

“Journey’s End?”

1 Chronicles 1:1-10; Matthew 1:12-16; Romans 11:17-24 ¹

Under the wide shade of an ageless oak, a mother watches her toddler discover acorns, leaves, and dandelions. Nearby, her mother, aunt, and uncle spread a checkered cloth over park tables and cover it with platters of fried chicken and bowls of potato salad, baked beans, and assorted family recipes. The clanging of her father’s and grandfather’s horseshoes against metal stakes mixes with cheers, laughs, and shouts of a touch football game. This is a family reunion, on a sunny afternoon filled with four generations and miscellaneous kids, parents, and second cousins once-removed.

Meetings like this are important as generations touch and connect with other branches of their family tree, each individual tracing his or her history back through time and culture, noticing physical similarities and treasuring long-observed traditions. Knowing our family tree helps us to know who we are.

While you hold a mental image of this family picnic, what’s the first thing that comes to mind when you hear the word “chronicle” or “chronicles”? The first thing I think of is *The Chronicles of Narnia*, but there are many others. A Google search also turns up such things as *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, *The Chandra Chronicles*, *The Babylonian Chronicles*, and *The Spiderwick Chronicles*, to name just a few.

These days, “the chronicles of . . .” frequently stirs the expectation of some rollicking-good tale; but in the Bible, the two books of “Chronicles” may be the greatest obstacle most of us face to reading the Bible through. The first nine chapters of 1 Chronicles—the book that is our focus for this morning—are, to most modern sensibilities, mind-numbing genealogical lists whose most obvious function is to put us to sleep! You might even have experienced a taste of this as Andrew read today’s Scripture.

If we’re attempting to read the Bible from cover to cover, many of us tend to fudge a little and either skip or skim these chapters, while the bravest and most committed grit our teeth and slog through what is about as exciting to western minds as reading the phone book. And for not a few folks, 1 Chronicles marks “journey’s end” for our effort to read the Bible through. We become discouraged and just give up. So what’s the deal with all these names?

Whatever you and I think of the matter, the Chronicler (probably Ezra or someone close to him) could hardly have begun his work with anything that his Jewish audience would have found more interesting. Matthew did the same thing with his Gospel, and for the same reason. Jewish folk were—and are—very much into genealogies, so Matthew’s choice of beginning his account of Jesus’ life with a genealogy was actually one of the most effective things he could have done to get the attention of a Jewish audience.

I expect that you and I could agree that, in principle, even genealogies are the inspired Word of God, and so God must have had a reason for including them in the Book. This morning we’ll attempt to discover some of those reasons.

I imagine that some of us here this morning actually enjoy genealogies—especially those of our own ancestors—and I suspect that there are a number of reasons why we enjoy them. Since most family trees include both the noble and the notorious, it’s often interesting to discover the famous and infamous persons who may inhabit our family tree.²

¹ A sermon by Dr. David C. Stancil, delivered at the Columbia Baptist Fellowship in Columbia, MD on September 22, 2019.

² My sixth great-grandfather, for example, fought with Colonel George Washington in the first battle of the French and Indian War. And my great-great uncle was wounded in the sinking of the *Albemarle*, one of the ironclad battleships of the Civil War.

If our genealogical sleuthing turns up something especially noteworthy, we may find inspiration from the lives in whose paths we follow. Genealogical work may turn up something worth commemorating, or even something worth bragging about. Genealogies tell us things about where we've come from, who we are, and where we might be going, and those are questions that interest us all.

While most genealogies seldom rise above the merely interesting, blood lines are sometimes very important, even to us. In addition to discovering potential health issues, one of those places has to do with inheritance and wills. Situations arise from time to time where a wealthy person dies without an up-to-date will, and great battles ensue with persons trying to prove that they are rightful heirs.

Another place where genealogy is critical is the succession of royalty. Kings and Queens have been known to do quite desperate—and frequently wicked—things to ensure that children are raised up to continue their dynasties. So, given all this, let's look again at what we know about these biblical Chronicles.

