

Psalm 139 Family Trees

Matthew 1:1-17

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Every family tree has its share of bad apples. For the past thirty years, my older sister has been the family historian/genealogist. She has traveled all over the United States checking out court houses, court records, cemeteries, and hospitals to learn as much as she could about our family tree. If my memory serves me correctly, I think that in her travels to Europe, she made time to interview a distant relative to make sure she had her historical facts straight. That's why our family was surprised by one of the findings she shared with us on my father's 90th birthday.

Allow me to set the stage before I continue. Growing up, I did not hear a lot about my father's father or my great-grandfather. Because my grandfather had died before I was born, there simply was not much reason for us to bring up his life or that of his father. I heard a few things about my grandfather, but very little of my great-grandfather. This absence of information and my sister's inborn curiosity about our roots was probably the catalyst that got her looking into our heritage.

I remember one summer after graduation from college I accompanied my father to a storage unit to pick up something. While we were there, I noticed an old scarred and scratched desk. I asked him, "Where did this come from? I've never seen it before." My dad told me that it belonged in the office of my great-grandfather, the senator of Montana, William A. Clark (January 8, 1839 – March 2, 1925). That was the first time I had ever heard that we had a politician in our family. I asked Dad about him, and he gave me a brief answer. He simply was a man of influence, and he and my great-grandmother set up orphanages. He told me that it was his grandmother who was the real saint in our family, making sure that they all went to church. But as it concerned my great-grandfather, that's all I knew about him.

So on the night of my father's 90th birthday, before all the family showed up to celebrate, my sister requested that we have at least one hour to view a

movie/slide show she had been working on for years that revealed my dad's roots. Reluctantly, we all agreed.

So after dinner we gathered around the TV to watch her production, part of which was made up of a thirty-minute program that the History Channel had produced as a biography of my great-grandfather. Talk about a shock! I knew that all families have a few skeletons in their closet, but I never expected this. (The expression "skeletons in the family closet" refers to family members whose shameful ways and deeds the family would rather remain hidden from public view.)

Besides being a man of influence, a banker, miner, railroad magnet, and a philanthropist, we learned that night that this man was, like many politicians, a crook! He used his immense wealth to buy his way into office. He was a scoundrel.

When the lights turned on after my sister's production concluded, there was a brief silence. For me, my heart was heavy with shame. I didn't want to be recognized as this man's relative. I couldn't speak. Dad finally did so in a quiet voice. He simply said, "I wish I had never seen that!"

The Bible doesn't keep the door shut on the skeletons in the family closets of its heroes. Even when it comes to tracing the ancestry of the Messiah, the Bible in **Matthew 1:1-17** specifically reveals the key figures in Jesus' genealogy, including those that were unsavory. The list includes forty-two names of men, which represent forty-two generations beginning with Abraham. There are also references to five women, which is odd for a Jewish genealogy. Women typically were not mentioned in genealogies, so that is a sign that there is something special to pay attention to concerning these women. And in addition, three of them were not Jews, which again is odd for a Jewish genealogy. There are no other non-Jews mentioned in Jesus lineage. So this genealogy, from the get go, is unusual, and God has it included for a reason in His Word.

All of this makes us wonder why God would introduce the first chapter of the New Testament with such a record. Most of us would probably just skip these genealogical sections of the Bible when we read through, because they make

no sense or appear boring. They don't seem relevant to us--all of these strange names we can barely pronounce. But in fact, they are often a loaded treasure chest of information, that when unearthed reveal important facts to understand if we are going to get a grip on what's most important in life.

