

WHY DID MATTHEW START WITH JESUS' GENEALOGY?

Matthew 1:1-18

A number of years ago, my cousin Susan began researching our family genealogy on my mother's side: the Kingdon Family. Her research took her to Illinois, New York and eventually to Cornwall-Devon in southwest England. Susan did a complete write up and gifted our family with a family genealogy stretching back to the 1700's.

She found a surprise in our family tree; our forefather who immigrated from England to America in the 1700's was an outlaw running from the law! He caught a ship to America to avoid prosecution for poaching! So if you've ever felt like there was something dark about me, now you know...!

I not only am descended from an outlaw on my mother's side, but also on my father's. Somewhere in our shadowy past our last named was changed to Nelson in order to avoid the pokey. Family rumor is that our actual surname was McColm; I might be part Scottish. That would explain why I fell in love with a Scottish lass (Cathy is a McDougall)!

We can chuckle about the outlaws in my family, but that's not something I'm going to include on my resume for a pastoral position. "Oh, by the way, I come from a long line of criminals"!

Jesus had people in His family tree who didn't enhance His resume. But rather than cover these up, the New Testament begins by highlighting these less than stellar branches of Jesus' family tree.

The first book of the New Testament, the Gospel of Matthew, begins with Jesus' genealogy. Matthew's theme is Jesus, the Messiah-King. Matthew quotes the Old Testament over 60 times. He shows that Jesus fulfills the OT prophecies concerning the first coming of the Messiah-King.

The expectation that Messiah would King in the line of King David is rooted in God's unconditional covenant with King David. The Davidic Covenant is recorded in 2 Samuel 7:8-17.

² Samuel 7:8-17 (ESV)

8 Now, therefore, thus you shall say to my servant David, 'Thus says the Lord of hosts, I took you from the pasture, from following the sheep, that you should be prince over my people Israel. 9 And I have been with you wherever you went and have cut off all your enemies from before you. And I will make for you a great name, like the name of the great ones of the earth. 10 And I will appoint a place for my people Israel and will plant them, so that they may dwell in their own place and be disturbed no more. And violent men shall afflict them no more, as formerly, 11 from the time that I appointed judges over my people Israel. And I will give you rest from all your enemies. Moreover, the Lord declares to you that the Lord will make you a house. 12 When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. 13 He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. 14 I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son. When he commits iniquity, I will discipline him with the rod of men, with the stripes of the sons of men, 15 but my steadfast love will not depart from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away from before you. 16 And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me. Your throne shall be established forever.'" 17 In accordance with all these words, and in accordance with all this vision, Nathan spoke to David.

The Davidic Covenant not only set the expectation that Messiah would be King; it also established one of the requirements to be King. A potential King of Israel must be a descendant of King David.

Matthew leading his gospel with Jesus' genealogy makes sense. It must be shown that Jesus is a descendant of David if He is to qualify as King. But there's a twist: the genealogy Matthew records proves Jesus *is not* qualified to be King of Israel!

Before I explain, let's take a look at the genealogy.

JESUS' LESS-THAN-PRISTINE GENEALOGY (MATTHEW 1:1-17)

First, the context indicates this is Jesus' genealogy on Joseph's side. Jesus' genealogy on Mary's side is recorded in the Gospel of Luke.

Second, in this genealogy, Matthew does not attempt to record every name in the family line. In fact, Matthew omits names in order to create three sets of 14 names.

Matthew 1:17 (ESV)

17 So all the generations from Abraham to David were fourteen generations, and from David to the deportation to Babylon fourteen generations, and from the deportation to Babylon to the Christ fourteen generations.

Matthew probably created these three sets of 14 names as a mnemonic device to aid memorization of the genealogy. The number 14 may have been based on the numerical value of the Hebrew consonants in King David's name.

Third, Matthew seriously deviates from Jewish tradition by including women. Even more so, he omits prominent Jewish women in Jesus' line such as Sarah or Rebekah but includes four Gentile women all of whom are tainted by sexual immorality.

Matthew 1:1-6 (ESV)

1 The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.

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

And David was the father of Solomon by **the wife of Uriah**,

- Tamar engaged in prostitution and incest (Genesis 38).
- Rahab was a Canaanite prostitute (Joshua 2).
- Ruth was a Moabitess – a people born of incest by Lot and his daughter (Genesis 19:30-38).
- “The wife of Uriah”, Bathsheba, was probably a Hittite. She committed adultery with King David (2 Samuel 11).

Why does Matthew deviate and include these women in Messiah's genealogy?

First century Jewish culture considered women and children as non-persons. By including these women, Matthew honors them. By including these four whose sin is obvious, Matthew is highlighting God's grace and the fact that the Messiah saves sinners, not just the “righteous” of Pharasaic Judaism. By including these four Matthew is also making the point that salvation is not for Jews only but Gentiles as well.

Starting from verses 1 & 2, Matthew's genealogy clearly establishes the fact that Joseph is descended from the kingly line of David.

THE CURSE OF JECHONIAH (1:11-12)

Matthew 1:1-2 (ESV)

1 The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.

2 Abraham was the father of Isaac, and Isaac the father of Jacob, and Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers,

Joseph's genealogy starts with Abraham showing Joseph is Jewish. Verses 6-16 show that Joseph is from the royal line of David:

Matthew 1:6-16 (ESV)

⁶ and Jesse the father of David the king.

