

A Gift From Heaven

The Bible and Boring Genealogies

How Bad Is Sin?

Ascension

Lesson 22

REFORMED
EVANGELISM
TASKFORCE

The Bible and Boring Genealogies

As you read the Bible you will come across parts where you can not help but wonder, what good does it do? Is it still relevant for us?

It is a good custom to read the Bible on a regular basis with your family. Read the Bible after every meal when the whole family is usually together. Get the children involved by letting them read portions of Scripture too. In that way their interest will be stimulated and their understanding will increase. Yet when you do this you will come across certain sections that do not appear to be suitable for that purpose, for instance, chapters with scores of difficult names, long genealogies, and seemingly boring lists of cities. What good does it do?

However, remember that God, the Holy One, wants us to serve Him, and the Bible tells us how to do that. The entire Bible does that, each Bible book in its own way. Every part of the Bible, even if it does not appear that way, is nevertheless important in the whole context of the Bible.

Instructive Genealogies

Even those dry, monotonous, and long genealogies in the Bible possess a message for Bible readers in our time. This becomes apparent once you pay attention to them during your personal Bible study.

In the fourth chapter of Genesis you find two genealogies because the two sons of Adam and Eve had both gone their own way (*Gen. 4:17-22, 4:25-5:32*). Sin came into the world, and as a result, the punishment and curse of God are evident in everything. The struggle for existence began. Nevertheless, the descendants of Cain seem to be coping quite well. By means of mutual support and encouragement, they tackled their troubles and got on with life.

Already during Cain's life, the first permanent settlements came into being (*Gen. 4:17*). Of course, they were not very big, but it was the start of the innumerable cities that we have today. Right from the beginning cities were the focal point of human activity. They were the strong holds in which Cain and his descendants could protect themselves against their enemies. Unfortunately, that protection was not exactly a luxury if you keep in mind Lamech's song of vengeance (*Gen. 4:23*). For Cain's descendants "survival of the fittest" is the rule. That attitude made them very uncharitable and greedy.

They developed their trade, arts, and culture rapidly to make their life easier and more pleasant (*Gen. 4:19-22*). Whatever their society offered them was not brought about to honour their Creator. Indeed, nothing was used to the honour of their Creator anymore. If you think about it, not much has really changed since those times. Also today man lives on earth to save his own skin, and whoever is not crafty or strong enough receives the short end of the stick.

On the other hand, the descendants of Seth develop themselves quite differently. There are no startling facts or impressive accomplishments listed in their genealogy. Their part in the civilization and progress of mankind is insignificant compared to the achievements of Cain's descendants.

There is only one special feature. "At that time men began to call upon the name of the Lord." (*Gen. 4:26*) At that time there were obviously enough descendants of Seth to hold formal worship services. Together they thanked God for all that He had done for them and given to them. Together they prayed for His protection and His help.

That is the exact opposite of Lamech's actions. The children of Seth acknowledged their dependency, while Lamech proclaimed his independence. Seth's descendants did not take the law into their own hands. They realized that their life was guided by God.

The two genealogies give two different styles of life. From the very origin of mankind opposites existed: on the one hand you find people whose point of departure is self-preservation and self redemption, and on the other side you find those who want to live by the grace and salvation of God.

The Glad Tidings, Also in Genealogies

In the first book of Chronicles you will find another genealogy, which at first sight looks even more complicated than the one in Genesis (*1 Chron. 1*). Yet, in principle, it is the same.

Immediately in the first verse of this register it strikes us that the family tree of Adam-Seth-Enos-Noah is mentioned, but not the tree of Cain-Lamech. The descendants of Cain met their end in the great Flood. They no longer have a role in the future that God is working on. They thought they could manage on their own and paid the dire consequence of this attitude.

After the Flood, the family of Noah served the Lord to a degree, but sin still lived in the heart of man (*Gen. 8:20*). The Flood had not cured them of that. Before long both Noah and his son Ham showed this in their behaviour (*Gen. 9:18-27*).

In this genealogy you can see how the generation that serves God becomes smaller all the time. Noah had many grandchildren, but only Abraham remained faithful to God. Likewise, Jacob was the only one of Abraham's descendants that stayed with God. In this way God established His nation Israel.

