

Why Should We Bother to Read Biblical Genealogies?

Mike Leake | Borrowed Light

2021 10 Jun



Photo credit: ©Getty Images/Digitalskillet

The apostle Paul says to young Timothy that “all Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness...” Be honest, do you ever question that claim when you find yourself in 1 Chronicles 1-9? How is a biblical genealogy profitable for any of these things? When we do our Bible reading program and come upon genealogies can we just skip them?



Photo credit: ©Getty Images/Richard Villalon

What Is a Biblical Genealogy?

Simply put, a genealogy is a line of descent traced continuously from an ancestor. At first glance a biblical genealogy is no different than how you or I may trace our family history. But it is actually so much more.

Biblical genealogies are telling a story—they are telling THE story of God’s restoring to humanity the rest, rule, and relationship we had with Him in the [Garden of Eden](#). And he is doing it through the “seed of the woman” ([Genesis 3:15](#)). They are often used to tell smaller stories—such as introducing a character like [Noah](#). Yet every genealogy ultimately is tied to this greater story.

Where Do We Find Biblical Genealogies?

The most widely known genealogy is probably that of Jesus Christ, and rightly so. There is a reason why; even though there are many prominent figures in the New Testament, none are given a genealogy. That is reserved for Jesus because all of history finds its climax in Christ.

The Old Testament is filled with genealogies. The book of Genesis appears to be structured around these biblical records. [Genesis 5](#) is one of the most unique genealogies (listing ages of when the patriarch became the father of the firstborn, saying “and then he died,” as well as the age at their death). [Genesis 10:1-32](#) with the descendants of Noah is also an important genealogy to move the story along, as are the genealogies centered around the Abrahamic family ([Gen. 11:27-32](#); 22:20-24; 25:1-4, 12-18, 23-29).

Other important Old Testament figures are introduced with genealogies as well. We read of Moses’ lineage in [Exodus 6:14-26](#) and David in [Ruth 4:18-22](#). The longest genealogy is found in [1 Chronicles 1-9](#). These, along with those in [Ezra 7](#) and [Nehemiah 11-12](#), are important for the post-exilic community to be reminded of their identity and place in God’s story.



Photo credit: ©Getty Images/pcess609

Why Do Genealogies Matter?

How important is it that I read that some guy that I do not know fathered some other person that I’ve never heard of who was the great-grandfather of a biblical character

that I'm only vaguely familiar with? Do genealogies matter? Why should I bother with them?

Of course, you are free in Jesus to skim through the genealogies. Your standing with God isn't determined by your knowledge of biblical genealogies. In that regard, sure, you can skip right through them. But I wouldn't, and here are a few reasons why.

1. Genealogies Matter because it Places the [Bible](#) in Real History

I heard a story once about a Bible translator who was working through translating the Gospel of Matthew. Thinking that the people would not want him to bother with the genealogies he started his gospel account in chapter 2. When he finally completed the other chapters he called together those helping him and they began working through the first chapter of Matthew. "Abraham was the father of Isaac. Isaac was the father of Jacob...." By the time they had worked through only a handful of these names he was startled to find that the men from the tribe helping with translation were getting excited.

"Do you mean these were real men?" they asked. 'Of course, they were real men.' At this the tribal men became excited saying, 'We had thought that these were just white man's stories. Do you really mean that Abraham was a real man?' When they came to understand the people in the Bible were real people it changed everything. It grounded the biblical stories in real history. For them the genealogy of Matthew was the key to belief for their tribe. [\[1\]](#) 'We didn't know that,' they said, 'but now we believe.'"

It is important to know that these are real people in a real place and time. Our redemption is grounded in history.

[\[1\]](#) Adapted from: Ryken, P. G. (2009). *Luke*. (R. D. Phillips, P. G. Ryken, & D. M. Doriani, Eds.) (Vol. 1, p. 144). Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing.



