

I. Introduction

A. Today is one of the days where I'm tempted to tell the greeters, "After I step up to preach, lock the doors." It's not that I am going to be talking about money or giving. You'll wish I was! I am speaking on a text in Luke that no one speaks on unless they are committed to working their way, line-by-line, through the whole book. We have arrived at the genealogies – the page of the phone book that made it into Luke's Gospel. "So and so begat so and so, who begat so and so, who begat."

B. If you were looking ahead you saw this coming and probably thought, "Surely Woodruff has enough common sense to skip over this list and get to the good stuff." Well, apparently not. In my defense let me say, I'm not a big fan of genealogies either. I have two genealogy books at home: one on the Woodruff side of the family, one on for the McBride – my Mom's maiden name.

C. The Woodruff book came out in the late 60s. I am listed in it. I am the oldest of five kids. My first sister, Kristin, is also in the book, but not my second, Karen, or my twin brothers. It came out before they were born. This really rankled Karen. And so, if they were fighting Kristin would usually say something like, "At least I'm in the book." Or, "Why would I care what you think, you're not even in the book." Never mind that none of us ever looked through the book.

D. The second book was compiled by my Uncle. He is the retired professor from University of Texas – the geologist I've talked about a few times. He's the guy with the sand collection that was confiscated by the FBI. Since retiring a few years ago he's been devoting a lot of his time to researching the family tree. Traveling to libraries and graveyards throughout the US and Europe. Doing DNA matches and then traveling to visit the people there is some link to. He's traced parts of that side of the family tree back to the 1600s.

E. I saw him this week in Austin. I was down there for a conference. We got together for coffee and he gave me another rock – just like he used to do. This time it's a piece of chert from Utah. He used to give me rocks - geodes, pieces of marble or quartz – every Christmas. About ten years ago I called him to say, "I'm just now realizing that when I was about ten you gave me a piece of asbestos." There was silence for a moment and then he said, "Uh, you've got the wrong uncle." He later claimed that if he was the right uncle and if he had given me asbestos that the statute of limitations was long past.

F. Anyway, he's a fun and interesting guy. He's written a number of things about our family and sent them to me. I have them all, but I haven't read much of any of it because, well, I'm just not that into genealogies.

G. But here's the deal – first: this genealogy is in The Book. Our passage today is essentially little more than a list of 76 names - 77 if you count God. Most of them you've not heard before. Many are hard to pronounce. But, they are in the Book. And, by my way of thinking, that makes them important. In 2 Timothy 3:16 we are told that all Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness. This doesn't mean that all Scripture is equally important. But God saw fit to include this in the Book. So, I start with the assumption that we need to give it a look. And second, it's actually really is good stuff. There is great stuff here. I think you'll be surprised.

II. So let me stumble through this list. It's begins in Luke 3:23.

A. Now Jesus himself was about thirty years old when he began his ministry. He was the son, so it was thought, of Joseph,