So, let's quickly read through this list and then begin mining it for the treasures that lay within. Beginning with **verse 1**, we read:

¹The record of the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah, the son of David the son of Abraham: ²Abraham was the father of Isaac, Isaac the father of Jacob, and Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers. ³Judah was the father of Perez and Zerah by Tamar; Perez was the father of Hezron, and Hezron the father of Ram. ⁴Ram was the father of Amminadab, Amminadab the father Nahshon, and Nahshon the father of Salmon. ⁵Salmon was the father of Boaz by Rahab; Boaz was the father of Obed by Ruth, and Obed the father of Jesse. ⁶Jesse was the father of David the king. David was the father of Solomon by Bathsheba who had been the wife of Uriah. ⁷Solomon was the father of Rehoboam, Rehoboam the father of Abijah, and Abijah the father of Asa. ⁸Asa was the father of Jehoshaphat, Jehoshaphat the father of Joram, and Joram the father of Uzziah. ⁹Uzziah was the father of Jotham, Jotham the father Ahaz, and Ahaz the father of Hezekiah. ¹⁰Hezekiah was the

father of Manasseh, Manasseh the father Amon, and Amon the father of Josiah. ¹¹Josiah became the father of Jeconiah and his brothers at the time of the deportation to Babylon. ¹²After the deportation to Babylon, Jeconiah became the father of Shealtiel and Shealtiel the father of Zerubbabel. ¹³Zerubbabel was the father of Abihud, Abihud the father of Eliakim, and Eliakim the father of Azor. ¹⁴Azor was the father of Zadok, Zadok the father Achim, and Achim the father of Eliud. ¹⁵Eliud was the father of Eleazar, Eleazar the father of Matthan, and Matthan the father of Jacob. ¹⁶Jacob was the father of Joseph the husband of Mary, by whom Jesus was born, who is called the Messiah. ¹⁷So 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.

Matthew makes two main points with his genealogy: first, that God fulfilled His promise that the Messiah would come from the household of David. And specifically, that Jesus is the son of David. I find it interesting that Matthew lists first, in **1:1**, the fact that Jesus is the son of David and then the son of Abraham, when chronologically Abraham lived before David. Matthew's emphasis here is obviously that Jesus is a son of David.

Also, Matthew divides his genealogy in four ways:

1. The origins of David's kingdom **2-6a**
2. The rise and decline of David's kingdom **6b-11**
3. The eclipse of David's kingdom **12-16a**

And then, at the moment of despair, when it seemed to all of the Jews that God's promise to David that his heir would occupy the throne forever and that his Kingdom would be raised up again was lost, Jesus the son of David, the promised Messiah, was born! With Jesus' pronounced birth we have

4. The arrival of the Davidic king and His kingdom **16b-17**

That is kind of an outline of the flow of thought for this genealogy.

Matthew's second purpose in listing Jesus ancestry is to trace Jesus' legal right to the throne through his father Joseph. In writing of this, Matthew makes an important shift in **verse 16**. Up to this point, he has written, "So and so was the father of so and so." But when he gets to Joseph, he changes that formula and states that Joseph was "**the husband of Mary, by whom Jesus was born.**" The pronoun "**whom**" is feminine in Greek, showing that Joseph was not the physical father of Jesus. But rather, as the physical human part was concerned, only Mary was involved. As Matthew explains in the rest of the chapter, Mary was a virgin until after the birth of Jesus. Mary's impregnation came not from Joseph but from the Holy Spirit.

Why is this important? If Jesus had been the physical descendant of Joseph, He would have been barred from the throne of David by a curse on Jeconiah, as stated in **Jeremiah 22:30**. But instead, even though Joseph was not Jesus' physical father, Jesus became a legal descendant of Joseph by being the son of Mary and, in our modern terms, adopted by Joseph. Hence, Jesus is rightfully declared a son of David, the Messiah!

In the end, Jesus is not only the son of David but also the son of Abraham as **verse 1** states. Jesus being the son of Abraham takes us back to the promise that God made with Abraham two thousand years before Christ, in which He promised that all the families of the earth (both Hebrew and non-Hebrew) would be blessed through Abraham's seed, Jesus (**Genesis 12:1-3**). Matthew's genealogy shows us that Jesus, the son of David and the son of

Abraham, brings the blessing of Abraham beyond Israel to the nations. This comes to its fullness at the end of Matthew when Jesus commands His disciples to go and “**make disciples of all the nations**” (28:19).

Looking at the list of men mentioned, we see that there is an adulterer who murdered his lover’s husband to cover up the misdeed. There are idolaters, liars, and a man who committed incest with his daughter-in-law whom he thought was a prostitute (which says something about his lack of moral character). Another was a notoriously wicked king who burned his sons to death as offerings to a pagan idol. The point is that Jesus had many men who were family skeletons in his lineage.

