

Genealogies & You

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- [0 : 00] If you have your Bibles, you can open back up to Genesis chapter 4. In these genealogies, you know, this is the part when you're doing your Bible reading plan and you're going through and you're like committing, I'm going to read Genesis or I'm going to read the whole Old Testament.
- And you get to the genealogies and you're like, is God cool if I just kind of like skip this part? Like what am I supposed to do with it? If you ever read through 1 Chronicles, the first nine chapters of 1 Chronicles are just genealogies.
- And you're like, Lord, Spirit, be with me. I'm trying to make it through this. You're kind of skimming your eyes over it a little bit. It might be tempting to skip these two genealogies here in the book of Genesis at the beginning.
- But one thing to point out, the structure of the book of Genesis is actually based upon genealogies, these generations. There's these things. The Hebrew word is Toledot.
- And the very first, there's actually been one before this one. It's in chapter 2, verse 4. The writer of Genesis said, these are the generations. These are the genealogies of the heavens and the earth, right?
- [1 : 10] And then it gets into God's people here. And then later what you get is you have the generations, the line of, you get Noah, and then you have Shem and Terah, and then later Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and so on.
- You get these different Toledotes that go through. And in fact, the Greek word that translates Toledote, the Hebrew word, is where we get the word Genesis from.
- Right? So these genealogies are actually very important because Genesis is an origin story. It's an origin story about where God's people came from and what his promise actually means.
- Right? There's a context to his promises. So I don't know how many genealogy sermons you've heard in your past, but you're getting one this morning. I don't know what it's like here in Scotland, but in the United States in the past, like, I don't know, 10, 15 years, there's been a huge, maybe even longer than that, a renewed interest in ancestry.
- You have all of these different, you know, ancestry.com and things like that, where you can send in a swab of your DNA and they can tell you how much, like, Mongolian you have in you from, like, Attila the Hun coming through a long time ago, then they own your DNA.
- [2 : 24] But people want to know, people are curious, where have I come from? I'm wondering, I'm kind of curious, actually, if, you know, with the Campbells and the McDonalds and things like that, if Scottish people know where they came from better than Americans do.
- You know, we're a newer country, we're scrambling for an identity. Who are we? So I have a question for you this morning. You don't have to participate if you don't want to, but I'd love for you, raise your hand if you know the name of your great-great-grandfather.
- Keep your hand up if you know the name of your great-great-great-grandfather. No? A little bit? Kind of? Maybe? Guessing? Of your great-great-great-great-grandfather.

Anybody? Okay, that's as far as we go. All right, so confession time. I know the name of my grandparents. If my mom was here and told me the name of my grandfather's dad and mom, I would remember it, but off the top of my head, I cannot remember it.

Some sort of Swedish name. It was Swedish on my mom's dad's side, Scottish on my mom's mom's side. But I don't even know. I can tell you the name of my grandparents, but not great-grandparents.

[3 : 35] And here's the thing. You might be asking, you know, like, why would an Israelite care about a genealogy? They would come and they would say, Nate, are you kidding me? You don't know the name of your great-great-grandfather?

What on earth happened? I could actually tell you the name of my great-great-great-great-great-great-great-grandfather. And the reason is, is because when we had decided to come to Scotland again, I was like, you know, Americans, we like to think we're Scottish even though we're not.

And we're like, there's Scottish roots back there somewhere. And so I went to my aunt who had, like, researched family history and genealogies. And I was like, hey, Aunt Dottie, do you think you could send that stuff over?

And she sent it to me. And I found out my great-great-great-great-great-great-grandfather, his name was David Smith, and he was a minister in a church in St. Andrews.

That church is still there. We visited last year, and sadly, I think it's going to be closed soon because they're consolidating. It's a church of Scotland now. Again, I don't know the name of my great-great-grandfather, but I do know the name of my seventh great-grandfather, David Smith.

[4 : 41] And again, it was for the first time. I don't think about it that often, but it was something on our way over here. We had already made the decision. That's not why we came. But I remember thinking, like, oh, like, that's kind of cool.

And it inspired me. In that moment, I was like, yeah, yeah, we have a history of serving the Lord in our family, and I would like to carry that on. He actually immigrated to Canada, and he started the first presbytery in Canada.

