

PRECISION IN THE LINEAGE OF JESUS

Matthew 1:17 ... “So, all the generations from Abraham to David are fourteen generations, from David until the captivity in Babylon are fourteen generations, and from the captivity in Babylon until the Christ are fourteen generations.”

Can you trace your genealogy back forty-two generations? How about ten generations? Few readers of this will be able to identify – by name – their ancestors more than three generations ago. If you are in a developed country with good access to birth records and genealogical data, such as where I’m from in America, you might be able to go back a few generations. But know one can reach back through history and identify by name, every ancestor over a period of several thousand years. That is strictly the marvel of the Bible (and Jewish Torah), and the ancestors of Joseph and Mary who gave birth to Jesus. As we celebrate the human birth of Jesus this month, let us also celebrate the Word of God that clearly identifies his heritage, his ministry on earth, his purpose for being sent, and the opportunity we have to spend eternity in his presence. You can read the entire genealogy of Jesus in verses 2-16 of Matthew chapter 1.

The stories of Jesus’ birth are unique and children who grow up in the church can recite them with glee: Mary becoming pregnant by the Holy Spirit of God, a long miserable donkey ride through the desert to Bethlehem, the birth of her baby in a stable, shepherds being informed of the birth by a heavenly chorus of angels, wise men from the East spending at least a year to travel to give Jesus gifts ... these are the stories that are commonly the centerpiece of our remembrance of Christ coming to earth. They are genuinely special and worthy of celebration.

But Matthew gave us insight into so much more by recording Jesus’ ancestry. He did so for two reasons: 1) To prove Jesus was a Jew (as a descendant of Abraham), and 2) to demonstrate his right to the throne of Israel because of his descendancy from King David. Another special feature of the genealogy of Jesus, is the mention of four women, which is not something the Jews usually did. Plus, the four women mentioned had somewhat scandalous roles in history. Tamar was the daughter-in-law of Judah, but when her husband died, she tricked Judah into sleeping with her and having a child. Rahab was a prostitute who helped Israel defeat the city of Jericho. Ruth was not even a Jew. She was a Gentile. And, Bathsheba was the mistress of David. We believe these people were included in the lineage of Jesus and documented by Matthew to show us that God’s grace can forgive even the foulest sin. Ruth’s inclusion shows that it is not just Israel (or the Jews) that God loves and includes in his kingdom. This is especially good news for you and me.

You may not be inspired to read to your family the first sixteen verses of Matthew 1 on Christmas day, but you would do well to summarize its content and enlighten your friends and family with the miraculous way in which the Bible illustrates our relationship to God and the sacrifices he made to save us from hell. Donkeys, angels, shepherds and wise men are truthful and fun stories to be reminded of at Christmas. But salvation, and God’s grace and forgiveness, are the most extraordinary events associated with Jesus’ birth, death and resurrection.

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