In the beginning, what we know as 1 and 2 Chronicles were a single document. But when the Hebrew Scriptures were translated into Greek—what we know as the Septuagint (c. 250 B.C.)—it was necessary to divide Chronicles into two books, since the Greek text required twice as much space as the Hebrew did, having no written vowels.³

The Hebrew title for Chronicles is “Things of the days,” meaning “things that have happened in the past,” or “history.” Jerome, who translated the Hebrew into Latin in the late fourth century A.D.,⁴ thought that a better title would be “The Chronicle of the Whole of Sacred History”; and so he's responsible for the present name of the books.⁵

As Jerome's title suggests, the two books of Chronicles present an account of God's dealings with humankind from Adam to Cyrus the Great (559-529 B.C.). They were written about 430 B.C., after the Jews returned from exile in Babylon, with the twin purposes of unifying God's people through reminding them of their history and heritage, and encouraging them to obey God's commands as they had been passed down through Moses and the Prophets.

The content of Chronicles parallels what we find in Genesis-2 Kings, reporting many of the same events through the perspective of life five hundred years later, and adding some things not found in the earlier works—things probably passed down through documents such as the Dead Sea Scrolls, discovered at Qumran in 1947.

Dr. Clyde Francisco, whose widow was a friend of mine in Louisville, wrote that “To try to understand the history of Israel without comparing Chronicles with Samuel and Kings would be comparable to studying the life of Christ by reading only one Gospel.”⁶ Indeed, scholars have developed “harmonies” of Samuel, Kings, and Chronicles similar to the harmonies that have been composed of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

About half of Chronicles consists of quotations of or clear references to other biblical accounts, frequently copied into Chronicles with little change. And, thanks to archaeological discoveries similar to those you can see displayed in *The Museum of the Bible*, we now believe that in places where scholars had once thought that the Chronicler changed his source text, we

³ Clyde Francisco, “1-2 Chronicles,” *The Broadman Bible Commentary*, vol. 3, ed. Clifton J. Allen (Nashville: Broadman, 1970), p. 297.

⁴ This translation was known as *The Vulgate*, and was the standard Bible in the West for nearly a thousand years.

⁵ Francisco, p. 297.

⁶ Francisco, p. 298.

have reason to conclude that he was actually following a text older than the Masoretic Text and similar to the fragments discovered at Qumran—the Dead Sea Scrolls.⁷

Dr. J. Barton Payne added that “If Kings, composed after the final collapse of the kingdom in 586 B.C., concentrates on how sin leads to defeat,⁸ then Chronicles, coming after the two returns from exile in 537 and 458 B.C., recounts, from the same record, how faith is the victory.⁹ As we read these documents today, we can be grateful that God’s moral judgments (as we see them in Kings) are balanced by God’s providential salvation (as they are revealed in Chronicles).¹⁰

Well, after all this introduction, if you’ll open your Bibles to the beginning of 1 Chronicles, let’s take a quick tour of what we find in the genealogies listed there. Chapter 1 begins with Adam, and lists the descendants of his three sons, as well as Abraham’s immediate descendants. Chapter 2 lists the descendants of Jacob, later named Israel, and chapter 3 lists the descendants of David and Solomon.

Chapters 4 and 5 list some of the Twelve Tribes of Israel, with the famous “Prayer of Jabez” appearing in 4:9-10. Chapter 6 focuses on the lineage of the Priests and Levites, who had charge of the Temple worship, which is a special emphasis in Chronicles. Chapter 7 gives various genealogies related to military rosters, and chapter 8 lists the genealogy of Saul. Chapter 9 concludes the genealogical section with a roster of those who returned from Babylon and reestablished worship in the Second Temple when it was completed in 516 B.C.

These genealogies were crucial for the Jewish people, since one had to be able to prove one’s lineage in order to be able to be admitted to worship in the Temple. Priests could not serve in the Temple unless they could prove that they were descended from Aaron, the first High Priest. And, as I’ll note in a moment, we who follow Jesus have been grafted into this same “tree,” which means that these people are our ancestors, too.