You also may have noticed that after the Flood, God does not punish those who rebel against Him with complete eradication. They lose their part in the redemption which God chose to bring through Abraham. God protects Abraham because through Abraham He will deliver mankind from the power of the devil. The Saviour Jesus Christ is that deliverer and thus the most important descendant of Abraham. When the Saviour has completed His work, all the nations of the earth will share in His salvation (*Acts 2:39*). That was what God promised to Abraham, and that is what we have been given (*Gen. 12:3*).

As king, David, a forefather of Jesus, was allowed to foreshadow the future reign of King Jesus as He was going to conduct it after His ascension into heaven. All the other generations veered away from that line and forgot God with the result that they have no part in the redemption which Jesus brought into the world.

Reading the records superficially, you may wonder, "What is the point of all of this?" However, if you read the Bible attentively and meditate on it, you will discover the glad tidings in these genealogies.

They show how God led His history toward the coming of the Saviour. Their message is "Jesus comes!" You can read it through the whole genealogy. Jesus came to save His people and that includes us even if we are not in David's family tree.

Just Another Family Tree

In *Matt. 1* you find yet another family tree. You might ask yourself whether a more suitable beginning would not have been more appropriate. However, again we find that there is a very important message in this genealogy. Always remember that the Bible was not put together by chance.

The purpose and meaning of the register in *Matt. 1* is slightly different from the former genealogies. In this family tree the focus is on the birth of Jesus. The promise of God to Abraham and David is now being fulfilled through the birth of His Son. It becomes clear from the genealogy of Matthew that although there was a natural succession of generations preceding His birth, it was nonetheless a miracle that God let the Messiah be born out of that generation. God remained

faithful to His promises even though the people which Matthew mentions in his register were not exactly "without sin". For instance, Judah gambled with the promise of God by his extremely sinful behaviour with Tamar (*Gen. 38*). Yet, God remained faithful to His promise. Rahab, a prostitute (*Josh. 2*) and Ruth a non-Israelite (*Ruth 1:4*) are maternal ancestors of the Son of God (*Ruth 4:18-22*). God also uses people like these to bring His promises to fulfillment. David has Uriah murdered for the sake of adding Bathsheba to his harem, yet God remains faithful (*2 Sam. 11*). The people are punished for their sins and have to live in exile in Babylon, but the house of David continues to exist.

After all the ages in which sinful people have opposed God in fulfilling His promise, that promise becomes reality. God bypasses Joseph in this process. Joseph is allowed to be called the father of Jesus, but he is not allowed to be His father. God brought the great Son of David into the world through the virgin Mary, without the help of man. God clearly demonstrates that He is not dependent on people. Indeed, if the coming of Jesus had been dependent on mankind, the Saviour would never have been born.

Although the coming of Jesus has a history that can be accurately traced throughout the centuries, His birth can only be ascribed to God. Little wonder that this genealogy also has an important place in God's Word.

The Bible Is Well Worth Being Acquainted With

The Bible brings the glad tidings of salvation and deliverance from sin. This deliverance was made possible by the life, the suffering and the death of Jesus Christ. No matter how sinful people may be, God wants to call them His children, provided they let themselves be saved by His Son. That is what the Bible teaches us, and it also uses long rows of names to show us this. It indicates that God has worked through sinful people in the past. As for the present, He does the same. He still calls you and I to serve, no matter how sinful we may be.

How Bad Is Sin?

Article 10

Do you live a decent life? Do others respect you? Do you pay what you owe? Most people, and perhaps you yourself, would answer "yes" to these questions. Sure, once in a while you make a small mistake here or there, but who does not? We all make mistakes. On the whole though, you stand up quite favourably. You might have to touch up on a few minor things but you certainly do not need a major overhaul.

This is very dangerous thinking. When you meet God after death, you will not be able to claim salvation on account of your decent lifestyle. You will also discover that your sins are much worse than you anticipated.

God Cannot Stand the Sight of Us

God does not take the "few small mistakes" in our life lightly. He created man to be good, one hundred percent good (*Gen. 1:31*). But after the fall into sin, man was no longer good. Man was not good with but the odd flaw here and there. No, since the fall into sin man is evil, very evil. So evil, in fact, that everything he thinks, and even "every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually" (*Gen. 6:5, 8:21*). His desires, motives and deeds became spoiled. Jesus says that evil thoughts, adulteries, fornication, thefts, murders all proceed from the heart of man (*Mark 7:21-23*). The fall into sin affected all people in the same measure. Even our children are at birth completely evil and sinful. We are conceived and born in sin (*Ps. 51:5*).