Found that out. It's pretty cool. It reminded me how I got to be me. I remember one of my Old Testament professors in seminary, he told a story. He said there was a Korean student who came to the seminary, to Covenant Seminary, and he brought with him a book of his family ancestry, his genealogies, and it went back 900 years.

Pretty cool. To some cultures, in modern Western cultures, we really struggle with identity. Who are we? What's our purpose? Why are we here? A lot of times, in different cultures, they don't struggle as much with those identity things because, in a way, it's a given.

Well, I'm part of this family. This is who we are. This is where we're from. This is what we're about. So what does the genealogy tell us? It tells you your story.

[5 : 59] How you got to be you. And it reminds you that the struggles that you're facing, you are not the first person in the world, not even in your family to face those things.

And you look back, and it also reminds you that there's going to be generations to come, and they're going to face struggles of their own. It helps you to see your issues in light of those things.

And it reminds you that you didn't just show up out of the blue. There's a history. There's a story to how you got to be you. So we're going to look at these genealogies a little bit more, but I want to pray for the preaching of God's word first.

Would you speak, O Lord, not just an ancient word, but an eternal word, an enduring one right now into our hearts. And as you speak, would you confront our doubts, our complacencies, and our foolishness.

And would you not just confront those things, but would you argue, and would you woo us to your good news and to your good ways, all so that we might love you and our neighbors more.

[7 : 05] We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. So, the year is 413. And there's this North African theologian who has just written one of the most influential books in the history of the world.

See, what's happened is three years earlier in 410, the city of Rome was sacked. The Visigoths in the southern part of Germany have come in and they have pillaged and they've sacked the city of Rome.

All of a sudden, the barbarian horde is running through the streets of Rome. They're tearing things apart. They're going into homes. They're going into political buildings. They're going into religious spaces.

And they're sacking the entire city. Now, the thing about Rome is that it hadn't been sacked in 800 years. 800 years. And in fact, it had earned the name the Eternal City.

That's what they thought. It was going to be around forever. And so, as people are kind of reeling from what happened, you see almost 100 years, a little less than 100 years before Rome was sacked, there was an emperor named Constantine.

[8 : 14] And in 325, he declared Christianity to be the official religion of the Roman Empire. And do you want to know why some Roman people were starting to say some citizens of the Empire?

How did this happen? The Eternal City got sacked? They blamed the Christians. They said, you know what it was? It was probably our gods were punishing us for turning away from them and going to the god of Christianity.

And not only that, but these Christians, their culture has changed our culture. We used to be strong. We used to be mighty. Now we're talking about charity and love and forgiveness.

And you see what happened? It made us vulnerable. And we've been pillaged by these barbarians. And so, this theologian in the north part of Africa named Augustine, he writes this book called The City of God.

And in it, what he is doing is he is trying to assure the Christians in the Roman Empire, hey, no, no, no, listen. This is actually what happens to every single city.

[9 : 20] And not only that, but he writes it as kind of a polemic against the gods, the polytheistic idolatry of those who hold to the Roman gods.

And the way that he does this is he actually traces it all the way back to Genesis 4. Cain heads east of Eden and he builds a city.

And in his book, his magnum opus, The City of God, he calls this city the city of man. And then Genesis 5, the line from that is the city of God.

And he says, listen, there's always been a city of man and a city of God. And then he goes through the entire Bible. He works his way through the whole Bible kind of making this argument. But you see, his point in this is that both cities are made by love.

He says, Cain's city is made by love of self and self-promotion, whereas the city of God is based on the love of God, using power to serve him and others.

[10 : 22] And so he says, listen, this is the way things have always been in the world. Don't be surprised, Christians. And listen, Romans, come on. This is what's going on. As you have these empires, these great cities rise and fall, city of man is bound to be destroyed, whereas the city of God is the one that endures.

Talks about genealogies to make his point. So here's our outline. It's four questions about genealogies. First off, what do they teach us? Secondly, how do they connect us to a bigger story?

Third, what are they calling us to do? And then last, how do you get the power to do it? Okay, what are they teaching us? What kind of bigger story do they connect us to? What do they call you and me to do this week with our lives?

And then lastly, how do we get the power to do it? So first off, what do they teach us? I don't know if you were sitting there taking notes as I was reading, but they actually do teach us quite a lot. And I'm just going to summarize it in a few things.

