

## The Royal Family Tree

The Sunday excitement grew almost to a frenzy. Rumors were rampant. Their hero was coming into Jerusalem. News spread faster than gossip on the Internet. People left their jobs and their homes to see for themselves. The word on the street was that Jesus of Nazareth was the Messiah. He was the one who preached to thousands, fed huge crowds with a boy's lunch, walked on water, predicted the future before it happened, made sick people well and brought dead people back to life again.

At last Israel would break free of Roman rule once and for all. The Messiah would gather and unify every dissenting group. He would muster an army. If they were hungry he could use his miracles to feed the soldiers. If there was a storm before a battle he could stop it. If soldiers were hurt he could heal them. If they were killed he could raise them up to fight another day. Jesus the Messiah would speak authoritatively to the government, persuasively to the people and directly to God. He could and would sit on King David's throne and restore the kingdom of Israel to its former spiritual and political greatness.

So convinced were these people that they blanketed the parade route with their clothes and with palm branches, just the way it was supposed to be done for a king. They treated him just as they would a triumphant monarch coming back to a capital city.

There was one catch in all this Palm Sunday revelry. In order for all this to be true, Jesus had to have royal roots.

He had to be 100% Jewish and he had to be a direct descendant of King David—not some half-Jewish, half-something-else like all the Herods who wore crowns because of money and power and not divine right. In other words, Jesus' credentials had to check out.

That was surprisingly easy to do, even in a pre-computer era of human history. Ancient Jews kept amazing genealogical records. Many aspects of society were governed by ancestral relationships. For example, a high priest had to be a direct descendant of Aaron, Israel's first high priest. A king had to be a direct descendant of King David.

As careful as they were, the ancient Jewish notion of family trees was different from the way we think today. Sometimes they would call a person a "son" even though he was a "grandson". Sometimes there were "levirate marriages" where, if a man died, his brother would marry the widow and their first child was legally recorded as an offspring of the dead first husband even though the living second husband was actually the father. They had many strict rules for keeping track of all these relationships.

All of this helps to explain the long list of names in the biography of Jesus recorded in Luke 3:23-37. It is one of many such lists of names in the Bible. Usually they are difficult for us to read; the names are hard for us to pronounce. Such family trees are boring to most

of us. But the list of names was extremely important to Luke's biography of Jesus.

Jesus' genealogy was unique. Luke explains in verse 23, "*Jesus himself was about thirty years old when he began his ministry. He was the son, so it was thought, of Joseph.*"

One of Luke's primary sources for his biography of Jesus was Mary, Jesus'

mother. She was married to Joseph who was Jesus' legal father. But Mary was a virgin when Jesus was conceived; in fact, she was still a virgin at the time Jesus was born.

Their laws were not unlike many American laws. If a couple is legally married and the woman

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has a baby, the husband is the legal father whether he is the biological father or not.

Mary's conception was miraculous—caused by the Holy Spirit of God. God was Jesus' father. Needless to say, this creates a lot of problems for a genealogy!

Picture one of those family trees that are popular today. On one side you have the mother with her parents and grandparents and as many generations back as you can trace. On the other side you fill in the blank for "father" with the three letters "G-O-D". Since God never began, there is no grandfather or great-grandfather or other ancestors. God has no family tree. God always was. God had no beginning. But it would have been blatantly unacceptable to list no ancestry for Jesus. If he was going to be the Messiah who claimed a right to King David's throne, he had to prove his ancestral credentials.

The solution was simple, but it was not easy. Luke listed Mary's family tree. That may make sense to us but it "just wasn't done" in ancient Israel. That was a patriarchal society; legal status and family name all came from the father's side. But Luke solved this problem by simply stating, "*He was the son, so it was thought, of Joseph.*" Then he wrote out Mary's family tree.

On Palm Sunday when the crowds applauded him, on Good Friday when they crucified him and even on Easter when he rose from the dead, I doubt many fully understood the uniqueness of this Jesus. He was no ordinary man. He was the Son of God himself. A billion infinities before he was born, before the name "Jesus" was announced, this amazing Person lived as God. Fully God; one-hundred-percent God. He was called the "Son" but he was no less God than the Father. He was the Creator of the universe, the Inventor of humanity, Lord of lords and King of all.

His birth was unique because he was and is unique. He was the Messiah, but he was much more than the Messiah. Jesus Christ was the only person in the universe who was (and is) fully divine and fully human. He alone was capable of living a perfect sinless life and then dying on the

cross as a sacrifice to pay for all of human sin. Maybe one perfect man could die in the place of one bad man and pay for that one sinner's entrance into heaven. But the only possible way for one to die for many was for the infinite God to become human. In a sense, only God was big enough to pay the price of all our sin.

All of this is why Jesus was born to a virgin. He was one of a kind in every way.

Luke said a lot when he wrote, "*Jesus was the son, so it was thought, of Joseph.*" What Luke was really communicating is that Jesus was really the Son of God. But Jesus still shares our humanity. At the same time, Jesus was and is fully human. That is why his family tree is listed—beginning with his grandfather Heli.

There are many interesting aspects to the long list of names. We are here taught that God cares about individuals. God keeps track of names. In the very limited space of the Bible, God chose to list whole pages of names of people even though future generations would not know or particularly care who they were.

