

“I DON’T FEEL LIKE I BELONG”

By Michael Cocoris

A friend of mine, who was employed at the famous Forest Lawn Cemetery in Glendale, California, invited me to speak at their employee’s thanksgiving service. After the meeting, we decided to go to a nearby restaurant. So he, my wife, and I climbed into his car and began the descent from the highest church in the park. We had not gone very far when my friend suddenly stopped the car, explaining that there was something he wanted us to see.

We followed him to a spot among the headstones, where he paused to show us the view. It was impressive. From where we were standing, you could see the skyline of downtown Los Angeles in one direction and a panorama of the valley and the mountains on the other. It was a picturesque sight. Then, he invited us to turn around and look straight down. At my feet was a headstone that had in parenthesis the words, “Factor Reject.” My friend explained that in his will, a young man requested that those words be put on his headstone. When the family objected, the young man’s attorney took them to court and the judge ordered that the young man’s wishes, written in his will, should be followed.

The young man felt that there was something wrong with him. He felt that he did not fit. The factory kept others, but he didn’t measure up, so his opinion of himself was that he was a reject.

Have you ever been in a place where you felt that you didn’t belong? Perhaps it was a wedding reception. You didn’t know the bride and groom well, but you were invited. The reception was at a costly home filled with people who had much more economically or educationally than you. To make matters worse, you didn’t know many people there. Then is when you felt, “I don’t really fit here. I don’t belong.”

All of us have been in that kind of situation. Some have felt that way at church. You may have even felt that way spiritually. Do you fit? Do you belong? Who does? Who qualifies to be named among those who are genuinely part and parcel of Jesus Christ?

This may sound strange, but the answer to that issue is found in the genealogy of Jesus Christ as recorded in Matthew 1:1-17. This passage consists of three parts, each of which is making the point that Jesus is the son of Abraham and the Son of David.

The Superscription

Like Genesis Matthew begins with the words, “The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the son of Abraham” (1:1). As many have pointed out, this superscription seems to be crafted after the one in Genesis (McNeile; Alexander; Plummer). The exact phrase, “the book of the genealogy of,” occurs in the Septuagint version of Genesis 2:4 and 5:1. As in Genesis, the phrase refers to just the immediately following material and not the whole book. The appearance of the word “genealogy” in verse 17 indicates that it only applies to verses 1 through 16 (France; Walvoord; Plummer applies it to the first two chapters). Verse 1 is the superscription to Matthew 1:1-17 and Matthew 1:1-17 is the introduction to the book.

A Genealogy How is it possible for Jesus Christ to have a genealogy? A genealogy is a family tree. Jesus Christ is the Son of God, which means He is God the Son. If God the Father is the direct Father of God the Son, how can Jesus Christ, the Son of God, have a family tree? If the Son of God has a family tree, it is a tree with one branch!

Jesus Christ, the Son of God, does not have a family tree. The subject of the Gospel of John is the deity of Christ and it does not contain a genealogy. Jesus was, however, also a human. As a human being, He has a family tree, an impressive family tree. He is the Son of David and the son of Abraham.

The two phrases, “the Son of David, son of Abraham,” are not in chronological order. Abraham lived before David. David, however, is placed first for emphasis. God made a covenant with David that one of his descendants would sit on the throne (2 Sam. 7:12). As the Son of David, Jesus Christ has the right to be King of Israel. That is the theme of Matthew. The phrase “Son of David” is equivalent to a formal declaration that Jesus is the Messiah (Alexander). It is the designation of Messiah (see 9:27; 12:23; 15:22; 20:30; 21:9, 15; 22, 42). Thus, the subject of Matthew is that Jesus Christ is the King of Israel, the Messiah. Matthew adds that Jesus Christ is also the son of Abraham, which means Jesus fulfills the promises to Abraham as well as the promises to David.

Wow! If Jesus is the King of Israel, I surely do not qualify to be part and parcel with Him. Imagine saying, “I’m part of the royal family of England.” How much more out of place to say, “I’m part of the royal family of Jesus Christ.” If you feel that way (or even if you do not), keep reading.

The Genealogy

The Genealogy of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the son of Abraham, is contained in Matthew 1:2-16. According to Matthew, this arrangement is deliberately divided into three parts (1:17).

