



Skeletons in the Closet

5 Bible studies on Jesus' surprising genealogy

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Skeletons in the Closet (1)

Introduction

Have you ever decided to research your ancestors? It can be a bit of a risk; most people have some skeletons in their closet somewhere! Of course, here in Australia its considered 'special' to be able to trace our family back to an early convict. However to the Jews, it was important to know their lineage was pure. That is why it is amazing that Matthew began his Gospel, written for Jews, with Jesus' lineage and threw in skeletons and all?

We are going to look at some of these surprises and then try to work out Matthew's reasoning.

- 1 Read Ezra 2:62
- a) Why were family records so important to the Jews returning from exile?

King Herod, who was half Jew and half Edomite, was so embarrassed at not having his name in the records that he ordered their destruction. He refused to allow anyone to claim a purer pedigree than his own!

- 2 Read Genesis 12:1-3 and Samuel 7:16
- a) What promise did God make to Abraham?

 - b) What promise did God make to David?

- c) Why do you think Matthew made sure that both Abraham and David are mentioned in Jesus' genealogy?

- d) What could be the connection between these promises and Jesus?

- 3 Read Matthew 1:1-16

- a) Is there a name that you would expect to find in Jesus' family tree that isn't there?

- b) Are there any names you are surprised to see there? Why?

Only 5 women are named in this long list. Mary, Jesus' mother seems a pretty obvious choice. What about the other four? We're going to look at each of these women and their stories in the next few weeks. Then we should be able to work out why Matthew mentioned them.

Tamar and God's abounding grace

- 4 Read Genesis 38:1-30

Not a soap opera, but certainly an enthralling drama, full of intrigue and wickedness! A bit of background for you: 'Levirate' marriage was common in Tamar's day. It was designed so that one branch of a family wouldn't die out. The whole family was considered responsible for the continuation of the line of a dead relative. Thus the brother of the deceased would sleep with his widow and any children would become heirs of the dead man, not the brother.

- (a) We know that Judah was part of the plot to sell his kid brother Joseph into slavery (Chapter 37) but, from this week's reading, what do we know about his marriage?

- (b) At a later date God forbade his people to marry foreigners (Deut 7:3-4). Why do you think he did this?

- (c) Why did Er die?

- (d) Can you think of a reason why Onan refused to father a child by Tamar?

- (e) Why did God respond the way he did?

- (f) What do you think was the reason Judah sent Tamar away (v11)? Do you think he was justified?

- (g) Look at Judah's reaction in v24. What are your feelings about it? It might help to read Hosea 4:14

- (h) Judah failed in his moral obligation under the levirate law. Tamar was determined to fulfill hers so she set a trap. Do you think she was morally right?

- (i) What do Tamar's actions tell you about Judah's reputation?

- (j) Why do you think Judah reacted the way he did in v26?

5 Read Genesis 12:1-3 again

Here is a God creating a chosen people, destined to be a blessing to the world. Each generation did its best to jeopardize God's plan, but he always took steps to maintain His way.

- (a) What does this show you about people?

- (b) What does it show you about God?

(c) How is Ephesians 2: 8-9 demonstrated in this story?

Have you noticed in your life, that God uses the strangest methods and the most unlikely people to achieve His purposes? God in his abounding grace gave Tamar not one but two children. One of them Perez, is mentioned in Jesus' genealogy (and so is his mother Tamar!)

Sometime during the week, make yourself a cuppa and think back over all the times you have "mucked things up". Then remember how God has not left you in the mess you deserve to be in. Praise and thank God for his grace in your life.

To Pray

Thank God for your ancestors that have been in His plan for you (skeletons and all)

Praise Him for his persistence with you despite the times you have failed Him.

Pray that he will empower you to achieve His purposes

Ask God to help you recognize those around you who are unaware of his abounding grace and ask for the words to tell them

Meditate on Jesus, our Redeemer, who saves us from our sins

Rahab, a Scarlett Woman (2)

Last week we read about Tamar who played a prostitute in order to trick her father-in-law into what today would be called incest. And yet she had an honoured place in Jesus' family tree.

This week we meet Rahab, a full-time prostitute in Jericho (a heavily fortified town), which stood in the way of the Israelites' conquest of the Promised Land. Joshua, the leader of the Israelites was on a mission from God. He was neither reckless nor naïve and he shows us that acting in faith doesn't mean acting thoughtlessly. Joshua did the wise thing and sent spies to check out Jericho.

