

Gems from the Genealogy of Jesus

His Family Tree, Part 2

Matthew 1

Discussion Guide

Main Idea:

The genealogy of Jesus written in the first chapter of Matthew reveals the ancestors of Jesus' adoptive father Joseph to show Jesus' legal claim to the throne of David. It shows Jesus' family tree, but it does much more. In this short historical document, God's character is often revealed as well. God shows up as the Sovereign One who worked the generations to his plan in unexplainable and unexpected ways. So many of the people mentioned in this rundown seem to be out of place, but God's goodness and sovereignty are revealed through it all as His plans remain unstoppable and always come to fruition.

Discussion Points:

The Bible is a truth-telling book. It is the special revelation of God to man about who He is and how man is supposed to live in relation to Him. In Matthew 1, the genealogy that leads up to the adoptive father of Jesus is clear and true, but it is surprising who God used throughout its course. We know who is included in the genealogy, but we do not have an explanation for why these people were included and chosen by God to be part of this Messianic line.

- What should our reaction be when we do not understand why God does something?
- How does faith operate in your life when God's work in your life is unexplained?
- How does God's character give you confidence to rely on Him even when your circumstances don't make sense?
- What are some of the attributes of God that give you a greater trust in His providence?

God's ways sometimes seem unexplainable, but they are also always unstoppable.

- What are some of the names in this list that prove God's plans are unstoppable?
- What other examples are there in the Bible to show how God's plans will always succeed?
- How do the past examples of God's faithfulness and sovereignty affect you now?

Discussion Guide cont.

It is interesting to study how God works over time through different generations and how those different generations chose to either follow or not follow God.

- What are some of the surprising differences between parents and children with respect to their relationship with God?
- What does your family tree's spiritual condition look like over time?
- What are you doing to impact future generations and their spiritual lives?

Some of the most spiritually mature men in the Old Testament had their own children walk away from fellowship with God. A relationship with God is not something that can be passed down or inherited even for these heroes of the Bible.

- How does this fact influence how you act as a parent?
- What kind of responsibilities do parents have for the spiritual lives of their children?
- How can you teach and train your kids yet not treat the results as a reflection of your job as a parent?
- In what ways should you be praying for your children?
- How does all of this make you feel about God's role in the lives of your children?
- Does this make it easier or harder to rely on God and trust him with your children?

One of the lessons that can be found through the genealogy of Jesus is that no sinner is unredeemable.

- Have you ever felt like you are unredeemable?
- What does the Bible say about redemption and forgiveness in Christ?
- What parts of this genealogy are surprising to you?

Gospel Connection:

God works in a very different way than we do. The Bible helps us to understand who God is and what he is like. It gives us everything we absolutely need to know about life and godliness. It often seems unfortunate to us, however, that we don't have an exhaustive list of answers to give us peace. God works in ways that are surprising and unexpected. He draws some people to himself that we would not expect. We have a very difficult time trying to understand what He is doing most of the time. But all of that confusion can give us a sense of peace. If we remember that the gospel is the good news that Jesus can save us because we can't save ourselves, we can have a peace and reliance on God's goodness and sovereignty. Even in a little list of names, we can see many examples about how good God is and how powerful He is. He knows all and causes His purposes to be accomplished. We can be thankful even when we don't understand everything, because we can trust that God will be faithful. We know we have what we need to know, so we can be joyful in following Him and trusting that He will save us and redeem us through the blood of His son Jesus.

Discussion Guide cont.

Practical Implications:

- Think:** How does this genealogy affect your understanding of God's character?
- Pray:** Thank God for his great love for you. Praise Him for knowing what is best for you. Ask Him to lead you in the way you should go and submit yourself to following Him.
- Do:** Think about the kind of impact the gospel has on your family tree. Commit yourself to doing your best to impact your family with the knowledge of the gospel of Christ.

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The Vietnam Veterans Memorial Wall is one of the most well-known national monuments in our country. Located on the National Mall in Washington, D.C., this wall is designed with 144 flat panels quarried from black granite. And on these granite panels, more than 58,000 names have been arranged in alphabetical order, according to the day they died.

There are no lengthy eulogies in sight of the wall – it stands without fanfare and embellishment – bearing silent tribute to 58,318 soldiers who sacrificed their lives for our freedoms.

