

Jesus' Ancestry.com, Part 1  
Matthew 1:1-17

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First Week of Advent

Having had an argument before they got into their car, this couple drove through the countryside (on their way to church) in silence. Neither wanted to concede their position. As they drove past a barnyard of mules, goats, and pigs, the husband asked sarcastically: "Relatives of yours?"

"Yep," the wife replied, "In-laws."

It's all relative...!

What do you know about your family tree, your ancestral roots? Are you related to someone famous or infamous? Perhaps, like most, your family tree holds secrets—a so-called "black sheep"—or a skeleton or two in the family closet?

Today with the ability to search electronic records and DNA testing, we can gain access to volumes of very detailed information – perhaps even more than we want to know –about our own families.

For centuries, genealogy has held some fascination for the human family. There are, in the Old Testament, at least nine chapters of genealogies or the "begats". More often than not, Bible readers skip over by these for obvious reasons. Same here. While we may have some fascination relative to our own origins, reading someone else's—even Jesus'—can put us to sleep. (I've been warned! But hang in there with me, please! I think you'll be glad you did!)

Why this fascination? I think it has to do with our own desire to understand who we are: our identities, our uniqueness, our place in the world and in relationship to others. We want to know about our roots.

Henry Louis Gates, Jr. hosts a program on public television called Finding Your Roots, now in its fourth season. Each episode takes an individual—often a celebrity—and takes their known information, follows paper trails, from historic records such as newspapers, military and immigration records, as well as DNA samples, and more—in order to fill in the gaps or missing 'branches' of the family tree.

Matthew as a gospel writer has a purpose in mind as he picks up his pen. Why does he start with the genealogy of Jesus?

He begins:

**“This is the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah the son of David, the son of Abraham” v.1**

What’s in a name? This can be one of the most significant decisions facing new parents when a baby is born. We have relatives whose first born was a boy. The father, himself from Idaho, goes by the nickname “Spud”. When the newborn’s initials spelled out TOT family members had to resist calling the little one, “Tater Tot”! No kidding...!

Jesus is the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew “Joshua”/“Yeshua”.

The Hebrew word “Messiah” means “anointed”. Only those set apart for special service, such as priests or kings, would be “anointed”. “Christ” is not Jesus’ surname, but the Greek equivalent of “Messiah”.

This Jesus is called “the son of David, the son of Abraham.”

From the very first verse, Matthew is intent on getting across two messages:

Both of these men—David and Abraham--had been recipients of God’s promises.

God revealed to Nathan the prophet (2 Samuel 7) that **through David**, God would establish his kingdom, the throne of which will endure forever (v.13).

“<sup>14</sup>I will be his father, and he will be my son. When he does wrong, I will punish him with a rod wielded by men, with floggings inflicted by human hands. <sup>15</sup>But my love will never be taken away from him, as I took it away from Saul, whom I removed from before you. <sup>16</sup>**Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me; your throne will be established forever.**” (2 Samuel 7:14-16)

So, unlike rulers who come and go, God has in mind to build an eternal kingdom through David’s offspring, namely, through Jesus. This is significant in terms of its **historic scope. This kingdom begins in a specific time and place but will last forever...**God uses----- human beings to participate in and be key players in God’s own kingdom which is eternal.

Jesus’ second ancestor named in verse 1, but first in terms of family history is Abraham. What’s so special about Abraham? Abraham is the recipient of God’s covenant promise that is significant in terms of scope also.

We learn from Genesis 12, that when God extends an invitation to Abram, it involves leaving behind his country of origin, his father and family and to go

to a land that God would show him. His obedient response evokes from God a blessing:

**<sup>2</sup> “I will make you into a great nation,  
and I will bless you;**

I will make your name great,  
and you will be a blessing.<sup>[a]</sup>

**<sup>3</sup> I will bless those who bless you,  
and whoever curses you I will curse;  
and all peoples on earth  
will be blessed through you.”**

The last time you were at the beach, how many of you tried to count the grains of sand? (What, nobody?) When you could last clearly see the night sky without interference of weather or city lights—how many of you attempted to count the stars in the Milky Way? What, not one of you?

I suppose no one took up the challenge because it would be an exercise in futility, right? Too many to count. What would be the point?

**God’s blessing to Abraham is reiterated in Genesis 22:17-18**, when God says:

**<sup>17</sup> I will surely bless you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore.** Your descendants will take possession of the cities of their enemies,<sup>18</sup> **and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed**, because you have obeyed me.”