B. the son of Heli,²⁴ the son of Matthat,

C. the son of Levi, the son of Melki,

D. the son of Jannai, the son of Joseph,

E.²⁵ the son of Mattathias, the son of Amos,

F. the son of Nahum, the son of Esli,

G. the son of Naggai,²⁶ the son of Maath,

H. the son of Mattathias, the son of Semein,

I. the son of Josek, the son of Joda,

J.²⁷ the son of Joanan, the son of Rhesa,

K. the son of Zerubbabel, the son of Shealtiel,

L. the son of Neri,²⁸ the son of Melki,

M. the son of Addi, the son of Cosam,

N. the son of Elmadam, the son of Er,

O.²⁹ the son of Joshua, the son of Eliezer,

P. the son of Jorim, the son of Matthat,

Q. the son of Levi,³⁰ the son of Simeon,

- R. the son of Judah, the son of Joseph,
- S. the son of Jonam, the son of Eliakim,
- T. ³¹ the son of Melea, the son of Menna,
- U. the son of Mattatha, the son of Nathan,
- V. the son of David, ³² the son of Jesse,
- W. the son of Obed, the son of Boaz,
- X. the son of Salmon,^[d] the son of Nahshon,
- Y. ³³ the son of Amminadab, the son of Ram,^[e]
- Z. the son of Hezron, the son of Perez,
- AA. the son of Judah, ³⁴ the son of Jacob,
- BB. the son of Isaac, the son of Abraham,
- CC. the son of Terah, the son of Nahor,
- DD. ³⁵ the son of Serug, the son of Reu,
- EE. the son of Peleg, the son of Eber,
- FF. the son of Shelah, ³⁶ the son of Cainan,
- GG. the son of Arphaxad, the son of Shem,
- HH. the son of Noah, the son of Lamech,
- II. ³⁷ the son of Methuselah, the son of Enoch,
- JJ. the son of Jared, the son of Mahalalel,
- KK. the son of Kenan, ³⁸ the son of Enosh,
- LL. the son of Seth, the son of Adam,
- MM. the son of God.

III. There are actually a number of genealogies in the Bible

A. There are several in Genesis; the Book of Numbers is essentially one long genealogy. They are found in First and Second Chronicles, Ezra and a few other spots in the Old Testament. There are two in the New Testament: Matthew 1 and Luke 3. Each genealogy is different and is recorded for different reasons.

B. You should know that they are not exhaustive. The refrain in what I just read was, “the son of” – that’s unusual. Luke goes backward. In every other genealogy they move forward, which means the line that is repeated over and over is, “the father of,” or, in the KJV, “begat.” Begat is an odd word but in some ways it’s a better word because a few generations might go missing between X and Y. When the text says, “X begat Y” well, Y maybe the great grandson of X. The genealogical records found in the Bible were abbreviated. Perhaps in part to make them easier to memorize. There is suggestion for this given that Matthew includes three lists of 14 and Luke gives us 11 lists of 7. It appears they’ve been adjusted so people could learn them easier.

C. You should also know that they were very important to the Jews. We could care less. Many people are hard pressed to give the names of their grandparents. I’ve asked people before and they say things like, “My Grandmother’s name was “Grammy” (or “Noona or Mimi), and we called my grandfather Powpow, but I’m just now realizing that those probably weren’t their real names. “You think?” That’s for their grandparents. Good-luck going back any further than that!

D. In contrast, virtually every Jew could trace their lineage all the way back to Abraham.¹ This was important to them because, in that culture, a lot depended on their lineage. The land was tied to various tribes, so sales from one family to the next would only be legally recognized after lineage was established.² There were issues involving taxes and inheritance that required certain proof of your background.³ Priests were only recognized as priests if they could trace their blood line back to Levi. Kings had to go back to David. Herod the Great called himself “King of the Jews” but the people didn’t accept him because he wasn’t a descendent of David. He wasn’t even a Jew, he was Idumean.⁴ He tried to court their favor. He tried to win them over, both by marrying into a prominent Jewish family and building a massive Temple. But, he didn’t have a drop of David’s blood in him and consequently they never really acknowledged him.

¹ This is no longer true. After returning from the Exile, the people not only rebuilt the Temple, they also set to work to restore the genealogical records that had been destroyed when the Temple fell. They then carefully preserved these through 70 AD. But at that time – when the Temple was destroyed and the Jews were sent away – the records were lost. Today, to their great sadness, few Jews are able to trace their line much further back than New Testament times.

² Genealogical records were consulted to insure that land belonging to one tribe was not sold to members of another tribe – thereby destroying the integrity of the ancient tribal boundaries.

³ We see this when Joseph has to return to Bethlehem to register for the census and to pay taxes.

E. To the Jews, genealogies were very important.

IV. Well, as I said, there are a couple dozen in the Bible. There are two in the New Testament: one in Mt 1 and the one we are focused on today in Luke 3

A. They are quite different. The list found in Matthew starts with Abraham, moves forward (in the traditional way), and is based on Joseph's blood line through Solomon. It's a legal document designed to show that as the adopted son of Joseph, Jesus was qualified to be the Messiah. He fit the profile. He could trace his lineage back to David.