First off, let's look at Cain's genealogy. What you see in Cain's genealogy is the decay that sin brings. All right? So first off, you see Cain's pride.

[11 : 24] He's already, earlier in chapter 4, he's refused to repent of his murder of his brother despite being given chances by God. Okay? And he's been kept from being the object of vengeance.

Remember, God's put a mark on him and said, if anyone strikes Cain, you know, vengeance will be taken to him sevenfold. Right? And Cain heads east and he gets to building a city.

Don't think skyscrapers or anything like that. It would be like a fortified settlement. And what does he name the city? He names it after his son, Enoch. It's interesting.

It's a contrast because at the end of chapter 4, it says about Adam's line is that's when they start, they begin to call upon the what? The name of the Lord, which means to worship him.

Right? Whereas what Cain is doing is naming a city after his son. It's the sign of pride. It's like a preview of what's going to come in the Tower of Babel.

[12 : 22] This is the city of man. Cain's not concerned with God's name but promoting his own. You also see the decay of sin in that Lamech takes two wives in verse 19.

If you ever wonder, like, why are people taking more than one wife in the Bible? Is that allowed? The answer is no. And even if it gives examples of it, later you have, like, Hagar and Sarah, Rachel and Leah, it never goes well.

The way God's intended things to be is Genesis 2, one man and one woman. Not only that, the decay of sin escalates to Lamech's violence in verses 23 to 24.

Do you remember the first poetry that we heard in the book of Genesis? It was love poetry between Adam and Eve. He's loving his wife. He's delighting in her. Now, all of a sudden, because of the decay of sin, you have Lamech giving a poem to his wives going, hey, I've got a little love poem for you.

And it goes like this. If somebody hurts Cain, the vengeance shall be sevenfold. If somebody hurts me, man, whoo, 77-fold. I've killed a man for looking at me the wrong way.

[13 : 32] Super romantic, right? Lamech is worse than his great, great, great, great, great, great, great grandfather Cain. You see the decay of sin. When he says 77-fold, he's saying like a gajillion million.

My vengeance will be unending. Sin even brings decay to good things. You have Lamech's son in verses 20 to 22.

I've got some good rhyming names, J-ball, J-ball, J-ball, T-ball. What are they? What are they doing? They build culture, right? They're culture builders in this city.

They're pioneering music, animal husbandry, agriculture, metalworking, and more. And this is an interesting thing because what has God tasked humanity with in Genesis chapter 1, being created in his image?

To create culture. To do things like Cain's sons are doing. It's called the cultural mandate. To use the things of the earth to bring forth flourishing and benefit others.

[14 : 35] You're creating culture. And this is what Cain's line does. And we get this idea that as great as those things are, I mean, who doesn't love music, right? You don't love music. I mean, come on, talk to me later.

You've got to love music, right? As great as those things are, all of those things are touched by the decay of sin. They're doing these wonderful things they've been created to do, and yet they're doing it in autonomy and pride.

So this rings true in real life. Let's paraphrase another writer. The same civilization that gave us Bach and Einstein also gave us the Third Reich. The same country that gave us Tchaikovsky and St. Basil's Cathedral also gave us genocide and gulags.

The same civilization that brought medical advancements in the First Amendment and cured polio has also made explicit materials easily accessible to all ages, enslaved and segregated people based on the color of their skin, and addicted itself to drugs.

Maybe we could add and bring it home to Scotland here. The same country that hundreds of years ago led the world in literacy and created the steam engine and penicillin also leads the Western world in gender confusion and had an all-time high last year of 16,000 abortions, up 20%.

[15 : 49] That's more than one in four pregnancies are terminated here in Scotland. Good things that are happening, and yet we see the decay of sin clinging to those things.

All right, so we see the decay of sin. The second thing that these two genealogies teach us is that despite the decay of sin, the image of God remains. Did you hear it reaffirmed in Genesis chapter 5?

Right? That Adam bore a son named Seth after his own likeness in his image. And it's not just for Adam's line.

It goes in Noah in Genesis 9. It says, All human beings are still created in God's image. Despite the decay of sin, human beings are still created in the image of God.