1 Read Joshua 2: 1-25

- (a) After reading all the chapter, can you think of a reason why the Israelite spies would stay in a prostitute's house?

- (b) It seems that it wasn't just the Israelites who had spies in Jericho. Who else did?

- (c) What crime was Rahab committing when she lied to the King's men? What punishment do you think she risked?

- (d) Circumstances seemed to have forced Rahab into choosing between loyalty to her own people and loyalty to the Lord of Israel. Do you think this still happens today? Explain....

- (e) Why did Rahab tell the messengers to 'go after them quickly' (v5)?

2 Read Joshua 2: 8-11 again

- (a) This is a great statement of Faith by Rahab, a Canaanite pagan. What had convinced her of the greatness of Israel's God?

- (b) These events showed Rahab that God was present and working with his people. Can you think of any other miracle performed by God that led to faith in Him?

- (c) Do we need miracles today to believe in God? Why? Why not?

- (d) In these verses we learnt that there are two reactions to hearing about God's miraculous acts. What were they?

3 Jericho had no television or radio so it is surprising how much Rahab knew about Israel's history and about God's plans for the future. Read Exodus 7:5

- (a) Who was the chief media man who spread the news and what was his purpose?

- (b) If Rahab hadn't heard about God's work in Egypt and the Trans-Jordan do you think she would have been convinced that he was able to give her homeland to Israel?

Something to think about

Do you think it is important to tell non-Christians about God's work in our lives?

4

Read Joshua 2: 12ff again

- (a) In return for her kindness to the spies, what does rahab expect in return (v12)?
- (b) What do you think Rahab actually expected when she asked that her family's lives be spared? What actually happened (Josh 6:20-25)?

From our perspective, Rahab's knowledge of the Lord was very limited, but her faith was appropriate for what she knew. Because of her faith, she was saved. How do you explain the salvation of her family?

God said that all the Canaanites were to be killed and yet, because Rahab was prepared to switch her allegiance she

survived and was listed among Jesus' ancestors. Could you use this story to explain the gospel to a non-christian? If so, how?

Obviously the scarlet cord was a handy signpost for the Israelites. To tie it there and be silent was also an act of obedience for Rahab and her family. Paul tells us that faith must lead to obedience. So there we have the story of Rahab, the prostitute, who as a result of her faith and obedience was rewarded with a place among God's people. Jesus the friend of sinners, could not have been ashamed of this 'skeleton' in his closet!

Pray about it

Praise God for his miraculous deeds, especially raising Jesus from the dead so that we too can have eternal life.

Thank God that he doesn't ask for blind faith, but reveals himself so that we might know Him as the Lord of heaven and earth.

Pray that we might reach out to the social outcasts with love and the gospel.

Pray for women who are forced into prostitution so that their families might survive.

A Foreign Skeleton (3)

Read the Book of Ruth- go on, it is only four chapters!!!

(This book is about ordinary people like us, living in times similar to ours, although a long time ago in sense of time.)

1 When did the events in Ruth take place? (1:1)

“This was a time of great evil in Israel. There was violence, immorality and civil strife. People had turned away from God and did what they wanted” (Judges 21: 25). On top of this, Naomi had the added hardship of living in a foreign country where foreign gods were worshipped and, therefore, there was no fellowship with fellow believers. Just like us, these Israelites found themselves under stress and enduring hardship.

How did they cope? Did they lose faith in the Lord's existence? Did they doubt the Lord's providence? (Providence is God keeping His hand on ALL of His creation, including us. He is always present, caring, ruling and providing. Nothing happens that God doesn't allow).

What can we learn by looking at these people?

2 NAOMI

(a) What stress was she under?

(b) What was her reaction?

(c) Did Naomi lose her faith in God? Are you ever as frank with God as Naomi was? Why/ Why not?

(d) How do we know that Naomi did not lose her faith in God's providence?

3 ORPAH

(a) What stress was she under?

(b) What was her reaction? What do you think about her returning to Moab?

(c) Did Orpah have faith in God and did she trust in the Lord's providence?

4 RUTH

(a) What stress was she under?

(b) How did she react?

(c) Did Ruth have faith in God?

(d) How do we know she trusted in his providence?

(e) What do you think about Ruth's refusal to return to Moab?

5 BOAZ

(a) What stress was he under?

(b) How did he react?

(c) Did Boaz have faith in the Lord?

(d) Did Boaz trust in the Lord's providence?

6 Today you have arrived at this study in the context of a much wider picture. A great deal occurs in any individual's life that often sits under the surface. As we consider the lives of these OT characters why not consider the following questions.