Among the names listed, 17,000 of them were married, 12 of them were 17 years old and 5 of them were 16, 997 of them were killed on their very first day in the line of fire and 1,448 of them died on their very last day – the day before their tour of duty was to be completed.

Carved into that granite wall are volumes; untold stories; families impacted to this very day.

I found it significant and moving to learn that this stone wall has been prepared and polished so that the observer can see their own reflection as they read the names – symbolically bringing the past and the present together.

The truth is, every name matters; every name counts. Every name made a difference in the history of our past and the freedoms we have inherited today.

If you're old enough in the faith and you've read through the Bible, you've discovered fairly quickly that God is into names.

The pages of scripture are often like black granite walls and every name in the past has impacted our lives in the present.

For those who intend to read through the entire Bible, First and Second Chronicles are more like Mount Everest; it's one list after

another. Every so often, you need an oxygen tank to make it through.

But from God's perspective, as He reminded us through the Apostle Paul in *1 Corinthians 10:11* all these names are significant in more ways than we could ever imagine.

In fact, the wall of scripture has been prepared and polished so that you see your own reflection in its pages – bringing the significance of the past into the significance of your present and the security of your future.

No list of names is more significant than the opening page of the New Testament book of Matthew.

Matthew is connecting the claims of Jesus Christ to real people, to a real family, to a real Messiah with a real claim to a real throne and a real kingdom.

Myron Augsburger writes in his commentary on this text how he ministered on one occasion in India. There he met a former Hindu who had come to faith in Christ as a young man simply by studying the genealogy of Jesus Christ in Matthew chapter 1.

When he was asked what made this text so profound to him, he stated that for the first time he had finally found a religion which was actually rooted in history, in contrast to the mythologies of Hinduism and Buddhism.¹ He had found the real Messiah rooted in the reality of history.

And that's exactly what Matthew wants to do. Let's go back to this list of names and for our study today, what I want to do today is again drop into this list, here and there, to make some observations.

I want to identify at least 6 gems of truth that just sort of sparkle away, if you take the time to pause and look into this genealogy of Jesus.

1. The first gem is this: God's ways are often unexplainable.

In other words, God often does not provide an explanation for the mysteries of what He does or what He doesn't do. His ways and His thoughts often are without any explanation.

For instance, at the very outset of this genealogy, you are left to wonder why God would choose certain individuals to carry on the royal line.

Why, for instance in *verse 2*, is **Judah** mentioned instead of Reuben, the firstborn son of Jacob? In fact, there were three older brothers than Judah.

Why did God choose Judah? Was he more deserving than his brothers? Well, if you go back to the record of Judah's life, you discover how after the sons of Jacob conspire together to throw young Joseph in a pit to let him starve to death, Judah is the one who comes up with the plan to sell him to slave traders who were passing nearby.

Judah was that uncaring. It might have seemed more merciful to leave him in that pit than sell him to slave traders.

It would be Reuben, the firstborn son of Jacob, who isn't there with the other brothers when Judah hatches his plan; and Reuben had evidently planned to return to that pit and rescue Joseph.

But when he returns to the pit and finds out from his brothers that Joseph has been sold into slavery, Reuben, the firstborn son of Jacob, is the only brother who sheds any tears over it. You can read the full account in **Genesis 37**. Reuben seems the likely candidate to continue the regal line of the Messiah.

However, many years later, the Bible records in **Genesis 44** that these same brothers are driven to Egypt during a famine in order to buy food for their families. And after a series of events, Judah is the one who offers his life so that his younger brother Benjamin can be spared. In fact, Judah is the one who steps forward and verbalizes the admission and confession of what they had done years earlier

to Joseph. And only then, **Genesis 45** records, Joseph reveals his identity to his brothers and he forgives them.

Maybe that's why Judah was chosen instead of his three older brothers. We're not told. God simply doesn't explain why Judah becomes the head of the royal tribe from which the son of David will descend. God just does it.

I found it equally surprising that several other men listed in this genealogy are not the firstborn sons in their families.

Judah, Zerah, Jacob – even King David; he was the youngest of his brothers. This goes against the normal inheritance procedures; this upsets tradition; this is the unpredictability in the sovereign plan of God.