But it's interesting that it notes that in chapter 5 rather than in Cain's line because what it is saying is that the image, its purposes, are going to be realized through the line of Adam, not through the line of Cain.

[16 : 53] Okay? Image bearing emphasized in chapter 5. It's going to be realized through Seth and his descendants. While Cain is still created in God's image, and we see the amazing things that his children do, those endeavors are like cul-de-sacs and dead ends, not actually carrying out God's purposes.

Third thing that you're taught from these two genealogies is about the reign of death. The way to make a point and emphasize something in the Hebrew narrative is to repeat yourself.

The way to make a point explicit in the Hebrew narrative is to repeat yourself. In Genesis chapter 5, maybe it felt a little bit redundant. You had this little formula.

But there is one Hebrew word that punctuates the end of every single one of those sentences except one. Did you hear it? Vayamot. That's the Hebrew word.

One word. It's translated into three words in the English. And then he died. And then he died. Eight times in that chapter.

[18 : 01] And then he died. This is the line that you want to be in. Not the other one. Not the city of man. The city of God. And yet every single time. And then he died.

It's like hope intermingles with this gut punch. Another one. Is this the seed of promise? Are God's purposes going to be realized? And then he died.

God's promised to overturn the curse. But the curse remains. And then he died. God's faithful. But death keeps getting the final word. And then he died.

Fourth and last we're taught that God actually has power over the curse. And the key to living in a world full of sin is walking with God.

There was one viamote. There was one and then he died that was missing. It was repetition, repetition, repetition. And then this one should stand out in bright lights.

[18 : 59] Did you hear it? There was one that was missing. It was Enoch. In contrast to the Enoch of Cain. Cain's son who he names the city after Enoch.

There's another Enoch that's born. That's quite interesting. And what's it say? Enoch walked with God.

This Hebrew word for walked is this idea of ongoing, continuous intimacy. Remember God walks with Adam and Eve in Genesis 3 in the garden. In Leviticus 26 when he builds the tabernacle, God says, I want to dwell in, you will be my people.

I will be your guard. I'm going to dwell in your midst. Right? And he says, I will walk among you. That God desires communion. To walk with God is to live in communion with him.

Micah 6.8. He has told you, oh man, what is good and what the Lord requires of you, but to love justice and to love mercy. And to what? To walk humbly with your God.

[20 : 03] And if we remember, Abel brought a sacrifice to God. And the implication in that is that Adam's family, specifically now in the line of Seth, who are calling upon the name of the Lord, is that worship of Yahweh descends from him.

Not Cain's. Right? And even Enoch is the seventh in his line in the genealogy. Who's the seventh in the line of Cain? Lamech.

Who boasts about his vengeance. In this world of vengeance and cruelty, the key to making it is walking with God. And instead of hearing this refrain, and then he died, it simply says about Enoch, and he was not.

Or it can be translated, he was not found. What happened? Verse 24 doesn't give a bunch of details. All it says is God took him. What's it show us, right?

It shows us that death's authority is not greater than God's authority. There is hope. There actually can be relief from the curse. It's Enoch's brief mention breaks this pattern.

[21 : 13] It's a reminder that you and I were not born to die. I hear this sometimes when people pass away at funerals and things like that. It's just natural. It's what happens. Death is never natural.

That is not how you were created to be. Never make peace with it. We can have hope in the midst of it, but it is not a normal thing. And life, life comes by walking with God.

Walking with God is the key to unlocking the chains of sin and death and the curse. And what we see with Enoch is that there is hope for relief from the curse.

It's as if God is showing us that those who walk with him will one day escape death. And at the end, what do you get? You get Noah, whose name means rest.

It's through Noah that God brings relief from the curse. So, two genealogies. What do they teach us? The decay of sin, it touches everything. Despite the decay, God's image remains. Death reigns.

[22 : 11] And yet, God is more powerful. So, we should walk with him in worship and communion. Second question. How do these genealogies connect to a bigger story and connect to us?

Right? Ancient Israelites, if they were reading this, they would see that God is faithful. That's what you see again and again. God is faithful and he calls his people to walk with him.

And not just that, but the story, it's going somewhere. An offspring is promised. A nation. A people. A rescuer. Again though, what on earth does that have to do with you and me?

That was so long ago. Here's my question then. Are you part of a bigger story? Again, did you just show up out of the blue or are you connected to a bigger story?

