

Jesus' Photo Album

This morning, we looked at Jesus' family photo album. The Gospel of Matthew begins with the photo album the ancient world used called a genealogy. Genealogies were important in the culture of the Ancient Near East. They determined a person's status in society, "religious purity, rights to political leadership, inheritance rights, marriage eligibility, and ethnic connections."¹ The genealogy in Matthew reveals quite a bit about the family into which God chose to become flesh. Matthew 1:1 opened the Gospel with this photo album, a "book of genealogy," and this will set the tone for the themes of Matthew's Gospel. He tailored the genealogy (a common practice) to accentuate the themes of the Gospel and to make a list that breaks down into three sections with 14 names in each section. Tailoring a genealogy is no different than deciding what photos go in the album and which ones are left out. This is not a rewriting of history, but focusing on certain parts.

Gematria: In order to understand Matthew's genealogy and its structure, we must know about something called *gematria*. This is an ancient system of equating letters to numbers. The Israelites adopted this practice from the surrounding cultures. The three sections of 14 names in Matthew's genealogy is based on the gematria of David's name. "David" is spelled in Hebrew with three letters (*dwd* - *d* = 4; *w* = 6; *d* = 4, so 4 + 6 + 4 = 14). Matthew's main audience were Jews who became Christians, so the significance of the name David and the number 14 would not be lost on them. Matthew makes it abundantly clear that Jesus is the promised Messiah through the line of David.

First, Jesus is the Christ, that is the Messiah. (1:1): This title means He is the promised anointed one for whom Israel had been waiting. **We must not miss the gravity of what Matthew states here.** There were competing views on what the Messiah would be like and what His role would be when He came. The word *messiah* means "anointed one." Kings, prophets, and priests were traditionally anointed with oil when they were set apart for their roles. Many Jewish groups expected the messiah to be a king who would liberate Israel. Some expected the messiah to be a prophet as Moses had promised (Deuteronomy 18:15). Some, like the group who wrote the Dead Sea Scrolls, expected a priest messiah. In fact, they expected two, possibly three messiahs, one fulfilling the role of king, another the role of priest, and another the role of prophet. (Read the book of Hebrews to see how Jesus alone fulfills all three roles.) The common denominator among all these views is that the Messiah was expected to liberate Israel. *For Matthew to claim Jesus as the Messiah while Rome was still in control of Israel is no small matter.*

¹ K. C. Hanson & Douglas E. Oakman, *Palestine in the Time of Jesus: Social Structures and Social Conflicts* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008) 26.

In other words, Matthew was a Jew who considered Jesus to be the promised Messiah despite the fact that Israel was still not liberated from Rome. We have to ask what convinced him to make this assertion. Obviously, Matthew was an eyewitness to Jesus' life, death, burial, and resurrection. This challenged Matthew's expectations and helped him see the truth. Matthew's Gospel was intended to provide the reasons that Jesus was the Messiah. Matthew used the lineage into which Jesus chose to place Himself as one aspect of Jesus' identity.

Jesus was "the son of David" (1:1): We must not forget that "son of..." in the ancient world was not limited to the immediate generation, as in the father who literally raised his son from birth. This expression, "the son of..." can skip many generations to indicate a person is a descendant of David. David lived almost 1,000 years before Jesus, yet Jesus was considered a "son of David." This title was required for the Messiah, as this was the way David's throne would last forever as God promised (2 Samuel 7:1-17). *Yet, Jesus did not provide geopolitical level deliverance as many expected, but He provided cosmic-level deliverance.*

Jesus was the "son of Abraham" (1:1): Ancient Israelites understood this expression to mean a person was a true Israelite. They were part of the covenant people. God's covenant with Abraham also included the promise of many descendants and that through Abraham all the peoples of the world would be blessed. Jesus fulfills this promise.

Snapshots of Jesus' Family

Abraham: Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is another designator for God's people to identify themselves. Abraham was called out of a pagan culture and responded faithfully. Yet, he also had his failings. He and his wife tried to usurp God's promise that they would be parents. They utilized Hagar, the servant girl, as a surrogate and Ishmael was the result. Overall, Abraham trusted God, and that faith brought righteousness into his life.

Isaac was the son God promised. At a young age, he had to carry the wood for his own sacrifice up the mountain, not knowing that Abraham was supposed to sacrifice him. Isaac's story is a clear picture of what would come with Jesus carrying the cross to Calvary, except Jesus knew where He was going. Abraham was called to sacrifice his son, but God stopped him and provided a sacrifice. *Ultimately, Jesus would be the Son who was the ultimate sacrifice for our sin.* Later, Isaac prayed for his wife and for children, which God granted. But, Isaac showed favoritism to his son Esau over Jacob.

