

Text: Acts 14:11
St Stephen's

Dec 24th, 2008
Christmas Eve

God Came Down...

Pedigree...

List of family names...

I've often thought it strange that Matthew would begin the New Testament with a genealogy. Can you imagine a modern author starting that way? Can you imagine a newspaper writing a lead article about the events of Jesus' birth and dedicating the first four paragraphs to his lineage. It would never be shown. But then again, Matthew wasn't a Hollywood scriptwriter competing for airtime. He was introducing us to someone, and he wrote quite an introduction.

This is a record of the ancestors of Jesus the Messiah, a descendant of David and of Abraham

Matthew 1.1

It is quite a record! Matthew lists three sets of fourteen families, about **42 in all**, tracing the lineage of Jesus in successive steps first from Abraham to David, then from David to the exile in Babylon, then from the exile to the birth in Bethlehem.

If you were to rattle off a list of 42 of your relatives, I'd nod off pretty quick. Maybe you would, too. But not an ancient Jew. To them **lineage meant everything**. For a Jew this was natural, and interesting, and actually the only way to tell the story of a man's life. Your lineage said who you were, where you came from, what you were made of.

A Surprising List of Names

Dig into the list and you notice some surprises:

- For starters we have a long list of **failed leaders**
 - **Abraham** was the father of this nation; do you remember that he had this habit of lying to save his skin? ([Gen. 12:10–20](#)).

- His grandson **Jacob** carried this to new heights; he cheated his brother, lied to his father, got conned and then conned his uncle ([Genesis 27, 29](#)).
- Jacob's son **Judah** was so blinded by sex that he sought out a prostitute, who turned out to be his daughter-in-law. When he found out he threatened to burn her to death for prostitution ([Genesis 38](#)).
- You wouldn't miss **David** himself, and you remember the story of **Bathsheba**, who knew exactly who was looking from the King's palace when she bathed naked on her rooftop – after the adultery and murder of her husband, they had a son, **Solomon**. And all three of them are in the list.
- Rahab's there; she was a harlot ([Josh. 2:1](#)). Ruth's there. She was a gentile ([Ruth 1:4](#)).
- **Manasseh's** on the list, he forced his children to walk through fire ([2 Kings 21:6](#)). His son **Amon** is on the list, he walked away from God ([2 Kings 21:22](#)).
- Seems that almost half the kings were crooks, half embezzlers, and to add to it, all but a handful worshiped an idol or two.

It is a surprising list of names!!!

- On the list we find four **unusual women**: It is not normal to find the names of women in Jewish genealogies at all. Women had few legal rights in the ancient world, and were often treated as property, not people. Every morning in prayer Jewish men thanked God that he had not made him a Gentile, a slave, or a woman. But here in the lineage of Jesus we find the names of four women! And they are not the women you would expect in the lineage of Jesus. Jews had four **matriarchs**: Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel and Leah. Each of their husbands was named in Jesus lineage, and Matthew could have selected their names – but he chose **four others** for his list: Ruth, Tamar, Rahab and Bathsheba. All of whom were gentiles, and all of whom were caught in heartbreaking difficulty or scandal. It is an **unusual** list.

- And finally you wouldn't want to miss the names of at least four **Gentiles**. Maybe this was the greatest surprise of all. To the ancient Jews, your ancestry established your racial purity and your racial purity was essential to your standing in the community. Jews believed that **racial purity** was a guardian of **spiritual purity**, that the container protected the content. And there are these Gentiles!! Four of them. No Jew would have missed their names. Matthew wrote them down, carefully.

So here in this famous introduction to Jesus, Matthew lists failed leaders and unusual women and gentile outsiders. Why does God inspire Matthew to list these people? It is **not a list you would brag about**, not once you know them. You think about that and it begins to dawn upon you; this is **not an unusual list at all**.

We know people like this, lots of them. Pick up your newspaper. Or better yet, just pick **any 42 people who you know well**. Any list will do, I think. Wouldn't you see Matthew's list there as well? When was the last time you attended a **family gathering**? Or think about the people on the **floor of your dorm in college**. Think about **40 or 50 people you work with** every day.

Don't people tell the same story?

Matthew brings his genealogy to a conclusion with these words:

There were fourteen generations from Abraham to David,
another fourteen from David to the Babylonian exile,
and yet another fourteen from the Babylonian exile to Christ

Matthew 1.17 (Msg)

Matthew has added it all up, and he is impressed. 14 and 14 and 14. From Abraham to Davis to the Exile to the birth of Jesus. He sees something else here beside the unusual list. **He sees the sovereign hand of God**. That through all the brokenness and all the failure the hand of God was at work, bringing history to its conclusion in the coming of Jesus.

