeconiah can rightfully claim the throne.

But Jesus wasn't a blood descendant of Joseph, was He? Oh no, Jesus was born of a virgin. And from the virgin Mary, he received his royal bloodline – because she was related to David too; but from his adoptive father, Joseph, Jesus received the legal right to reign.

There was only one way for Jesus to circumvent the curse of Jeconiah, be related as an heir of David legally and yet still somehow be related by royal blood to David, which was required.

You see, when God providentially put Joseph and Mary together, He knew He was giving Jesus Christ the blood line from Mary and the legal line from Joseph – so that Jesus could rightfully claim the throne of his ancestor David . . . his parents lines had

converged to give him the royal pedigree – and the royal privilege to claim Israel’s throne.

In fact, you can’t help but notice how carefully Matthew records this fact.

Look over at *verse 15. And Eliud the father of Eleazar, and Eleazar the father of Matthan, and Matthan the father of Jacob, and Jacob the father of Joseph and Joseph the father of Jesus – oh no – notice the shift – and Joseph, the husband of Mary, of whom Jesus was born.*

This genealogy served not only to validate the pedigree of Jesus, and demonstrate the providence of God – thirdly, this genealogy was given:

3. To illustrate the principles of grace

Study each entry in this genealogy and you will find that Jesus effectively descended from a line of kings. Matthew names 15 of them – from David to Jeconiah.^{vii}

But take a closer look sometime and discover that only half of them were godly kings like David and Hezekiah and Josiah – godly kings who still failed in so many respects.

And they’re the good guys. About half of the kings in this list are utterly and openly wicked. Like Ahaz and Rehoboam and Jeconiah and Manasseh who, the Bible records, “*did more evil than all the nations*” (2 Kings 21:9-18).

Instead of God cleaning up his family tree, he includes them, claims them, forgives them and chooses to descend from them.

Just keep in mind, Jesus didn’t come to praise his forefathers, he came to die for them.

Still more shocking than any inclusion of a king – either godly or wicked – was the fact that Jesus would inspire the inclusion of four women the public record of His royal genealogy.

This was highly controversial.

And to add to the scandal of grace, all four women were Gentiles.

Jewish genealogies typically bent over backward to show only their pure Jewish lineage . . . but Jesus openly admits what every Jew already knew . . . the royal line was mixed with the blood of Jews and Gentiles.

Tamar is mentioned first here in *verse 3. And Judah the father of Perez and Zerah by Tamar.*

You’re thinking . . . no no no . . . put a period after Zerah . . . you don’t need to mention Tamar – she’s a blemish on the reputation of Judah our royal forefather.

Her story unfolds in *Genesis chapter 38* where she married the son of Judah. Her husband died. And her next husband died.

She was desperate for a child and so she dressed herself like a temple prostitute with a veil covering her face. She sat near the place where her father in law, Judah was keeping sheep. She catches his eye – 9 months later, she has twins and the first born joins the lineage of the Messiah.

Do you really want to hint at that episode? Shouldn’t we clean up the family tree? Frankly, if we were God, we would have switched the royal line to somebody else.

Tamar is specifically mentioned to remind Israel that their very fountain head of the royal tribe is corrupted by sin. Even Judah and his descendants need a Savior.

The second woman is mentioned *in verse 5*. None other than *Rahab* – another embarrassment to the pride of Israel.

The trouble with *Rahab* was that she was a little bit like Tamar, only, unlike Tamar, prostitution was her profession.

She lived in the city of Jericho and ran a brothel in her home.

Now she had already become convinced that Israel’s God was the true and living God (*Joshua 2:11*) and God graciously allowed her path to intersect some rather frantic Israeli spies who’d been spotted inside the city.

They darted into her brothel and mixed in – but she hid them and effectively saved their lives – but

not before effectively becoming the first Gentile convert in the land of Canaan.

Some have tried to soften the edges of this story by saying that the Hebrew word for harlot can be translated inn keeper . . . they were indeed often were part of the same industry.

But the word used by the writer of *Hebrews in chapter 11* as well as James in his letter where he refers to Rahab, used the same word, “porne (πορνῆ) which gives us our word pornography, translated fornicator.^{viii}

Rahab didn’t run a bed a breakfast, she ran a brothel.

Listen, why soften the story. This is the point of God’s grace – God demonstrates His grace to an unlikely sinner who is the most unlikely person in her entire city to become a demonstration of living faith in God.

And she will go on to stake her entire future on the grace of God to accept her.

Do you have a past you’d never want put into print. I’m sure Rahab didn’t want hers in print either. She’s most often referred to in scripture as Rahab the harlot.

Let me encourage you to leave your reputation in the hands of God; and go about your business of living for Him now.

Look at Rahab’s past. But look at her future.

If you know her biography, she’s rescued after the walls fall down . . . she and her family. It isn’t long before a godly Israelite man named Salmon meets her . . . he’s impressed by how and why she believed and what she risked – he says, this is the woman I’ve been waiting for to be my wife.