Excluding Mary, the mother of Jesus, of the four remaining women referenced, only one is of Hebrew descent. The others were from idol worshipping backgrounds, and three were notorious for their immorality. Like the situation with the men, Jesus’ lineage also had its fair share of female skeletons in the closet.

All in all, this list is made up of a rather motley crew that produced the Savior of the world! It is obviously not fabricated, because no religious Jew would have put together a list like this if he were trying to impress his readers with the pedigree of the Messiah.

I have taught this passage before, and I have even taught on the four different women named here. Back then, I knew there was more treasure in the text to uncover, but until now I did not have time to unearth it. In my research and preparation for this morning, I came across some notes by another pastor who made an amazing observation that I want to share with you. His name is Pastor Stephen Cole of Flagstaff, Arizona. I have several suggestions I uncovered for why God led Matthew to introduce his Gospel with Jesus’ ancestry, when neither Mark nor John did. But in reading Pastor Cole’s notes, I picked up a couple more.

So, with the remainder of our time, I want to suggest to you that Matthew’s record of Jesus’ ancestry is quite relevant for us today, for four reasons.

For one thing, as Stephen Cole observed, all of these people lived for a short while and died. So when you think about that, you are reminded that life is short. No one will live forever. Whether we die relatively young or live for a century, death and judgment before the God who knows all of our deeds is inevitable. Once the reader recognizes this observation it quickly leads to a question: “After I die, where will I spend eternity? How can I be sure of it?” Those are important questions, and you want to be sure that in answering them you don’t want to be in error. And I would add that if you are not sure, I would be happy to give you some direction to help you be sure.

A second observation about this list of names is that they reveal a broad spectrum of people. Among them are patriarchs, kings, and commoners. In addition, everyone on the list shares something in common--whether they were relatively good people or notoriously bad people, they all were sinners who needed a Savior. They were all people who had overtly disobeyed God or simply ignored Him. In **Romans 1-3**, Paul argues that everyone, whether pagan Gentiles or religious Jews, is guilty before God as rebels, suppressors of the truth about God, and sinners. Paul sums up his evaluation of the entire human race in **Romans 3:23**, “**For all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.**” In the end, this list reveals that all people everywhere are sinners and in need of a savior.

Even the godly virgin Mary, mother of the Messiah, acknowledged her need for a Savior when she prayed in **Luke 1:47**, “**And my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior.**” She goes on to say in **Luke 1:54-55** that through the One in her womb, God has remembered His mercy to Abraham and his descendants, of which Mary was one. Good people do not need God’s mercy. Sinners need His mercy. Mary knew this. Mary knew she needed a savior and was glad to have Jesus.

A third reason for God’s beginning the New Testament with this list of Christ’s ancestry is that through the lives of the four women mentioned here there is revealed a pattern for God’s saving grace. This is the main observation I gleaned from Pastor Cole’s work, and I greatly appreciate and am excited to pass it on to you. Apart from Mary, let’s look at the four other women in this list of names. As we do, you will see how each of them teaches us something important about God’s salvation as provided in Jesus Christ.

In **verse 3**, Tamar is the first woman mentioned. Tamar's story occurs in one of the most sordid chapters in the Bible, **Genesis 38**. Judah, one of the twelve sons of the patriarch Jacob, arranged a marriage between his firstborn son and Tamar, a Canaanite woman. But that Hebrew son was evil in the Lord's sight and the Lord took his life. Judah then told his second son to go in to Tamar to conceive an heir for his deceased brother. When that son dodged his responsibility, the Lord killed him as well. Judah then promised Tamar that when the third son grew up, she could be married to him. But as the years passed, Judah either forgot or ignored his promise.

Tamar, tired of waiting and believing that Judah would never fulfill his promise to her, disguised herself as a prostitute, hid her face under a veil, and tricked Judah. Not knowing who she was, Judah propositioned her and had relations with her. As a result, she became pregnant with twins, Perez and Zerah. Perez, an illegitimate child of incest, was in the line of men that led to Jesus Christ. Tamar's history illustrates that Jesus is the perfect savior for all sinners, regardless of the extent or depth of their sin.