(a) What stress are you under ?

(b) How are you reacting?

(c) Does your stress cause you to doubt your faith in God?

(d) Does it make you wonder about the providence of God?

(e) Has anything happened on the news lately that has caused you to ask "Why does God allow this to happen?"

Lots of people talk about chance or good luck or bad luck, today. They could read Ruth and say that chance played a part in the famine, in the deaths, in Ruth's choice of Boaz's field, in his attraction for her and in their eventual marriage. But those who trust in God would see His hand in all that happened.

7 Do you have problems with seeing God's hand in famine and other hardships?

8 After reading the book of Ruth: What 1 characteristic would you like to share with:

- (a) Naomi?
- (b) Orpah?
- (c) Ruth?
- (d) Boaz?

9 Remembering what we have learnt about Levirate marriage, whose family name would Ruth and Boaz's first son take?

Can any man's love be greater than Boaz's for Ruth, the Moabitess? He truly was her kinsman- redeemer.

10 Read Ephesians 2: 11-13, 19
What similarities can you see between Boaz and Jesus?

The book of Ruth began with 3 deaths and finishes with a list of births.

11 (a) Who was the great grandchild of Boaz and the foreigner, Ruth?

(b) Who was their eventual descendant?

Pray about it

Praise God for His control of history

Praise God for His concern for individuals and for His concern for detail in the little things of life

Thank God for bringing a 'foreigner' like you into His family and His inheritance

Ask God for patience and increased faith as He works out His purposes in your life

Pray that you will handle the stresses in your life in such a way that you will be a faithful witness to God's loving providence.

The Flawed Hero (4)

In today's society adultery has become common place. When people condemn it, it is usually on the grounds that the spouse or the kids get hurt therefore, it is wrong. This outlook downgrades God's view of marriage and largely ignores adultery's destructive outcomes. The marriage relationship is likened to the covenant relationship between God and his people. Unfaithfulness to God is called spiritual adultery.

This week we have a story of lust, abuse of power, adultery, dishonesty and murder. Yet, there is also love, tenderness, grief, repentance and forgiveness. If you have not sinned and taken pleasure in it (even though you knew it was wrong), this study is not for you.

However, if you have had to face the effects of sin and the damage done by it, if you've wept for your failure and yearned to turn the clock back, continue on while we consider Jesus' ancestor, King David.

1 Read 2 Samuel 11: 1-3

(a) In 11:1 we are told that in spring, kings went to war. After all, the rainy season was over, the roads would have been passable, there would have been plenty of fodder for the animals and food in the fields for the men. However, which king did not go to war that spring?

(b) This neglect of duty had far reaching consequences. When we are told King David got up from his bed, what did he do?

2 Read Matthew 5: 27-28

Why could Jesus have had David on his mind in this passage?

3 Read 2 Samuel 11: 4-27

(a) Do you think Bathsheba had any choice when David sent for her?

(b) King David is master of all he surveys, yet it is not enough; he wants the wife of his loyal servant Uriah. Do you think abuse of power is still prevalent today? Are men like Bill Clinton unique?

(c) v4's purification issue is difficult to understand. See Leviticus 15: 25-30 to help you understand. What significance does this have to the rest of the story?

Verse 5 gives us the only recorded spoken words of Bathsheba and they lead to her husband's death, marriage to the King and to becoming an ancestor of Jesus.

David sent for Bathseba. He sent for Uriah. Royal power was being abused. The loyal, innocent Uriah committed one crime (v 8-9, 13); and it is unfortunate that he got in the way of royal lust and power.

(d) David hatches up a 3 part plan to cover up his sin. Name them.

1.

2.

3.

(e) What caused David's early plan to fail?

(f) Read 1 Samuel 21: 4-5. What does this tell you about Uriah?

(g) Who besides Uriah dies because of David's plan (2 Samuel 11:17)

(h) How is Uriah's relationship to David described in 2 Samuel 11:21-24?

(i) What was David's attitude to the death of his loyal servant (v25) and what was God's attitude to David's sin (v27)?

4 Read 2 Samuel 12: 1-24

In this passage we meet the prophet Nathan. Nathan appears without introduction in 2 Samuel 7 (1 Chronicles 17) when David expresses his wish to build a temple. Nathan approves at first, but after speaking with God informs David that this task is for David's descendant.

Here Nathan is best known for his fearless denunciation of David's double sin against Uriah the Hittite and the proclaiming of a parable of judgment upon the King.