God does what God does and we cling to the promise as believers that whatever God does, is right (**Daniel 9:14**).

- God doesn't explain why He does something in one family and doesn't do it in others;
- He doesn't explain why He allows evil or crime to affect one family member, but keeps another family member safe;
- He doesn't explain why some of your family member suffers hardship or ill health and other family members never have.

The unexplainable nature of God's sovereign plan is seen in this genealogy and it shows up in yours as well.

God knew who your parents would be; you didn't get to choose them. He planned that they would be healthy and wealthy or ill and poor or a mixture of both. He also planned what country you'd be born in and which century you'd be born in too. And it wasn't because we were more deserving that we were born after the invention of electricity, but how great is that?! And air conditioners and automobiles and football – in that order.

The truth is, God not only planned you to be born into the world at this time, He planned the

world to be at this time what it would be for you to live for Him.

He planned every detail and arranged every circumstance so that at the end of your life – and at many times through it – you would more deeply worship Him and trust Him even during His unexplainable ways.

As William Cowper wrote that classic hymn text several centuries ago:

God moves in a mysterious way
His wonders to perform;
He plants His footsteps in the sea
And rides upon the storm.

Deep in unfathomable mines
Of never failing skill
He treasures up His bright designs
And works His sov' reign will.

Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take;
The clouds ye so much dread
Are big with mercy and soon shall break
In blessings on your head.

1. God's ways are often unexplainable

2. The second gem is closely tied to the first; God's plans through history are unstoppable.

As you read through this genealogy, you quickly observe that even though the plan of God involved weak and sinful men and women, His plans for the Redeemer's lineage were uninterrupted.

Yes, Tamar and Judah and Manasseh and Bathsheba and David and Ahaz are all responsible for their sin. If anything, this genealogy points them – and us – to the cross of the Messiah who will die for sinners.

But it's obvious, isn't it, that Jesus, though having never sinned, was definitely related to a lot of sinners. What a family – what a bunch of sinners!

Just like your relatives, right? I don't want a show of hands.

As we've pointed out already, if Jesus isn't ashamed to be related to His ancestors, He won't be ashamed to be related to His descendants – you and me, a bunch of sinners, brought into the family of God by faith.

Here's the point: even the sin of the forefathers of Jesus was unable to unhook the railway cars of His lineage from the engine of God's divine purpose.

That's what Satan was attempting throughout this historical lineage, and he did not succeed.

So also in your own life –

- even though your life is intersected by sin (and you must take that to the cross);
- even though your life is impacted by other sinners;
- even though your world is governed by Satan (who longs to stop the train of God's will for your own life)

– nothing can derail you from the tracks upon which you will ride one day, secure in Christ, into that Heavenly City.

Beloved, listen; here is a gem from this genealogy that stretched over thousands of years: you're going to make it. You're going to make it because of the unstoppable plan of God who saved you; because of your ancestor Jesus who redeemed you and will one day glorify you. You're going to make it; you're going to make it.

You might notice the inclusion of the names here in verses **13-15** – *Zerubbabel was the father of Abihud, Abihud the father of Eliakim* and more; these are hard names to pronounce. I'd read them all, but we just don't have time.

Nine names are listed in these verses and guess what – we know absolutely nothing about them. Nothing.

Don't you know that you can look up every member of the Queen of England's family and at least get a paragraph?

This is the family of the King of Kings!

And the only thing we know about these nine men is that their lives covered a period of nearly 500 years of history.ⁱⁱ

We have no idea what contribution they made on planet earth. We have no clue if they were godly or ungodly; followers of Yahweh or idolaters.

To us, time has forgotten why they mattered – but not God. He hasn't forgotten them, and the fact that they were somehow used by God in the unstoppable chain of events – God's Spirit whispers to Matthew, include these names as well.ⁱⁱⁱ

I couldn't help but think about the fact that, to this day, the gospel of Christ is advanced by unseen, unknown men and women – young and old – who never make headlines.

