

THE HARVESTER

"The harvest truly is great, but the laborers are few: pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he would send forth laborers into his harvest" (Luke 10:2)

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DOES YOUR BACKGROUND MATTER?

How important is your family tree or your hometown? Do they determine important outcomes such as your Christianity or salvation? Although we share at least a few things in common with each other, the Church is composed of people from various backgrounds. Some have come from families with a recognized name and upstanding reputation, others carry a surname that makes others think "uh oh, one of them..." The same is true of the places we would call our hometown, if we have one. Some have moved from location-to-location too frequently to claim one. Regardless, do these aspects of our his-

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tory determine our outcomes in the present? Are we doomed to find ourselves repeating the mistakes of those in our family tree? Can we be anything more than a hometown's reputation of being too poor or uneducated to amount to anything else? Jesus, having lived a human life, faced these same questions.

Although we recognize that Jesus was God in human form, lowering Himself so that mankind could be elevated (John 1:1-18), we may forget how human of a life Jesus lived. We think of Jesus' great teachings in parables, Him performing miracles, and His cruel death and resurrection that provides the hope of salvation. We hear that Jesus understands our struggles, but maybe we fail to fully see how. As Jesus grew up, what reputation did His earthly family tree carry? What was the stereotype of where he grew up, Nazareth? Finally, did either of those ingrained aspects of His background hold back Jesus?

We can find Jesus' ancestry in multiple locations. These records of genealogy prove fulfillment of prophecies related to family lines, but there's more detail inside what seems like a listing of one name after another. First, put yourself in the perspective of someone living at the time of Jesus' birth and early life. Especially if you were Jewish, you had certain expectations of this long-prophesied Messiah. For one, you would expect the Messiah to be as purely Jewish as possible; Jewish ancestors would fill the family tree from top to bottom. Secondly, you would expect the Messiah to come from a line of honorable, upstanding people with sterling reputations. Finally, you would also expect an entirely patriarchal notation of lineage, listing males from generation to generation in the family tree. Both Matthew's and Luke's accounts of the Gospel include genealogy leading to Jesus, but Matthew's account offers some interesting details in relation to those three expectations. All Gospel accounts tell the same story, but each has a specific perspective and target audience in its writing. Matthew, an eyewitness to many of the events of Jesus' life, was

Jewish in background. Matthew tailored his account to convince fellow Jewish readers that Jesus was the prophesied Messiah. So, it is particularly interesting in how Matthew lists a few key names in Jesus' ancestry in Matthew 1:

And Judas begat Phares and Zara of Thamar... (v. 3)

Thamar is Tamar from Genesis 38. Instead of just noting these children of Judah (Judas) were in the line leading to Jesus, Matthew points out Tamar. So, we've already challenged the expectation of seeing an entirely patriarchal listing. Also, Tamar has a few stains associated with her name. Tamar dressed and presented herself as a prostitute while widowed and awaiting Judah to have his youngest son marry her. In this deception Tamar became pregnant by Judah. Judah took responsibility when he realized he had been tricked. After all, this was due to him having not married his youngest son to Tamar as Judah had promised (Gen. 38:11-30). So, we have another expectation of Jesus' genealogy challenged. This story of Judah and Tamar involves unmet promises, prostitution, and pregnancy out of wedlock between a father-in-law and widowed daughter-in-law. This is the kind of story a family would rather sweep under the rug, and it's not one you would expect to lead to Jesus. However, Matthew reminds us by listing Tamar. Continuing farther down the genealogy in Matthew 1:

And Salmon begat Booz of Rachab; and Booz begat Obed of Ruth... (v. 5)

Rachab is Rahab of Joshua 2. She aided Joshua's spies in Jericho, so she was clearly helpful to the Jewish people at that time. However, recall that her occupation was that of prostitution. Still to this day we know her as Rahab the Harlot. Being native to Jericho, she was non-Jewish and a Gentile. So, all three expectations of lineage are challenged by Matthew listing a single name: Rahab. She was a harlot, female, and Gentile.

In the same verse (Mat. 1:5), Matthew also goes out of the pa-

triarchal listing to mention Ruth. Being of Moab, she was a Gentile. So, relatively early in Jesus' family tree, we've got prostitutes, lies, and Gentiles. Matthew continues with even more cobwebs in the family tree in Matthew 1:

And Jesse begat David the king; and David the king begat Solomon of her that had been the wife of Urias; (v. 6)

David was possibly the most upstanding and highly regarded name in Jewish history. The Jewish people were picturing another figure like David when they imagined the Messiah. They pictured a great king with great battle prowess. However, in listing this bright and shining name in Jewish history and Jesus' ancestry, Matthew goes out of his way to list David's biggest mistake. Matthew does it in such a way that he doesn't even mention Bathsheba by name. Rather, he words David's affair with Bathsheba in a way that notes how clearly in error this was: "...her that had been the wife of Urias." This highlights the worst thing David had ever done. David had not only given into lustful temptation and committed this affair with Bathsheba, but he had also effectively had Urias killed to try to cover up his sin.

All of these tales of prostitution, adultery, lies, and non-Jews were in Jesus' background. The cobwebs in Jesus' earthly family tree came with His name. Did they doom Him to similar outcomes? They did not. Such sins Jesus would condemn, and we know He never committed any. The lesson here is that Jesus really did know what it was like to come from a family that had some less-than-glamorous history. That part of his background did not hold him back from the great things to come in His time on earth.

Shortly after the miraculous tale of Mary's pregnancy and birth of Jesus, we get another glimpse into how Jesus would grow up.