As the recipient of God’s covenant promise, the impact of Abraham’s involvement is significant in terms of scope also. Through Abraham’s offspring—namely Jesus—**ALL the nations on the earth** will be blessed.

**From the very first verse of his Gospel, Matthew is communicating Good News to/for ALL people—every tribe and every nation, and for ALL Time – “to infinity and beyond”! Who knew all of that was packed into the first sentence of the first book of the NT?!**

And that is just the beginning. Matthew lists three sets of 14 “begats”. Unless this is your family tree, it could be really boring...but if you are a believer, **it IS your family tree and mine**. (It is quite likely that Matthew relied upon an existing genealogy, as there are detailed ones in the first 9 chapters of I Chronicles.)

What is unique about Matthew's genealogy is that **he includes five women**, four are our focus today. **Normally women were not named** in Jewish genealogies. Furthermore, **three of the five women were Gentiles NOT Jewish. And three of the five were questionable characters.**

**Tamar** (Genesis 38), twice widowed, was impregnated by her father-in-law who mistook her for a temple prostitute. One of her twin boys, Perez becomes a forbearer/great-great-grandfather of Jesus (Ruth 4:18-21).

**Rahab**, a prostitute and resident of Jericho, hid the men that Joshua had sent to spy out the land. She lied to protect them, and helped them escape in exchange for her and her family's freedom when the Israelites invaded and attacked Jericho. (Joshua 2-6). **Rahab is mentioned three times in the NT: here as the great-great-grandmother of Jesus**, in the roll call of faith (Hebrews 11:31) and she is cited by James (2:25) as an exemplar of good works.

**Ruth, originally from Moab, is related to Jesus by marriage.** First by marriage to the son of Naomi. Naomi and Ruth and her other daughter in law are all three widowed, but Ruth decides to cast in her lot with Naomi and Naomi's people and Naomi's God. Together they migrate to Naomi's home in Bethlehem where **Ruth eventually marries Boaz. Boaz is King David's great-great-grandfather.**

And finally **Bathsheba**. You know the story. According to one commentator, **Matthew blushes for he cannot bring himself to use her name, calling her instead "the wife of Uriah the Hittite"**. Perhaps. But blushing or not, the responsibility for what happens to Bathsheba falls squarely on King David who was home in the spring time when all his troops, including Uriah, are off at war. **Temptation, lust, seduction, an unplanned pregnancy.** In an attempt to cover it up, David goes to great lengths, but his efforts are foiled and he manipulates the murder of Uriah. Then, "he brought her to his house, and she became his wife and bore him a son" (2 Samuel 11:27). **Solomon is another ancestor of Jesus.**

**To what purpose does Matthew include these four women in Jesus' genealogy?**

These women are problematic for several reasons. Three of the four of them have questionable morality. Two give birth to children under less than ideal circumstances. One is a practitioner of the world's oldest profession, who lies to the authorities and shelters spies. But Rahab does so because she

perceives that the God of the Israelites is going to be victorious and she wants to be on the winning side. Perhaps somewhere in there is a germ of faith.

All four of these women do have something in common: not one of them is Jewish. They come from different gentile/Canaanite "tribes", and yet here they are in the genealogy of our Lord.

**To what purpose would God include these women, in this promise of a kingdom for all time and for all people? Ah, perhaps there is a clue right there.**

Not one of us—since Adam and Eve—save Christ alone, is or has been without sin. All were and all are flawed human beings...doing our best to make sense of life as we are experiencing and living it. This genealogy (and any for that matter) disabuses us of any pride that we might take in past generations, in that, for all the good that some may have accomplished, likely there are those who inflicted equal amounts of harm.

I read that one celebrity asked Mr. Gates, host of Finding your Roots, to remove those in his family tree who were discovered to have been slave owners. I suppose one could "prune that branch from the family tree", however it would not change the truth--that he had slave-owning relatives. **So Matthew's genealogy of Jesus reminds us that pride and denial can be two sides of the same coin.**

In other words, every family history has within it "branches we'd like to prune", chapters that we'd like to erase: affairs, divorce, lawbreakers, drug addicts, embezzlers, you name it--you'll find unsavory characters somewhere down the line. But there are good and righteous people too--people who step up, who make a difference, who serve and sacrifice for others.

