

Surprising Ancestry

His Family Tree, Part 1

Matthew 1

Discussion Guide

Main Idea:

There are certain parts of our Bibles that tend to be only glanced at and skipped over. One of these portions happens to be genealogies or records of descent. Names can be difficult to pronounce, so people sometimes think it is better to not even try. They then skip these portions and try to get to the meaty part. The problem is, knowing about the family tree of Jesus is a meaty part. In the record of the genealogy that led to Joseph, the man who adopted Jesus as his son, many characters show up and are important to recognize to see the depravity of man and the redemption of God. If we gloss over details like the genealogy given in the first chapter of Matthew's account of the gospel of Jesus, we miss a key part of the story. We miss God's goodness in the midst of man's corruption. We miss God's sovereignty over all things. We miss God's supremacy and victory over Satan and the sin of man. Studying this genealogy will show us many examples of sinners who, like us, needed the Savior that God provided in his Son, Jesus.

Discussion Points:

Too often, people like to skip the first 17 verses of Matthew 1 because it seems dry or difficult.

- Have you ever skipped this section yourself for convenience reasons?
- Have you ever been told it is okay to skip around in your Bible like that?
- Why is this section important to understand the rest of the gospel?
- How does the genealogy help give confidence in the historicity of the Biblical record?

This genealogy was key in establishing Jesus' right to the throne of David. At the time of Jesus, there was quite a bit of mystery and misunderstandings about the Messiah, but one thing they knew for sure was that he would be a direct descendant of David. That was a distinct promise from God.

- Why in verse 1 is it significant that Jesus was the son of David?
- What do you think the reaction would have been for people in the 1st century hearing the claim that Jesus was from the line of David?

Discussion Guide cont.

It is obvious that David was a descendant of Abraham, but verse 1 says that Jesus was the son of both David and Abraham.

- What is the significance of Jesus being associated with both David and Abraham?
- What promises did Abraham receive regarding the Messiah?
- Why does Matthew's genealogy of Jesus begin chronologically with Abraham?

This genealogy shows God's sovereignty and honesty by keeping his promise through all these generations of wickedness.

- What are some of the names in this genealogy that were defiant against God?
- What does it reveal about God that He continued to keep his promise through all the disobedience of this family line?
- How do these potentially embarrassing names help build a case for the accuracy of the Bible?

This genealogy shows the humility of Jesus. He humbled himself to become a man in the first place, but coming into such a broken and dysfunctional and sinful family takes it even further.

- What different kinds of evil and sin were people in this family tree involved in?
- Why was it important for Jesus to come into a sinful history and environment?
- What kind of surprise would it have been for such a righteous and sinless Savior to come from this family?
- Why was it important for Matthew to detail this line accurately and not try to take out the most egregious sinners?

Gospel Connection:

It is pretty easy for us to be thankful about the sacrifice Jesus made for us on the cross. That was a huge deal! God's eternal son was killed because of our sin. That remembrance is often easier and more dramatic for us to have around Easter time, but we should also think about the sacrifice Jesus made to even take on flesh and become a man at Christmas. He was God and did not need anything from us. He did not rely on us, but he loved us and wanted us to be able to know him. He came to earth and humbled himself in dramatic ways so that he could be the Messiah at Easter, but it all started there at Christmas. Jesus came into the earth into a family of sin. He was slandered because of the scandal with his virgin mother and he was slandered his whole life for that and for other things. He never deserved any of that, but made sacrifice after sacrifice so that we could know him and join his family tree.

Discussion Guide cont.

Practical Implications:

- Think:** How does this genealogy affect your understanding of Jesus and the gospel?
- Pray:** Thank God for his great love for you. Praise Him for his character of sovereignty and goodness toward you and all generations.
- Do:** Read through this genealogy and study it. Do not pass over it but seek to understand the context and meaning of this claim.

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Tracing your genealogy is all the rage today. I have read that more than 100 million people this year did some type of research online in relation to their family tree. And the number is rising. In fact, last year, people curious about their family tree spent nearly \$3 billion on genealogy products and services.

But researching your ancestry doesn't always turn up good news of heroes and royalty. It often turns up criminals and some unsavory characters.

New York filmmaker Heather Quinlan found more than a few skeletons when digging into her ancestors' closet. Among them was Thomas Fagan, her grandmother's great-grandfather, who, it turned out, had killed a man during a drunken fight in a saloon in 1868 - hitting him over the head with a chair.