Jacob: The nation of Israel took shape with his twelve sons. Jacob was a bit effeminate according to the culture (Genesis 25:27-28). He was conniving at times, and deceived his father and brother. However, God worked on him through trials and despite some of his poor choices. God even changed his name to Israel, and his twelve sons became the nation of Israel. *Jesus chose a family of people who struggled to live faithfully.*

Judah and his brothers (1:2): Judah is singled out because it will be through him that the royal line of David will come. His "brothers" reminds us of the twelve tribes of Israel, and Jesus' choice of twelve disciples fulfills the symbolism of God's new covenant people. The "brothers" also points to the idea of the church being a family (brothers and sisters).² These were the brothers that sold one of their own (Joseph) into slavery. Of course, the slavery idea was plan B as originally they wanted to murder him. *Jesus' family included people who made terrible choices.*

Perez and Zerah whose mother was Tamar (1:3): These were twins born to Judah through Tamar (Gen 38). These babies were born amidst a Jerry-Springer type scandal in Judah's life. Tamar was Judah's daughter-in-law, but Judah had wicked sons who both died from the results of their sin. Tamar was a widow and waited for Judah's youngest son to reach the age of marriage. However, Judah did not keep his word and never gave her to his son. Tamar set in motion a scheme by posing as a prostitute, becoming pregnant by Judah, and taking evidence of his sexual immorality to prove the babies were his. This secured Tamar's wellbeing, albeit through immoral ways, because the family would have to take care of her,.

Perez was the second-born of the twins, and it was through his line that David came. Frequently, God bypassed the inheritance norms and honor status of the firstborn to bring about David's dynasty. David himself was the youngest of eight.

Tamar (1:3) and Women in the List: Matthew includes four women in this genealogy, which was not typical in Jewish genealogies from the ancient world. Matthew includes Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, and the wife of Uriah (Bathsheba). These women's stories all demonstrate how God can work through or in spite of circumstances that seem impossible. Each of these women faced marital challenges or sexual immorality. Tamar was sexually immoral and exposed sexual immorality to secure her place in the family. Rahab was a foreigner and a prostitute in Jericho. Ruth was a foreigner and without a husband, but ultimately taken in by Boaz (and there is debate if her actions were considered seductive). Bathsheba

² Grant R. Osborne, *Exegetical Commentary on The New Testament: Matthew*, vol. 1, ed. Clinton E. Arnold, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010) 63.

was married to a foreigner and had an affair with king David. Through murder and adultery, Solomon was born.

All of this will lead to the mention of a fifth woman, Mary, Jesus' mother. Her pregnancy was considered illegitimate and immoral by others, because they did not know her pregnancy was from the Holy Spirit of God. God worked through all of these broken people or their broken circumstances to bring about the promised Messiah. *God is not limited in who He can use.*

Hezron and Ram (1:3): Hezron was part of the seventy that migrated to Egypt with Jacob (Genesis 46:12), and through his son Ram, Jesus would eventually be born. We don't know much about Ram except we have two bits of evidence that suggests he may have been an honorable man. He was second-born, yet through him the line of the Messiah would come. His older brother, Jerahmeel, appears to have named his firstborn after Ram (1 Chronicles 2:25). Jerahmeel would not likely name his firstborn after Uncle Ram if Uncle Ram was evil.

Amminadab, Nahshon, and Salmon (1:4): Amminadab fathered Nahshon who was the chief of Judah's tribe in the wilderness years. They led the east side of the encampment, which is to say they were on the leading side of the camp as it made its way to the Promised Land (Num 10:14). Amminadab also fathered Aaron's wife, Elisheba. This is interesting in that Aaron did not take for himself a wife from the tribe of Levi, but from Judah. We know little of Salmon other than he was an ancestor ("the father of") of Boaz. If Salmon was married to Rahab, there would about 200 years between Rahab and Boaz.

Boaz, whose mother was Rahab (1:5): Rahab was a prostitute and is well-known for hiding the spies in her home at Jericho (Joshua 2 & 6). She lived 200 years prior to Boaz. Again, genealogies in the ancient world skipped generations while retaining the expression "son of..." The fact that a foreign prostitute is part of Jesus' family means there is hope for us all! She is remembered as a person who responded in faith to God's judgment and was spared (Joshua 6:25; Hebrews 11:31; James 2:25).

