

Three Missing Kings (Part One)

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Forerunner, "Personal,"

In II Timothy 3:16-17, the apostle Paul writes something that ought to be committed to every Christian's memory:

All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.

All Scripture is profitable, but we tend to overlook or maybe even altogether neglect parts of it. Usually, these neglected parts appear in the Old Testament. Often, they are “the begats,” where passage after passage relates who begat whom for many generations, for instance, I Chronicles 1-8; Ezra 2 and 10; Nehemiah 7, 10, and 12. In most peoples' Bibles, those chapters are in mint condition because they have never been read!

However, God through Paul, though, says that the whole Bible is profitable. It is a practical and helpful tool for teachers and students alike. Scripture stands as the standard for testing everything that claims to be true. In that way, it is also our safeguard against false teaching, sounding a warning when we hear it. If we study it diligently, God's Word is a source of guidance in the right path, training us to understand how to live and do Christ's work in this world.

The apostle's words in II Timothy 3:16 tell us that we need *all* Scripture to function properly—even “the begats”! God put them in the Book for some good reason. By combining Scripture, the Holy Spirit, and experiences in this life, God brings a person to spiritual maturity and holiness.

When “the begats” show up in the New Testament (Matthew 1; Luke 3), as in the Old, we pay scant attention to them. We must often force ourselves to read and study those chapters. But they are there and inspired by God. He

made them a part of His Word for our edification. We dare not skip over them.

When we study those chapters and compare them with similar lists in the Old Testament, some interesting details emerge into the light. Curious differences appear between “the begats” in Matthew and those in parts of the Old Testament. We will concern ourselves with one of these curious differences between Matthew 1 and I Chronicles 3.

Jesus’ Genealogy

Notice Matthew 1:8: “Asa begot Jehoshaphat, Jehoshaphat begot Joram, and Joram begot Uzziah.” This pattern is typical of just about every verse between the first and seventeenth verses of the chapter. A similar but inverse genealogy in Luke 3:23-38 uses the words “son of” rather than “begot.” These words more correctly imply the idea of “descendant,” not necessarily a literal son of the man in question. The “son” named may not be a son but a grandson, great-grandson, or even more distant descendant. In this particular list, all of the people named are related by blood, and this bloodline ends in Jesus Christ, demonstrating its importance.

Confusing things even more, Scripture will occasionally call someone a son of somebody or something—for example, “a son of Belial”—not to indicate a relationship by descent but as a descriptor. In this way, the Bible’s authors reveal that a person “shows the characteristics of” the one named. In this case, *Belial* means “foolishness.” So, a son of Belial demonstrates the characteristics of a fool.

Matthew organizes Jesus’ genealogy into three groups of fourteen names: Abraham to David, Solomon to Jeconiah (the son of Josiah), and Shealtiel to Jesus Christ. It covers three distinct historical periods: God’s calling of Abram to the establishment of the Davidic Monarchy, Israel’s height of power to its ignominious downfall, and the Babylonian Exile to the ministry of Jesus.

Luke’s list, as mentioned above, runs in the opposite direction, beginning with Christ and ending with Adam, whom he calls “the son of God.” Interestingly, Matthew includes four women in his record of Jesus’ line:

Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, and Bathsheba. His list contains 42 men and four women, all of whom are ancestors of Jesus.

Like all humans, they varied considerably in personality, spirituality, and experience. Some, like Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, David, and Ruth, were heroes of faith. Tamar and Rahab, on the other hand, had shadier reputations, and a few, like Abijah, Manasseh, and Amon, were downright evil. Many of them were ordinary personalities; we know only their names as they appear just in these kinds of lists!

Of the women, two—Rahab and Ruth—were definitely Gentiles, and another, Tamar, was probably a Gentile as her name is not Israelitish. The fourth, Bathsheba, married a Gentile, Uriah the Hittite, and as a result, the Israelites may have considered her to be Gentile. These women in Christ's family tree make an interesting study all by themselves.