She also discovered that a murderous feud had taken members' lives in her family—going all the way back to the 1830s where one of her family members killed a relative and when he was caught, he was hanged. She then discovered that even her own great-great-grandfather was involved in this family feud and had also been caught, but he escaped with his life after the jailer forgot to lock his cell door.

Acceptance can be harder, experts say, when the skeletons hanging from the family tree are much closer to where you are.

Another researcher, Ron Arons, set out to piece together his family's past after discovering a box of documents and a family tree following his parents' deaths. After being raised believing his forefathers were all upstanding citizens in their community, the records actually revealed that his great-grandfather was married to two women at the same time. When he was arrested, after a rather wild police chase, he served time in Sing Sing prison for bigamy. So his great-

grandfather who had been pictured as a leader in the community was actually the opposite.

Crista Cowan, a genealogist, worked with a client who discovered, to his horror, that his great-great-grandfather, whom he thought was called the "Sausage king" of Chicago because he was the owner of meatpacking plant, was actually a man who had earned that nickname only because he had murdered his wife and disposed of her body in that meatpacking plant by using a sausage grinder.¹ Imagine discovering that kind of family secret!

Another family researcher found out the real story behind a rather proud family legend. She had set out to explore the oft-told story she heard as a child about her great-grandfather – a war hero who had served alongside General William Sherman during Sherman's historic march to the sea and the capture of Savannah, Georgia during the Civil War.

Instead of finding commendations of her great-grandfather's bravery, she learned that he never saw any action at all. In fact, he was discharged after only a few months for his nonstop complaining about his poor health due to "excessive marching and falling over a log." Not exactly the family hero after all. She said that when she broke the news to her parents and family members, the news was not well-received.

We would rather not know that surprising reality of our family history.

Of course, you can't study genealogy very long without coming across the humorous discovery by Judy Wallman, a professional genealogy researcher.

She discovered that she and Senator Harry Reid shared a common ancestor – her great-great uncle, Remus Reid, who had been hanged for robbing trains in Montana in the late 1880's.

She found a photograph of the hanging of Remus Reid and on the back of the photograph she obtained during her research was this inscription: “Remus Reid, sent to prison in 1883 but escaped; robbed Montana railroad six times; caught by Pinkerton detectives, convicted and hanged in 1889.”



Here’s the photograph of that event.

So, for fun, she emailed the photograph and the information to Congressman Reid to inform him that his family member had been a crook – and records indicated that just about everybody in the county showed up to watch him being hanged.

Sometime later, Harry Reid's office sent back the following statement – having a little fun of their own. “According to our research, Remus Reid was a famous cowboy in Montana and had extensive 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.”

There are times when you would rather not know who is hanging from your family tree! Of course, there are times when you might find something worth becoming proud over, but even then, you need to be careful.

One evangelical author writes, “Not long ago I sat down with my little girl and explained with great pride that her grandfather was a preacher; her great-grandfather was a preacher; and her great-great-grandfather was a preacher too! Her eyes grew wide and she said, “Wow, we come from a long line of grandfathers!”

The most famous family tree in existence – researched and studied for centuries – happens to be located on the first page of your New Testament. It has been inspected more than any other genealogy in human history.

In fact, if this family tree isn’t correct, none of us are going to heaven. Christianity would be proven – at the very outset – just another empty religion with a truckload of empty promises.

Over these next few weeks, I want to do some genealogical research with you. It won’t cost you an online membership fee; all the material we need has already been provided.

Turn to Matthew chapter 1. Today, we have just enough time to take a flyover of His family tree; we’ll drop in for a closer look here and there and then we’ll take an in-depth look later on at some of the surprising members of this Family Tree.

But what I especially want to accomplish today is to point out at least 4 significant discoveries in the family tree of Jesus.

Matthew chapter 1, verse 1. The record of the genealogy of Jesus – the record – the *biblos* – literally, the book – **of the genealogy** – the *geneseos* (γενεσεως) – which gives us our word *genesis* – this is the book of the Genesis of Jesus – the beginning – the roots – the generations of Jesus.

By the way, that phrase – **the book of the generations** isn’t found anywhere else in the New Testament. In fact, if you start paging backwards through your Old Testament you’re not going to find it until you get all the way back to **Genesis chapter 5** where it begins at **verse 1, This is the book of the generations of Adam.**ⁱⁱ

Imagine this significant discovery that there are two books: Adam’s book represents the human race and everyone related to Adam has one thing in common – the Apostle Paul writes, **in Adam all die (Romans 5:12).**

But Paul refers to Jesus, in **1 Corinthians 15:45, as the last Adam**; in other words, He is the head of a new race.