Do you ever wonder if anyone will remember you after you have died? If you are fortunate, your death will be grieved for months and your life will be remembered for years. Maybe your grave marker will survive for a century. Some of us will be remembered longer than others, but life will go on after each of us dies.

Most of us will soon be forgotten. There will be new jobs, new marriages, more deaths, babies born and everything else that will blur any remaining memory that we ever lived. Sooner or later just about everyone will forget all about us—except God. God does not forget. God cares. God remembers names and relationships forever.

These names do not mean much to us. But someday the names will be our names, if our names remain on any list at all. Everyone else will have forgotten, except God. God never forgets!

Personally, I find great comfort, great meaning and a great sense of importance that God knows who I am, cares and will always remember.

This particular list has some interesting stories connected to the names. We know nothing about some of the names. Some of them we know a great deal about.

David, for example, was a brilliant musician, a skilled hunter, an effective soldier, a military strategist and a man who pursued God with zeal. He also seduced his neighbor's wife, slept with her, she became pregnant and David put a hit on her husband and had him killed to cover up his own adultery.

Judah fathered twins by his own daughter-in-law.

Jacob was an interesting ancestor of Jesus. He had a reputation as a conniving cheat. Although in his later years he increasingly turned his heart and his life toward God.

Abraham was the father of all the Jewish people. He was a great man of faith, but he had lapses where he lied about his wife and said she was his sister in order to protect his own skin.

Noah is most famous for building an ark, but that's not all he did. Much of his life he trusted God in exceptional and amazing ways. However, he did have a problem with alcohol.

Methuselah was an ancestor of Jesus who was famous for one thing. He lived longer than anyone else recorded in the Bible—969 years. I am not sure if living long is by itself a good thing to do, but Methuselah lived almost a millennium.

Enoch was one of the godliest in the family tree. The Bible describes him simply as a man who “walked with God”. His greatest claim to fame is that he never died. Apparently God skipped death and took him right to heaven.

Isn't it interesting that Jesus had such a mix of sinners and saints in his family? Just like all of us. We have some family members who make us proud and others who are a total embarrassment. In the genetic heritage of Jesus were murderers, adulterers, addicts, thieves, liars, manipu-

lators and some very good people. Just like us! The long list of names reminds us that he was like us. He came from a family much like our families.

It is especially interesting that this family tree goes all the way back to Adam. It didn't have to. Luke could have stopped with David or Abraham and the Jewish community would have been satisfied. But there was a greater point being made here. Jesus was more than a Jew. Jesus is the Savior of more than the Jewish people. Jesus is one of us all. He descended from Adam just like every other human being. Jesus is the Savior of Jews and Gentiles, blacks and whites, Asians and Native Americans, males and females. The human history of Jesus clearly teaches that Jesus shares all of our humanity.

But Jesus had royal blood, too. Mary also was a descendant of King David, but it was through a son of David's named Nathan, not through David's son Solomon who succeeded him as king. So, Jesus was a descendant of King David. He fit the necessary profile to be both King and Messiah. He was technically qualified to fulfill the prophecies of the Old Testament.

There is an interesting further confirmation of this that comes from silence. Remember that

Jesus had many critics and very strong enemies. They made false accusations, lied about him and eventually had him arrested on false charges and crucified. But they never denied that he was a descendant of David. They accused him of being a tool of the devil, but they never said he

lacked royal heritage. Even his enemies knew he was qualified to be the Christ.

What they failed to realize was how royal he really was. There is a dramatic description of Jesus almost on the last page of the Bible in Revelation 19:16 where he is described as “the King of kings and Lord of lords.”

This Jesus was a descendant of David and therefore had some scraps of royal genetics wo-

*Be a fully committed Christian, ...willing to give everything to Jesus the Christ.*

ven into his chromosomes, but he was much, much more. This Jesus was the Head King, Number One, absolute Sovereign, King of kings. As Lord God of all, every head of state and every head of government was subject to him.

King Jesus had the right and the power to order anything of anyone. There was not an army or court of politicians that could ever force him to do anything he did not choose to do. That's what makes the rest of the story so stunning. From Palm Sunday he walked through the next week until his subjects beat him, crowned him with thorns, nailed him to a cross and put a sign over his head that said in multiple languages *THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS*. They killed the King!

Whether you find Jesus' genealogy interesting or boring is really not the point. The point is how do you respond to Jesus? That is what really matters. Do you believe that Jesus is unique in his origin, the eternal Son of God born to the Virgin Mary? Do you acknowledge his human history – that he came to be one of us, born into a human family so that he could become our Savior from sin? Do you submit to him as your King, the supreme ruler of your life as well as the world?

We have an interesting expression in our culture and language for complete love and loyalty to another person. It is the kind of expression

that probably is not easily understood by persons from other languages and cultures. We say that he would “give you the shirt off his back.” In other words, he would give up everything. It's just about as far as a person can go. But Jesus went much farther than that. He gave life—for us!

When Jesus entered Jerusalem on Palm Sunday the people laid their clothes down to carpet his way. I suppose that many of those people never got back what they gave for Jesus. But they didn't care. They were willing to give him everything.

I invite you to be that kind of a person. Be a fully committed Christian, willing to give your life, willing to give the shirt off your back, willing to give everything to Jesus the Christ.

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