

Skeletons in Jesus' Family Tree

Matthew 1:1-17

Slide 1

Today, we're going to look at a passage that many think of as dull genealogy. Many dismiss this passage as boring and irrelevant.

Yet, we'd make a serious mistake if we thought lightly of any single sentence in the pages of the New Testament. Why?

2 Timothy 3:16-17, "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work."

The Bible's a unique book. Though it has existed for many centuries, it's the most taught, bought, distributed, loved and hated book in existence today.

It's not an exaggeration to say that no book has been criticized as much as the Bible.

During the Stalin era, the Marxist government derided the Bible as a book full of legends, myths, and old wives' tales. Stalin's government even established an anti-Bible Museum in Moscow.

So, why would any government take time to build and maintain such a museum? Because they knew that this One Book had the unique power to change people's lives.

These challenges to the Bible aren't history. They're continuing today. In fact, just a few month ago, a member of the Finnish Parliament was found innocent of her use of the Bible in her public communications.

Do you understand what I just said? This individual was taken to court because she quoted the Bible.

The prosecutor had charged her with “*criminal agitation against a minority group*” because she publicly questioned her own church leaders’ decision to affirm LGBT pride quoting Romans 1:24-27.

The Bible is God’s very words. It’s hated because, like a mirror, it shows our flaws and punctuates our sin, but we can’t change unless we know something’s wrong.

The Bible is a living book. Unlike any other book in existence today, the Bible has the power to change lives.

This new series we’re starting is titled, *You’ve Got the Time*, is more than a sermon series, it’s a spiritual growth campaign.

It’s a time where I’m challenging you to read the entire New Testament by the end of this series.

Surveys reveal that many people spend more time showering or using on their phone than reading their Bibles.

So, by the end of this sermon series, you’ll have had enough time to have read the entire New Testament.

So, let’s get into today’s passage; turn to Matthew 1:1-17.

Slide 2

In this passage, Matthew began his letter with the progression of Jesus’ family tree only in reverse.

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

This first verse one is an outline of Jesus’ genealogy. Verses two through seventeen fill out of the details of this outline.

Matthew 1:2-17, “Abraham was the father of Isaac, Isaac the father of Jacob, Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers, Judah the father of Perez and Zerah, whose mother was Tamar, Perez the father of Hezron, Hezron the father of Ram, Ram the father of Amminadab, Amminadab the father of Nahshon, Nahshon the father of Salmon, Salmon the father of Boaz, whose mother was Rahab, Boaz the father of Obed, whose mother was Ruth, Obed the father of Jesse, and Jesse the father of King David.

David was the father of Solomon, whose mother had been Uriah’s wife, Solomon the father of Rehoboam, Rehoboam the father of Abijah, Abijah the father of Asa, Asa the father of Jehoshaphat, Jehoshaphat the father of Jehoram, Jehoram the father of Uzziah, Uzziah the father of Jotham, Jotham the father of Ahaz, Ahaz the father of Hezekiah, Hezekiah the father of Manasseh, Manasseh the father of Amon, Amon the father of Josiah, and Josiah the father of Jeconiah and his brothers at the time of the exile to Babylon.

After the exile to Babylon: Jeconiah was the father of Shealtiel, Shealtiel the father of Zerubbabel, Zerubbabel the father of Abihud, Abihud the father of Eliakim, Eliakim the father of Azor, Azor the father of Zadok, Zadok the father of Akim, Akim the father of Elihud, Elihud the father of Eleazar, Eleazar the father of Matthan, Matthan the father of Jacob, and Jacob the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary, and Mary was the mother of Jesus who is called the Messiah.

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.”

Now, listing a person’s family tree is an odd way of starting the most significant book of all time. No other Gospel begins the way Matthew’s does. Yet, for Jewish readers of Matthew’s day, this wasn’t unusual.

Genealogies were a big deal for the Jewish people; Jewish families commonly kept private family records and took great pride in being descended from the great patriarchs such as Abraham.

Genealogies communicated a person's social standing and status. This is why Jesus' family tree is so important; it shows His pedigree.

Jesus' family line travels through many of the Old Testament luminaries such as Solomon, David, Jacob, Isaac, and Abraham, fulfilling many Biblical prophecies along the way.

Knowing this, Matthew provides us with three pivot points in Jesus' genealogy. The first, found in verses 2 - 6a, lists Jesus' family from Abraham to David.

The second, verses 6b - 11, lists Jesus' family from Solomon to the deportation (or, in other words, from Solomon to Jechoniah).

And the third pivot lists Jesus' family from the deportation to Jesus (or, from Shealtiel to Jesus Himself).