You can trace these generations through Genesis, but I'm actually going to skip ahead to the New Testament, to the book of Luke, chapter 3. There is this carpenter from Nazareth.

[23 : 12] And he goes down to the Jordan River to be baptized by this locust-eating prophet. And this prophet baptizes this carpenter. And people see the skies open and a dove in shape.

The Holy Spirit comes down. And a voice from heaven says, This is my beloved son in whom I'm well pleased. And what happens right after that? Does anybody know? What happens right after that baptism in Luke 3?

You get a genealogy. Instead of going forwards, it goes backwards and it's selective. It skips things. But it says, Jesus was fathered by Joseph, his adopted dad in this world.

And it goes back. And all of a sudden, the names from Genesis 5 start to show up again. The son of Noah. The son of Lamech.

The son of Methuselah. The son of Seth. The son of Adam. The son of God. So, if you're reading the Gospel of Luke, you hear this genealogy and it's going back.

[24 : 13] And you should be going, Whoa! Is this the one who's going to bring relief from the curse? Is this the one?

And so, you can imagine the shock of the disciples thinking that this is the rescuer. When the same ending that punctuated every single person except Enoch in Genesis 5 comes and echoes like a death knell on Jesus on the cross.

And then he died. What? But it's through his death that he actually defeats death.

It's through his death that he defangs death. He is the one that we've been waiting for. He is the one who rises and puts his foot on the serpent's head. And now those who are born not just into a lineage of Israel, but born of the Spirit, are adopted into what?

The family of God. So, if you are a Christian, you are part of this family. What's that mean? It's that this genealogy becomes part of your story.

[25 : 27] What does the genealogy in Genesis 5 have to do with you? Everything. Everything. This is who you are.

This is the God that you serve. These are his promises, and this is what it calls you to. This is the family line that you and I are a part of. This is your family history. That's how it connects us to the bigger story.

Third question. Okay. It connects us to the bigger story. What does it call me to do? I can mention a few different things. I'm going to apply these genealogies in three quick ways. First off, see your role as a member of God's family, the church, as being a city within a city.

Augustine would tell you and me right now there are two cities. The city of man and the city of God. There's two genealogies, right? The line of Cain and the line of Seth. Or as Jesus would say in the Sermon on the Mount, you are a city set on a hill.

Let your light shine so that others may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven. What does this genealogy call you to? It calls you to live within a culture as a counterculture.

[26 : 39] Right? So Jeremiah 29.7, the people of God are in exile, and God calls them to seek the welfare of the city. Right? You can seek the good of those around you.

And yet, at the same time, you don't identify with that. You are part of it, but you're also set apart. You're a city within a city.

You belong to the city of God. You belong to the line of Seth. Right? There's two Enochs in these genealogies. One, self-promotion. The other one, humility with God.

You're supposed to live like the humility with God one. There's two Lamechs. One curses anybody who steps on his toes, and the other searches for and waits for relief from the curse.

So you live as a member of the family of Seth. Let that shape your identity. Second application. Take seriously the nurturing of your children's walk with God.

[27 : 35] If you notice, in these two genealogies, there is a legacy of unbelief, and there is a legacy of belief. This isn't trying to guarantee salvation to whichever line you're in.

Your children are guaranteed. There's still the role of the Holy Spirit. We know examples from our own lives. In the Bible, right? There'll be examples of a generation who remain faithful, then all of a sudden, there's a generation who doesn't call upon the name of the Lord.

And it's sad. And then also, God can totally grab someone, not from this line, and remember, he redeems them and brings them into a new family. This guy named Abraham, whose dad, Terah, lived in Ur of the Chaldeans and was a moon worshiper.

God can do those things. Those are the caveats. But here's my point. By and large, in the world, in the history of the world, those who call upon the name of the Lord have parents who called upon the name of the Lord.

And one of the glories of someone who doesn't know the Lord coming to know the Lord is not just that they are now calling upon the name of the Lord, but the hope and the promise and covenant reliance is that their children then too will call upon the name of the Lord.

[28 : 48] They're hoping that there's this lineage, there's this genealogy of faithfulness that gets passed down. And one of the hard things of seeing a child walk away from the faith, that is a super hard thing to watch if you're a Christian family, watching a child walk away.