Boaz was a wealthy landowner who rescued Ruth from poverty and widowhood by becoming her "kinsman redeemer." This was the practice of levirate marriage that protected women and the honor of their deceased husbands. If the woman became a widow without any sons, her brother-in-law was to marry her to provide for her and produce heirs for the deceased husband. Despite Ruth being a foreigner, and despite that Boaz was not the first relative in line who should take on the responsibility, he stepped up none the less and married her. Obed was the result of both Ruth's and Boaz's faithfulness. *While there are quite a few questionable characters in Jesus' family, Boaz and Ruth were two of the good ones!*

Obed, Jesse, and David (1:5-6): Obed was the product of faithfulness. Jesse was his son who was blessed with eight sons. Seven sons was considered ideal, so to have eight was to be blessed in abundance. Jesse's name was used by Isaiah to predict the coming Messiah (Isaiah 11:1, 10). David was the eighth son God chose to be king and through whom God chose to establish an everlasting kingdom. David is the central figure in this history and the Messiah had to come through his line (see above about the Messiah and "son of David"). David, however, was not perfect. When he sinned, he sinned boldly! He had an affair with Bathsheba. Her husband was Uriah the Hittite, a foreigner who converted to Judaism. Throughout the whole scenario, Uriah the Hittite was more faithful to the Law than David the pure-blooded Judean. David eventually recovered, but it cost him dearly (see 2 Samuel 11 and following). Despite David's failure, he is still known in Scripture as "a man after God's own heart." *Even believers can fall into the traps of sin, but we do not have to let them define our entire life. We must repent and move forward.*

Solomon, whose mother was the wife of Uriah (1:6): Solomon was a product of adultery and David's failure to be faithful to God. Bathsheba is not named to highlight that she was the wife of a Hittite who was more faithful to God in the situation than David (see 2 Samuel 11-12). This also highlights David's dishonoring of Uriah. In the ancient culture, to commit adultery with a woman ultimately dishonored her husband.

Solomon was also not perfect. While he achieved much for the nation of Israel, he often lived in debauchery. He was used by God to build the Temple that brought identity to the nation and centralized power around God's presence. Much of the Temple imagery would prepare the way for the Messiah. God gave Solomon wisdom, but Solomon did not always use it. *Our lives will be covered in even more splendor than Solomon if we trust God's truth in all aspects of life.*

Rehoboam, Abijah, and Asa (1:7): The kings in this section of Matthew's list reflect some flawed characters indeed. Rehoboam singlehandedly dismantled the kingdom David and Solomon built. His overtaxation created revolt and civil war. He became the paradigm for evil kings in the southern kingdom of Judah. Abijah, whose name means "Yahweh is Father," had mixed reviews and did not always live up to his name (negative in 1 Kings 15:1-8 and positive in 2 Chronicles 12:16-14:1). He defended Judah from King Jeroboam in the north, but he was not faithful to God in all things. Asa, however, made sweeping reforms, tearing down idolatry in the nation.

Jehoshaphat (1:8): He was one of the good ones. He was known for godliness and brought about even more reforms than his father, Asa.

Jehoram (1:8): He was evil, possibly influenced by his wife and in-laws. Ahab and Jezebel's ruled the northern kingdom of Israel, and Jehoram married their daughter, Athaliah, to form an alliance. He murdered his brothers, a crime more egregious in their culture than ours, to prevent rivalry for the throne, and his reign caused revolts (2 Chronicles 21). *God places boundaries in our lives to protect us from evil.* Jehoram ignored those boundaries. God exercised divine wrath on Jehoram and struck him with an incurable disease in his bowels. He died in agony and filth, and the people did not honor him at his death (2 Chronicles 21:18-20).

Uzziah (1:8): He was the fourth king to reign after Jehoram (three generations are skipped - Ahaziah, Jehoash, and Amaziah). The other three had mixed track records, and their photos were left out of the album. Uzziah started well but fell into sinfulness and pride later in life. He stepped outside the role assigned to him as king, and tried to be something he wasn't (2 Chronicles 26:16-21). He died alone and in shame as a leper. *Do not think more highly of yourself than you ought to think, but think with sober judgment, according to the measure of faith that God has assigned (Romans 12:3).*

Jotham (1:9): His track record was mixed as a king. He was a good king, but he failed to remove the high places in the land where idol worship occurred. He accomplished a lot in construction and won wars, but he failed to lead the people to a deeper walk with God (2 Kings 15:32-38; 2 Chronicles 27). *Success in the world is not measured the same as it is in God's kingdom.*