Consequently, the deliverance from our sins is something totally different from the removal of a few little blemishes. To be delivered from sins takes, as it were, a complete reconstruction of ourselves. We have to become a new people, a new creation (*2 Cor. 5:17*). Jesus tells us this very emphatically by using the expression "born anew". Unless one is born again, he cannot enter the Kingdom of God (*John 3:3*). His Spirit has to change us completely. That is how bad sin is.

Man Is Destroying Himself

God made man in His own image (*Gen. 1:26*). That unique aspect distinguished man from all other creatures. By using the expression, "in His image" the Bible does not mean the outward appearance of God. In outward appearance we show many similarities with certain animals. The structure of our body, digestive system and blood circulation can be compared in many ways with those of the higher animal species. Drawing on this similarity, science has conceived the unfounded theory that we have actually evolved from animals. But there is one very big difference between man and the animals: God created man in His image. That has nothing to do with outward similarities, but it has everything to do with our glorious position, and our talents. God made man in His image in order that man should have dominion (*Gen. 1:26,28*). Around us are living and lifeless creatures: plants, animals, mountains, and oceans. There is endless variety and endless beauty. There is unimaginable harmony in the forces of nature, and between stars and planets. There are varied patterns in plant life and different types of behaviour by animals. There is the incessant motion of atoms and

molecules. God made it all. It is His. He "plays" with it and He amuses Himself with it (*Ps. 104:24-26*). He is Maker and Master of it all.

What Is Man's Place In All This?

Is man moved by indefinite, uncontrollable laws of nature? Is he led by instincts which he cannot control? Some of this is indeed in man. He is a creature, but his place is at God's side. God has put some of His majesty and dominion in man. God has made man almost godlike. "Thou hast given him dominion over the works of thy hands; thou hast put all things under his feet" (*Ps. 8:6*). Men are the children of their Father, God.

Sin has changed all this completely. The sinful rebellion against God turned man, the image of God, into an image of the devil. Selfishness, craving for power, pride, envy, hate, war, and debauchery have come into the world. Since the fall into sin in paradise, man is busy destroying himself and his world (*Rom. 1:21*). His heart is darkened; he has become a slave to his desires. Man who had dominion over creation, is now afraid of it. He fears animals which he cannot dominate, and is scared of the forces of nature: storms, earthquakes, avalanches, and even atomic energy. He fears illness and death (*Heb. 2:15*). By using alcohol and drugs, man who was given dominion, enslaves him self to things which he should control.

We live in a corrupt world, but it is our fault. "Seriously, just because of a few small mistakes?" you might ask. The answer is: "Yes, sin is that bad."

God: Not an Amiable Benefactor in Heaven

Many people who live in today's world, take courage from the thought that there is an end to everything. Sin or no sin, oblivion will come. After death, existence turns into a vacuum. That is why some people commit suicide. But there is no final end. Being dead is not being liberated. Everyone will meet God. Everyone will have to stand before His judgment seat (*Rom. 14:10,12*). God has pronounced His curse on all those who do not live according to all that He has written in the book of the law (*Gal. 3:10, Deut. 27:26*). Death does not offers a way out. It offers quite the opposite. It brings a direct confrontation with God, the judge who shall pronounce His judgment (*Eccl. 12:14*).

There is only one way out, and that is if the Judge grants a complete pardon. Only the Judge can grant such a pardon (*Eph. 2:8*). The apostle Paul provides an excellent example of this.

Paul, or Saul as he was called at the time, made it his occupation to oppose Christ. Persecution was a common horror for Christians of his day. But then God turned things around. He met Saul on the road to Damascus and called him to be an apostle to spread His Word to the Gentiles. Can you believe that? God changes a persecutor into a preacher (*Acts 9:3-6, 15,16*). Obviously, this is a God to be revered.

How much is God respected? The billions of people on the earth all belong to Him. Yet, everything that belongs to God is used by man carelessly, contrary to His will, and without ever thanking Him for it. Man abuses his talents and possibilities, destroying others and himself in the process. And even if everything seems proper on the outside, the sins are still there, they are just hidden in a person's heart. But God knows the heart of every single individual. God warns us through His Word, but the majority of people simply shrug their shoulders, and act as if He does not exist.