You become a descendant of Adam by being born into the human race. And it isn’t a pretty picture.

You become a descendant of Jesus Christ by being born again.

The Book of Adam is a book of obituaries. Read *Genesis chapter 5* and it's a funeral march. Over and over again you'll read, and he died . . . and he died . . . and he died.

The Book of Jesus is a Book of Life. Paul calls it the Book of Life (*Philippians 4:3*); John the Apostle calls it the Lamb's Book of Life (*Revelation 13:8*). And because you are related to Jesus by faith and trust in Him, you've been given the right and privilege to become children of God (*John 1:12*), so that even though you die because you are related to Adam, you'll live forever in Heaven, because you are related by faith to Jesus Christ.

Jesus said, I am the resurrection and the life; whoever believes in me shall live, even if he dies (*John 11:25*). And He confirmed that promise by rising from the dead Himself.

The genealogy of Jesus is a genealogy you can join; it's a family tree you can climb into; it's a family tree of faith in Christ.

This is exactly where Matthew is guiding us – notice *verse 1 – the record of the genealogy of Jesus* – and just who is He? He is the *Messiah – the Christ* – the *Christos* – which means, the anointed One.

He's the Messiah! Oh really? The Jewish people had heard that one before – many times over. A dozen or more had already made that claim and even more would make that claim after Jesus rose again.

Josephus, the first century Jewish historian, wrote about a man by the name of Theudas who claimed to be the Messiah around 44 A.D. And many were deluded by his claims. He planned to take his followers to the river Jordan where he promised that he would part the waters as their new deliverer. The Roman army caught up to them, killed most of them, including Theudas, whose head they severed and prominently displayed back in Jerusalem to discourage any other followers.ⁱⁱⁱ

A tradition has lingered that Simon the Magician, introduced in *Acts chapter 8*, eventually gathered a following around his claim to be the Messiah – he went to the roof of the temple quoting the verse that God would

give his angels charge over him – and then he jumped off to prove it – and that was the last verse he ever quoted.

He wasn't the last to be followed. Look at the end of human history, according to the Book of Revelation, and who is going to step forward to amass a global following? A man claiming to be the Messiah; he is better known to us as the Anti-Christ.

So this opening line by Matthew isn't going to get much attention from anybody.

But the combination of terms in the rest of the verse will have every Jewish leader coming out of their chair – rushing to the Sanhedrin where the genealogical records were kept secure so they could check it out.

And that's because Matthew writes, *The record of the genealogy of Jesus, the Messiah – now notice – the son of David the son of Abraham.*

1. One of the 4 things this genealogy did was validate the royalty of Jesus Christ.

He's *the son of David, the son of Abraham*. Now Matthew knows that Abraham comes before David, but here he reverses the order to get everybody's undivided attention.

Here is the opening, and rather surprising reality: Jesus is royalty; he is from the direct line of King David.

You could paraphrase the opening line of this genealogy to have Matthew clearly announcing, "Hey Israel – hey world – here is the King! Jesus, the Messiah is the legal heir to the throne! Go ahead; inspect the records, evaluate the evidence of his lineage, and then read His biography. Watch Him and listen to Him."

I agree with evangelical authors who point out that to this very day, the Jewish people will argue against the resurrection of Jesus, but not the genealogy of Jesus.

You can believe that the Jewish leaders checked it out, line by line – and found it to be true. Jesus was indeed a legal heir as a direct descendant of David. In fact, Jesus is a

descendant of a dozen more kings – all listed here in this genealogy.

They knew that *the Son of David* – which Matthew calls Jesus nine different times in His Gospel – that the true king would bring healing to their land and to the people of Israel.

Tolkien in his massive parable entitled, *The Lord of the Rings* put the messianic promise this way – “the hands of the king are the hands of the healer.”^{iv}

Jesus offered them both – and He offered them both in a very literal way – He was unmistakably royalty and He was a divine healer. Peter preached this in his opening sermon on the Day of Pentecost when the church was birthed – Jesus was validated – He was authenticated to you – through miracles (Acts 2:22). And the connection between who He was as the son of David and what He did as the Son of God was clear.

That’s why early in His ministry, two blind men followed Jesus calling out, “*Have mercy on us, Son of David (Matthew 9:27)*.”