We have no idea who millions of Christians are who are making disciples or how they have been interwoven into the global, unstoppable plan of God. Even though they are unknown to us, they are known to Him. But for all of us, this genealogy reminds us that the same God who guided the unstoppable process of the coming of Christ is guiding the unstoppable progress of the church; He is guiding the life of every single Christian.^{iv}

You might be unknown or well known. Some of you might make headlines and some of you, like me, might not even buy a newspaper, much less read one. Whether you make headlines or not, God knows who you are. You happen to be part of His unstoppable plan.

Here's a third gem from the genealogy of Jesus:

3. A personal lineage of godliness is unpredictable.

I just want to touch on this briefly: I found it fascinating that there is no predictability or guarantee from father to son in regards to their walk with God.

In *verse 9* you have the mention of *Hezekiah* – a godly king who cleansed the temple of former idolatries and tore down idolatrous high places (*2 Chronicles 20*).

But Hezekiah's son, *Manasseh* is described as one of the most wicked kings in the history of the nation. He rebuilds all the pagan altars his dad had torn down and reinstates idolatry in the temple that his dad had cleaned out.

But then, according to *2 Chronicles 33*, Manasseh actually repents and returns to following after God. It is one of the most surprising conversion stories in the Old Testament; he tears down the idol altars and leads the people back into proper temple worship of Yahweh.

And you think, "Wow, this is going to change everything for generations!"

But then Manasseh's son, *Amon*, in *verse 10*, takes the throne and evidently ignores his father's repentance and spends his two-year reign chasing after idols.

And you think, "Now it's going to be messed up for generations." But then, Amon has a son named *Josiah* who turns out to become one of the nation's godliest reformers.

He's only 8 years old when he ascends the throne, but he removes all idol worship from the land, begins to renovate the Temple, rediscovers the Books of Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy and ends up leading the nation back to God.^v

Talk about unpredictability! A godly father has an ungodly son who has a godly son who has an ungodly son.

Here's the point – and this genealogical gem is true in your family tree as well: ultimately, it is the grace of God that is magnified in the conversion of every family member.

Salvation isn't inherited. Parents, be careful not to take the blame for the unbelief of your child; parents, be careful not to take the credit for the belief of your child.

Parents, be careful not to take the blame for the unfaithfulness of your child; and be careful not to take the credit for the faithfulness of your child.

We lay both at the feet of Jesus and ultimately yield to the plan and the grace and the calling of God.

4. Here's another gem from the genealogy of Jesus: tests of faith and obedience are unforeseeable.

Here's King Uzziah (*verse 9*) mentioned in detail in **2 Kings 14** who walks with God and wins victories as he trusts in God for strength and wisdom – all is well and the future is bright.

In fact, he became the king when he was only 16 years old, but instead of running wild, he follows after God and reigns for 52 years.

But somewhere the seeds of pride were sown, perhaps in his long string of military victories. And Satan patiently baited the hook of self-confidence and pride and then waited and waited and waited.

In the parallel account of his life in **2 Chronicles chapter 26**, you have that telling and disastrous biographical statement made by the chronicler – *his fame spread afar, for he was marvelously helped until he was strong. But when he became strong, his heart was so proud that he acted corruptly, and he was unfaithful to the LORD his God, for he entered the temple of the LORD to burn incense on the altar of incense* – that was something only the priests were allowed to do.

Suddenly, leprosy broke out on Uzziah's forehead and he was rushed out of the temple in disgrace; he ended up quarantined for the remainder of his life. He had started so well, but ended poorly.

Faithfulness to God in the past, beloved, does not guarantee faithfulness to God in the future.

And you can believe that Satan has baited a hook for you and me. And as a fisherman, he happens to be very patient.

Don't ever believe the lie that your testimony or your integrity is safely guaranteed. Uzziah started well, but ended poorly.

Hezekiah, mentioned in *verse 9*, started well, but ended unfaithfully. In fact, he had one of the most unusual prayers answered by God.

In **2 Chronicles 20**, the Lord informed him that his illness would lead to his death; but

Hezekiah prayed for more time, and God told him that he would live another 15 years.^{vi}

Now you'd think, after that kind of answered prayer, Hezekiah would never doubt God again. But he did. In fact, later in life, he grew distrustful of God's protection and, even though he was warned, he made a secret pact with Babylon, which ultimately became the nation's undoing.

Listen, if you start thinking – “You know, if God will just answer this one prayer, I'll stop doubting Him; if He'll move just in this one issue, I'll never question Him again – it'll be nothing but praise and worship from here on out.”

