

No Missing Links or GRACE Links: Matthew 1:1-18

Has anyone used one of those DNA kits? AncestryDNA or 23andMeDNA? Sandie and I know our ethnicity!

God is the greatest story writer.

Read Matthew 1:1-17. This is not the most exciting way to start a biography of a famous person. It's like putting the long list of actor's names and credits at the beginning of the movie and not the end. Most of us skip verses 1-17 and begin with verse 18, "Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way..."

This genealogy is important for other reasons than just to link Jesus Christ to Abraham, and God's promise to Abraham to bless all the families of the earth by one of his descendants (Genesis 12).

My first title for this message is "No Missing Links." (Evolution is always looking for the missing link in human evolution and will never find it because it never existed.) My second title for this message is "GRACE Links" because God's grace preserves the lineage and there are no missing links from Abraham to Jesus Christ. There are a few gracious links in the human lineage of Jesus and they are females.

The mention of women was unusual since a family line was traced through men: Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, Bathsheba, and Mary. Why are these 5 women given special recognition?

The story begins with God's promise to send a Savior right after A & E sinned. Genesis 3:14-16: *Then the Lord God said to the serpent, "Because you have done this, you are cursed more than all animals, domestic and wild. You will crawl on your belly, groveling in the dust as long as you live. And I will cause hostility between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring. He will strike your head, and you will strike his heel."*

Then God said to the woman, "I will sharpen the pain of your pregnancy, and in pain you will give birth. And you will desire to control your husband, but he will rule over you." ~ This is the source of all marital conflict!!

So, God promised to send a Savior from sin through the body of a woman. That promised passed through the bodies of 42 women (Matthew) from

Abraham to Mary, and 76 women (Luke) from Eve to Mary, until the Savior was born (Mary's genealogy recorded in Luke's Gospel). So let's trace the promise through the women highlighted in Christ's genealogy - 4 out of 5 were non-Jews or foreigners.

The most bizarre and seemingly immoral story is Genesis 38. It's embarrassing to tell this story, but it's in the Bible.

Tamar was the daughter-in-law of Judah. Judah married a Canaanite woman and she bore him three sons: Er, Onan, Shelah. Judah got a wife for Er and her name was Tamar. Er was wicked and God killed him. (He probably remained a pagan Canaanite due to his mother's influence.) Er died and left Tamar a childless widow.

Deuteronomy 25:5-10 describes Levirate marriage in the Law of Moses. It was a brother's duty to have a child with his brother's widow to continue his name and lineage. This was practiced in Jesus' time and religious leaders tried to trap Jesus with a question about it (Matthew 22:23-28).

Judah ordered his second son Onan to impregnate his brother's wife Tamar. Onan cheated on Tamar and didn't impregnate her. Onan didn't want to give his brother Er a child so he could receive the benefits of being the next oldest son. God killed Onan for his wicked act.

Judah didn't want to lose another son, so he sent Tamar back to live with her family while she waited for Judah's third son Shelah to grow up (complete puberty). But Judah had no intention of giving Shelah to Tamar.

Judah's wife died. Tamar was told that Judah was going to shear his sheep. Tamar pretended to be a cult prostitute sitting in front of a pagan temple. (Cult prostitution was a religious obligation for Canaanite women and not the same as a regular prostitute.) Judah negotiated to have sex with her. He promised to pay her a goat. Tamar (disguised) wanted a pledge that Judah would keep his word and send her a goat. She asked for Judah's wedding ring and iPhone. Judah unknowingly impregnated his daughter-in-law! A friend went to give the cult prostitute a goat, but could not find her.

Three months later Judah found out Tamar was pregnant and wanted to burn her at the stake for sexual immorality. She said, "Not so fast, father-in-law! The man who gave me this ring and iPhone, impregnated me." Judah realized his sin against Tamar and said, "She is more righteous than me."

What does that mean? How did she do something righteous? Tamar did what was right in the eyes of God according to the Law of Moses (before the Mosaic Law existed). She fought for her rights according to the Word of God. Tamar's righteous act preserved the tribe of Judah. Tamar gave birth to twin sons: Perez & Zerah. There was a wrestling match in Tamar's womb. It looked like Zerah would come out first, but Perez pushed him out of the way and came out first.