Ahaz (1:9): Ahaz refused to listen to God's prophet, Isaiah. Ahaz was under pressure as Judah was being defeated in war and was under God's judgment for Ahaz's idolatrous ways. He not only brought unbelief into the nation, but while in distress, he turned to other gods, the gods of Damascus. He offered his son as a sacrifice to a false god (Moloch perhaps). Under his reign, Judah lost its freedom and became a vassal kingdom to Assyria. *When we are under duress, is God the first One we turn to or the last? If we do not trust Him in the good seasons of life, we will not trust Him in the difficult seasons.*

Hezekiah (1:9): He cleansed the Temple and tore down the high places where idol worship occurred in the land. He was facing illness and death, but God extended his life by 15 years. Despite God's mighty work in his life and God's warning, Hezekiah made a pact with Babylon that it cost the nation greatly in tributes to Assyria. *We must never forget God's blessings and boundaries in our lives.*

Manasseh (1:10): He is known as the most wicked king in Judah's history. He practiced idolatry, cult worship, sorcery, and sacrificed his own son in fire. However, he later repented after hitting rock bottom. God brought commanders from Assyria in and arrested Manasseh. While in Babylon, he repented. He

was allowed to return to Jerusalem and he removed the altars dedicated to false gods. He reinstated temple worship before his death. His repentance did not remove all of his consequences

Amon (1:10): He was evil and full of abominations, and his own servants killed him.

Josiah (1:10): He reformed Amon's terrible influences. He removed idolatry and renovated the Temple. He rediscovered a copy of the Law in the renovation and renewed the Passover. *When God's word is forgotten, we are lost. When God's word is heard and practiced, it brings revival.*

Jeconiah and brothers (1:11): He lost his reign to his brother, Zedekiah, and the nation was destroyed and exiled to Babylon.

Sheatiel (1:12): Not much is known about him, but he bridges the generation from the exile to after the exile.

Zerubbable (1:12): Persia appointed him to be governor of Jerusalem. He became a messianic figure, and the prophet Haggai called him God's "signet ring" and "chosen one," and Zechariah called him a "lampstand" and "anointed."

Abiud, Eliakim, Azor, Zadok, Akim, Eliud, Eleazar, Matthan, and Jacob (1:13-15): These nine names cover about 500 years. The source of these names is unknown, but the names and their meanings are interesting:

Abiud - Father of Majesty - (The Father of Majesty sent His Son into the world.)

Eliakim - God raises up - (God raised Jesus.)

Azor - Helpful - (Jesus will help.)

Zadok - Righteous - (Jesus is righteous.)

Akim - The Lord raises up - (Jesus raised several up.)

Eliud - God of Majesty - (Jesus is the God of majesty.)

Eleazar - God has helped - (God helped us be sending His Son.)

Matthan - Gift - (Jesus was the ultimate gift.)

Jacob - from the Hebrew word that means "heel." (Through this Jacob, Jesus would come and the serpent (Satan) will strike his heel but Jesus would crush the serpent's head.)

Joseph (1:16): Interestingly, Joseph is defined as the "husband of Mary." The man being defined by his wife is quite unusual for genealogies in the ancient world. Joseph adopted Jesus as an earthly father, but Jesus made it possible for us to be adopted by our heavenly Father. Joseph, as is seen later in the story,

was a righteous and kind man (Matthew 1:19). The coming verses also demonstrate his faithful obedience to God's direction.

Mary (1:16): Her story will unfold in the coming verses. While Jesus was adopted into a human lineage that comments on His social status, the reality is that His status is far above anyone else. His ultimate genealogy is found in the Trinity, as God the Son. Mary, of course, is very obedient to God's call on her life, but she was not without moments of doubt and struggle (Mark 3:20-21). *Jesus chose parents that were faithful, though not perfect, and they were from a family that was not perfect.*

Fourteens

Matthew summarizes the genealogy as having 14 generations from Abraham to David, 14 generations from David to the Exile, and 14 generations from the Exile to the Christ. Again, the number is based on David's name, but more importantly the whole genealogy communicates that *Jesus is the fulfillment of God's promises throughout redemptive history.*

The Messiah and His Kingdom is here! Through God's providence and sovereignty, there is hope for humanity. Let us rejoice!

There's another photo that can be added to this family...

Are You in The Family?

When a person receives Jesus, when they believe in His name, He gives that person the right to become a child of God (John 1:12). Jesus chose to be born into a family that had both good folks and dysfunctional people, but none of them were perfect. Jesus chose to be born into this family, but now, because He shed His blood on the cross for our sins, died, and rose again, He gives us the opportunity to be born into His family. Have you made that choice? Membership into God's family is not automatic; it is a choice each of us has to make. **What will you decide?**