Don't count on it. Unforeseen tests of faith and obedience are just around the corner. Which is why dependence on God should never go out of style. His mercy and wisdom and strength are needed every new morning.

Let me drop into your thinking another gem from this genealogy – number 5, if you're keeping count.

5. Here it is: the game plan of God is unconventional.

You don't have to read very long in this genealogy to discover that God is doing things differently than anyone would have imagined.

It's as if Matthew rubs the noses of every Jewish reader in the reality of their heritage – which is embarrassing. In *verse 3*, he mentions **Judah, the father of Perez and Zerah**, but why keep going and mention **Tamar**?

We mentioned last Lord's Day that Tamar, the daughter-in-law of Judah – and a widow – grew impatient in her desire for an heir. She dressed up like a prostitute where she knew Judah was tending his flocks, caught his eye, conceived by him and the sordid story only gets worse.

Why include Tamar? In fact, Tamar was a Canaanite, so the lineage of Jesus is only going to get muddier.

In fact, why mention women at all? This is a legal document and women in the first century weren't legal heirs; they weren't even allowed to testify in a court of law. What is Matthew doing here?

Down in *verse 5*, you have the record of Salmon was the father of Boaz who was the father of Obed – wait a second – that's not what it says. Matthew inserts, *Salmon was the father of Boaz by Rahab*. Who is she?

She wasn't someone who pretended to be a prostitute; she was, in fact, a career prostitute.

Even though she is rescued when the walls of Jericho come tumbling down and marries a prince from Israel, her tag line will read all the way into *Hebrews 11*, "*Rahab the Harlot*."

Why? For starters, not everyone will identify with the life of an Abraham or even a Solomon or a David. But everyone can identify with a sinner like Rahab.

This is also a subtle reminder from Matthew that while you might look at any sinner's past life, just make sure you don't overlook their future life.

And with that, let me add one more observation to the list. Here it is:

6. No lost sinner is unredeemable.

Rahab was the only person in Jericho who was interested in the God of the Israelite spies who hid out on her rooftop.

And when the spies left her home and escaped, they told her to hang a scarlet chord out her window if she indeed wanted to follow Israel and their true and living God. And when Israel returned to that city – a city whose walls were about to come tumbling down – there was that scarlet chord.

The usual Hebrew word for *chord* is bypassed in *Joshua 2:12* and instead, the word

used is often translated in the Old Testament with the word *hope*.

Hope! Imagine – she was hopeless, but now staked everything on her hope in a forgiving, accepting God. And Rahab goes from a hopeless harlot to a forgiven follower of God.

I'll never forget preaching several years ago in the rough, rather dangerous city – at that time – of Medellin, Columbia. Our sermons are translated into Spanish and aired in that city 3 times a day. I'll never forget that radio rally – a government auditorium had been rented and several thousand people were packed into it and many people were turned away an hour before the service began. I preached a simple gospel message on the incarnation and humility of Christ and my translator invited people forward afterward where counselors from neighboring churches were prepared.

After an hour, most of the people had finally left and several people had accepted Christ. One of the translators brought up on stage a woman that several people had evidently invited; they had been praying for her, that she would come that night.

She appeared to be in her late twenties/early thirties and she began to talk to me – through a translator – how she was a prostitute and a drug courier for one of the cartels in Columbia. And with tears in her eyes, she said that she was leaving that life behind; she was now a follower of Jesus Christ.

I couldn't help but think of Rahab. What a past; but what a future!

For every one of us who believes in Christ, we were not too far for the mercy and grace of God to reach. Look at *your* past life, but don't stop there; follow Him in your present life. And then try – just try – to imagine your future life in Heaven.

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 12/10/2017 by Stephen Davey.

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- i Myron S. Augsburger, The Communicator's Commentary: Matthew (Word Books, 1982), p. 23
 - ii Grant R. Osborne, Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: Matthew (Zondervan, 2010), p. 67
 - iii William Hendriksen, New Testament Commentary: Matthew (Baker Book House, 1973), p. 115
 - iv Adapted from Osborne, p. 69
 - v Adapted sequences from Osborne, p. 66
 - vi More observations adapted from Osborne, p. 66