

SERIES: THE CHRISTMAS BACKSTORY
SERMON: "CHRISTMAS AND JESUS' ANCESTORS"
MATTHEW 1:1–17 / P. 807

DECEMBER 23, 2018

INTRO.

-- Read Matthew's account of "Christmas story" in **1:18–25**

-- That's the marvelous story of Christmas. But it's not the whole story - at least the way Matthew tells it. Notice where we started reading - in verse 18. We skipped over the first 17 verses, something that's usually done.

-- Those first 17 verses are what we call the "backstory." During this Christmas season we're trying to deepen our understanding and appreciation of the Christmas story by concentrating on its backstory, the people and events leading up to and preparing the way for the story.

-- The backstory sets the table for the story. When we have a special meal like the Christmas meal, my wife pays a lot of attention to setting the table and she does it beautifully. She arranges the table with the right tablecloth, a centerpiece and candles. We get out the special China and glasses. She even makes folded name tags for our places at the table, even though we always sit at the same place and already know one another's names. Now, we could just put out paper plates and plastic utensils and eat with them.

We would still get nourished, but our experience wouldn't be the same. We would fill our stomachs, but we wouldn't delight our sense of beauty and wonder.

-- Reading Matthew's story without reading the backstory is something like eating the Christmas meal without setting the table in a fitting way. Matthew's first 17 verses enrich our delight, appreciation for and even understanding of the Christmas story.

-- Now, there is a reason why this section is usually disregarded in the telling of the Christmas story. It's a genealogy, and unless you're a Mormon, genealogies just don't seem all that exciting, especially biblical genealogies, which seem to be an uninspiring list of hard-to-pronounce names. If you're reading through the Bible, genealogies are where you practice speed reading.

-- But if you take a few minutes to examine Matthew's genealogy you'll find a fascinating backstory to Christmas, a backstory that gives us important and valuable insight into the nature of the God who planned Christmas and into the identity of the One who was born on Christmas.

I. GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY

-- Concerning God's nature Matthew's genealogy testifies to God's magnificent sovereignty.

A. DISPLAYED IN HIS DIRECTING OF HUMAN HISTORY

-- God's sovereignty is displayed in the way He directed human history to fulfill the promised birth of Jesus. (1:1–2)

-- Starting with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, Matthew proceeds through 46 individuals up to the birth of Jesus. Then Matthew concludes in v. 17.

B. 3 KEY OT ERAS

-- Matthew structures his genealogy around 3 key OT eras.

1. Abraham to David

-- This is the "Pre-Monarchy Era," which includes the time of the Patriarchs, the Exodus from Egypt, the conquest of the Promised Land and the leadership of judges like Samson.

2. David to the Exile

-- This is the "Monarchy Era," which starts with the Golden Age of Kings David and Solomon, followed by national decline beginning with a civil war that split the nation into Northern and Southern Kingdoms and ending with the destruction of the Northern Kingdom by the Assyrian Empire and the destruction of the Southern Kingdom by the Babylonians and the deportation of the Jews to exile in Babylon.

3. Exile to Christ

-- This final era starts with the return of the Jews to their homeland and includes the rebuilding of Jerusalem and the Temple there, the ministry of the last OT prophet (Malachi), and 400 years of waiting until the silence of heaven is broken with the angelic announcements of the birth of Jesus.

C. GOD IS DIRECTING IT ALL.

-- What we need to understand here is that God is directing all of this

-- Last week we saw that the first promise of a Savior occurred in the Garden of Eden, immediately following the sin and fall of Adam and Eve. The OT is the record of how God directed the events of human history to accomplish that promise.

-- As Matthew indicates, God fulfilled His plan by directing the lives of individuals through succeeding generations starting with Abraham, whom God chose to be the patriarchal ancestor of the Savior.

-- But God directed not only the lives of individual people but also the affairs of entire nations and empires. The Egyptian, Assyrian, Babylonian and Persian empires ruled the world, but they were nothing more than instruments to serve the purposes of the sovereign God.

-- Everything that happened throughout those eras unfolded according to the eternal plan of God. And He was directing everything towards the birth of Jesus, who is the focus of all history. We recognize that every time we write the date. In just over a week we'll enter a New Year, 2019. It will be 2,019 years since what - the birth of Jesus.

All dates before that event are called "B.C." (Before Christ) and all years since are called "A.D." (not "After Death" but "Anno Domini," in the year of our Lord, since His birth). God has sovereignly set Jesus at the center of history.

-- And that brings us to the second but primary purpose of Matthew's genealogy - to present evidence about Jesus' identity.

II. JESUS' IDENTITY

A. JESUS IS THE FULFILLMENT OF PROMISES ABOUT THE MESSIAH.

-- Matthew starts his genealogy by referring to Jesus as "the son of David, the son of Abraham."