God is showing us here that human imperfections do not limit Him. He can work through anybody to carry out His will, even the disreputable characters in the ancestry of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

David's Heirs

I Chronicles 3 contains a counterpart to Matthew's list, at least his middle section covering the kings of Judah, that is, the family of David:

Solomon's son was Rehoboam; Abijah was his son, Asa his son, Jehoshaphat his son, Joram his son, Ahaziah his son, Joash his son, Amaziah his son, Azariah his son, Jotham his son, Ahaz his son, Hezekiah his son, Manasseh his son, Amon his son, Josiah his son. The sons of Josiah were Johanan the firstborn, the second Jehoiakim, the third Zedekiah, and the fourth Shallum. The sons of Jehoiakim were Jeconiah his son and Zedekiah his son. (I Chronicles 3:10-16)

From David to Zedekiah, twenty-one kings reigned in Judah. But in Matthew's list, only the names of fifteen kings appear. Three of the six left out, the three who followed Josiah (Shallum/Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, Zedekiah), were of the same generation, brothers—blood relatives, of the

same family line. However, two of them, Shallum and Zedekiah, are not direct ancestors of Jesus and so are not included, providing a logical reason for their absence. Matthew further disparages this generation by skipping over Jehoiakim and naming his son, Jehoiachin or Jeconiah, as Josiah's son (his literal grandson).

In addition, a renegade queen, Athaliah, is not on either list. She was the granddaughter of Omri, king of Israel (II Chronicles 22:2), and a truly evil woman. She usurped the throne following her son Ahaziah's death by killing all his heirs. She deserves exclusion, yet some of the most evil kings of Judah are on the list as part of Christ's ancestry.

Another three kings whose names appear in the king list in I Chronicles 3 fail to appear in Matthew's list. Which three kings they are is not entirely clear because of a confusion of names. There are two possibilities, which we will try to untangle later.

The kings in question appear in I Chronicles 3:11-12: "Joram his son, Ahaziah his son, Joash his son, Amaziah his son, Azariah his son, Jotham his son." The first possibility is that Matthew excluded Ahaziah, Joash, and Amaziah from his list because of their connection to Athaliah.

The second possibility is that he left Joash, Amaziah, and Azariah off his list. The last of these kings is better known as Uzziah. Why did Matthew drop them from Jesus' family tree? Rather than excluding them due to their connection to Athaliah, he may have omitted them to draw attention to a disastrous flaw these three men had in common.

God does not tell us which is the correct answer. Either of the two possibilities would be a good enough reason for their absence from Matthew's list. We will consider the first briefly, but we will explore the second more thoroughly because it has greater application to Christians living and growing today. We are not descended from or have any direct connections to Athaliah, but we may well have a similar spiritual problem to what Joash, Amaziah, and Uzziah had.

The Reign of Jehoram

Before proceeding further, we need to understand that the books of Kings and Chronicles are in some ways much like the four gospels. They give differing points of view or perspectives of the same events. After Solomon, Israel separated into two kingdoms: the ten-tribed kingdom of Israel in the north and the two-tribed kingdom of Judah in the south. The books of Kings primarily approach events from the standpoint of the history of the kings of the northern ten tribes of Israel. The books of Chronicles focus on kings of the southern kingdom of Judah. We can think of them as somewhat similar to America's North and South perspectives during its Civil War.

Other differences go farther than that. For instance, the books of Kings deal with facts and so do not provide much insight into spiritual causes or motivations. They give the reader facts of history from a human point of view. They comprise, for the most part, a historical record without commentary. On the other hand, the books of Chronicles often provide God's thoughts about the events that took place—history from a divine standpoint. They give a spiritual perspective on the same history that the books of Kings cover, showing declines, repentances, deliverances, and reformations. Because of this godly viewpoint, we will spend most of our time in Chronicles.

We will begin with Jehoram in II Chronicles 21:1-4:

And Jehoshaphat rested with his fathers, and was buried with his fathers in the City of David. Then Jehoram his son reigned in his place. He had brothers, the sons of Jehoshaphat: Azariah, Jehiel, Zechariah, Azaryahu, Michael, and Shepatiah: all these were the sons of Jehoshaphat king of Israel. Their father gave them great gifts of silver and gold and precious things, with fortified cities in Judah; but he gave the kingdom to Jehoram because he was the firstborn. Now when Jehoram was established over the kingdom of his father, he strengthened himself and killed all his brothers with the sword, and also others of the princes of Israel.

What a horrible way to begin his reign! He slays his brothers to ensure that they do not usurp his throne. If we give him the benefit of the doubt, it is entirely possible that, from a carnal standpoint, he had good reason to rid himself of them. Perhaps his brothers showed signs of plotting a *coup d'état*

out of envy (though God says in verse 13 that they were better men than Jehoram). Maybe they thought Jehoshaphat should have given them the throne since they were better men. In any case, Jehoram held power, and he beat them to the punch, putting them to death before they assassinated him.

