

Border Crossing Christmas Series

#2 The Border of Reputation

12/9/2018

In recent years programs like Ancestry.com and MyHeritage.com and 23andMe.com have become quite successful as the interest in people tracing their ancestry has become popular. Not only can this process be fascinating but it can also be quite life changing as well. At our Thanksgiving family celebration, Connie's uncle and aunt stopped by and I was intrigued as her uncle, Jack (89), was sharing that just recently he discovered he had a biological sister (75) alive that he never knew about. He was put up for adoption early in his life and never knew much about his family. But through one of these services they were able to find each other and connect.

Sometimes though as people dig into their past they've discovered things about their ancestors that we a little surprising and possibly a bit disturbing. But the world of DNA tracking has opened up a whole new world of intriguing possibilities.

To the Jewish people of Jesus' day keeping track of your ancestry was important for several reasons.

1. To prove you were a Jew and thereby eligible for citizenship in Israel.
2. You wanted to know if you were eligible to be a priest, if you were in the Levitical line.
3. You wanted to know if you were in the line of royalty, the line of King David.
4. People kept track of the line of David because the Messiah was supposed to come from that line.

So, the gospel of Matthew, which was written primarily to a Jewish audience, begins with Jesus' genealogy. Primarily, because he wants to prove, right off the bat, that Jesus qualified to be the Messiah. And while a genealogy might seem pretty dry and boring at first, trust me, this is no ordinary genealogy. There's some things tucked away in Matthew's genealogy that I think you'll find quite fascinating and hopefully encouraging to you as well.

So, follow along in your Bibles, if you like, as I read from Matthew 1:1-17.

Read [Matthew 1:1-17](#)

Notice the subtle switch right at the beginning of this listing. Matthew says that this is the genealogy of *Jesus the Messiah the son of David, the son of Abraham*. And yet when he begins the actual listing of names, does he begin with David? No. He starts with Abraham. The reason being – every Jew knew that the Messiah was to come from the line of David not Abraham. So, Matthew is claiming that the purpose of this listing is to show you that Jesus is qualified to be the Messiah by his blood line. But the actual nation of Israel would trace it's beginnings back to Abraham the father of the Jewish faith.

Now, the other important piece of information you need to know about genealogies back then was that in many ways they also served as a sort of **resume** of their life. It provided somewhat **boasting rights** if you could show that you had royalty or other important people in your bloodline. So, often times, as they would put their own genealogy together they would pick and choose who to include. If there were some shady characters in the line they would edit them out. Also, in that culture the line was always traced through the father's bloodline, and so rarely would women be included in the listing. However, you may have noticed, that Matthew chose to list 5 women in his genealogy of Jesus. And not only is that odd, but equally as strange is the women he chose to include. They aren't some of the outstanding women in the line of David, but they are women that any Jewish man would have excluded for sure.

Women included:

- **Tamar:** Tamar tricked her father-in-law (Judah) into sleeping with her by pretending to be a prostitute. Additionally, Tamar wasn't even a Jew but a Gentile.
- **Rahab:** we first encounter Rahab when Israelite spies sneak into the walled city of Jericho in order to spy on it in advance of waging war against it. In that account in Joshua we're simply told that Rahab was a prostitute. And not only does Rahab have this poor reputation because of her chosen profession but she's also a Canaanite who were hated enemies of Israel. Additionally in the account of her in Joshua, she lied to the city leaders looking for the spies. So, she's got 3 strikes against her: (1) she's a hated foreigner (2) she's a prostitute and (3) she's known for lying. And yet she's not only included in the line of Jesus but she's also listed as a woman of faith in [Hebrews 11:31](#))
- **Ruth:** Ruth was a Moabite. The Jews hated Moabites and Ammonites. She really shows up in the story at all because there was a famine in the land of Israel and her husband died.
- **Uriah's wife (Bathsheba):** I would guess most of you couldn't tell me a whole lot of information about Bathsheba. But the one piece you likely know about her is that she slept with King David. As a result of this, King David arranged to have Bathsheba's husband, Uriah, killed on the battlefield. And then David tried to cover the whole thing up. Notice that Matthew doesn't mention Bathsheba by name but simply as Uriah's wife. There were other accomplishments in Bathsheba's life, but by listing her as Uriah's wife, it would immediately draw us to that initial affair, murder and lying to cover up. So, Matthew seems to be intentionally drawing our attention to the events and people most Jews would cover up. But not Matthew.

For free, did you know that Uriah was much more than merely Bathsheba's husband. He was also listed in Scripture as one of David's Mighty Men (2 Samuel 23:39). These are the brave men who were willing to put their lives on the line to protect King David. And yet, when it came down to it, David intentionally arranged for this brave warrior to die – simply to cover up his affair with his wife.