-- The first promise and prophecy of a Messiah (Savior) that I just mentioned is recorded in **Genesis 3:15**.

Cf., **Gen. 3:15 (NLT)** And I will cause hostility between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring. He will strike your head, and you will strike his heel.

-- As you proceed through the OT God makes a covenant with two men that this promised Savior will be their descendant: Abraham and David.

The covenant with Abraham is in Genesis:

Gen. 12:3 And I will bless those who bless you, And the one who curses you I will curse, And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed.

Gen. 22: 18 In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed,

The covenant with David is given in 2 Samuel:

2 Sam. 7:16 Your house and your kingdom shall endure before Me forever; your throne shall be established forever.

-- The purpose of Matthew's genealogy is to show us that Jesus fulfilled that requirement, that He was, indeed, "the son of Abraham, the son of David."

B. JESUS IS BOTH MAN AND GOD.

Matthew's genealogy reveals another important truth to us about Jesus' identity - that He is both man and God, human and divine.

-- cf., v. 1, "the genealogy of Jesus Christ"

Jesus is an earthly name pointing to His humanity. Christ is not a name but a divine title, pointing to His deity.

1. Jesus' Humanity

-- The genealogy emphasizes Jesus' human nature, that He is a real man, descended from real human ancestors.

-- The genealogy emphasizes Jesus' identification with all groups and classes, something that is particularly clear in a very surprising aspect of this genealogy: it includes 4 women. Mentioning women in Jewish genealogies was extremely rare, but even more unusual are the women that Matthew chooses to include - not matriarchal heroines such as Sarah, Rebekah or Rachel but 4 women who were in some way tainted.

a. Tamar (v. 3a)

-- Tamar was the Canaanite daughter-in-law of Judah.

Judah's son (Tamar's husband) was an evil man and God struck him dead. According to Jewish practice Judah was expected to provide another son as a husband to father children with Tamar.

Judah promised to give her his youngest and only remaining son, but it became evident that Judah had no intention to keep that promise and was content for Tamar to die a childless widow. Knowing her father-in-law's weaknesses well, Tamar disguised herself as a prostitute and enticed Judah to have sex with her, which resulted in her giving birth to twin sons - Perez and Zerah - and Perez is part of Jesus' ancestral line.

b. Rahab (v. 5a)

-- Tamar disguised herself as a prostitute, but Rahab needed no disguise - she really was a prostitute. She operated a brothel in her home that was part of the enormous wall surrounding the city of Jericho. It was Rahab who protected and saved the lives of the two spies that Joshua had sent into the city prior to his attack.

c. Ruth (5b-6)

-- Unlike Tamar and Rahab, Ruth was a woman of high moral character, but she was a Moabite - a pagan nation that was the enemy of Israel and was under the curse of God. Moabites were forbidden to worship at the Tabernacle. Ruth ended up marrying a Jewish man named Boaz and becoming the grandmother of King David.

d. "The wife of Uriah" (Bathsheba) (v. 6b)

-- The fourth woman isn't even named; she is referred to simply as "the wife of Uriah." This statement alludes, of course, to the tragic episode in which David sinned by committing adultery with Bathsheba and then arranging for her husband, Uriah, to be killed in battle. David and Bathsheba's first son died in infancy; but their second son, Solomon, became one of Jesus' ancestors.

-- The fact that Jesus' line includes such dysfunctional sinners and social outcasts and that Matthew makes it a point to emphasize all this shows that Jesus identified Himself fully with fallen humanity and that His grace would be available to all kinds of sinners -- that He would be a Savior of Jews and Gentiles, of adulterers, prostitutes and murderers.

2. Jesus' Deity

-- As I mentioned earlier, "Christ" is not a name but a title. Look at verse 16.

v. 16 "Jesus...who is called Christ"

-- The title Christ is the same as Messiah and points to Jesus' deity.

-- We see that truth also indicated in Matthew's precise wording in this verse. Throughout the genealogy Matthew has repeated the same pattern: "the father of ... the father of ... the father of..." - through 16 verses of 40 some ancestors. So, when we come to Joseph, we would expect for Matthew to continue the pattern and say, "Joseph the father of Jesus." But that's not at all what Matthew says. Instead, Matthew says, "Joseph, the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus." And something you can't tell from the English is that the phrase "of whom" is a feminine gender in the Greek, meaning that it can refer only to Mary.

-- The point Matthew is making to us is that legally, Jesus is a descendant of Joseph - Jesus is Joseph's legal son and can trace his ancestry back to David and Abraham. But biologically Jesus is not Joseph's son - Jesus' only biological parent is Mary.

CONCLUSION

All of this is back-story to set the table for the Christmas story so we can experience and enjoy it in a richer way.

Read vv. 18-25