

*In 1947, there was a song performed by Lonzo and Oscar entitled “I’m My Own Grandpa.” In the song, it seems a man married an older woman – a widow, and this widow had an adult daughter who subsequently married the man’s father which in turn created a tangled mess – and the song goes like this:*

*Now, many, many years ago, when I was twenty-three  
I was married to a widow who was pretty as could be  
This widow had a grown-up daughter, she had hair of red  
My father fell in love with her and soon the two were wed  
This made my dad my son-in-law and changed my very life  
My daughter was my mother ‘cause she was my father’s wife*

*To complicate the matters, even though it brought me joy  
I soon became the father of a bouncing baby boy  
My little baby then became a brother-in-law to dad  
And so became my uncle, though it made me very sad  
For if he was my uncle, that also made him the brother  
of the widow’s grown-up daughter who, of course, was my step-mother*

*My father’s wife then had a son that kept them on the run  
And he became my grandchild for he was my daughter’s son  
My wife is now my mother’s mother and it makes me blue  
Because, she is my wife, she’s my grandmother too  
Now, if my wife is my grandmother then, I am her grandchild  
And every time I think of it, it nearly drives me wild  
For now, I have become the strangest case you ever saw  
As husband of my grandmother, I am my own grandpa*

I wonder how the folks at *Ancestry.com* would deal with that one. You know, in recent years, there has been a surge in the interest of genealogy. There are numerous books and search engines on the internet that people can use to trace their lineage, and there are companies who will do it for you – searching your ancestry from all over the world. People want to know where they came from, but that was not a problem for the Jews in the first century.

Every Jew, who cared to know – and they cared to know, could learn exactly who their ancestors were for all of this information was carefully recorded and maintained in the temple at Jerusalem. Genealogy was very important to the Jews are here are a few reasons why – it had a bearing as to where one lived. If you remember, each Jewish tribe had received an inheritance of property in the

Promised Land, and for a Jew to purchase or inherit property in a particular area, they had to prove by lineage that they descended from that particular tribe.

Genealogy was also essential in proving whether a Jewish male could serve as a priest. Only men from the tribe of Levi could serve as a priest, and this connection was proved through genealogy.

And then most importantly, genealogy was vital in identifying the royal line of kings – more specifically the Messiah. The Old Testament made it clear that the Messiah would be from the tribe of Judah, from the line of King David – therefore, records of this lineage were essential in proving a royal connection to the throne, and if this connection could not be made through the records, then there was no use of going on any further.

As you can see, genealogy was very important to the Jews, especially when it came to royalty, and that's why Matthew starts with the genealogy of Jesus to prove to the Jews that Jesus is legally in the royal line for the throne and is their promised King.

So, with that said, if you have your Bible turn to **Matthew 1**, and we are going to work through the section that we often skip in our Bible reading – it's the boring stuff – it's the *list of names* we routinely pass over, and yet, it's the *list of names* the Jews could not ignore. Matthew tells us in **verse 1**,

**The record of the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah, the son of David, the son of Abraham:**

Okay, let's stop right here before we venture on because something unusual is presented to us by Matthew and let me explain. When it comes to genealogies, especially for a Jew – they consistently begin with the earliest ancestor because a Jew considered that person to be the most significant since everyone else came from them, but in this genealogy, it begins with **Jesus** – the final descendant in the lineage, implying that Jesus is more important than all who came before Him.

In this verse, Matthew makes an amazing claim – revealing how Jesus – this carpenter from the backwoods, fulfilled the Old Testament criteria for the throne. If you notice, he drops the name of **Abraham**, and back in **Genesis**, God promised Abraham that his descendants would be given the land of Israel, and through his bloodline would come forth someone who would bless all the nations of the earth. So, Abraham became the founding father of the Jewish nation, and then centuries

later, recorded in **2 Samuel 7**, God made a covenant with **David** and swore, “*Your house and your kingdom shall endure before Me forever; your throne shall be established forever.*” So only an heir from the bloodline of David would have the right to reign as the King.

Now, before we dive head-long into the deep end of this ancestral pool, I need to say a few things about how Matthew organizes this record. He doesn’t just present us with a list of ancestors in chronological order, but rather he divides it into clusters – first from Abraham to David, secondly from David to the Babylonian captivity, and lastly from the Babylonian captivity to Jesus. Then, within each cluster, Matthew selects 14 generations – intentionally leaving out some of the lesser-known ancestors, but surprisingly including a few women which was not normal in Jewish genealogy, and then even more surprising – most of these women were Gentiles.

