

The Ignored Chapter

A forgotten chapter in the Christmas story is Matthew chapter 1. For most it is t a list of names, with some no one has any idea about.

Want to add to the fun of studying the genealogies of Jesus? Compare Matthew's genealogy to the one in Luke chapter 3. Side by side you may think you are looking at 2 totally different families. Critics sometimes suggest that both were simply made up. Suggesting the genealogies are not true could not be further from reality. The Jewish people of Jesus' day valued genealogies and would never have been duped by a false list, nor would they ever have allowed a fake list to go unchallenged. Read Luke 2:1-4. How did Joseph know he had to go to Bethlehem? He knew his genealogy. Every Jew of Jesus day kept their genealogy and knew when one was faked.

The leadership of the early church knew the genealogies were different and understood the reasoning for that or they would never have included both books in Scripture. A major criterion of selecting the books of the Bible was the consistency of message.

There are several differences between Matthew's and Luke's genealogy. Luke began with Joseph and went back to Adam through David. Read Luke 3:23. Matthew began with Abraham and went forward through David. Matthew went through David's son Solomon while Luke moved through David's son Nathan.

The genealogy of Jesus is complicated by the fact that while on the Jewish birth certificate Joseph would have been listed as the father. He was not as Mary was a virgin when the Holy Spirit placed Jesus' seed in her. Many commentators believe that Luke recorded Mary's line because of that, while Matthew went through Joseph.

One factor in the writers having different genealogies is that they had different purposes in writing. Matthew needed to show his Jewish audience that Jesus was legitimately qualified to be the Messiah and sit on the throne because He was a descendent of David. Luke wanted his Gentile audience to know that the Messiah was a man like us and able to represent us for redemption.

Read Matthew 1:17. In our 21st century genealogical thinking we need to list every individual in the line. In biblical times they only listed key individuals in the line and undoubtedly Matthew chose to organize his list in groups of 14 to make it easier to memorize.

A thousand years before Jesus was born, God said that the promised one would be, according to II Samuel 7:12-16, a descendant of David. Matthew set out to show this. Read Matthew 1:1. Jesus was qualified in every way to be the promised Messiah and inherit the throne that He will rule over. He was a legitimate descendant of David.

The genealogies remind us of the grace of God. If you read through the list of names one thing that jumps out is that the family line of Jesus was filled with gross sinners whom God still used.

Abraham and Isaac were both liars. Jacob was a deceiver. Judah slept with his daughter-in-law thinking she was a temple prostitute. David was an adulterer and Solomon was married to multiple wives at the same time. Matthew 1:10 lists Manasseh and II Kings 21 details his sins, declaring over and over that he did more detestable things than others around him. He sacrificed his son to idols, practiced divination and consulted mediums, all of which God strictly forbid. Jesus did not come from human pedigree. It was the pure grace of God that He could/would use any of those in the lineage of Jesus.

In Jesus' day the Pharisees and other religious leaders prided themselves on their righteousness and family lineage. They looked down on anyone who did not meet their standard. Matthew included 4 women in his genealogy. Three were Gentiles and three guilty of sexual sins. The genealogy of Jesus certainly did not meet the standards of the religious leaders of Jesus' day. They would not have even talked to them, but Jesus claimed them as family. The family of Jesus was filled with sinners, but they were exactly the ones Jesus came to redeem. Jesus said He did not come for those who thought they were OK but for the sick. He came to seek and save sinners. A major message of Christmas is that Jesus came for all of us. There is no one whose background or life is outside the grace of God and the life that Jesus came to provide.

If you **really** want to talk about the graciousness of God, look at the women in Matthew's genealogy. The fact that women were included may not surprise you but must have really come as a shock to the Jews of Jesus' day. Women were not usually included in genealogy, but God had Matthew include them in Jesus' genealogy. Jesus was for women's rights long before the popular movement of today.

Not only were women included but the ones listed, with the exception of Ruth, would have been ostracized from any religious activity in Jesus' day because of their sinful ways. The genealogy of Jesus not only contained the names of women, they were Gentile women and, women of ill repute. Women who would not have been allowed to worship in the temple were identified as ancestors of the Messiah.

The first woman in the genealogy is **Tamar**. Her story is recorded in Genesis 38. Skim that chapter. She was the daughter-in-law of Judah whose son, named Er, married her. Er died, so his brother Onan married her according to the practice of the day, so she could bear a son and carry on Er's line. Then he died leaving Tamar without a husband or child. In that day that was considered a double curse. So, Tamar came up with a simple plan to cause her father-in-law Judah to sleep with her. She became pregnant and gave birth to twin boys—Perez and Zerah. Tamar's actions were immoral and wrong.

That both Judah and Tamar are included in the genealogy of Jesus is a testimony to the grace of God and I believe a testimony to the truth of Scripture because no one who might have set out to create a false genealogy would never have included Tamar.

The second woman in Jesus' genealogy is **Rahab**. She was a Gentile and Canaanite woman. When she first appears in Scripture she is described as a harlot and soon after that she became a traitor to her people as well as a liar. Read Joshua 2 for her story. She helped the Israelites so perhaps she was a shade better than Tamar but still an unlikely candidate for an ancestor to the one God promised would redeem His people, the one whose birth we celebrate at Christmas.

The third woman mentioned in Jesus' genealogy is **Ruth**. Because of who she became we view her as one of the good guys, but she was a Moabite woman and the Moabites were bitter enemies of the Jews. Her story begins in Genesis 19 and the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. Lot escaped with his wife and two daughters. His daughters saw no chance of finding husbands where they were, so they came up with a plan to get their father to sleeping with them. On successive nights they got Lot drunk and slept with him. Both sisters became pregnant and gave birth to sons - one named Moab, the other named Ammon. Those two boys, both born of incest, grew up to establish nations that would be evil and bitter enemies of Israel. The Jews hated both the Moabites and Ammonites. But the promised Messiah would be for all people, so God arranged as a testimony to that, for Ruth the Moabite to be in the genealogy of Jesus.

The final woman named in the genealogy of Jesus is **Bathsheba**, Matthew identified her as the wife of Uriah, as if to note that the way she got into the ancestry of Jesus was anything but right. II Samuel 11 and 12 records her background. The child of that adulterous relationship died in judgment for David's sin. Read II Samuel 12:24. Matthew included Bathsheba and Solomon in the genealogy of Jesus.

Both Matthew and Luke include in their genealogy of Jesus individuals whom society might like to blank out but then everyone of Jesus' ancestors was a sinner as are all men except Jesus. All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. One of the primary messages of Christmas is that Jesus came for all people. He loves the world, so He paid the price of our sins along with the sins of His ancestors when He took them to the Cross.

I have seen often the little quote:

"I'm a Christian.

I'm not perfect.

I make mistakes.

I mess up.

But God's grace is bigger than my sins."

God's grace, available to all who believe, transforms sinners into children of God and that is what Christmas is all about.