So, how can we be spiritually nourished by a genealogy?

Slide 3

When you read this genealogy, you'll see that Jesus' family tree focuses mainly on men with four notable exceptions. Matthew includes four women.

Tamar in verse three, Rahab in verse five, Ruth also in verse five, and Bathsheba at the end of verse six.

All these women were involved in some kind of scandal. Yet, all were chosen by God to form an essential part of history's greatest story.

Matthew first mentions Tamar in verse 3. Her story is found in Genesis 38. Tamar was married to a wicked man. He was so wicked that God killed him to rid the earth of his sin.

Then God commanded his brother, Onan, to father children with Tamar.

This was the custom in the days of the Old Testament so the family property would not be lost and the children would eventually provide for their mothers.

Yet, Onan, the brother-in-law, would not comply with God's command. Therefore, God killed him because of his wicked and selfish heart.

Now, since both of Onan's older sons had also been killed, Judah, Tamar's father-in-law, tells her to live as a widow in her father's home until Onan's third son was old enough to father children with her. Then Judah forgets about his daughter-in-law.

In time, Judah's wife dies. When he goes to the city of Timnah, Tamar dressed up as a prostitute and entices an unknowing Judah to sleep with her, his former daughter-in-law.

Before he leaves, Tamar had Judah leave some of his personal effects as a pledge that he would send a payment for her services. Then, Judah is faced with the consequences of his actions.

Genesis 38:24-26: "About three months later Judah was told, "Your daughter-in-law Tamar is guilty of prostitution, and as a result she is now pregnant." Judah said, "Bring her out and have her burned to death!" As she was being brought out, she sent a message to her father-in-law. "I am pregnant by the man who owns these," she said. And she added, "See if you recognize whose seal and cord and staff these are." Judah recognized them and said, "She is more righteous

than I, since I wouldn't give her to my son Shelah." And he did not sleep with her again."

Through her relation with her father-in-law, Judah, she gave birth to Perez and Zerah. You'll find the names of Judah, Tamar, Perez, Zerah in verse three.

The product of this unseemly relationship, Perez, is a great-grandfather to Jesus Christ. This family is part of Jesus' family tree.

The second woman we meet is found in Matthew 1:5, Rahab. Rahab's last name isn't known. Yet, if you study her life for any length of time, you'll soon hear her referred to as "*Rahab, the Harlot.*"

Rahab was a prostitute. She's best known for assisting the spies of Israel as they sought to occupy the territory as described in Joshua 2.

Rahab lived in Jericho; a military town nestled into the interior of the Promised Land.

It was common for prostitutes to operate inns so visitors could find a place to rest even if they had no intention of procuring their services.

The Bible tells us that Rahab feared God and therefore protected the spies. When the Israelites conquered Jericho, only her family's lives were spared of all the citizens.

According to Matthew 1, Rahab's child, Boaz, is a great-grandfather to Jesus. Yes, one of Jesus' great-grandmothers was a prostitute.

Slide 4

The third woman we meet is also found in verse 5, Ruth.

Now, Ruth was morally the least questionable of the four women. She even has her own book in the Bible that describes her story in considerable detail.

Ruth and her mother-in-law, Naomi, lived during the time of a great famine. Naomi's husband moved his family to Moab in order to find food and a better place to live.

Unfortunately, Naomi's husband and two sons, including Ruth's husband, died while they were in Moab. Because they had no children or relatives in Moab to care for them, they returned to Israel.

But the story doesn't end there. Instead, we learn that Ruth, as she scavenged for food caught the eye of a prominent landowner, Boaz, and later married him.

Boaz rescued both Ruth and her former mother-in-law from the grips of poverty. But what makes Ruth unique is her bloodline. She wasn't Jewish she was a Moabite.

The fourth woman we meet is Bathsheba in verse 6. At the very thought of the fourth women's name, even Matthew can't name her directly but only says, "*by the wife of Uriah.*"

Bathsheba was identified as an exceptionally beautiful woman. Remember David, while taking some time off from war, saw her bathing as he walked on his roof and desired her.

We're not told how long David deliberated over his plan to have her, but in 2 Samuel 11:4, the writer tells that he sent messengers for her and "*he slept with her.*"

What David didn't consider was Bathsheba becoming pregnant. So, in an attempt to conceal her pregnancy and his part in it, David had her husband killed in battle.

God then sent a preacher named Nathan to confront David with his sin, after which God took David's child's life as punishment for his sin, but the story doesn't end there.