B. Luke starts with Jesus and moves backwards – which is different and, perhaps a bit more exciting. It follows Mary's blood line. It also works its way back to David, though it does so via Nathan instead of Solomon. Also, it goes back past Abraham all the way back to Adam and then to God.

V. There are a number of key insights to be gleaned here. If you sit with these lists for a while – and it takes a while. Insights from genealogical records seldom jump off the page at you. You have to dig. You have to read The Book over and over. But if you do, after a while a few things emerge. For instance:

A. God took his time. He did not move quickly - at least 2,000 years transpired between his initial promise to send a rescuer and that promises fulfillment. Over and over he has Old Testament prophets say, "things are bad. God is sending the Messiah." And then centuries go by before he does. God does not move quickly as we measure time. Some of you know that from your own experiences. It's good to be reminded of that here.

B. He broke into history. The genealogies make it clear that this is not a fable. Jesus was a real person. We are reading real history. It's not, "once upon a time in a land far, far away." Part of what makes the Christian faith so offensive to some is that it's not a claim to what is true for me. It's a claim to truth. This is what happened. This is reality.

C. In his treatment of this passage Tim Keller makes much of the fact that Jesus is the seventh seven in Matthew's list. Remember, I said that it's clear that these lists were condensed. Well in Matthew's list, there are 3 sets of 14, which makes Jesus the seventh seven – which for a Jew would have pointed to all kinds of ideas around Sabbath rest and year of Jubilee.⁵

⁴ Idumean's – like Samaritans – were Semitic. They were descendants of Edom. In other words, they were very close, but they were not Jews.

⁵ See "The Begats," by Tim Keller, Dec. 25, 1994.

D. There is a lot here. I want to highlight two big ideas.

VI. First, let's be clear about the main reason this passage is in Luke's Gospel. It's to highlight the fact that Jesus is The One.

A. The principle reason the genealogies make it into The Book is to point people to Christ. It's not to entertain or even simply to inform and educate. It is to support the main purpose of The Gospels themselves to persuade people to follow Jesus. To put their faith in Him; to worship Him; to obey Him.

B. Think about it this way: each writer crafted their Gospel to a specific audience.

1. Mark wrote for the Romans – the members of a multi-national, multi-ethnic empire who didn't care about blood lines. Roman citizenship was for sale, which meant that the Roman elite were an amalgamation of all kinds of people. No one blood line mattered, consequently, Mark doesn't make a genealogical argument.

2. John is writing for the Greeks – who have been shaped by big ideas, by philosophy, by Heraclitus, Socrates, Plato and Aristotle. Consequently he skips the genealogies, preferring to explain how Jesus is the eternal logos – and how God became Man.

3. Matthew is writing for the Jews, so right out of the gate – before he so much as says Boo. Before there is any Christmas story, anything about anything at all – virgin birth, angels from heaven, eternal life, forgiveness of sins, anything, he lets them know Jesus is a descendant of David. Matthew 1:1 reads, “This is the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah the son of David, the son of Abraham.” You see, there were others who had claimed to be the Messiah. The Jews were looking, but they were also a bit skeptical. So, right away Matthew goes to their very first question: is this would-be Messiah in compliance with 2 Samuel 7? Is he a descendant of David?⁶

⁶ Matthew mentions David before even Abraham because David's lineage was the more limiting factor.

C. Which brings us to Luke. Luke is writing for Gentiles. They want to know if Jesus is really God and Man, someone they should follow and worship. So, Luke uses a genealogy to show that Jesus is a real person but, he doesn't stop when he backs up to Abraham. That might be all it takes for a Jew because they are all familiar with the promises God made to Abraham back in Genesis 12. Instead, Luke goes all the way back to the beginning. He goes all the way back to God – stating in a way none of the biblical genealogies stated – that Jesus was God himself. The way this is crafted, the argument is, Jesus is equal to the Father. They are peers.