The Son of Abraham His genealogy begins, “Abraham begot Isaac, Isaac begot Jacob, and Jacob begot Judah and his brothers” (1:2). Luke traces the lineage of Jesus Christ back to Adam. Matthew starts with Abraham. Matthew used Abraham, the covenant name, not Abram (McNeile; Toussaint). God promised Abraham that He would make him a great nation, give him the land of Palestine, and bless all the nations of the world through him (Gen. 12:3). As the son of Abraham, Jesus Christ came to fulfill the promise to bless the nations of the world (Gal. 3:8-9). Indeed, by dying for the sins of the world, Jesus Christ is not just a Savior for Israel but is “the Savior of the World” (Jn. 4:42). All who trust Jesus Christ for the gift of eternal life are made members of God’s family (Jn. 1:12). They belong to Him. It does not matter how many sins you have committed or how many times you have committed them, if you trust Jesus Christ for eternal life, you are forgiven; you belong to God and will live with Him forever.

Matthew singles out Judah from his brethren because “the Messianic promise of sovereignty was given to him” (Toussaint).

In verse 2, the genealogy is exactly as it is described in Genesis, but Matthew adds something in verse 3, which says, “Judah begot Perez and Zerah by Tamar, Perez begot Hezron, and Hezron begot Ram” (1:3). When Matthew gets to Judah, he adds that Judah begot Perez and Zerah by Tamar (1:3). Tamar was a woman. It was not the standard Jewish custom to mention a woman in a genealogy, because inheritance came through the fathers. At any rate, Judah and Tamar had two sons, Perez and Zerah. The Messiah did not come through the line of Zerah; He came through Perez. The phrase “the son of Perez” was a rabbinic expression for the Messiah (McNeile).

The genealogy continues, “Ram begot Amminadab, Amminadab begot Nahshon, and Nahshon begot Salmon, Salmon begot Boaz by Rahab, Boaz begot Obed by Ruth, Obed begot Jesse, and Jesse begot David the king” (1:4-6a). The genealogy in Matthew 1:3b-6a is precisely like the one found in Ruth 4:18-22, except Matthew adds “by Rahab” and “by Ruth” (1:5). Matthew is going out of the way to mention women. By the way, the Old Testament does not record that Rahab was the mother of Boaz.

Matthew’s genealogy of Christ contains the names of five women: Tamar (1:3), Rahab (1:5), Ruth (1:5), Bathsheba (1:6), and Mary (1:16). To mention a woman in a genealogy was unusual; to list five was highly unusual. Furthermore, three of these women were guilty of gross sins and one was a Gentile (France suggests that perhaps four were non-Jewish). Tamar deceived her father-in-law, making him think she was a prostitute and, as a result, gave birth to Perez (Gen. 38:1-30), who is listed in the genealogy of Jesus (1:3)! Rahab was a prostitute (Josh. 2:1) and Bathsheba, “the wife of Uriah” (1:6) committed adultery with King David (2 Sam. 11:1-12:23). Ruth was a Moabite, that is, a Gentile. Moabites were forbidden to enter the congregation of Israel until the tenth generation (Deut. 23:3).

The inclusion of such women in the genealogy illustrates how Jesus fulfills the Abrahamic covenant. As the son of Abraham, Jesus fulfills the Abrahamic covenant. He died for sinners and makes them part of His family. These women are not only members of the family, they are in the royal lineage of Jesus Christ! If you feel like you do not fit, take a long look at this list. If they belong, you belong. Tamar committed incest. Rahab was a professional prostitute. Ruth was an outcast Gentile. Those of the lowest state were part of the highest royal line, the royal line of the eternal King Jesus Christ.

The speaker began by holding up a \$20 bill. In the room of 200 people, he asked, “Who would like to have this \$20 bill?” Virtually every hand was raised. He said, “I am going to give this \$20 to one of you, but first, let me do this.” He proceeded to crumple the dollar bill. Then, he asked, “Who still wants it?” Still, the hands were up in the air. Asking, “What if I do this?” he dropped it on the ground and started to grind it into the floor with his shoe. He picked it up, now all crumpled and dirty. “Now who still wants it?” Still, the hands went into the air. He then made the point that no matter what he did to the money, they still wanted it, because it did not decrease in value. It was

still worth \$20.

We are dropped, crumpled, and ground into the dirt by the decisions we make and the circumstances that come our way. We feel as though we are worthless, but no matter what has happened or what will happen, you will never lose your value in God's eyes. To Him, dirty or clean, crumpled or finely creased, you are still priceless. We are made in the image of God and Christ died for us. God wants to include us in His family.