The background for this event reaches back to II Chronicles 18:1, where it innocently reads, “Jehoshaphat had riches and honor in abundance, and by marriage he allied himself with Ahab.” Ahab, whose wife was the infamous Jezebel, was possibly the most wicked king who ever ruled over Israel. Jehoshaphat and Ahab cemented their relationship by arranging a marriage between Jehoshaphat’s son, Jehoram, and Ahab and Jezebel’s daughter, Athaliah. Such arranged dynastic marriages were quite common in those days. So, the two houses became allies through marriage.

The story continues in II Chronicles 21:5-6:

Jehoram was thirty-two years old when he became king, and he reigned eight years in Jerusalem. And he walked in the ways of the kings of Israel [not in the ways of his father, Jehoshaphat, who was a good king overall], just as the house of Ahab had done, for he had the daughter of Ahab as a wife; and he did evil in the sight of the LORD.

The circumstances in Judah became so bad that Elijah, who had been taken away in a whirlwind seven or eight years before, sent a letter to Jehoram:

Thus says the LORD God of your father David: Because you have not walked in the ways of Jehoshaphat your father, or the ways of Asa king of Judah, but have walked in the way of the kings of Israel, and have made Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem to play the harlot like the harlotry of the house of Ahab, and also have killed your brothers, those of your father’s household, who were better than yourself, behold the LORD will strike your people with a serious affliction—your children, your wives, and all your possessions; and you will become very sick with a disease of your intestines, until your intestines come out by reason of the sickness, day by day. (II Chronicles 21:12-15)

His story concludes a few verses later:

And after all this the LORD struck him in his intestines with an incurable disease. Then it happened in the course of time, after the end of two years, that his intestines came out because of his sickness; so he died in severe pain. And his people made no burning [of incense before God] for him, like the burning for his fathers. He was thirty-two years old when he became king. He reigned in Jerusalem eight years and, to no one's sorrow, departed. However they buried him in the City of David, but not in the tomb of the kings. (II Chronicles 21:18-20)

The language here indicates the low regard in which his subjects held him. His regrettable story had its beginnings in a foolish, arranged marriage and ended with tragic results for Judah. Jehoram preferred to follow the ways of his evil wife and her equally wicked parents rather than his godly father. Jehoram's evil was so pernicious that it just kept growing and consuming more victims. The people refused to honor him with burial among the other kings of Judah. He died unlamented and unmissed, yet this evil man is on the list of Christ's forebears.

More Wicked Kings

II Chronicles 22:1-5 mentions Jehoram's son, Ahaziah, whom we will return to later. However, note that in verse 2, the chronicler relates that his mother's name was Athaliah, granddaughter of Omri. He explains the significance of this fact in verses 3-4:

He also walked in the ways of the house of Ahab, for his mother advised him to do wickedly. Therefore he did evil in the sight of the LORD, like the house of Ahab; for they were his counselors after the death of his father, to his destruction.

This king, Ahaziah, may be listed within Matthew's genealogy, or the apostle may have excluded him. If we include him, then what we have read is the record of another king just as wicked and evil as his father, Jehoram. He became involved in Jehu's extermination of the house of Ahab and died in Samaria (verses 8-9).

The record of Manasseh, another evil king who reigned fifty-five years, appears in II Chronicles 33. He was the son of Hezekiah, probably the third best king that Judah ever had. In my mind, the four best kings of Judah were David—the standard who stands in a class of his own as Scripture compares every king to him, even the good ones—Josiah, Hezekiah, and Jehoshaphat, in that order. The Bible compares only these last three kings favorably to David. Manasseh, then, grew up under one of the best kings, Hezekiah.

But he did evil in the sight of the LORD, according to the abominations of the nations whom the LORD had cast out before the children of Israel. For he rebuilt the high places which Hezekiah his father had broken down; he raised up altars for the Baals, and made wooden images; and he worshiped all the host of heaven and served them. He also built altars in the house of the LORD, of which the LORD had said, “In Jerusalem shall My name be forever.” And he built altars for all the host of heaven in the two courts of the house of the LORD. Also he caused his sons to pass through the fire in the Valley of the Son of Hinnom; he practiced soothsaying, used witchcraft and sorcery, and consulted mediums and spiritists. He did much evil in the sight of the LORD, to provoke Him to anger. He even set a carved image, the idol which he had made, in the house of God, of which God had said to David and to Solomon his son, “In this house and in Jerusalem, which I have chosen out of all the tribes of Israel, I will put My name forever; and I will not again remove the foot of Israel from the land which I appointed to your fathers—only if they are careful to do all that I have commanded them, according to the whole law and the statutes and the ordinances by the hand of Moses.” So Manasseh seduced Judah [a phrase used exclusively about him among all the kings] and the inhabitants of Jerusalem to do more evil than the nations whom the LORD had destroyed before the children of Israel. (II Chronicles 33:2-9)

Judah became worse under this wicked man than all of the pagan peoples whom God had sent Israel into the land to destroy—the Canaanites, the Hivites, the Hittites, etc. Manasseh seduced Judah using astrology, spiritism, witchcraft, human sacrifice, pagan altars, and idol groves. He destroyed all

of Hezekiah's good works. Most surprising of all, he repented in captivity! Apparently, because of his former evils, he was not buried with the kings of Judah. Despite all of his wickedness, he makes Matthew's list.