Even when Jesus traveled to neighboring regions, the people expected him to exercise his royal claim with the power of healing – two blind men were sitting by the roadside outside Jerusalem and when they heard that Jesus was going by, they shouted, “Lord, Son of David, have mercy on us.” (*Matthew 20:31*)”

Matthew is essentially saying at the very outset of Jesus’s biography, and then throughout the rest of his Gospel account, “Check out the evidence in His ancestry and in His royalty. This unimpressive peasant boy, born in squalor and obscurity, the adopted son of a carpenter, was, in fact, in the direct line of kings – there is healing in His hands.”

2. The genealogy of Jesus secondly, proves the honesty of God.

God promised Abraham that the Messiah would be born from him (*Genesis 12:3 and 22:18*). In other words, the Messiah would be a member of the Jewish race, whose patriarch, Abraham, was the founder.

Even later, God promised David that the Messiah would descend from him as well. Tucked into the promise of God to David was something David didn’t fully understand: a future tense application of the prophetic promise which we as believers will watch one day as it comes true – because it still hasn’t happened yet. God said to David, *I will raise up your descendant after you, who will come forth from you, and I will establish . . . the throne of his kingdom forever (2 Samuel 7:12-13)*. That kingdom is yet to come.

Beloved, in showing that Jesus is the son of David and the son of Abraham, Matthew is showing us that God keeps His word; He is faithful to His promise.

And, by the way, when God promised Abraham a descendant who would be a blessing to the world, Abraham probably thought that the son God was referring would be Isaac. But in the fullest sense it wasn’t Isaac; the ultimate fulfillment of that promise from God to Abraham wouldn’t arrive until 42 generations later.^{vi} Forty-two generations later.

If you thought God was taking a long time to answer you – to fulfill a promise He made to you – can you hold on?

This genealogy is a record of the honesty of God.

3. The genealogy of Jesus also reveals the sovereignty of God.

This list of names is structured by Matthew as he intentionally selected names, under the guidance of the inspiring Holy Spirit.

Some names are left out – there are three sections of 14 names, many believe, to aid the memory for those who will memorize this list – that is, if you learn how to pronounce all the names, right?

But while Matthew has arranged them on paper, God has arranged them in history, to prove the same theological point that Paul made to the Galatians in *Galatians 4:4 – But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth His Son.*

At the perfect time God sent forth His Son! One paraphrase renders this to read, “But when the right time came, the time God decided on, he sent his Son. Another reads; but when the time arrived that was set by God the Father, God sent his Son.

Beloved, God designed all of human history around the birth of His Son. Which makes Christmas, as we call it, the very center of history.^{vii}

But still, the timing of God seems a bit early, even if the promise happened 42 generations later.

Doug O’Donnell wrote with humor and realism, asking the question, why didn’t God send His son to be born and minister, die and rise again in the 21st century, instead of the 1st century? Imagine the benefit of coming to earth during the era of television, video and the internet when nearly everything He said and did could be documented and played on CNN? Well, at least on Fox News (I added that part). Imagine a streaming video of his every movement – photographers and reporters camped just a few feet away from Jesus and the disciples for three years straight. Can’t you imagine the 10:00 news starting every night with the latest miracle – close-ups of His hands as he broke bread and fish and then kept breaking bread and fish that never seemed to disappear? Can you imagine the news anchor opening, “Today Jesus healed 10 lepers; we interviewed 9 of them; 1 refused to be interviewed so that he could return to Jesus and thank Him.” And can you imagine the cameras catching the resurrection on film – and the angels announcing to the women – and the television reporters – that Jesus had risen. Wouldn’t that have been much better? No. What we wish for is that God’s timing was such that He removed the need for faith from our faith.^{viii}

Faith requires faith. Even with all the eyewitness accounts of the Lord’s miraculous work in the 1st century, in spite of first hand reports and the testimony of those who were not only healed, but brought back to life, the nation of Rome was uninterested in Him and the nation

of Jews was ultimately infuriated by Him. “He’s messing up our world. He’s ruining the status quo.”

You see, God has given us ample evidence. According to His plan, at just the right time He sent His son and by faith we believe in the record of evidence we have before us.

4. Number 4: This genealogy highlights the humility of Jesus.

Let’s make sure we don’t miss the obvious.

The record of the genealogy of Jesus Christ the son of David, the son of Abraham, informs us that at the very outset of this Gospel account, this is the record of a real man – the God-man.

But look who He is related to, in this list. People like Ron Aron’s great-grandfather, the man married to more than one woman. People like Remus Reid, horse thieves and crooks; people like Abraham, who, although he as the father of the Judaism, was a coward and a liar.