I just wanted to point that out, and with that, beginning with **verse 2**, we are told:

**<sup>2</sup> Abraham was the father of Isaac, Isaac the father of Jacob, and Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers. <sup>3</sup> Judah was the father of Perez and Zerah by Tamar, Perez was the father of Hezron, and Hezron the father of Ram. <sup>4</sup> Ram was the father of Amminadab, Amminadab the father of Nahshon, and Nahshon the father of Salmon. <sup>5</sup> Salmon was the father of Boaz by Rahab, Boaz was the father of Obed by Ruth, and Obed the father of Jesse. <sup>6</sup> Jesse was the father of David the king.**

Okay, let’s stop right here at the end of this first cluster because I want to point a few things out. First as a technical note, in this record, you see the words “**father of**” over and over again, or in other translations it is the word *begat* – but in the Greek it has two meanings. It can mean *the physical father of*, but it can also mean *the ancestor of* – and I bring this up because Matthew skips over several lesser-known individuals, and yet he still maintains the legal succession by the way of the more popular individuals who are, in fact, ancestors.

So, this first cluster represents the period that included the patriarchs of **Abraham** and **Isaac**, and if you recall that story, Abraham and his wife Sarah did not get pregnant with their promised child *Isaac* until Abraham was 100 and Sarah was 90.

Then there is **Jacob** – who was later named *Israel*, and **Judah**, from whose tribe – the tribe of Judah, the line of kings was to come.

Now, this is also the period that spanned the time of bondage in Egypt, it covers the Exodus under Moses, the giving of Law, and the conquest of the Promised Land under the leadership of Joshua.

These were important historical events for the Jews, great reference points, but Matthew does not focus on them, instead he mentions for example, that **Judah** was the father of **Perez and Zerah by Tamar** which is one of those embarrassing “*skeleton in the closet*” stories.

*There was a very prominent family who commissioned a professional biographer to record their family tree. They gave him very detailed instructions, and cautioned him to deal very carefully with a certain “Uncle George”, who in a drunken stupor had committed murder and was later executed in the electric chair. He was an embarrassment to this family, but the biographer assured them that he could handle it, and this is what he wrote:*

*“Uncle George occupied a chair of applied electronics at an important government institution. He was attached to his position by the strongest of ties, and his death came as a real shock.”*

Well, Matthew is not that creative and elusive, and he lets the skeleton right out the closet by mentioning Tamar and her twins.

Tamar was a Canaanite woman who married Judah’s first-born son named *Er*. Er was evil in the sight of God and so God took his life leaving Tamar a widow and childless. Well, as I said earlier, lineage was very important to the Jews, and so according to the law, the brother next in line was supposed to take the widow for himself so that she might have children and carry on the lineage of the deceased brother. So, the second son named *Onan* marries Tamar, but Onan did not fulfill his husbandly responsibility, so God took him too.

Well, Judah – the father-in-law of Tamar, tells her that he has one more son named *Shelah* – but he’s just a boy, and she needs to wait in her father’s home until he becomes a man and then Shelah will perform his responsibility to ensure the family line continues. Years go by, Shelah grows up, but Judah does not keep his promise to Tamar. It would seem that Judah planned to leave her a widow and childless, and she gets desperate.

Judah had lost his wife, and after a while, Tamar learned of the road that he normally took on his way to the fields, so she dressed up like a prostitute, covered her face with a veil, and she waited on the side of the road. Sure enough, Judah walks by, he doesn’t recognize Tamar, and he propositions her. She’s game, and

they negotiate payment which was a goat – but go figure, Judah didn't have a goat with him, so Tamar says,

*“That’s okay, I will take your ring, your cord – which was small engraved hollow clay cylinder carried on a cord around the neck, and your walking staff as a pledge for payment, and after we are done having fun, you can bring me my goat and I will return your property.”*

So, Judah spends some “quality time” with Tamar – who he still does not recognize, and when the goat is later sent to her for payment, she’s nowhere to be found. Well, Tamar becomes pregnant with twins, and after three months, word gets back to Judah that Tamar had been sleeping around, and Judah wants to have her burned at the stake. Judah does not care for Tamar – he’s already lost two sons in marriage to her – and he’s ready to pass judgment. So, they go get Tamar and bring her before Judah, and then she tells Judah,

*“You can burn me, but the father of my children who owns this ring, this cord, and this walking staff is just as guilty as I am.”*

Of course, Judah recognizes the property and he also recognizes the real problem. He was the problem because he did not keep his promise to Tamar.

That’s just one story in the genealogy of Jesus that would not end up in a Jewish record. Now, if time permitted, we could look at **Rahab** who was another Canaanite woman. If you recall, she was a real prostitute who lived in Jericho and she helped to hide two spies sent by Joshua to scope out the city before Israel came that way. She and her family were spared when the walls of Jericho came tumbling down.

Then you have **Ruth**, a Moabite, who stuck by her Jewish mother-in-law Naomi. You know that story well, and once again, she would have never made it into any other Jewish genealogy record. I imagine that the Jews, after reading all of this, would stand back and scratch their heads and ask what’s Matthew’s problem by including all of this stuff about women – none the less – foreign women.