The most important biblical genealogy that concerns us, though, is found in the first chapter of Matthew. I’ll begin reading with verse 12:

*¹² After the Babylonian exile: Jehoiachin was the father of Shealtiel. Shealtiel was the father of Zerubbabel. ¹³ Zerubbabel was the father of Abiud. Abiud was the father of Eliakim. Eliakim was the father of Azor. ¹⁴ Azor was the father of Zadok. Zadok was the father of Akim. Akim was the father of Eliud. ¹⁵ Eliud was the father of Eleazar. Eleazar was the father of Matthan. Matthan was the father of Jacob. ¹⁶ **Jacob was the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary. Mary gave birth to Jesus, who is called the Messiah.** The main thing I want to highlight here is the last verse, about Mary. I’ll come back to her in a minute.*

First, though, I invite your attention to Romans 11, beginning with verse 17: *¹⁷ But some of these branches from Abraham’s tree—some of the people of Israel—have been broken off. And you Gentiles, who were branches from a wild olive tree, have been grafted in. So now you also receive the blessing God has promised Abraham and his children, sharing in the rich nourishment from the root of God’s special olive tree. ¹⁸ But you must not brag about being grafted in to replace the branches that were broken off. You are just a branch, not the root.*

⁷ Francisco, p. 299.

⁸ 2 Kings 17:15, 18

⁹ 2 Chronicles 20:20, 22

¹⁰ J. Barton Payne, “Introduction to Chronicles,” *Expositor’s Bible Commentary on the Old Testament* (electronic version).

¹⁹ “Well,” you may say, “those branches were broken off to make room for me.” ²⁰ Yes, but remember—those branches were broken off because they didn’t believe in Christ, and you are there because you do believe. . . .

²⁴ You, by nature, were a branch cut from a wild olive tree. So if God was willing to do something contrary to nature by grafting you into his cultivated tree, he will be far more eager to graft the original branches back into the tree where they belong.

Well, so what’s the point of all this? Is there anything we can actually “take home” from this genealogical meandering? I think there are some important things, and I want to suggest three:

First, at the end of Matthew’s genealogy, when Mary enters it, the line of succession changes from blood to faith and obedience.¹ **That’s a Big Deal, because that’s how you and I get in.**¹¹ You and I have been grafted into the blood line of the Messiah, because Jesus gave His life’s blood for us, as Paul told us in Romans. We who have been born again through Jesus into the Life of the Spirit are spiritual heirs to the Covenant that God made long ago with Abraham. (I’ll say more about genealogies in the online version of this sermon.)

Second, **one of the most interesting things about Matthew’s genealogy of Jesus is that he includes five women.** Although women are obviously present in every genealogy, the Jews didn’t usually list women in their genealogies, and Luke, whose Gospel pays special attention to women, didn’t include any women in Jesus’ genealogy. Moreover, three of the five women Matthew lists had pretty shabby reputations: **Tamar** committed incest with her father-in-law; **Rahab** was a prostitute; and **Bathsheba** committed adultery with David.

On the other hand, **Ruth** was a model of virtue and loyalty, as was **Mary**, Jesus’ mother. And, according to some scholars, out of these five women, only Mary was actually a Jew. That should have something to say to us today in our arguments about “immigration.”

The men in the list were a similar lot. **Abraham** had many good qualities, but he was also a coward and a liar. **Jacob** was a liar and a cheat. **Judah** committed incest. **David** committed adultery and murder. **Solomon** worshiped idols. **Rehoboam** was arrogant and stupid. And **Manasseh** was even more wicked than the pagan nations that Israel had conquered when they entered Canaan.

Yet here, too, there were some bright spots. **Boaz** was a righteous man. **David** repented of his sin. **Solomon** was very wise, and **Uzziah** was a good king. Many of the other men in Jesus’ family tree appear to have been “just ordinary guys,” and there are eight or nine of them that we know nothing at all about.

So here’s the significance of all this: the motley crew that makes up Jesus’ human heritage—a list that includes liars, murderers, adulterers, prostitutes, and other unsavory folk—is a powerful statement that God can use anyone—anyone—whose life is made available to Him . . . even me . . . and even you.