People like David, a king – but also as guilty of murder like the sausage king of Chicago who killed his wife.

Judah, mentioned in *verse 2*, might have carried the promise of the royal scepter, but he will hire a woman pretending to be a prostitute who ends up being his own daughter in law – and she conceives by him and has twins, one of whom carries on the Messianic line. And by the way, Judah – and his brothers (mentioned also in *verse 2*) – were guilty of selling their little brother, Joseph, to some slave traders heading toward Egypt.

Jesus descended from a line of 15 kings – half of whom were men who followed after God, rather imperfectly – like you and me; and the other half were absolutely committed to giving their lives to evil – men like *Rehoboam (verse 7)* and *Manasseh in verse 10*.

Here’s Manasseh’s bio statement from *2 Kings 21* –

- he did more evil than the pagan nations around him; he sacrificed his sons in the fiery belly of the idol Molech;

- he practiced witchcraft and used divination;
- he had mediums and channelers in his counsel;
- he placed an idol in the temple precinct;
- Manasseh murdered so many people, one historian wrote, that he filled Jerusalem from one end to the other with innocent blood.^{ix}

Jesus is related to Jehoshaphat (*mentioned in verse 8*), a man who had a growing fascination with Ahab and Jezebel – not exactly people worth admiring. He sanctioned the marriage of his son *Jehoram* (mentioned in *verse 8* as well) to a woman named *Athaliah*.

Behind the scenes, Satan was constantly at work trying to pervert and, in fact, stamp out the Davidic line of kings in order to destroy the promise of God that the Messiah would be in the direct lineage of David. And he almost succeeded because when *Jehoram* dies and his heir dies as well, *Athaliah* takes the throne and then massacres every possible relative that could take the throne away from her. She almost succeeds in wiping out the royal line of David – almost.^x

A grandson from the line of David is secretly hidden away for 6 years and then brought forward to reign. And on and on it goes. But here is a point often missed: we are not just talking about wicked family secrets and evil men and women. We are talking about the relatives of Jesus! Sitting in the branches of Jesus's Family tree is a collection of really bad people.

If coming to earth to live as a man wasn't humiliating enough for the glorious Son of God, just meet His family: Murderers, adulterers,

bigamists, polygamists, idol-worshipping, child-sacrificing, immoral, proud men and women.

One author writes, Jesus comes from the right stock, but it is really bad stock. There is no pattern of righteousness in the lineage of Jesus. The point is almost too obvious to belabor – the gospel is seen here.^{xi}

Which is why none of these skeletons are hidden in the closet; they are for everyone to see. Jesus didn't come to praise His forefathers, He came to die for them.

Paul spelled it out – *It is a trustworthy statement deserving full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners (1 Timothy 1:15)*. These people are just like you and me; sinners in need of saving!

He is deserving of full acceptance. Have you accepted Him?

Imagine – He came into the world *to save sinners*. Not good people; sinners. The good news is that you are not too wicked to qualify. This is for sinners!

And here is more surprising news from the Family Tree of Jesus: if Jesus isn't ashamed of His ancestors, He will not be ashamed of His descendants – redeemed sinners like you and me whose names have been written down in the Lamb's Book of Life.

There are two books: the Book of Adam's race (you joined that one by birth) and the Book of the Lamb's redeemed (you joined that one by faith.)

When you said of Jesus – He isn't just any King – He's my King. He is my King and I am His.

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 12/03/2017 by Stephen Davey.

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- i Adapted from online blog by Sue Shellenbarger (January 15, 2013)
- ii Adapted from J. Vernon McGee, Through The Bible: Volume IV (TTB, 1983), p. 8
- iii Flavius Josephus, Jewish Antiquities 20.97-98 and Acts of the apostles 5.36
- iv Daniel M. Doriani, Matthew: Volume 1 (P & R Publishing, 2008), p. 10
- v Adapted from Doriani, p. 10
- vi Matthew Henry, Matthew Henry's Commentary: Volume V (Fleming H. Revell, 1900), p. 3
- vii Douglas Sean O'Donnell, Preaching the Word: Matthew (Crossway, 2013), p. 33
- viii Adapted from O'Donnell, p.33
- ix Adapted from Doriani, p. 6
- x Adapted from John Phillips, Exploring the Gospel of Matthew (Loizeaux, 1999), p. 31
- xi Adapted from O'Donnell, p. 37