So, that’s the first cluster – and now, let’s move onto the next one beginning with the second part of **verse 6**. Matthew tells us,

**David was the father of Solomon by Bathsheba who had been the wife of Uriah. <sup>7</sup> Solomon was the father of Rehoboam, Rehoboam the father of Abijah, and Abijah the father of Asa. <sup>8</sup> Asa was the father of Jehoshaphat, Jehoshaphat the father of Joram, and Joram the father of Uzziah. <sup>9</sup> Uzziah was the father of Jotham, Jotham the father of Ahaz, and Ahaz the father of**

**Hezekiah.** <sup>10</sup> **Hezekiah was the father of Manasseh, Manasseh the father of Amon, and Amon the father of Josiah.** <sup>11</sup> **Josiah became the father of Jeconiah and his brothers, at the time of the deportation to Babylon.**

Okay, we'll stop here. So, in this second cluster, I counted seven *good* kings and seven *bad* kings, and need I remind you that this is the genealogy of Jesus. Now if you noticed, Matthew includes some major figures in this record such as **Solomon** who built the temple in Jerusalem, and he mentions the sin of David who committed adultery with **Bathsheba** and killed her husband **Uriah** by ensuring he was sent to the front line in battle without any support.

Matthew also includes **Rehoboam** who because of his pride and lust for power, was responsible for the dividing the Promised Land into two kingdoms – the north called *Israel* and the south called *Judah*.

Another stand out who you may not know is **Manasseh**, who had the longest reign of all the kings of Judah – 55 years, and yet he was the most wicked king they ever had – even worse than **Ahab** if that's possible. He was into idolatry, he sacrificed his own son to the pagan god Molech, he worshipped the sun and the stars, and he killed anyone who disagreed with him. Later, Manasseh was carried away in chains to Babylon and in his prison cell he humbled himself, prayed to God, and repented. God extended grace to Manasseh and returned him back to Jerusalem where he made some reforms. Now, it does not seem that he had any influence over his evil son **Amon**, but he may have had a godly influence over his grandson **Josiah** who would later become a good king.

Now **Jeconiah**, who is also called *Coniah*, creates an interesting problem in this genealogy record, and let me explain. Back in **Jeremiah 22**, God cursed this evil king and said that none of his descendants would ever sit on the throne of David. **Well, if that's the case, then how could Jesus be the King when Joseph was in this bloodline, and therefore, also under this curse?** Well, there are two answers. First, Joseph was only the legal father of Jesus – not the actual father, and secondly, Jesus gets His rights to the throne of David not by Joseph but through Mary whose genealogy is given by **Luke**. In Luke's record, after King David, the bloodline came to Mary from *Nathan* – Solomon's brother, not Solomon, thereby bypassing this curse against Jeconiah and his descendants.

It is said "*we can't pick our family*" but Jesus did before the foundation of the world, and thus far in this legal record from Matthew, Jesus came into this world from a people that most of us would want nothing to do with. Many of them we

could call failures, many we could call wicked, but if the truth be told, they are no different from us – and that’s why God did not give up – and Jesus came.

Okay, let’s look at this last cluster beginning with **verse 12**.

**<sup>12</sup> After the deportation to Babylon: Jeconiah became the father of Shealtiel, and Shealtiel the father of Zerubbabel. <sup>13</sup> Zerubbabel was the father of Abihud, Abihud the father of Eliakim, and Eliakim the father of Azor. <sup>14</sup> Azor was the father of Zadok, Zadok the father of Achim, and Achim the father of Eliud. <sup>15</sup> Eliud was the father of Eleazar, Eleazar the father of Matthan, and Matthan the father of Jacob. <sup>16</sup> Jacob was the father of Joseph the husband of Mary, by whom Jesus was born, who is called the Messiah.**

This third cluster represents about 500 years, most of which occurred between the Old Testament and the New Testament – the 400 years of silence, and therefore, we hardly know the people named here.

Yes, we can read about **Zerubbabel**, who was appointed by the Persians to return to Jerusalem to supervise the rebuilding of the temple, and of course, we know about **Joseph** who was the legal father of Jesus, but as for the rest – we know very little. Matthew does not tell us how he obtained these names, but I think it is safe to assume he had access to the genealogy records.

Now speaking of Joseph, notice that Matthew does not say that Joseph was the *father* of Jesus – because he is not. Joseph is only known here as the **husband of Mary**. It was Mary – a virgin – conceived by the Holy Spirit, by whom Jesus was born.

Okay, in our last verse – **verse 17**, Matthew sums it all up, and he says,

**So all the generations from Abraham to David are fourteen generations; from David to the deportation to Babylon, fourteen generations; and from the deportation to Babylon to the Messiah, fourteen generations.**

This morning we looked at the genealogy of Jesus. It’s the legal record – the record the Jews would have acknowledged and honored, and it reminds me of the saying,

*“Families are like fudge – mostly sweet with a few nuts.”*

In the genealogy of Jesus, Matthew reveals that redemption in the person of Jesus Christ made its way to us through a long list of sinners – some well-known, some completely unknown – but all except for Jesus – were sinners.

It tells us that God uses the failures and the flawed, and His grace is great – and if the people in this record could be included in the Lord’s story – then people like you and me can be added to His story as well. No matter your past – a murderer, a prostitute, an adulterer, a liar, a cheater, an idolator, a thief – you name it, no matter what you have done – in His amazing grace, Jesus can save you.

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