1. About a year ago Sheri, Jason and I were walking out of the high school after some event and there were a lot of cheerleaders practicing and one of them runs by and does all kinds of cartwheels and back flips. And we all sort of marveled and I said, “Wow, it’s been a long time since I’ve done anything even close to that.” At which point Jason said, “Not me. I did a cartwheel about two weeks ago. I was challenged. So I did it. Not pretty. But I did a cartwheel. You should do one Dad. Come on. Try it.”

2. I said, “I am not going to try to do a cartwheel. Those days are long gone.

3. “Come on Dad. Do a cartwheel. You can do it. I’m throwing down the challenge. Peer pressure.”

4. At which point I said, “You’re not my peer. Peer pressure is generally a bad idea. But, newsflash, you’re not my peer. You’re my 17 year old son. I’m not going to be shamed into trying to do a cartwheel.”

5. Now, we’ve since had conversations in which I’ve noted that at some point, he will be my peer. The lineage of Jesus going back to God is highlighting the fact that Jesus is God. He is co-equal with the Father.

D. Luke includes the genealogy of Jesus where he does as one more piece of evidence that Jesus is The One. He opened with the supernatural announcement to Zechariah that his son would be born in order to announce the arrival of the Messiah. Some remarkable things happen around John’s birth – hey, just the fact that Elizabeth got pregnant is seen as a bit of a miracle.

E. There are all of the special features around Christ’s birth:

1. The angel’s announcement to Mary

2. The Virgin conception through the Holy Spirit

3. The testimonies of many – not just Mary and Joseph, but also Simeon and Anna, who testified that Jesus was the salvation of the Jews.

4. Luke builds the case about Jesus being unique with a glimpse at his unique nature at the age of 12.

5. Luke builds the case for Jesus with the events we've been looking at about his baptism

- a) John doesn't feel qualified to perform such a task
- b) The heaven's part and God the Father declares that Jesus is God.
- c) The Holy Spirit descends upon him.

6. The genealogies are just more evidence. That's why Luke includes these names. The principle reason is to keep building the case that Jesus is God and we should worship, obey and follow him.

F. Men and women, nothing is in here by accident. I know that when you went to college you learned to add filler to essay questions. You would add any esoteric point you could think to include. Some of you would repeat the essay question three different ways in a desperate attempt to look like you knew what was going on. The opposite happens in the Gospels. Paper was rare. You only put down things that mattered. The genealogies matter. They are here for a reason – and the principle reason is to argue that we should follow Jesus. He is God.

G. He's a real person. He is divine. He fulfills the prophecies. God loves us in spite of who we are – and Christ is here to make a way back for us.

H. There are other things to note. For instance, Luke opens by noting that Jesus was thirty. The passage reads, "Now Jesus himself was about thirty years old when he began his ministry." This is quite standard. It's the age Old Testament prophets generally began their ministry. Ditto for Scribes and Levites. Ditto for David as King, John the Baptist and others.

I. It's also worth noting how Luke is careful to preserve the claim to the virgin birth in the way he traces things. "Now Jesus himself was about thirty years old when he began his ministry. He was the son, so it was thought, of Joseph, the son of Heli, the son of Matthat...". The line, "so it was thought" is code for: though this was not true. And, in case you missed this, he doesn't say he was the Son of Joseph. He was adopted by Joseph but he doesn't say he was the son of Joseph. He starts the list by noting that Joseph was the son Heli.⁷

⁷ The various ways it is suggested that Joseph is not Jesus' biological father are not only important in preserving the Virgin Birth, they are also noteworthy because of a curse recorded in Jeremiah 22:30, which reads, This is what the LORD says: "Record this man as if childless, a man who will not prosper in his lifetime, for none of his offspring

VII. Second, God can use anyone. God can work through messed up people and dysfunctional families. Let me camp here for a bit.

A. People generally play up historical links to those who were successful and prominent, sometimes doing so whether they have any justification to do so or not. You might remember, Saddam Hussein claimed to be a direct descendent of Mohammed.⁸ Today people will say, “I’m the 38th cousin of Abraham Lincoln.” They do not say, “I’m the second cousin to John Wayne Gacey.” You highlight those you like and you downplay those you don’t.