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The Son of David The genealogy continues, "David the king begot Solomon by her *who had been the wife of Uriah*. Solomon begot Rehoboam, Rehoboam begot Abijah, and Abijah begot Asa. Asa begot Jehoshaphat, Jehoshaphat begot Joram, and Joram begot Uzziah. Uzziah begot Jotham, Jotham begot Ahaz, and Ahaz begot Hezekiah. Hezekiah begot Manasseh, Manasseh begot Amon, and Amon begot Josiah. Josiah begot Jeconiah and his brothers about the time they were carried away to Babylon" (1:6b-11). Of all the kings mentioned in this genealogy, only David is called king. Twice in verse 6, Matthew says David was "the king." God promised David that He would establish the Kingdom of David's son forever (2 Sam. 7:12-13, 16). As the Son of David, Jesus Christ fulfills that promise. He is King of the Jews (27:37). Matthew underscores that fact by adding "the king" to David's name (1:6).

The promises to Abraham were personal, national, and universal. He was promised that his name would be great, his descendants would be many, and through him, the world would be blessed. The promises to David were Jewish, national, and royal. He was promised an eternal king, an eternal throne, and an eternal kingdom. In His first coming, Jesus Christ fulfilled the promise to Abraham to bless the world. When He comes the second time, He will fulfill the promise to David to establish an eternal Kingdom (19:28).

Matthew underscores the fact that sinful women were part of the lineage by not using Bathsheba's name. He goes out of the way to say she "had been the wife of Uriah." (1:6a). In 1 Chronicles 3:15, she is called Bathsheba, the daughter of Ammiel.

The Son of Mary Matthew finishes the genealogy saying, "And after they were brought to Babylon, Jeconiah begot Shealtiel, and Shealtiel begot Zerubbabel. Zerubbabel begot Abiud, Abiud begot Eliakim, and Eliakim begot Azor. Azor begot Zadok, Zadok begot Achim, and Achim begot Eliud. Eliud begot Eleazar, Eleazar begot Matthan, and Matthan begot Jacob. And Jacob begot Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus who is called Christ" (1:12-16).

In this section, one generation is missing. In 1 Chronicles 3:19, Assir is listed between Jecoviah and Shealtiel. The Greek word "begot" does not necessarily mean "the actual father of." It can mean a descendant. The omission was not because of ignorance, nor was it inadvertent (Alexander). It was intentional. Matthew deliberately artificially arranged the genealogy to fit his purposes (see comment on 1:17).

The nine names in verses 13-15 belong to the period between the Old Testament and the New Testament. There is no way to verify them, but there is "every reason to believe that they were found in the public archives of the tribe of Judah or the private genealogy of the family of Joseph" (Alexander).

Joseph is called "the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus" (1:16). He is not called the father of Jesus, because as Matthew explains in the next paragraph, Joseph was not the biological father of Jesus. Moreover, Matthew uses the feminine pronoun for "whom," indicating that Jesus was born of Mary, not Joseph (Walvoord).

The genealogy in Matthew is traced through Joseph, Jesus' legal (though not natural) father (McNeile; Alexander; France). The legal and royal line always passed through the father. As the adopted son of Joseph, Jesus was the legal descendant of Abraham and David, having the legal rights to their inheritance. So this genealogy establishes Jesus' right to reign on the throne of David. Had Jesus been the natural son of David, He could not legally occupy David's throne, because a king in the line named Coniah was cursed that none of his descendants could sit on the throne of David (Jer. 22:24, 28; 37:1). The genealogy in Luke 3:23-38 is through Mary. As the natural son of Mary, Jesus was in the bloodline of Abraham and David. Through Joseph, Jesus was in the royal line.

In the first division of Matthew's genealogy, the Davidic throne is established; in the second, it is destroyed, and in the third, it is restored in the coming of Christ. Also, in the first, the Abrahamic Covenant was established, in the second the Davidic Covenant, and in the third the New Covenant.

Someone has said,

If God had a refrigerator, your picture would be on it.
If he had a wallet, your photo would be in it.
He sends you flowers every spring and a sunrise every morning.

Whenever you want to talk, he'll listen.
 He can live anywhere in the universe, and he chose your heart.
 And the gift he sent you in Bethlehem?
 Face it, friend, he's crazy about you.