Who do you think God is? God is not an amiable benefactor in heaven, who accepts the whims of man with a smile. He is not a benevolent, kind-hearted Being who gets angry once in a while, but always brushes over whatever man does wrong in a good natured manner.

No, God is the Holy One (*Lev. 19:2*). He detests the evil which we do. He hates wickedness (*Ps. 45:7*).

His holiness is a blazing fire before which no sinner can stand (*Isa. 6:2-5*). Soon His judgment will come forever upon those who did not want to know Him and have rejected His love. Sin is that bad.

Through His Word, He makes His unfathomable love known to us (*John 3:16; 1 John 4:16,19*). That is the anchor of our existence. That is the only support in a man's life. God is holy. God is love. He cannot bear to have His love rejected. Accept it then, for your salvation's sake!

Ascension

Acts 1

What's in the Bible for me? Many people have asked that question. The second section of this course emphatically pointed out that the Bible is a book in which the faithfulness of the Lord is shown. The whole Bible displays God's faithfulness. In fact every lesson of this Bible course deals with the faithfulness of God. The recurring theme is that His Son came to the world to bring salvation to people who otherwise would have had to live without God. God kept His Word. It will, therefore, be no surprise to learn that the ascension of Jesus is also concerned with this issue. Though the disciples of Jesus, as well as ourselves, have to be without Him on earth, now that He is in heaven, Jesus did not quit His redeeming work on ascension day, but instead He introduced a new stage. His work continued.

King of the Whole Earth

After His resurrection from the dead, Jesus went to heaven. Just before His ascension, however, He explained the significance of His ascension to His disciples. He said to them, "All authority in heaven and earth has been given to me" (*Matt. 28:18*). What the Lord Jesus wanted to convey was that through His ascension it would become apparent that He was, and is, the promised Son of David and Abraham. To understand this clearly, you should compare the beginning of the gospel of Matthew with the end. In his gospel, Matthew makes it very clear to us that Jesus is the "Promised One" (*Matt. 1*). It is only fitting then that he ends his gospel with Jesus fulfilling an age old covenant promise.

If you look at the gospel according to Matthew in that manner you will begin to see the significance of Ascension. In the first verse of his gospel, Matthew says that he will deal with Jesus Christ, the Son of Abraham, the Son of David. What God had promised to David, and even to the ancient patriarch Abraham, was now brought to fulfillment. These promises to David can be found in the book of Samuel and in several Psalms (*2 Sam. 7:11b-16; Ps. 89, Ps. 132*). God had given David important promises relating to his descendants. He said that the royal house of David would never disappear. His offspring would receive a throne and a kingdom that would be everlasting.

As you will recall, God's promises to Abraham are found in the book of Genesis (*Gen. 12,13,15,17, and 22*). God gave a large number of promises to Abraham which He reiterated time and again, clarifying and elaborating on them continually. God would make Abraham's descendants a great nation by blessing Abraham and cursing his enemies. Regardless of the circumstances and opposition God would protect Abraham. God promised a son and even though Abraham and Sarah were too old to have children God kept His promise. God also promised them the land of Canaan. Even though the people were constantly rebellious, God kept His promise. God promised Abraham innumerable offspring, among whom there would be kings. Even though the nation was under the opposition of Pharaoh, Israel grew. God promised that one day all the nations of this earth would be blessed. When did He keep that promise?

God set Abraham apart from other nations exactly for the purpose of keeping that promise. That is the first thing God told Abraham when He recruited him in His service (*Gen. 12:3, 22:18*). And years later God repeated that promise once more. Now, Matthew points to all those promises of God in the first verse of his gospel, and at the end of his gospel he shows the fulfillment of those promises. Jesus receives the throne as the Son of David, and as the Son of Abraham He uses that throne to bless all the nations. The royal house of David no longer reigns from earth, but from heaven with

Jesus on the throne (*Ps. 2, 110*). You can also read about this in the last book of the Bible, in Revelation. We read there that the angels and the entire church honour Jesus as the "Lamb" that was slain, "For thou wast slain and by thy blood didst ransom men for God from every tribe and tongue and people and nation" (*Rev. 5:9*).

Before His ascension, Jesus made clear to His disciples that God was performing what He had promised to Abraham and David. God is faithful. The great event of the ascension of Jesus is His work.