My daughters won't watch the news with me. It makes them upset. Can't blame them! Maybe I am just too hardened, or I've gotten too used to it. The reports of another drive-by shooting. Or another drug bust in a regional junior high school. They were looking for heroin. Or was it the story of the \$50B ponzi scheme that seems to have rocked every educational and charitable and financial institution I've ever heard of. Or maybe it is the evidence that Wall Street was not too different – just riding the bubble of the way up with little thought to who was going to get crushed by all this debt. I could go on for quite a while. My son goes back to Afghanistan to join some of our other sons and daughters fighting there and in Iraq still. Too many of my friends are sick. The economic collapse has meant the loss of jobs and financial security to No wonder my daughters won't watch the news! Here is what they want to know...

Is there someone in the cockpit of this plane, or has the pilot bailed out just as we come in sight of the storm?

*"she will bear a son, and **you shall call his name Jesus**, for he will save his people from their sins."*

Matthew 1:21

Gabriel presumably heard it from God. At his birth, I am certain that Mary and Joseph began to speak his name as they looked into his little eyes that night... "Jesus", "Jesus!"

What was so important that God himself settled it and sent an archangel to communicate it? Let me suggest two reasons... The first:

"Jesus" Means "God Saves"

Gabriel explained it: **"you shall call his name Jesus**, for he will save his people from their sins"

That was and is no small task... Just think of our lists.

We have a problem, and the problem in our lives is not someone else, not someone out there, but is in reality in here. The problem is **me... and you**. To fix the problem it will take someone with the power to fundamentally change me. To thoroughly change me. There is in the whole created order **only one** who has that power. **His name is "God Saves"... His name is Jesus.**

If "Jesus" is a Mighty Name, it is also a Common Name

Naming the infant Jesus was like calling him Joe or Dick or John... **He wasn't named** "The Most Reverend Holiness Divinity of the Seventh Heaven"! That would be a name! But God did no such thing! He gave him a name that would have been on the roster of any Israeli baseball team... in the class roll of any Jewish schoolroom... it would have been found on many gravestones, it would have been on the lips of many fathers and mothers as they considered names for their newborns. **It was a common name.** And that says a lot.

God gave him a common name because God made him a common man.

John 1:14 And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us...

Peterson: "The Word became flesh and blood and moved into the neighborhood..."

He was born in a cow stall, was quickly a refugee in Egypt, and then spent 80% of his years on earth in a small, out-of-the-way city named **Nazareth**, a **common** Galilean city. He grew in the simple home of Joseph and Mary, a family of very **modest means**. He probably **shared a room** with his brothers and maybe even with his sisters during his earlier years. His brothers and sisters, by the way, saw nothing special in him. Now that's common! His step father Joseph was **a carpenter**. Jesus became one also. **Jesus worked with his own hands for a living.** Some people seem to think that there is shame in that. Not Joseph. Not Jesus. Not God.

Do you get the picture? Luke writes, "**he was called Jesus**". A common name, ordinary, familiar, everyday name for an ordinary,

familiar, everyday man. **If it was in our generation** that he was born and **in our neighborhoods** that he was raised, you wouldn't notice him because of his name or his clothes or his jewelry. He wouldn't be noticed because he was an All-American on the soccer team or a National Merit Scholar or the best looking guy or the valedictorian of his class. He wouldn't stand out because of these things. I suspect that he wouldn't stand out at all. Because he didn't. **"The Word became flesh and blood and moved into the neighborhood..." and God named him Jesus**

Because **he was evidently a man - a common man**. The sort of man you'd want to have as a friend for your children. He'd be at home in your home, and you'd be at home with him. No pretenses, no inflated self importance. His tears were genuine. His laughter a delight. He'd listen when you talked, and you'd know he really understood! He was solid, unaffected, **approachable**. I think **that's the word that stands out most...** He loved to get near people, and they loved to get near to him. People came to him in the heat of the day and in the secret hours of the night. Little children and blind men and desperate parents and hungry rabbis and broken prostitutes and hardened sinners and hard working businessmen. He walked in their streets and they came to him. He tried to get away for a rest and they poured out after him. Do you see it? **"The Word became flesh and blood and moved into the neighborhood"**

There was not a man or woman who met Jesus who feared his rejection. Many hated him. Others resisted him. More than a few misunderstood him. The leaders were jealous of him. Some, as they understood better who he was... and who they were... trembled before him. Yet every single person who felt the terrible weight of their brokenness and the heavy burden of their lives found Jesus approachable, touchable. In his presence they found forgiveness and hope and strength and wisdom and life.

A Missing Name

Three sets of 14. Except that the final set is only 13. There is a missing name.

Four new matriarchs tell of the deep and wide mercy of God.

(i) *The barrier between Jew and Gentile is down.* Rahab, the woman of Jericho, and Ruth, the woman of Moab, find their place within the pedigree of Jesus Christ. Already the great truth is there that in Christ there is **neither Jew nor Greek**. Here, at the very beginning, there is the universalism of the gospel and of the love of God.