And David was the father of Solomon by the wife of Uriah, ⁷ and Solomon the father of Rehoboam, and Rehoboam the father of Abijah, and Abijah the father of Asaph, ⁸ and Asaph the father of Jehoshaphat, and Jehoshaphat the father of Joram, and Joram the father of Uzziah, ⁹ and Uzziah the father of Jotham, and Jotham the father of Ahaz, and Ahaz the father of Hezekiah, ¹⁰ and Hezekiah the father of Manasseh, and Manasseh the father of Amos, and Amos the father of Josiah, ¹¹ and Josiah the father of Jechoniah and his brothers, at the time of the deportation to Babylon.

¹² And after the deportation to Babylon: Jechoniah was the father of Shealtiel, and Shealtiel the father of Zerubbabel, ¹³ and Zerubbabel the father of Abiud, and Abiud the father of Eliakim, and Eliakim the father of Azor, ¹⁴ and Azor the father of Zadok, and Zadok the father of Achim, and Achim the father of Eliud, ¹⁵ and Eliud the father of Eleazar, and Eleazar the father of Matthan, and Matthan the father of Jacob, ¹⁶ and Jacob the father of Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom Jesus was born, who is called Christ.

To us, it looks like Jesus meets the first requirement for Kingship; through Joseph, His adopted father, Jesus is a descendant of King David. This is what many commentaries and Bible notes teach. But this is incorrect. For Jews trained in Jewish history, verses 11 & 12 stick out like a sore thumb.

Joseph is a descendant of *Jechoniah!*

Game over.

End of story.

Jesus' bid for the crown is finished.

Why?

Because the second requirement to be King is to NOT BE DESCENDED FROM JECHONIAH.

Why?

God cursed Jechoniah. Around 598B.C. God cursed Jechoniah (also called *Coniah*). The crux of the curse is that no descendant of Jechoniah would ever have the right to sit upon the throne of David.

Jeremiah 22:24-30 (ESV)

²⁴ "As I live, declares the Lord, though Coniah the son of Jehoiakim, king of Judah, were the signet ring on my right hand, yet I would tear you off ²⁵ and give you into the hand of those who seek your life, into the hand of those of whom you are afraid, even into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon and into the hand of the Chaldeans. ²⁶ I will hurl you and the mother who bore you into another country, where you were not born, and there you shall die. ²⁷ But to the land to which they will long to return, there they shall not return."

²⁸ Is this man Coniah a despised, broken pot, a vessel no one cares for?

Why are he and his children hurled and cast into a land that they do not know?

²⁹ O land, land, land, hear the word of the LORD!

³⁰ Thus says the LORD: "Write this man down as childless, a man who shall not succeed in his days, for none of his offspring shall succeed in sitting on the throne of David and ruling again in Judah."

This is the *curse of Jechoniah*.

Joseph, Jesus' adopted father, is under the curse of Jechoniah. None of Joseph's descendants are qualified to reign as King over Israel. If Jesus is the *biological* son of Joseph He is **disqualified** to be King. Matthew's Jewish audience knew this. Jesus' Jewish enemies knew this.

Matthew records Joseph's genealogy to show that **Jesus is not the biological son of Joseph**.

The virgin birth of Jesus protected Him from the curse of Jechoniah.

Jesus' right to the throne of David comes through Mary. Mary is a descendant of King David but not through the line of Jechoniah (Luke 3:30).

Matthew makes clear Jesus is not Joseph's biological son two ways. In verse 16 Matthew writes:

Matthew 1:16 (ESV)

¹⁶ and Jacob the father of Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom Jesus was born, who is called Christ.

In the Greek text, "of whom" is feminine in form and can only refer to Mary. In the rest of the genealogy the formula is "and Jacob the father of Joseph". But regarding Jesus, Matthew breaks out of that formula to make it clear Joseph is not the father of Jesus, but the husband of Mary. Mary and Mary only is the biological parent of Jesus.

Matthew makes this point even more explicit in Matthew 1:18:

Matthew 1:18 (ESV)

¹⁸ Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit.

By virtue of His virgin birth through Mary, Jesus meets both requirements necessary to be King of Israel. He is a descendant of King David, but not through the line of Jechoniah.

The genealogies of Israel's tribes, clans and families were kept in the Temple in Jerusalem. In 70A.D. all the genealogies of Israel were incinerated when the Romans burned the Temple to the ground.

But through Matthew and Luke, the genealogies of Jesus are preserved.

At His first coming Israel rejected Jesus' offer of the Kingdom. That was no surprise to God; He revealed the rejection of the Messiah-King through His Old Testament prophets. But He also revealed the Messiah-King will come a second time, not as a baby, but as a conquering King.

Jesus is coming again to claim His throne and establish His kingdom on earth. The Apostle John was privileged to see Jesus' coming in a vision:

Revelation 19:11-16 (ESV)

¹¹ Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse! The one sitting on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war. ¹² His eyes are like a flame of fire, and on his head are many diadems, and he has a name written that no one knows but himself. ¹³ He is clothed in a robe dipped in blood, and the name by which he is called is The Word of God. ¹⁴ And the armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, were following him on white horses. ¹⁵ From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron. He will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty. ¹⁶ On his robe and on his thigh he has a name written, King of kings and Lord of lords.

How can you guarantee you will be part of Jesus' Kingdom and not an outcast? Study out the life and teachings of Jesus and put your faith in the fact that He died on the cross to pay the penalty for your sins and rose again to give you eternal life with Him. Make Him King of your life today.