**The very, very Good News, is that God uses ordinary people, flawed human beings--not unlike but in fact, very much like you and me--to accomplish God's life-saving purposes in this world!**

If God can use Abraham, David, Tamar, Rahab, Bathsheba and Ruth, (Scoundrels, saints and sinners all!) do you suppose God might use you or me to be part of "good-newsing" our world?

I hope so! Who else is there??! God's relying on you and me to be bearers of Good News! (Especially during Advent!!)

**From the first verse of his Gospel to the last, the Great Commission where Jesus commands us to “make disciples of all nations” (28:19-20) Matthew reminds us that the coming of the Savior into the world is an event of epic proportion...in time and scope.**

**Jesus’ kingdom is and shall be eternal, and it will include people of every race, of every tribe and tongue, and nation!**

The promise to Abraham—that all people will be blessed through his descendants--is fulfilled through these four women, from four different non-Jewish “tribes”.

This is why the angels proclaim to the Shepherds (those again, who were “outsiders” :  
(Luke 2:10-12)

<sup>10</sup>But the angel said to them, **“Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. <sup>11</sup>Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. <sup>12</sup>This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.”**

Indeed—This is Good News even today—for outcasts, insiders/outsideers, men/women, children and teens, regardless of class or clan—The Savior whose birth we celebrate brings salvation to ALL THE PEOPLE...for All Time. Halleluia!

**The invitation to the table is to all who trust Jesus Christ as Savior. For Jesus said:**

***People will come from east and west and north and south, and will take their places at the feast in the kingdom of God. (Luke 13:29)***

**A place has been reserved for you! What we share today is actually just a foretaste—an appetizer, if you will—of the feast that Jesus promises. I don’t know about you, but I can hardly wait!**

**Join me in prayer:**

**Gracious God: How grateful we are that you chose to work your life saving ways in us and through us, indeed, the very sinners Jesus came to save. Set these elements apart from their daily to their sacred use, that we might indeed experience a taste of your infinite love, your inclusive grace, your eternal kingdom. In the name of Jesus, the Messiah, Amen.**

## Matthew 1 New International Version (NIV)

# The Genealogy of Jesus the Messiah

**1** This is the genealogy<sup>[a]</sup> of Jesus the Messiah<sup>[b]</sup> the son of David, the son of Abraham:

<sup>2</sup> Abraham was the father of Isaac,

Isaac the father of Jacob,

Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers,

<sup>3</sup> Judah the father of Perez and Zerah, whose mother was Tamar,

Perez the father of Hezron,

Hezron the father of Ram,

<sup>4</sup> Ram the father of Amminadab,

Amminadab the father of Nahshon,

Nahshon the father of Salmon,

<sup>5</sup> Salmon the father of Boaz, whose mother was Rahab,

Boaz the father of Obed, whose mother was Ruth,

Obed the father of Jesse,

<sup>6</sup> and Jesse the father of King David.

David was the father of Solomon, whose mother had been Uriah's wife,

<sup>7</sup> Solomon the father of Rehoboam,

Rehoboam the father of Abijah,

Abijah the father of Asa,

<sup>8</sup> Asa the father of Jehoshaphat,

Jehoshaphat the father of Jehoram,

Jehoram the father of Uzziah,

<sup>9</sup> Uzziah the father of Jotham,

Jotham the father of Ahaz,

Ahaz the father of Hezekiah,

<sup>10</sup> Hezekiah the father of Manasseh,

Manasseh the father of Amon,

Amon the father of Josiah,

<sup>11</sup> and Josiah the father of Jeconiah<sup>[c]</sup> and his brothers at the time of the exile to Babylon.

<sup>12</sup> After the exile to Babylon:

Jeconiah was the father of Shealtiel,

Shealtiel the father of Zerubbabel,

<sup>13</sup> Zerubbabel the father of Abihud,

Abihud the father of Eliakim,

Eliakim the father of Azor,

<sup>14</sup>Azor the father of Zadok,

Zadok the father of Akim,

Akim the father of Elihud,

<sup>15</sup>Elihud the father of Eleazar,

Eleazar the father of Matthan,

Matthan the father of Jacob,

<sup>16</sup>and Jacob the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary, and Mary was the mother of Jesus who is called the Messiah.

<sup>17</sup>Thus there were fourteen generations in all from Abraham to David, fourteen from David to the exile to Babylon, and fourteen from the exile to the Messiah.