(ii) *The barriers between male and female are down.* In no ordinary pedigree would the name of any woman be found; but such names are found in Jesus' pedigree. The old contempt is gone; and **men and women stand equally dear to God, and equally important to his purposes.**

(iii) *The barrier between saint and sinner is down.* Somehow God can use for his purposes, and fit into his scheme of things, those who have sinned greatly. **"I came," said Jesus, "Not to call the righteous, but sinners"** (Matthew 9:13).

Here at the very beginning of the gospel we are given a hint of **the all-embracing width of the love of God**. God can find his servants amongst those from whom the respectable orthodox would shudder away in horror

*Joseph was the husband of Mary,
and Mary was the mother of Jesus.*

Jesus is called the Christ.

Matthew 1:16

Jacob was the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary.

Mary gave birth to Jesus, who is called the Messiah.

I may have found part of the answer in, of all places, the first chapter of the New Testament. I've often thought it strange that Matthew would begin his book with a genealogy. Certainly not good journalism. A list of who-sired-who wouldn't get past most editors.

But then again, Matthew wasn't a journalist, and the Holy Spirit wasn't trying to get our attention. He was making a point. God had promised he would give a Messiah through the bloodline of Abraham ([Gen. 12:3](#)), and he did.

"Having doubts about the future?" Matthew asks. "Just take a look at the past." And with that he opens the cedar chest of Jesus' lineage and begins pulling out the dirty laundry.

Believe me, you and I would have kept some of these stories in the closet. Jesus' lineage is anything but a roll call at the Institute for Halos and Harps. Reads more like the Sunday morning occupancy at the county jail.

It begins with Abraham, the father of the nation, who more than once lied like Pinocchio just to save his neck ([Gen. 12:10–20](#)).

Abraham's grandson Jacob was slicker than a Las Vegas card shark. He cheated his brother, lied to his father, got swindled, and then swindled his uncle ([Genesis 27, 29](#)).

Jacob's son Judah was so blinded by testosterone that he engaged the services of a streetwalker, not knowing she was his daughter-in-law!

When he learned her identity, he threatened to have her burned to death for solicitation ([Genesis 38](#)).

Special mention is made of Solomon's mother, Bathsheba (who bathed in questionable places), and Solomon's father, David, who watched the bath of Bathsheba ([2 Sam. 11:2–3](#)).

Rahab was a harlot ([Josh. 2:1](#)). Ruth was a foreigner ([Ruth 1:4](#)).

Manasseh made the list, even though he forced his children to walk through fire ([2 Kings 21:6](#)). His son Amon is on the list, even though he rejected God ([2 Kings 21:22](#)).

Seems that almost half the kings were crooks, half embezzlers, and all but a handful worshiped an idol or two for good measure.

And so reads the list of Jesus' not-so-great grandparents. Seems like the only common bond between this lot was a promise. A promise from

heaven that God would use them to send his son.

Why did God use these people? Didn't have to. Could have just laid the Savior on a doorstep. Would have been simpler that way. And why does God tell us their stories? Why does God give us an entire testament of blunders and stumbles of his people?

Simple. He knew what you and I watched on the news last night. He knew you would fret. He knew I would worry. And he **wants us to know that when the world goes wild, he stays calm.**

Want proof? Read the last name on the list. In spite of all the crooked halos and tasteless gambols of his people, the last name on the list is the first one promised—Jesus.

“Joseph was the husband of Mary, and Mary was the mother of Jesus. Jesus is called the Christ” (Matt. 1:16).

The famine couldn't starve it.

Four hundred years of Egyptian slavery couldn't oppress it.

Wilderness wanderings couldn't lose it.

Babylonian captivity couldn't stop it.

Clay-footed pilgrims couldn't spoil it.

The promise of the Messiah threads its way through forty-two generations of rough-cut stones, forming a necklace fit for the King who came. The engineer has not abandoned the train. Nuclear war is no threat to God. Yo-yo economies don't intimidate the heavens. Immoral leaders have never derailed the plan.

God keeps his promise.

See for yourself. In the manger. He's there.

See for yourself. In the tomb. He's gone.

Here With Us

Verse 1

It's still a mystery to me

That the hands of God could be so small,

How tiny fingers reaching in the night

Were the very hands that measured the sky

Chorus

Hallelujah, hallelujah
Heaven's love reaching down to save the world
Hallelujah, hallelujah

Son of God, Servant King,
You're here with us
You're here with us

Verse 2

It's still a mystery to me, oh,
How His infant eyes have seen the dawn of time
How His ears have heard an angel's symphony,
But still Mary had to rock her Savior to sleep

Chorus

Hallelujah, hallelujah
Heaven's love reaching down to save the world
[these lyrics are found on <http://www.songlyrics.com>]
Hallelujah, hallelujah
Son of God, Servant King
Here with us
You're here with us
(Ohh, mmm, here with us)

Bridge

Jesus the Christ, born in Bethlehem
A baby born to save, to save the souls of man

Chorus (2x)

Hallelujah, hallelujah
Heaven's love reaching down to save the world
Hallelujah, hallelujah
Son of God, Servant King
You're here with us
You're here, with us