You may think, "But I'm not as sinful as a prostitute or a swindler! I have my faults, but I'm not a terrible sinner!" Be careful! That was the mental mistake of the Jewish leaders, the Pharisees. Their self-righteousness and incorrect evaluation of God's standard of righteousness caused them to reject the only Savior whom God sent to save them.

Remember what the angel who told Joseph that Mary had conceived through the Holy Spirit said in **Matthew 1:21**, "**She will bear a Son; and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins.**" To benefit from the reason for which Jesus came to this earth, humbling himself to be born in a poor home, you must recognize in the first place that you have sinned against the Holy God and that all of your good deeds cannot measure up to atone for your sins. You need a perfect, never sinned Savior to atone for your sins.

But how do we obtain salvation? How does a person obtain forgiveness and be made right, acceptable, full and forever approved of by God? Rahab, our second woman in the list, in **verse 5**, answers that question.

Elsewhere in Scripture when Rahab is discussed, she is referred to as “Rahab the harlot.” Just as we can’t think of the disciple Thomas without thinking of the word “doubting” or his most recognizable name “Doubting Thomas,” so we can’t think of Rahab without thinking, “the harlot.” Like Tamar, Rahab was a Canaanite woman, excluded from God’s covenant people, the Hebrews. She lived in Jericho. But she knew that the city was going to be destroyed, and she believed in the God of the Hebrews, that **“He is God in heaven above and on earth beneath” (Joshua 2:11)**. So when her fellow Jerichoites came to her home in search of the enemy Hebrew spies, she hid them and pleaded with them to spare her life and the lives of her family. In the great New Testament chapter on faith, **Hebrews 11**, we read in **verse 31**, **“By faith Rahab the harlot did not perish along with those who were disobedient, after she had welcomed the spies in peace.”** She was saved **“by faith.”** Hence, Rahab’s life illustrates that salvation comes to sinners by faith in Christ.

But, someone in this audience may ask, “Doesn’t **James 2:25** state, **‘In the same way, was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way?’** So which is it, justification by faith or works? Is this a contradiction?” No. There is no contradiction. James is making the point that genuine saving faith is not merely intellectual assent. The demons have that kind of faith but are not saved. Rather, saving faith always results in or is proven by a life of obedience. As **I John 2:3** states, **“By this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments.”** This is what scripture declares elsewhere when it speaks of the **“fruits of repentance.”** Rahab’s mind changed as to what she believed about the Canaanite gods when she met the God of the Hebrews. As a result, the way she acted changed. A normal Jerichoite would not have hidden the slaves. He or she would have turned them over to the Jericho police.

Believing in or praying so that you put your confidence in Christ Jesus does not mean that He is your Savior but you can go on living as you’ve always lived. Genuine saving faith always works out in a process of a changed heart, which in turn leads to changed attitudes and actions. When one puts trust in Christ, one cannot help but be changed, because Jesus promises to transform the lives of all who come to Him.

Rahab proved that her faith was genuine by her obedience in risking her life to protect the Hebrew spies. Furthermore, the fact that Rahab is listed here as the wife of Salmon shows that she turned away from her previous life of prostitution to be a faithful wife and mother. By faith in God's promise, she experienced His salvation. By God's grace through faith in Christ, even this prostitute became an ancestor of the Savior.

The next woman mentioned here in **Matthew 1:5** is Ruth. Like Tamar and Rahab, Ruth, too, was a Gentile. She was a Moabite and thus outside of God's covenant people of the Hebrews. However, unlike Tamar, Rahab, and Bathsheba (who is referenced in **verse 6**, whom we will look at next), Ruth was a moral woman. She was married to a Jewish man who died. When her mother-in-law Naomi decided to return to Israel, out of love for her and her God, Ruth chose leave her homeland and go with Naomi. But she chose more than to leave her home and to follow her mother-in-law. She chose to worship the God of the Hebrews. Ruth made that great confession in **Ruth 1:6**, "**Your people shall be my people and your God, my God.**"

As a non-Jew, Ruth is a type of those Gentiles who are good, moral people and not flagrant sinners. But, as non-Jews, they are still under the curse of sin and in need of a savior.

