

We've all come from somewhere and discovering our family trees can be fascinating – there are several popular television programmes delving into the trees of famous people. And there are many online sites that now make it easy for us to trace our own lines. Answering questions about where we come from - and showing our place of belonging in a larger family.

My grandmother was a Sheridan and I enjoyed looking into her family tree with my mother to find that we could trace it back many generations to find a distant common thread with the 1780s playwright and politician Richard Brinsley Sheridan.

But I think that if we are being really honest most of us would have a tendency to skim over Matthew Chapter One – so and so was the father of, the father of, the father of and – as if one family tree wasn't bad enough – we also get a second one in Luke Chapter 3 so and so was the son of, the son of, the son of etc. By not reading both we would miss some significant points and interesting differences.

We might wonder why Matthew started his book in this way, it doesn't seem the most exciting way to begin a book. But he knew exactly what he was doing – he was writing for a Jewish audience who knew the scriptures well and by listing Jesus's family tree he wanted to persuade them from the start of his Gospel that Jesus of Nazareth was the long awaited Messiah. That he was descended from Abraham and was in the line of King David. These connections were the bare minimum requirement for being the Christ, the Messiah. God had promised Abraham in Genesis 22 v18 "through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed" and he had promised that the true King of Israel who would sit on his eternal throne would be an heir of King David - in Psalm 89 v4 "I will establish your line forever and make your throne firm through all generations".

Luke on the other hand waits until Chapter 3 to list Jesus's family tree, that is after Jesus' baptism by John the Baptist and the start of his public ministry. He also notes Jesus's connection to David and Abraham but unlike Matthew traces him beyond Abraham - all the way back to Adam, the original son of God.

Some recognisable names appear in this last section of family tree.

- Shem, the son of Noah.
- Methuselah the oldest man ever recorded.
- Enoch who didn't die but was taken away by God.
- Finally we reach Seth, son of Adam, son of God.

Luke was writing specifically for a Greek or gentile audience and was focusing on the humanity of Jesus and his role as Saviour for all. In Adam the original son of God we inherited the curse of sin, in Jesus the literal son of God we inherit the promise of forgiveness, salvation and eternal life. As it says in 1 Corinthians 15 v45 "The first man Adam became a living being; the last Adam, a life-giving spirit." By linking Jesus with Adam he is linking Jesus to all humanity showing he is not only the Saviour of the Jews but also the Saviour of any son or daughter of Adam – all of us.

At the time of writing their gospels, Jewish record keeping was meticulous and this would have enabled their readers and listeners to fact check and verify all the names listed through their public records, thus adding to the credibility of the rest of their writings about Jesus.

But if the records were so precise why are the names listed in Matthew and Luke not totally identical?

One suggestion that theologians debate is that Matthew is recording the legal genealogy according to Jewish custom through Joseph ie his “father”, whilst Luke is tracing Jesus’s family tree through Mary in recognition of the virgin birth. But I’m going to leave that there for you to find out more about for yourselves - if you’re interested - as what I found really interesting was that only Matthew mentions any women. Ancient Jewish genealogies didn’t usually include women at all – but Matthew names four specific women – Tamar, Rahab, Ruth and Uriah’s wife.

And when you look at who they are it gets even more puzzling.

- Tamar deceived her father in law Judah and became pregnant by him.
- Rahab was a Jericho prostitute who hid and protected Israel’s spies.
- Ruth a Moabite, left her home and accompanied her mother in law Naomi to an unknown land where her faithfulness caught the eye of the landowner Boaz thus securing her place in the family tree.
- And then - there was Uriah’s wife – better known as Bathsheba! Now David and Bathsheda’s story was full of scandal including adultery and murder, but ultimately a story of repentance and forgiveness.

So these four women are in turn a deceiver, a brave woman with a dishonourable job, an outsider and an adulterer. But all played key parts in God’s plan which culminated in the birth of his son from a virgin. They each paint a picture of what Jesus came to earth for – to save everyone.

The Bible illustrates time and again that God uses broken sinful people and this is not hidden or shied away from. These names could easily have been left out and others such as the matriarch Sarah, wife of Abraham, be included instead. But Jesus isn’t ashamed of these relatives, he welcomes everyone into his family.

Whoever we are, wherever we have come from, no matter what we’ve done in the past, or have in our family’s past, we can all be part of Jesus’ family.

God’s goodness and faithfulness are demonstrated throughout this history - and understanding this genealogy is a good reminder that God can use us, even in our brokenness. The Bible tells story after story of those who have tried to rush God, do their own thing, seek their own agenda, hurt others, told lies, broken promises and yet, throughout it all God’s faithfulness endured.

He has a plan for each and every one of us.

Now let us pray

Dear Lord we seek to draw closer to you, use our backgrounds and our pasts for your glory. We open our hearts and invite your Holy Spirit to dwell within us. We surrender our pasts, our pain, our doubts, fears and anxieties and ask you to use us for your glory and welcome us as part of your family.

Amen

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