The Conclusion

Deliberate Arrangement Matthew concludes, "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

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until Christ are fourteen generations" (1:17). This verse confirms that Matthew deliberately edited the genealogy. He did so to suit his purposes. He intended to demonstrate that Jesus is the Son of David. As the Son of David, through the legal line of Joseph, Jesus is the legal heir to the throne of David. Matthew also intended to show that Jesus is the son of Abraham. As the son of Abraham, Jesus saves sinners. There were women, sinners, and even a Gentile in the family tree of Jesus.

Fourteen Matthew says that there were fourteen generations during three periods of Israel's history, but he only lists forty-one names, not forty-two. He counts David twice, once in each of the first two sets (Toussaint). This is yet another way Matthew highlights David.

Why did Matthew say fourteen? It was not because there were fourteen generations during three periods in the Old Testament. That is obvious from the fact that Matthew omitted names in the lineage. After Joram, Ahaziah, Joash, and Amaziah should be listed and after Josiah, Jehoiakim and Eliakim. (2 Kings 8:24; 1 Chron. 3:11; 2 Chron 22:1, 11; 24:27; 2 Kings 23:34; 24:6). Such omissions were common. For example, in 2 Chronicles 22:9 "son of Jehoshaphat" means "grandson of Jehoshaphat."

Omissions do not invalidate a genealogy. It was not at all uncommon to leave names out of a genealogy. The purpose of a genealogy was to establish proof of one's ancestry, a direct line of descent (Toussaint). Therefore, every name was not necessary. Skipping a generation does not negate that.

Matthew omitted names to arrive at fourteen for each of three periods, but why fourteen? Various explanations have been suggested. It was probably used to create literary symmetry (Walvoord). Although, it is interesting that the numeral value of the Hebrew letters in David's name equals fourteen. The three Hebrew letters in David's name have the numerical value of four, six, and four, totaling fourteen (see McNeile's "Additional Note on the Genealogy" and Barclay). In other words, this was another way of emphasizing that Jesus was the Son of David.

Matthew deliberately divided the period from Abraham to Christ into three parts. Plummer explains the division by suggesting that because of David, the family became royalty. At the captivity, the royalty was lost and in Jesus, the royalty is recovered, but that does not account for going back to Abraham. Following S. Lewis Johnson, Toussaint points out that in the first period "the Abrahamic covenant was established, in the second the Davidic covenant, and in the third the New Covenant. All were to be fulfilled in the person and work of Jesus the Messiah."

Summary: The genealogy of Jesus Christ proves that He is the Son of David, the son of Abraham and that sinners are included in His line.

As Son of David, Jesus is the Sovereign of Israel. As the son of Abraham, He is the Savior of the world. He is the sovereign who saves sinners. He is the gracious God, the merciful Messiah, and the loving Lord. In short, He is the gracious King. Those who trust Him are saved by Him and those who follow Him rule with Him.

Jesus came to call sinners, not the righteous (9:13) and to summon those not of Israel (8:10; 15:28). Jesus saves sinners. Saved sinners are in the family tree. If you are a sinner, you belong. God's grace forgives sin and reaches beyond Israel to the world.

David committed adultery and murder (2 Sam. 11-12). He was a polygamist (2 Sam. 12:8) and a failure as a father (2 Sam. 13-14). Abraham lied about his wife in Egypt (Gen. 12:10-20) and did it again at Gerar (Gen. 20:1-18). He did not believe God's promise concerning a son so he committed adultery with Hagar (Gen. 16:1-4). Solomon was a wise man who did foolish things. It's not too much to say he sometimes was surprisingly stupid. For example, he married foreign wives and had hundreds of concubines who turned his heart from the Lord. Nevertheless, God not only forgave their sin, He put them in His family. They are in the family tree!

Kenyon Scudder, a prison warden, tells the story of a small-town Oklahoma boy who ended up in prison. While

he was in jail, he did not hear very much from the folks at home. They were illiterate. So writing was not easy. He was not sure if that was a problem or if they had just given up on him. When it came time for him to be released, he wrote his parents a letter. He told them he was coming home on the train, which would pass their back yard. He told them to tie a white ribbon on the tree in the back yard if they could forgive him and accept him as part of the family. He said if he did not see the ribbon, he would keep going and be out of their lives forever. He did not get a letter in response.

Nevertheless, as promised, when he was released, he boarded the train headed for home. As the train got close to his hometown, he was so overcome with emotion. He moved from the window seat telling a nearby passenger I cannot bear to look out the window, will you look for me? When they came to the spot, the passenger grabbed his leg and whispered, "The whole tree is filled with ribbons."

God the Father has a tree in his back yard in the shape of a cross, filled with white ribbons.