B. Well, this was especially true in older times when your genealogy was your resume.⁹ There are few places in the world today where your lineage matters less than it does in the US. We are a melting pot. We are all about being independent and self-made. We are a bit unique that way. For most people at most times your ancestry mattered a lot. It was a big. Consequently, you played up the good and you buried the bad.

C. What I’d like you to see is that we get almost the opposite here in the Bible. The lists we are given are a collection of idolaters, murders, thieves, adulterers, liars and slave owners. It’s a whole bunch of people that most families would go, “yeah, we don’t talk about him.”

D. It’s not just that some people on the list are a bit scuffed up. It’s that virtually all of them have big problems.

E. I understand that this might be news to you because it’s not the way the story is often told. We celebrate Abraham for his faith, hiding the fact that he wasn’t man enough to defend his wife. We celebrate David as a man after God’s own heart, overlooking the adultery, which was followed by murder to cover it up.

F. Matthew includes four women on his list - Tamar, Rahab, Ruth and Bathsheba – that no one else would be likely to include. It’s not just that women were not included in lineages back then, although they weren’t. Luke traces Mary’s blood line without mentioning Mary. But that’s not the surprising part. It’s that three of them are Gentiles – Tamar, Rahab and Ruth. And three of them – Tamar, Rahab and Bathsheba – are known for some pretty salacious behavior.

will prosper, none will sit on the throne of David or rule anymore in Judah.” If Jesus was Joseph’s son, he would be disqualified from being the Messiah.

⁸ In the Greek and Roman world, genealogies were often used to establish the pedigree of a hero. There was a lot of myth involved. Plato, Alexander the Great, some of the Caesars, etc. would often be tied back to one of the gods of the Greek or Roman pantheon.

⁹ The ancient Greek and Roman leaders were often traced back to some member of the pantheon of gods.

1. Tamar seduces her father-in-law, Judah, the son of Jacob.¹⁰
2. Rahab, who was a Canaanite – one of Israel’s bitter enemies – was a prostitute, a liar and a traitor.
3. Bathsheba sleeps with David while she’s married to Uriah.
4. Ruth who appears to make many good moral choices – honorable choices – is a Moabite, that is, a descendent of the incestuous relationship between Lot and one of his daughters.

G. These are not people you list for references. These are not people you expect to find in the genealogical record for the Son of God. At first pass it’s hard to tell if it’s more shocking that they are in his past or that they show up on this list. It would not have taken much to hide them – but that is not what happened.

H. And I believe that a big reason they show up here is to make the point that God works through broken people.¹¹ It’s not that they are so wonderful and good. It’s that He is! It’s not that God is able to use them because of who they are – it’s that He can use them in spite of who they are. One of the main things that jumps out of the genealogies in Matthew and Luke is that God uses broken, sinful, incestuous, greedy, lying, unqualified people, and He does so because He is a God of grace.

I. And I don’t know about you, but I’m really glad to hear that.

J. On Saturday’s at 5:00 and then again on Sundays at 8:30, we meet to walk through the service: do sound checks, make sure we know who is doing what and when. Those meetings begin with prayer that combines an acknowledgment of our sinfulness alongside a request for his presence. We ask God to use even us.

K. We are not here to lead in worship on the basis of our insight, qualifications, good hearts, spiritual merit – but in spite of our brokenness. Don’t get me wrong. We come boldly into God’s presence. We ask for his favor. We ask that He work in and through us to His glory. But we do so in the name of Christ. We do not ask on the basis of our goodness but in spite of our badness. We ask that God would use EVEN us.

L. I appreciate the list of misfits that make up Matthew and Luke’s Gospel. And I believe that one of the reasons the list makes it into our Bibles is so that we can be reminded: God uses broken people.

¹⁰ The strange story about Tamar is told in Genesis 38.

¹¹ Martin Luther said that Jesus is the “kind of person who is not ashamed of sinners, in fact, he even puts them in his family tree! Ulrich Zwingli said that the genealogy of Jesus in Matthew contained all the essential theology of the reformation.