

A vivid childhood memory I have is visiting my home town cemetery every Sunday afternoon to put flowers on the graves of deceased relatives. I would walk amongst graves and read the tombstones of pioneer settlers, and of young children who died from illness in the pre-vaccination early 20th century; and stories from the present – of local residents - important people and ordinary people - who had recently died.

Reading Matthew 1 is like me as a young boy walking through my town's cemetery.

Matthew Chapter 1 records the family genealogy of a very important royal family. It includes the familiar names of tribal leaders and of famous kings, now long dead. There are surprising names of people whose stories we least expect to be revealed. In a Hebrew genealogy you expect men to be mentioned not women, yet they are! You expect Jews to be mentioned but not Gentiles, yet they are! There are insiders and outsiders. There are foreign people and foreign places. A genealogy is a strange way to start a gospel. But that is the point! The beginning of *this* gospel is not the beginning of *the* gospel. The gospel does not begin in the four books called gospels. The Gospel doesn't begin with Jesus' birth. The gospel begins in God's loving heart. It's '*the gospel of God*' (Rom 1:1). Matthew doesn't begin in Bethlehem, but in Babylon. The New Testament is never truly new unless you first begin in the Old Testament.

'This is the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah the son of David, the son of Abraham'

The story of Jesus' human ancestry is the story of covenant promises and of crowns. **It is the story of Abraham** who received the promise that all peoples on earth will be blessed through him. This is a gospel promise that drives the entire Biblical storyline. '*The Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying 'All the nations shall be blessed in you.'*' (Gal 3:8)

God's promise to Abraham is what determines the meaning and the movement of history, and which culminates in 'the promise of life that is in Christ Jesus. (2 Tim 1:1)

We live by God's promise, not by explanations: by faith, not by sight; trusting in God.

It is Israel's story: Did you join the rush to see Marvel's 'Endgame' movie? 'Endgame' makes sense only if you've watched at least seven of the preceding 21 Marvel films.

Likewise, when Christian read the Bible they often rush to Jesus, forgetting the story of Israel, without which Jesus' story makes no sense. '**Abraham was the father of**

Isaac, Issac the father of Jacob, Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers' (Matt 1:2)

The promises God made to Abraham were reaffirmed to Isaac (26:3) and Jacob (28:3-4).

'With my mouth I will make your faithfulness known through all the generations....

Who is like You, LORD?...mighty, and your faithfulness surrounds you.' (Psalm 89:1, 8)

It is David's story, whose role as king (2 Sam 7:12-16) fulfilled God's promise to Abraham:

'Kings will come from you' (Genesis 17:6) and to David himself: "*I have sworn to David my servant, 'I will establish your line forever and make your throne firm through all*

generations.' (Psalm 89:3-4) David's city Jerusalem was to be a house of security (Ps 122:3),

unity (122:4) and authority (122:5). God's people gathered under David in anticipation of the promised Messiah coming to reign over the earth and to bless all the nations. We expect Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and David to be in Jesus' ancestral family story but we don't expect women. Biblically the father determined national and tribal identity. We don't expect these women: *Judah father of Perez and Zerah whose mother was **Tamar**; Salmon father of Boaz whose mother was **Rahab**; Boaz father of Obed whose mother was **Ruth**...David father of Solomon, whose mother had been **Uriah's wife**,* **They were Gentiles:** Tamar and Rahab (Canaanites), Ruth (Moabite) and Bathsheba (we presume was a Hittite). Three of them were involved in sexual sin: prostitution incest, and adultery; two belonged to cursed communities (Genesis 9:25-27; Deut 23:3). 'No Ammonite or Moabite or any of their descendants may enter the assembly of the LORD' Matthew's message is that the Messiah's comes to save sinners by God's grace.

This is the story of outsiders brought inside God's family. *'Gentiles...foreigners to the covenants of the promise...now in Christ Jesus have been brought near.'* (Eph 2:11-13)

The gospel is for excluded people - men and women in the human family - lost in sin. Four times Matthew mentions Israel's exile (1:11.12.17). The gospel is for exiled people. Israel's greatest national tragedy was being deported from their land because of sin. Israel's hope was in the Messiah to bring them out of exile into God's covenant rest. But who is this Messiah? Which Jewish king has the power to save Jew and Gentile? J

Joseph was a descendant of David through Solomon and also through Jeconiah.

¹¹Josiah the father of Jeconiah and his brothers at the time of the exile to Babylon. But Jeconiah was cursed by God. Is this a problem for Jesus receiving David's throne?

'O land hear the word of the LORD! Record this man as if childless...who will not prosper in his lifetime...none of his offspring will sit on the throne of David or rule anymore in Judah.'

(Jeremiah 22:29-30) This curse was laid on Jeconiah for the duration of his life. As long as Jeconiah lived, neither he nor his sons would sit on David's throne or rule in Judah. And they never did. The curse was perpetual in his family but not permanent for all the generations. Jeconiah's descendent Zerubbabel (1:15; see Haggai 2:23) did return to the land later, but Israel would have no king until Jesus inaugurated the kingdom.

'Joseph, husband of Mary, and Mary was the mother of Jesus who is the Messiah.' Jesus fulfils royal and legal requirements to rule. He has the pedigree and authority Jesus is qualified to be the Messiah, and his Father qualifies us to be in God's family. In the birth of Jesus the Father intervened through the Holy Spirit to interrupt the exclusion and exile of humans because of sin. You need not live separate from God. Are you Male? Female? Excluded? Exiled? Sinful? Come and join God's family today.

'the Father has qualified you to share in the inheritance of his holy people. For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins..' (Col 1:12-13)

Come and receive God's love, redemption, and grace in Jesus for unexpected people.