Finally, these genealogies remind us that **God keeps promises.** Though God’s timing and God’s actions are frequently not what we expect, **history continues to move forward toward God’s appointed end.** When you are tempted to become discouraged about the situation in the world these days, remember the perspective these genealogies give us, and lean into God’s Future. The Best is yet to come!

¹¹ Of course, Paul argues—quite correctly—that right relationship with God has been by faith all along (Romans 4:9-17).

As Jesus would later say at the very end of the Bible, “*I am both the source of David and the heir to his throne*” (Revelation 22:16). Jesus is Lord of the universe. The galaxies and stars, the comets and quasars, all obey His command.

And this same Jesus—the risen and glorious Lord Christ—invites you to be a part of His spiritual and eternal family, to be an heir of the King. If you’ll let Him, Jesus will forgive your Sin, renew your mind, and use your life to make a difference in the world—indeed, He will use you to make a difference in eternity.

Have you accepted His invitation?

Are you doing what He has called you to do?

What do you need to do NOW?

ⁱ The Gospels actually give us two genealogies of Jesus, and they are rather different. The other one is in Luke 3. Whereas Matthew begins with Abraham, showing that Jesus is truly the Messiah for the Jews, Luke traces Jesus’ genealogy all the way back to God himself, showing that Jesus is the Savior of all humankind. Luke’s genealogy works backward from Jesus through seventy-seven listed “generations”; Matthew works forward from Abraham through forty-one generations.

Neither genealogy is complete in the way we would do a genealogy today. Even seventy-seven generations wouldn’t get back as far as Abraham, much less to the dawn of humankind. Jewish genealogies often compressed history, meaning that not every single generation was listed. The phrase “the father of” can also be translated “the ancestor of,” and that is more likely the meaning here.

Some scholars think that the differences in the genealogies arise from the fact that Matthew gives Joseph’s genealogy, while Luke really gives Mary’s. The *Life Application Bible* takes this view. Others think that Matthew traces the legal succession to the throne of David while Luke gives Joseph’s ordinary genealogy. Whichever is true, the point is that according to first-century genealogical standards, it was possible to clearly demonstrate that Jesus was the promised Messiah.

The Old Testament had said that the Messiah would be descended from Abraham through Isaac, Jacob, Judah, and Jesse, and that he would be the successor to David’s throne. This Messiah would also be known as the Son of God.^(see note below) These genealogies are one of the ways in which these prophecies are shown to be fulfilled in Jesus of Nazareth.

Matthew concludes his genealogy by saying that there were “fourteen generations from Abraham to King David, and fourteen from David’s time to the Babylonian exile; and fourteen from the Babylonian exile to the Messiah” (v. 17). Forty-two generations would not begin to cover the 1,800 years between Abraham and Jesus, so Matthew is obviously speaking symbolically.

So why three sets of fourteen? The most likely explanation is that Matthew, being a Jew, employed the standard Jewish symbolism that used the number three to symbolize completion. Also, according to the Jewish symbol system, the “number” of David’s name was fourteen. So developing a genealogy of three fourteens that included Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Judah, Jesse, and David was a very strong way to say that Jesus was indeed the Messiah. The symbolic value of the fourteens is more important than their precise breakdown.

Jesus was the person of whom Isaiah spoke when he wrote, “*Out of the stump of David’s family will grow a shoot—yes, a new Branch bearing fruit from the old root*” (11:1). “*Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David’s throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever*” (9:6-7).

Note 1: Abraham (Genesis 12:2-3, 18:18, 22:18); Isaac (Genesis 17:19, 21:12); Jacob (Genesis 35:10-12; Numbers 24:17); Judah (Genesis 49:10; Micah 5:2); Jesse (Isaiah 11:1, 10); David (2 Samuel 7:12-16; Psalm 132:11; Jeremiah 23:5); God (2 Samuel 7:12-16; 1 Chronicles 17:11-14; Psalm 2:7; Mark 3:11).