Photo credit: ©Getty Images/Roter Panther

Genealogies Matter because it Tells Us That Ordinary People and Ordinary Actions Matter

The fact that we cannot recognize many of the names in a genealogy is one of the reasons why we are tempted to skip them. “Nahshon the father of Salmon” means nothing to me other than perhaps making me a tad hungry for fish. I have no idea what Nahshon looks like. I know nothing of his hobbies, his passions, his pains, his preferences. Nothing. But Nahshon matters.

Nahshon, among many others within the genealogies, is a faceless name to us, yet he is still a vital component to God’s great plan of redemption. Nahshon’s life, though meaningless to us, was used by God to bring Jesus into the world. This is an important reminder for us because most of our lives are made up of the mundane. We will likely be faceless names as well. Don’t believe me? What’s the name of your great-great grandfather? What was his mom’s name? But you are here because of their ordinary life.

In the Bible we see ordinary people using ordinary means of grace and God doing some really amazing things. These ordinary moments do not seem to matter. But they add up. The genealogies remind us of this truth. Ordinary people and ordinary actions matter.

3. Genealogies Matter because They Remind Us of God’s Sovereign Care

There are some names in the biblical genealogies that will be familiar to biblical readers. Consider the genealogies of Jesus. One of those names which might be familiar is the name Boaz ([Matthew 1:5](#)). He is one of the main characters in the [book of Ruth](#). Reading through the book of Ruth we learn that “Boaz the father of Obed by Ruth” is a situation that could have only been brought about by God’s sovereign care. Ruth was a widow. She was a Moabite woman. Boaz did not have to do what he did, but he cared for Ruth. His care is but a shadow of the care of God for humanity. It would be through Boaz and Ruth that we would have Obed, then Jesse, then King David.

This is only one of the many stories in the Bible reflected in the genealogical records. Pick one of the genealogies in the Bible. Perhaps start with [Matthew 1](#). “Abraham was the father of Isaac...” Do you realize the miracle of that statement? Abraham and his wife were way past the child-bearing years. But still “Abraham was the father of Isaac...”

As you reflect on each of these “father of” combinations, pause and realize all of the circumstances and stories that had to align in order for these to take place. Even if we do not know “Hezron the father of Ram” we know there was a story behind this. Each birth is a miracle. And each one a testimony to God’s sovereign care. If he can orchestrate history in such a way to bring about the [birth of Jesus](#), then he can work in your life to provide redemption. Let the genealogies remind you of God’s sovereign care.



Photo credit: ©Getty Images/Ruben Earth

4. Genealogies Matter because They Tell of God's Grace

When we are talking about genealogies, the truth is that there should only be one name listed. Adam. When he engaged in treason and betrayed the Creator, the King of the Universe, justice would have demanded his immediate death. But God provided cover for his sin and even spoke of childbirth and a “seed of the woman” who would crush the serpent. In one sense, every name in a genealogy is a testimony of grace. But there are some names which are highlights of grace.

Consider the statement, “David was the father of Solomon by the wife of Uriah” ([Matthew 1:6](#)). David did not belong with [Bathsheba](#). He took her for himself. He abused her. And yet somehow we still see that through this horrendous action, God is able to bring about the birth of the One who would make everything right. God can use messed up people and messed up circumstances to accomplish His purposes. The genealogical records bear witness to this.

God Is Behind Every Story

Why bother with genealogies? They can be difficult to read through because they are so unfamiliar. But I would encourage you to read through them slowly and as you stumble through unfamiliar and faceless names, consider the God who is behind the story. Even though you and I do not know many of these stories, God does. And we are in our own cultural moment and responsible for our own slice of time because of all that have gone before us. We will likely someday be one of those faceless names. But we aren't faceless to the Lord. Our story is part of His story.

Related articles

[How God Used 5 Women with Questionable Pasts in Jesus Genealogy](#)

[8 Steps to Take When Reading the Bible Feels Boring](#)

[11 Times the Old Testament Predicts Jesus' Birth and Death](#)