It's not just that that own child's faith, they're not walking with the Lord and calling upon his name, but that also most likely their children are also not going to too.

Okay? G.K. Chesterton, he put it this way, there are two ways of getting home and one of them is to never leave. And I get it, I'm not trying to lay a guilt trip on anybody who's seen that happen to their own children.

This isn't a point, some things are outside of our control, you might have remained faithful. But it's just a call to remember and to take seriously and to actively seek to pass on your faith.

That's a huge topic, right? That's a sermon series in its own. But you start, pray at meals. Read the Bible and worship together in your home. Use bedtime with your children if they're small.

[29 : 54] Maybe some of them are too big now for your dad to put you in bed and sing a psalm to you, right? But while they're little, take advantage of those times. Wisely, you know, confess sin that maybe happened that day.

Seek forgiveness. Bless them. Let them know that you love them and you want to seek God's blessing in their life. Pass down the faith. And then you see it as your, the primary responsibility is with you as a parent.

A benefit of being part of a covenant family is you have things like Sunday school where they've gone right now and they are going to be taught the faith, right? But that's in addition to, that's alongside.

The primary responsibility of teaching your kids what it means to walk with God lies on the parents. Third application. Trust and walk with God. What you see in Genesis 5 is that you are no fool and you have not wasted your life if they write on your tombstone, he or she walked with God.

Live a life that makes sense of the story that you are a part of. What does it mean for you to walk with God? Again, that's another sermon series, like 12 sermons. I'll quote one commentator.

[31 : 08] He says, it's easy to understand how we may practically walk with God. It is to open to him all our purposes and hopes to seek his judgment on our schemes of life and ideas of happiness.

One last question though. How do we get the power to do this? I don't know about you, but life is hard, right? You've had a busy week, there's ups and downs, there's things that you face that I don't know about, and you're like, we're sitting here and he's reading about genealogies to me and guys who are super old, nobody lives that old anymore, what's going on?

And this preacher up there is like, have a bunch of kids and teach them about Jesus and be a countercultural witness and just pour out your life in honoring God. Yeah! Slow down.

That's really hard, right? This is what you and I need to hear. It's the opposite of Lamech's boast. What does Lamech boast? If somebody wrongs me, my vengeance is going to come seventy-sevenfold.

There's a group of guys following this Nazareth carpenter named Jesus, and they're starting to pick up on this grace stuff that he's talking about or so they think. And one of them says to Jesus, if somebody wrongs me, should I forgive him seven times?

[32 : 26] And what does Jesus say to them? No, seventy-seven times. What's he doing? He's reversing Lamech's boast. He's reversing Lamech's boast, and Lamech's boast is what?

His vengeance is a gajillion million unending. What's Jesus saying? The forgiveness and love should flow out a gajillion million from you. And again, not to heap another burden on you, but he tells a story right after that.

And it's a story about this guy who owes a huge debt. And that huge debt, one he could never repay in twelve lifetimes, is forgiven. And he won't forgive a small debt.

And the point is this. When you realize the huge debt and the huge love that has been shown towards you, that actually gives you the power to start living this out.

You get the power to do it when it dawns on you that the endless decay of your sin has been met and overcome by the endless grace and forgiveness of Jesus.

[33 : 28] The one who actually says, vengeance is mine, takes what you and I deserve at the cross. And he doesn't leave you alone, but he sends his spirit. Right?

What's the spirit do in Romans 8? It testifies to you and me that we're children. That this is our story. That this is our genealogy. And not just children, but heirs, co-heirs with Christ.

So, as you go to work or school or whatever it is this week, and trials come and your whole week just feels like one big ol' and then he died, I want you to remember these two genealogies.

I want you to remember God's faithfulness, that there is one who has defanged death, that there is one who brings relief and rest from the curse, and he invites you into this story. It's a story of two genealogies, of two cities, but one Lord and one gospel.

Thanks be to God. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we do thank you for the gift you've given us of a new family name. Would you help us to look to our older brother Jesus as we live life in an alternate city within Glasgow.

[34 : 40] By the power of the Holy Spirit, would you help us to walk step by step, day by day, in communion with you, looking to you as the author of our story.

We pray this in Christ's name. Amen.