(a) How did God make David confront his sinfulness?

(b) What do you think of David's outburst (v5-6)?

(c) God had given David so much, but what does God say in v8?

(d) What punishment do you think David deserved and what punishment did God give him?

5 Read Psalm 51

(a) Look at verse 13 and from your reading of Psalm 51, what do you think caused David to repent so totally?

(b) Despite repentance, David was still punished. Was that fair?

Why do you think God took the baby's life?

(c) When God told David his baby would die, David pleaded with God, fasted and slept outside on the hard ground. Is it Ok to ask God to change his mind? What do you think of David's reaction to the news of the baby's death?

David was weak, flawed, a sinner; yet in 2 Samuel 11:24 we are told that the Lord still loved him. Why would this fill you with joy and thanksgiving?

In v24, we are told that David comforted his wife Bathsheba. He had wronged her terribly and caused her enormous grief. When David repented he did not dump Bathsheba to distance himself from the guilt. He took responsibility for what he had done and made amends to the best of his ability. The son of this comforting became King Solomon of Israel. Bathsheba was to be an ancestor of the Messiah. Perhaps it would be a good time to reflect on those we have wronged. Have we done all we can do to rectify the situation with God and with them?

Pray about it

Praise God for reminding us that He loves us even though we are sinners.

Thank God that we, weak and flawed, are part of Jesus' family.

Jesus and Uriah showed integrity and courage in the face of temptation. Pray for God to empower you to do the same.

Pray that we will remember that when we sin against someone, our major sin is against God.

Pray for wisdom and courage in upholding God's standards within our society.

Why Not Hide the Skeletons?

Matthew's genealogy of Jesus was utterly amazing for its day (Pre-Jemism). In Jewish culture, women had no legal rights. They couldn't inherit property or give testimony in a court of law. They were completely under their husband's power and were seen more as "things" rather than as people. The Jewish man thanked God every day that he had not been born a slave, a gentile or a woman! What's more, apart from Ruth, these women (and David) were not the type of people a Jew could want in his record of ancestors. Why did Matthew, a Jewish Christian, choose to include them in His Lord's genealogy? What is he teaching about Jesus?

1 Whose genealogy is Matthew telling about in v1?

2 Think about these titles. What is Matthew setting out to prove?

(a) Jesus (Hint: v21)

(b) Christ (Hint: means Anointed One)

(c) Son of David (Hint 2 Samuel 7:12)

(d) Son of Abraham (Hint Genesis 12: 1-3)

3 Apart from them being women, why would Matthew's readers have been surprised to find Tamar, Rahab, Ruth and Bathsheba named?

Maybe we will see what was in Matthew's mind by looking at [Galatians 3: 26-29](#). Please read these verses. Early in chapter 3, Paul links up the promise given to Abraham in Genesis 12: 1-3, the law given to Moses and the way Jesus fulfilled both. We all know that anyone can get to heaven if they keep God's laws- PERFECTLY! But one mistake and you're out! Of course, sinful men and women can't be perfect, no matter how good they may seem, or try, to be.

4 To claim the promise of a covenant relationship with God, what must people do?

5 If God knew that mankind couldn't keep the law, why did he give it?

a) Romans 3:20

b) Romans 13: 3-4

c) Ephesians 2: 10

6 Explain what "justified by faith" means to you. (Hint Romans 4)

7 When we are justified by faith what is our relationship to God our Father.

8 What image comes to your mind when you read "you have clothed yourself with Christ"?

9 Verse Galatians 3:28 tells us we are ALL ONE person in Christ Jesus. What implications does this have for our relationship with one another?

10 Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, Bathsheba- four foreign women. On this ground alone, is there a reason for excluding them from the community of God? Why/ Why not?

12 But what about all the terrible things they did, all God's laws that they broke? What is Matthew teaching us when he mentioned them in relationship to Jesus? Can you back up your answer with Bible verses?

Matthew must have thought very carefully about who got a run in Jesus' list of ancestors. I think he wanted to remind us that, "all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:22), but Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham, was anointed by God to save people from their sins. He, as King, would call people to inherit the promise of a covenant relationship with the Father, according to the promise made to Abraham. That is what Matthew is teaching us when he reveals the "skeletons in Jesus' closet!"

Pray about it

Thank God for all that Jesus is to you.

Thank Him that you are included in His Purposes, warts and all!

Pray for opportunities and courage to share what you have learnt.

Pray that you will not put up divisions, but recognize yourself as being one with all other Christians.