The daughter-in-law who became pregnant by her father-in-law became a descendent of Jesus Christ, the Lion from the tribe of Judah.

Jacob's final prophecy over his sons, Genesis 49:8-10: "Judah, your brothers will praise you. You will grasp your enemies by the neck. All your relatives will bow before you. Judah, my son, is a young lion that has finished eating its prey. Like a lion he crouches and lies down; like a lioness—who dares to rouse him? The scepter will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from his descendants, until the coming of the one to whom it belongs, the one whom all nations will honor."

Revelation 5:4-5: Then I (Apostle John) began to weep bitterly because no one was found worthy to open the scroll and read it. But one of the twenty-four elders said to me, "Stop weeping! Look, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the heir to David's throne, has won the victory. He is worthy to open the scroll and its seven seals."

Jesus is called the Lion from the tribe of Judah, but he wouldn't have that name and honor without Tamar. Without her, the lineage to the Messiah would have been broken - a missing link. She was courageous and risked her life for her right to be the mother of the tribe of Judah and to ensure the tribe's survival and the continuation of the lineage to the Messiah. The Messiah's lineage came close to extinction. Without Tamar, Judah's tribe would have assimilated with the pagan Canaanites and ceased to exist. Tamar is an essential messianic link.

Lesson 1: Behind Judah's sin and Tamar's righteous act, the sovereign and gracious God was working to preserve the human chain to the Messiah, Jesus Christ; therefore, we have a Savior. God saved the Lion of Judah from extinction through the seemingly immoral but righteous action of Tamar.

Lesson 2: Those who disregard God's law and pursue a life of self-gratification, God will correct. God will correct using *talionic* justice. The very thing Judah tried to prevent happened (Tamar's pregnancy by his third son Shelah), and it was his means of correction or discipline. *Talionic* = the punishment must match the injury - eye for an eye justice (Exodus 21:23-24).

Lesson 3: **BREAKTHROUGH**. Perez means "he who breaks through." The name signified the completion of Tamar's struggle. She broke through the obstacles - her wicked husband killed by God, her dead husband's wicked brother, the dishonesty of Judah her father-in-law, and years of waiting as a childless widow - and she became the mother of Judah's tribe. She is the heroine!

RAHAB the prostitute shows how works are evidence of genuine faith. Hebrews 11:31: *It was by faith that Rahab the prostitute was not destroyed with the people in her city who refused to obey God. For she had given a friendly welcome to the spies.*

James 2:24-26: *You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone. And in the same way was not also Rahab the prostitute justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way? For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead.* God blessed Rahab. She gave up prostitution and married a Prince of Judah named Salmon - he may have been one of the spies she saved. That's God's amazing grace.

RUTH shows the significance of a family Redeemer. Ruth pledged her loyalty to Naomi (1:16-17), and said, "Do not urge me to leave you or to return from following you. For where you go I will go, and where you lodge I will lodge. Your people shall be my people, and your God my God. Where you die I will die, and there will I be buried. May the LORD do so to me and more also if anything but death parts me from you."

God rewarded her faith and loyalty to Naomi and placed her in the lineage of Christ our Savior when she married Boaz, the family redeemer of Naomi.

BATHSHEBA was an adulterer and married the murderer of her husband. Her story is like one of those murder mysteries I've watched on Forensic Files

or 60 Minutes or 20/20 - one spouse involved in an adulterous affair has the other spouse murdered instead of divorcing and paying child support, so he/she can remarry the other person.

Notice the genealogy lists Bathsheba as the widow of Uriah. This reminds us that she was first Uriah's wife. God created a descendant for Jesus Christ out of David & Bathsheba's adulterous affair and murder. David and Bathsheba's son Solomon became the great king. That's God's amazing grace!

Finally - MARY

1:18: Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit.

Would you be ashamed or proud to have in your family history an incestuous mother, a prostitute, an adulteress, and a foreign widowed daughter-in-law of a poor, depressed widow, a teenage girl suspected of being pregnant by premarital sex? It's not a family history I would share with anyone. I would keep it all a secret - hide the skeletons in the closet. But not God. God tells the stories because he delights to show his amazing grace!

God is not ashamed to have any of us as his children. We are all trophies of his amazing grace.