

The Genealogy of Grace

Matthew 1:1-17

A287

Have you ever sat down for your daily devotions to meditate on the genealogies of Scripture? Just saying that seems odd, but if you attempted it, I think you'd be pleasantly surprised by what you find.

Consider the genealogy of Jesus Christ, Matthew's genealogy in particular. It tells more than who Jesus' ancestors were—it's more like an abridged tribute to God's grace throughout redemptive history.

Matthew wants us to see that Jesus, the King of Israel, is like no other king on earth. He is a king of grace—that's what His pedigree shows us. The people God chose to be a part of the Messiah's lineage reveal the wonderful grace of God to provide hope for every sinner.

I want to show you what I mean by looking at Matthew's genealogy, found in Matthew 1:1-17. I'm taking more of a logical than a chronological approach to show you four key instances of God's amazing grace.

One Woman

Jacob was the father of Joseph the husband of Mary, by whom Jesus was born, who is called the Messiah (Matthew 1:16).

In Mary, God showed His grace by choosing her to be the mother of the messianic King. Although descended from the royal line of David, Mary was an ordinary, unknown young woman. Contrary to claims of her immaculate conception, that she was conceived without original sin, Mary was just as much a sinner as every other person born.

She said so herself at the very beginning of her Magnificat, "My soul exalts the Lord, and my spirit has rejoiced in *God my Savior*" (Luke 1:46-47, italics mine). Any teaching that exalts her to a level beyond a grace-saved sinner is wholly unscriptural.

Mary did receive grace, a very generous measure of grace. God chose her to be the mother of the Savior who provided the atonement to take away her sins. It was a tremendous honor and privilege to be the mother of the Savior, and Mary knew it (Luke 2:19).

Two Men

The record of the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah, the son of David, the son of Abraham (Matthew 1:1).

Although David is remembered as a man after God's own heart (Acts 13:14), he was guilty of horrific

sin. He committed adultery with Bathsheba, and then conspired to cover his sin with the treacherous murder of her husband.

David's polygamy and poor parenting produced tragic results in his family life. When his son Amnon raped his half-sister Tamar, he did nothing (2 Sam. 13:1-22). That neglect set in motion the events that darkened the final years of David's reign. Tamar's brother Absalom murdered Amnon, usurped David's throne, and committed public immorality with David's concubines.

Abraham too, though the father of all who believe (Romans 4:11), demonstrated tremendous cowardice, fearing for his life rather than trusting in God. Two different pagan kings brought Abraham's wife Sarah into their harems. Why? Abraham told them she was his sister (Genesis 12:11-19; 20:1-18). He failed to love and protect Sarah, and brought shame on Sarah, on himself, and on the God he claimed to trust and serve.

David and Abraham were sinners, just like you and me. Yet God made Abraham the father of His chosen people, Israel, from whom the Messiah would arise. He made David father of the royal line from whom the Messiah would descend. Jesus was the Son of David by royal *descent* and Son of Abraham by racial *ascent*.

God blessed both of those men. He prospered them in life, included them in the ancestry of the One who would overcome the tragedy and shame of all their sin—"Jesus the Messiah, the son of David, the son of Abraham."

Three Eras

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 (Matthew 1:17).

Matthew's summary shows three periods, or eras, of Israel's history—the grace of God was abundant in each one.

The first period, "from Abraham to David," was that of the patriarchs, and of Moses, Joshua, and the judges. It included wandering, enslavement, deliverance, covenant-making, law-giving, conquest, and victory.

The second period, "from David to the deportation to Babylon," represents the monarchy. David, Jehoshaphat, Hezekiah, and Josiah were the only good and godly kings—the rest led Israel away from God and into trouble. That was a period of almost uninterrupted decline, degeneracy, apostasy, and tragedy. There was defeat, conquest, exile, and the destruction of Jerusalem and its Temple.

The third period, "from the deportation to Babylon to the time of Christ," was that of captivity, exile, frustration, and of marking time. It is a period of obscurity and anonymity, Israel's "Dark Ages."

Those three eras are the national genealogy of Jesus, a history mingling glory and pathos, heroism and disgrace, renown and obscurity. When Jesus entered Israel's history as her Messiah, she rejected and crucified Him. But God still elected Israel as the nation Messiah would rule, though a rebellious and undeserving nation—further testimony of His infinite grace.

Four Outcasts

Judah was the father of Perez and Zerah by Tamar . . . Salmon was the father of Boaz by Rahab, Boaz was the father of Obed by Ruth, . . . David was the father of Solomon by Bathsheba who had been the wife of Uriah (Matthew 1:3-6).

Matthew's genealogy also shows the work of God's grace in His choosing to include four former outcasts in Messiah's pedigree. In a genealogy otherwise dominated by men, these women are exceptional illustrations of God's grace.

The first outcast was Tamar, the Canaanite daughter-in-law of Judah. She gained notoriety in Genesis 38 by resorting to deception, prostitution, and incest when she couldn't get a child any other way. Tamar disguised herself as a prostitute and tricked Judah into having sexual relations with her. From that illicit union were born twin sons, Perez and Zerah, and thus Tamar and her son Perez joined Judah in the Messianic line. Despite prostitution and incest, God's grace fell on all three of those undeserving persons, including a desperate and deceptive Gentile harlot.

The second outcast was also a woman and a Gentile, but she made prostitution her livelihood. Rahab was no paragon of virtue, but she put her faith in the God of Israel and demonstrated it by protecting the two men Joshua sent to spy out her city. God spared her life and the lives of her family when Jericho was besieged and destroyed (Joshua 2:1-21; 6:22-25), and, brought her into the Messianic line. She became the wife of Salmon and the mother of the godly Boaz—David's great-grandfather.

Ruth, the wife of Boaz, was the third outcast. Though she was a Moabitess and former pagan, having no right to marry an Israelite, God's grace brought Ruth into the family of Israel, and through Boaz, into the royal line. She became the grandmother of Israel's great King David.

The fourth outcast was Bathsheba. She entered the Messianic line through adultery with David. The son of their sinful union died in infancy, but the next son born to them was Solomon (2 Samuel 11:1-27; 12:14, 24), successor to David's throne and continuer of the Messianic line. Once again, by God's grace Bathsheba became the wife of David, the mother of Solomon, and an ancestor of the Messiah.

I hope you can see how the genealogy of Jesus Christ is immeasurably more than a list of ancient names; it is even more than a list of Jesus' human forebears. It is a beautiful testimony to God's grace and to the ministry of His Son, Jesus Christ. He is truly the friend of sinners who came to call not the righteous but sinners to repentance (Matthew 9:13).

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