And when the days of her purification according to the law of Moses were accomplished, they brought him to

Jerusalem, to present him to the Lord; (As it is written in the law of the Lord, Every male that openeth the womb shall be called holy to the Lord;) And to offer a sacrifice according to that which is said in the law of the Lord, A pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons. (Luke 2:22-24)

The original law in Leviticus 12 noted,

And when the days of her purifying are fulfilled, for a son, or for a daughter, she shall bring a lamb of the first year for a burnt offering, and a young pigeon, or a turtledove, for a sin offering, unto the door of the tabernacle of the congregation, unto the priest: Who shall offer it before the LORD, and make an atonement for her; and she shall be cleansed from the issue of her blood. This is the law for her that hath born a male or a female. And if she be not able to bring a lamb, then she shall bring two turtles, or two young pigeons; the one for the burnt offering, and the other for a sin offering: and the priest shall make an atonement for her, and she shall be clean. (Lev. 12:6-8)

Notice in Luke 2:24, Mary offered two turtledoves, the poverty version of the sacrifice. The prophesied Messiah, Jesus, was going to grow up a poor child. Again, not quite what the Jewish people were expecting from a savior. Not only were Mary and Joseph poor, but they were going to reside in a poor place. After escaping to Egypt to evade Herod, Joseph and Mary finally returned to Nazareth after Herod died. Nazareth was a small village in the mountains. It carried a reputation of being a poor place. Today, we might call someone who grew up in Nazareth a hillbilly. In fact, this was the response of people when they heard someone came from Nazareth. When Jesus finds Philip who begins following Him (John 1:43), and Philip goes to bring in Nathanael:

Philip findeth Nathanael, and saith unto him, We have found him, of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets, did write, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph. And Na-

thanael said unto him, Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth? Philip saith unto him, Come and see. (John 1:45-46)

When told the Messiah was found, Nathanael's first response was to doubt that anything good would come from such a poor area as Nazareth. Not only did Jesus grow up in a poor, hillbilly town, but He likely spent quite a bit of His childhood in hard, manual labor. He grew up the son of a carpenter, but probably not for too long. We find no more mention of Joseph after Jesus spent time in the temple at age twelve (Luke 2:41-52), so it's very likely that Joseph died sometime afterwards. So, Jesus likely had a helping hand in raising the other children Mary had. As the eldest of them, Jesus would have had to take on a caring, nurturing, fatherly role. So, Jesus grew up in a small, dirt poor town, doing hard work, and spent several of those years as the "man of the house" helping raise others. Did any of these hold Jesus back? No, they did not. Growing up in such a place and in such a way, these families were likely tight-knit and helped raise each other. After all, "it takes a village to raise a child." It makes it all the sadder to realize this same town rejects Jesus when He comes back to speak in the synagogue years later (Luke 4:16-30).

Jesus knows what it's like to have a family name with a tarnished reputation. Jesus had a hard, human life, including His childhood. However, the lesson is that His background didn't determine His outcomes. Jesus rose high and above the sins of others' past and did as we must do today: do what is right, right now. Regardless of what name we carry, where and how we were raised, it is our duty to please God in the actions of today.

Then cometh Jesus from Galilee to Jordan unto John, to be baptized of him. But John forbad him, saying, I have need to be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me? And Jesus answering said unto him, Suffer it to be so now: for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness. Then he suf-

ferred him. And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water: and, lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him: And lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. (Mat. 3:13-17)

BEN

FROM THE SCRIPTURES: ABOUT PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY FOR YOUR SOUL

(Ezekiel 18:19-24)

Yet say ye, Why? doth not the son bear the iniquity of the father? When the son hath done that which is lawful and right, and hath kept all my statutes, and hath done them, he shall surely live. The soul that sinneth, it shall die. The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son: the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him.

But if the wicked will turn from all his sins that he hath committed, and keep all my statutes, and do that which is lawful and right, he shall surely live, he shall not die. All his transgressions that he hath committed, they shall not be mentioned unto him: in his righteousness that he hath done he shall live.

Have I any pleasure at all that the wicked should die? saith the Lord GOD: and not that he should return from his ways, and live? But when the righteous turneth away from his righteousness, and committeth iniquity, and doeth according to all the abominations that the wicked man doeth, shall he live? All his righteousness that he hath done shall not be mentioned: in his trespass that he hath trespassed, and in his sin that he hath sinned, in them shall he die.

SEARCH THE SCRIPTURES

1. How old was Joshua when he died?
2. Which city did David pray for the peace of?
3. Out of the ten lepers Jesus healed, what nationality was the one who returned to thank him?
4. In the parable of the laborers in the vineyard how much was each person paid to work?
5. What did Jesus and the disciples have for breakfast when Jesus appeared to them after the resurrection by the Sea of Tiberias?

...ANSWERS NEXT MONTH

And remember last month's questions?

1. In prison, for whom did Joseph interpret dreams?
THE BUTLER AND THE BAKER (Gen. 40:2-5)
2. Where were the Jews taken captive to when Jerusalem was destroyed? BABYLON (Jer. 29:4)
3. In which book of the Bible would we find Haman, the son of Hammedatha? ESTHER (Est. 3:1)
4. When Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch arrive at some water, what does the eunuch say? "WHAT DOTH HINDER ME TO BE BAPTIZED?" (Acts 8:36)
5. How many horsemen are there in Revelation chapter 6?
FOUR (Rev. 6:2-8)

THE HARVESTER is a monthly publication intended to encourage all men everywhere to become laborers into God's harvest (Luke 10:2). This paper is mailed free of charge to anyone who wishes to receive it. Please submit name, address, address changes and all correspondence to:

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