David and Bathsheba had another child, Solomon, who's also in Jesus' family tree. David, Bathsheba, and Solomon are great-grandparents of Jesus. Her story is found in 2 Samuel 11-12.

As an aside, a closer look at these women shows that all four were foreigners.

Tamar was from Aram, which made her a Canaanite. Rahab was from Jericho, which also made her a Canaanite, Ruth was a Moabite, and Bathsheba was a Hittite.

Now, the big question here is, "*How can this genealogy feed me spiritually?*" Three of these women were involved in immoral sexual relationships.

These three women were notable sinners: Tamar plays the prostitute to seduce Judah; Rahab is a prostitute; and Bathsheba commits adultery with David.

The inclusion of all four women in Jesus' genealogy is all the more remarkable as you contrast the names of certain women who aren't listed.

For example, nowhere does Matthew mention such good women as Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel, or Leah.

These four matriarchs were the wives of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and they are conspicuous by their absence.

For the patriarchal Jewish society of the day, you would've included the names of certain women if their purity or dignity would've enhanced the pedigree.

Yet, one gets the impression that Matthew pored over his Old Testament until he could locate the most questionable relationships possible.

You see, Matthew wanted to preach the Gospel even when telling the story of Jesus' family.

By including these four women, Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, and Bathsheba, he's able to tell the story of God's deep forgiveness and wide mercy.

Had all of the descendants been alive and gathered together in one place, Jesus would've be happy to introduced His family which included an adulterer, a prostitute, and Tamar, who forced herself to sleep with her father in law in order to avoid the shame of being barren.

Quite a family reunion. Reminds me more of a Jerry Springer show than a family. Jesus is no ordinary Savior. He has the power to flip the most entrenched sinners and make them whole.

Slide 5

Have you heard the story of Steve Saint. Steve was just five years old when his father, along with four other missionaries, was martyred in Ecuador more than a half-century ago.

In just two short years, two of the widows of these missionaries, lived among the very people who killed their husbands.

Steve became family friends with the very man who killed his father. In fact, he calls this man his grandfather today.

But at five years of age, Steve saw little of this. At five years of age, his father had promised that he would teach him to fly.

And now, he had no one to teach him. His fascinating story was even made into a movie, *The End of the Spear*.

In the process of making the movie, Steve explained that a replica of his father's plane was needed.

Although his father didn't have the time to teach him how to fly and build a plane, Steve had figured it out through the years. So, Steve built the plane that was used in the movie.

More than this, there was no one around who wanted to fly the plane in the remote jungles of Ecuador much less land the plane in a 300-foot airstrip along a jungle river.

So, Steve Saint, the son of Missionary Pilot, Nate Saint, flew the plane for the movie, landing the plane on sandbars and in a tight place.

Where did Steve learn to fly now that his father died? God arranged it. When Steve went to Wheaton College outside of Chicago, he bought an old WW II airplane for \$2,200.

He offered free rides, unless you got scared. If you got scared and grabbed a hold of the two bars in front of you, you paid Steve \$10. He paid his way through school giving free rides.

Although Steve never learned to fly from his father, God had arranged for him to learn. "*Everything happens for a reason,*" is something we often say.

A young boy's father isn't around to teach him to fly and yet he builds a replica of the very plane his father flew in order to tell his father's story.

Even though his father died trying to reach the Auca people with the Gospel, Steve calls the man who killed his father “grandfather.” The Gospel of Jesus’ death brought reconciliation.

The Puritans knew this as Providence. Providence refers to God’s invisible hand turning random and chaotic events of life into His order.

Providence literally means “to see beforehand,” where God funnels history.

You can see this clearly when you examine Jesus’ family tree. This family tree displays God’s grand purpose throughout history. Jesus’ family embraces the whole history of God’s work with His people.

It brackets the calling of Abraham to the end of time. This is significant because the numerous people involved, and the number of years involved.

If you met the person who coordinates major sporting events... the person who arranges all the bands, the concessions, the media, and the VIPs, I think you’d be impressed.

So too with Jesus’ tree as God presents His coordination ability as He compresses thousands of years into this one family tree.

Like the Amazon River that snakes through the jungles of South America, God weaves His purpose through the lives of misfits and the downtrodden to arrive at His Son.

The skeletons just didn’t happen to appear in Jesus’ family tree, God placed each one there on purpose. Who else but God could bring purity out of such scandal?

After His birth, Jesus would turn peasant fishermen and a tax collector into men of great honor by making them part of His Twelve Disciples.

Even in our lives, God hasn't made any accidents. It may seem like chaos, but if you look through God's lens, you'll see His steady and sure hand.

Remember, God never has a plan B, all things work out as He has planned.