He proposes – she accepts. Get this – he just so happens to be one of princes of Judah – he’s a member of the royal, messianic line.

How do we know that? We know that because they have a baby boy . . . and they name him Boaz.

And Boaz grows up watching his faithful Jewish father and his faithful Gentile mother . . . and his little heart is prepared to do the same – because he’s going to fall in love with a Gentile woman too! A

woman nobody wants . . . and her name is Ruth – and she’s the next woman named – here in *verse 5*.

But dig into her history and you discover she’s not only a Gentile, she’s a Moabitess.

The Moabites are so despised that they are disallowed entrance into the temple. (*Deuteronomy 23:3*)

Their sordid history began when Lot fled Sodom and Gomorrah with his two daughters as the judgment of God fell. Along the way, he had to abandon his wife who’d disobeyed God and tried to return and by the judgment of God, became a pillar of salt.

Lot hides out in a cave and his daughters, whose morals matched the cities they’d left, got their father drunk and both of them had relations with him and conceived. And the oldest daughter’s son was named Moab.

Of all people to put into the family tree of Israel’s Prince . . . let’s clean that one off the record, shall we?

Good night, what are you trying to do here with this genealogy, Matthew, run everybody away?

No. He’s just giving everybody the mission statement: Jesus came, not to call the righteous to repentance, but sinners.

A Gentile who left her past nation of idolaters behind and trusted by faith in the God of Israel just like her husband’s mother, a former prostitute named Rahab.

Illustrations of the grace of God.

And a couple of generations later, Boaz and Ruth will have a great-great grandson who is none other than King David.

Look at their past . . . look at their future.

Wisdom for the Heart 3 times a day in Spanish throughout 14 countries in South America on 90+ radio stations. Two years ago, I traveled to Colombia and preached several times to our listening family who’d brought friends and family . . . the venues were packed and jammed – frankly, I’d never seen anything like it. After one rally, my translator gave an invitation for anyone who wanted

to come forward for help and counsel. About an hour later as the building was nearly empty, a counselor brought up to me on stage a woman. Folks had evidently been praying for her. She had been invited . . . she had come after all. The translator filled in the gaps, telling me that this woman was now a believer; she was currently a carrier for a drug cartel there in Medellin, Colombia – she was also going to be leaving her side job of prostitution. With tears of joy in her eyes she told me that she now belonged to Jesus Christ.

What a past . . . what a future . . . that's grace.

One more woman is included here in this pedigree of the Prince of Peace; *verse 6 tells us*, look at it. ***And David was the father of Solomon by the wife of Uriah.*** Again . . . Matthew . . . too much information. Just tell us that David was the father of Solomon . . . why bring up one of Israel's darkest secrets.

Why not keep it hidden?

If you were dictating Jesus' genealogy, you'd get to this story and say, "Okay, enough's enough . . . let's keep this to ourselves, shall we?"

But it's like God said, "Matthew, don't just include the names, I want you to put in an editorial comment." Go back and look at *verse 6*, it's like He's bound and determined to say it. ***And David was the father of Solomon by the wife of Uriah.*** ***Why not write, by the widow of Uriah.*** Why write it in the worst of terms . . . why not, *the widow of Uriah* . . . why remind everyone that David stole Uriah's wife?

In Matthew 1:21 we read the key to it all: ***And she will bear a Son; and you shall call His name Jesus, for it is He who will save His people from their sins.***

What has God just done with this genealogy? He has, in effect said, "Israel's history is filled with sinners. And that's who My Son has come to save."

Here's the good news . . . if Jesus Christ was not ashamed of His ancestors, He will not be ashamed of his descendants.

This genealogy is nothing less than a declaration of grace to the world. And, by the way, the family tree of Jesus Christ is still being written. His descendants are still being added every day. His genealogy is called, "the Lamb's book of life."

It's the only family tree that I know of that you can become part of by invitation. And yet, He offers to this day, ***As many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become the children*** – family members – ***of God.***

This genealogy has served to this day, to validate the pedigree of the rightful heir to the throne of David; it serves to this day to illustrate the providence of God whose purposes have been and will be fulfilled; at it serves as an illustration of the grace of God.

It doesn't matter who you are or what you've done. There is going to come a day when Jesus Christ will open the book; He'll take one last look at His family tree. The most important thing is that you and I, by grace, have become members in the family tree of God.

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 12/15/2013 by Stephen Davey.

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i William Barclay, The Gospel of Matthew: Volume 1 (Westminster, 1975), p. 12

ii Ibid.

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- iii R.C.H. Lenski, The Interpretation of St. Matthew's Gospel (Augsburg Publishing House, 1964), p. 27
- iv Warren W. Wiersbe, Be Loyal: Matthew (Victor Books, 1989), p. 16
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- vii Daniel M. Doriani, Matthew: Volume 1 (P & R, 2008), p. 6
- viii Fritz Rienecker and Cleon Rogers, Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament (Regency, 1976), p. 731