- **Mary: the mother of Jesus.** You probably can't tell me much of anything else about Mary other than the fact that she was a young inexperienced teenager girl who God chose to give birth to Jesus. No one of notoriety, not old enough to have many other things of note.

Additionally, consider some of the other individuals listed here.

- **Abraham:** father of the nation of Israel and a great man of faith. And yet, he also is the same man who on two separate occasions instructed his wife, Sara, to lie and tell others she was actually his sister rather than his wife. Why? To protect his own life because if they found out she was Abraham's wife they may have killed him in order to free her up to marry them.
- **Isaac:** like father, like son. Isaac followed in his father's footsteps and instructed his wife to do the same thing.
- **Jacob:** When his older brother, Esau, was very hungry and asked Jacob for a bowl of stew, Jacob, rather than kindly giving him a bowl of stew, instead made Esau sell him his very valuable first born birthright for a bowl of food. And then later he stole his older brother's blessing from his father in a wild scheme that his own mother dreamed up that involved tricking his blind father into believing he was actually his brother.
- **Judah:** devised the plan to sell his brother, Joseph, to merchants on their way to Egypt and later unknowingly slept with his daughter-in-law causing her to become pregnant. Notice it mentions that *Judah was the father of Perez and Zerah, whose mother was Tamar.* Judah had other sons prior to Perez and Zerah. Those twin sons came through his sexual encounter with Tamar – so Matthew

intentionally is listing them in order to bring to our recall that sordid event in Judah's history. It was out of this dysfunctional family that Jesus came.

- **David** was an adulterer, murderer and tried to cover his affair up
- **Solomon** was a big time polygamist with 700 wives and 300 concubines.
- **Manasseh** was the most evil king Israel ever had.

So not only did Matthew intentionally list 5 women in Jesus' genealogy and 3 of them being non-Jews, he includes men who weren't exemplary in their behavior as well and intentionally mentions these names in such a way to bring to mind some of these sins committed by them.

So, the question we're left with is **WHY?** Why would Matthew put these individuals in Jesus' genealogy for people to see for thousands of years? If he felt so compelled to include women in Jesus' genealogy He could have picked women who were weren't foreigners or prostitutes or adulterers or who hadn't become pregnant from their father-in-law. He could have worded it differently as not bring to mind many of the sinful actions of the individuals in Jesus' blood line. And remember, if you believe in the inspiration of the whole Bible, that means that God is the one who inspired Matthew to write such a controversial genealogy. So why did God want this type of genealogy of his son recorded for people to read for many many generations?

We don't know for sure – but I'd like to make an educated guess. And that's that God wants every person to know, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that God is not going to reject you because of your past or even your present. He is so full of love and grace and an incredibly deep desire for everyone to come to know Him that no one is rejected based on things in your past that you'd rather keep hidden in your own private closet for no one to see. God already knows about everything you've ever done and He still loves you and wants you.

To support that theory of why God chose to include "shady" people in Jesus' genealogy, consider these facts as well.

Breaking Through the Reputation Border:

1. The two groups of people invited to see baby Jesus: **stinky shepherds** and **non-Jewish wise men.**
2. The groups of people Jesus hung out with (**tax collectors, fishermen and sinners**)
3. The answer to the question: "**who's my neighbor?**" was a **Samaritan** who cared.
4. Jesus' two example of "**great faith**" were a **Roman soldier** and **Canaanite mother**
5. The first witness to Jesus' resurrection were **women**

All of this mounting evidence from Jesus' genealogy and Jesus' ministry make it pretty clear that Jesus wasn't caught up in establishing a squeaky clean reputation. A far greater priority was letting everyone know that they matter to God and are invited to come into a right relationship with Him.

In Jesus' own words he said: "**I came to seek and to save** (not those who have it all together or the righteous or the religious leaders but) **the lost.**"

Hebrews 2:11 (NIV) *Both the one who makes people holy and those who are made holy are of the same family. So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers and sisters.*

He's talking about you and me right there.

Border Crossing Christmas #2 The Border of Reputation

Why genealogies mattered to Jews:

1. For _____
2. To know if you were eligible to be a _____
3. To know if you were in the _____ line to be _____
4. It was from the line of _____ the Messiah was to come

Women in Jesus' genealogy:

1. T _____:
2. R _____:
3. R _____:
4. Uriah's wife: B _____
5. M _____

Other shady characters:

Breaking Through the Reputation Border

1. People invited to see baby Jesus: _____ & _____
2. The groups of people Jesus hung out with: _____
3. Answer to the question "Who's my neighbor?" _____
4. The two examples of "great faith": _____
5. The first witnesses to Jesus resurrection were _____

What part of your past would you like to hide from God?

Thank God for wanting you in His family despite your past

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