The Son of David Blesses His People

Matthew has shown us that Jesus, the Promised One, received royal majesty. Luke, on the other hand, tells us about the ascension of Jesus from a different angle. He shows us that the Son of David, who came to the throne as King, is also a priest. You can read Luke's account of the ascension in chapter 24 of his gospel. To be able to understand his narrative, we again have to return to the beginning. Luke begins his gospel narrative in the temple. The priest Zechariah has brought the offering and he has prayed. With that done, it was his task to bless the people. However, Zechariah had met an angel, while he was sacrificing, who told him he would have a son. Zechariah did not believe him and therefore was struck dumb and was unable to pronounce the blessing (*Luke 1:5-23*). So, the gospel according to Luke begins with a priest who is unable to pronounce the blessing. It ends, however, with a "blessing priest" who is able to pronounce the blessing after He brought the offering. But His single offering was much more than all the offerings of the Old Testament, and the blessing that followed was much more too! "...And lifting up his hands he blessed them. While he blessed them, he parted from them, and was carried up into heaven" (*Luke 24:50-51*).

To bless, with uplifted hands, was the task of the priest in Israel. The uniqueness of this situation is that the blessing here is given by someone who did not belong to the tribe of Levi. Priests had always come from the tribe of Levi and their tasks were not to be performed by anyone else. Once Saul disobeyed the Lord and sacrificed a burnt offering. When Samuel, the priest, arrived a little later he reprimanded Saul strongly. It was clear that nobody besides the priest, not even the king, was allowed to offer sacrifices. However, Jesus the Son of David who belonged to the tribe of Judah, not the tribe of Levi is now blessing His disciples (*Luke 1:32,33*).

This King is now doing what up until that time had always been done by the priests (*Num. 6:22-27*). Jesus has brought the great atoning sacrifice for sin. As a priest He now blesses His people. Jesus, with His perfect sacrifice, bridged the gap between the two offices (*Heb. 2:8,9 and 17*).

Jesus the King rules over us, and Jesus the priest blesses us.

Jesus Will Come Back Again

When Jesus was hidden by a cloud and ascended into heaven, He left His disciples behind on a very hostile world. What could they do? They were just Galileans, men from a backward region (*Acts 1:11, 2:7*). However, the blessing of Jesus the Priest meant protection, and as King He would look after them and give them strength. He ensured that they could do everything that was necessary. He sent those simple men out into the world to spread the gospel. "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?.... No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us" (*Rom. 8:35-37*).

The suffering and death of Jesus culminated in His ascension. As soon as He entered heaven, Jesus received all honour. All things living, in heaven and on earth, honour Him (*Phil. 2:5-11*). Jesus had entered a new stage in His work as Redeemer. Although He became a true man, He still has the glory which He had with the Father before the world existed (*John 17:4,5*). The divine power which Jesus possesses, He now uses to help those who believe in Him. He will also use His divine power to judge both believers and unbelievers when He returns on Judgment Day.

Questions 22

The Bible and Boring Genealogies

1. What is the similarity of *Gen. 12:3* and *Matt. 28:19*? What is the significance for us?
2. In *1 Chron. 6:24-26* you will find the genealogies of the tribe of Levi and the generations of Aaron. What is the importance of these registers? (*Ezra 2:59-63, Neh. 7:61-65*)
3. From *Luke 2:36* and *Phil. 3:5* it appears that the genealogies were kept up to date by the Jews. Why would Luke mention here that Anna came from the tribe of Asher? What becomes evident from *Titus 3:9*?

How Bad Is Sin?

1. You often hear people say that if there were a God, there would not be so much misery in this world. What is the answer to such a remark?
2. What does it mean to be "born again"? (*Eph. 4:20-32; Col. 3:5-17*)
3. How can a man be born again? (*1 Pet. 1:23-25, Rom. 10:14,15*)

Ascension

1. What is said about the kingship of Jesus in *1 Cor. 15:23-28*?
2. *Ps. 110* says concerning Christ, "Thou art a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek." What distinguishes Melchizedek's priesthood from Aaron's? (*Gen. 14:18-24*) Why is Christ called a "Priest after the order of Melchizedek"? (*Heb. 6:20, 7:3,11,23,24*)
3. Just before Jesus ascended His disciples asked Him, "Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" They still expected Jesus to set up a political kingdom. What did Jesus have planned for His disciples instead? (*Matt. 28:19,20, Acts 1:6-8*)