Ruth, having put her faith in Naomi's God and the promised redeemer of Israel, Jesus Christ, was redeemed. This is what the Apostle Paul writes about in **Ephesians 2:8-22**. We Gentiles, we non-Jews who formerly were excluded from God's people, even if we were good but were condemned by His law, were brought into His family as His chosen bride, for by grace we were saved through faith. (**Ephesians 2:11-22**)! Hence, Ruth is a beautiful picture of the salvation by Christ that is for non-Jews as well. We too, are redeemed by faith in Christ.

Thus, notice the three-step progression laid out for us in the order of these women introduced to us in Christ's ancestry: Tamar shows that Christ brings salvation for all sinners, no matter the depth or extent of their sin. Rahab teaches us that this salvation is received through faith. Ruth illustrates that God's salvation is for Gentiles condemned by the law but redeemed by His grace.

Bathsheba is the last woman referred to in **Matthew 1**. She is called “**the wife of Uriah**.” Her name is not given, because the Jews knew who she was. Bathsheba had been made famous to all, because of her sin with King David, and because her son was the next king of Israel, Solomon. So, by calling her “**the wife of Uriah**,” Matthew subtly alludes to her and David’s sin of adultery. He is highlighting her as a sinner.

Furthermore, it is presumed that of the four women she is the only one who was a Jew, based on the words of **I Chronicles 3:5**, in which several other of David’s wives and their sons, all with Hebrew names, are listed. As such, she and David remind us of the fact that even believers can fall into gross sin. Bathsheba’s place among the ancestors of Christ shows us the salvation that Christ brings is sufficient to preserve a believer’s salvation, in spite of his or her sins. Other scriptures proclaim this same assurance of salvation for all who have put their trust in Christ. For one, we have the assurance of **Philippians 1:6** that tells us, “**He [God] who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus.**” This means that God the Father will continue to transform cracked and chipped vessels, Christians, until Jesus comes, at which time, they will be made complete, mature as God has planned for all believers to be.

This record of Christ’s genealogy and, in particular, these four women illustrates from different angles the great news that God saves sinners. Jesus shed some of his glory in heaven to be born a baby that He might one day die so that we could be saved.

If you have failed terribly, God sent this very baby Jesus for you! Jesus willingly came for you. Maybe you don’t just have skeletons in your family closet. Maybe you are the family skeleton! If so, this genealogy invites you to come to Jesus and ask Him to save you from your sins. If you have trusted in Christ as Savior but have fallen into serious sin, this genealogy invites you to turn back to Christ, experience His forgiveness, and walk in fellowship with Him again. In Christ, God has sent a Savior for sinners.

I believe there is another reason that God led Matthew to include this record of Jesus’ lineage. The fact that we have here a genealogy of Jesus Christ (**1:1**) establishes an important truth: our faith is rooted in 2000 years of fulfilled

prophetic history. Some prophecies go back to Abraham and speak of his “**seed.**” Job, the oldest book in the Bible, refers to the “**redeemer.**” Many verses prophesy that the Messiah would come from the house of David, be born of a virgin, be born in Bethlehem, and be reared in Nazareth.

Matthew is demonstrating that our faith is not built upon a myth or legend that is not supported by outside eyewitnesses of the actual events. There is no other faith built upon 2000 years of fulfilled prophecies and historical data so well supported as this presented in the Bible. Furthermore, if Matthew had fabricated this genealogy of Jesus, the Jews would have challenged him on it. Interestingly, they never have.

So this genealogy of Jesus the Messiah should give us great hope as we think on His birth. His first coming represented the fulfillment of a 2,000-year-old promise to Abraham and a 1,000-year-old promise to David. His Second Coming will fulfill the repeated New Testament promises that He will come to judge the earth.

The question is, are you ready for that day? The stories of Tamar, Ruth, Rahab, and Bathsheba show us that God’s mercy extends to all sinners who will repent and trust in Christ.