These wicked kings, Jehoram, Ahaziah, and Manasseh, appear—warts and all—in Matthew 1. Apparently, their relative evil or goodness had little to do with whether the apostle included them in Christ's ancestry. God, however, leaves three other kings off the list, seemingly not because they were particularly evil, but because He wants to draw our attention to something that will teach us a vital spiritual lesson. He could just as easily have excluded the three wicked kings from the list, and we might have judged it was better without them. But that is how human beings look at such matters.

A Confusion of Names

Before moving forward, we need to attempt to clear up a matter of names. Remember that “begot” (or “the father of,” as in the *English Standard Version*) may not indicate the actual, biological father of the person named as his “son.” The genealogy may skip a generation or two so that the relationship is factually that of grandfather/grandson or great-grandfather/great-grandson. Sometimes, the gap between “father” and “son” covers many generations, as when Matthew calls Jesus “the Son of David, the Son of Abraham” (Matthew 1:1) or when he later identifies Joseph as “the son of David” (Matthew 1:20).

Our investigation begins in Matthew 1:8: “Asa begot Jehoshaphat, Jehoshaphat begot Joram [also called Jehoram], Joram begot Uzziah.” Who is this man, Uzziah? The King James Version reads “Ozias,” which is closer to the Greek version of the name. To answer this question makes things very interesting. The confusion over which group of three kings God excludes derives from uncertainty over these names, particularly “Uzziah.”

We will pick up the trail of these names in the reign of Jehoram:

And they [an army of Philistines and Arabians] came up into Judah and invaded it, and carried away all the possessions that were found

in the king's house, and also his sons and his wives, so that there was not a son left to him [Jehoram] except Jehoahaz, the youngest of his sons. (II Chronicles 21:17)

This invasion was devastating for Jehoram. He lost all his wives and sons except the youngest, Jehoahaz. In II Chronicles 22:1, after the ignominious burial of Jehoram, the people of Judah crowned a new king: "Then the inhabitants of Jerusalem made Ahaziah his youngest son king in his place."

Just four verses earlier, the chronicler names Jehoram's youngest son "Jehoahaz," and here he calls him "Ahaziah." Are these two different men or the same man with two names? The latter is the correct answer since, in both cases, he is identified as the youngest son. Over a couple of years, his name changed from Jehoahaz to Ahaziah. It is most likely that his birth name was "Jehoahaz," but he took "Ahaziah" when he ascended the throne. (In my lifetime, Britain's Prince Albert, Duke of York, took the regnal name of George VI. His given name was "Albert Frederick Arthur George," and before his ascension to the throne, he was always known as "Albert" or called by his nickname, "Bertie.")

This king's name becomes more complicated in II Chronicles 22:6:

Then he returned to Jezreel to recover from the wounds he had received at Ramah, when he fought against Hazael king of Syria. And Azariah the son of Jehoram, king of Judah, went down to see Jehoram the son of Ahab in Jezreel, because he was sick.

Beyond the fact that the king of Israel is also named "Jehoram" as Ahaziah's father was, the text calls the king of Judah "Azariah"! This person cannot be a different king of Judah because no other sons of Jehoram remained alive. This king obviously has three names: Jehoahaz, Ahaziah, and Azariah.

And the confusion continues! In II Chronicles 25:27, another name crops up: "After the time that Amaziah turned away from following the LORD, they made a conspiracy against him in Jerusalem, and he fled to Lachish; but they sent after him to Lachish and killed him there." This verse recounts the death of Amaziah. When a king dies, a new king ascends to the throne, and II Chronicles 26:1 relates who followed Amaziah: "Now all the people of

Judah took Uzziah, who was sixteen years old, and made him king instead of his father, Amaziah.”

Amaziah’s son, Uzziah, now sits on David’s throne. II Kings 15:1 contains a parallel account of this event: “In the twenty-seventh year of Jeroboam, king of Israel, Azariah the son of Amaziah, king of Judah, became king.”

Amaziah’s son is here called “Azariah.” This Azariah is the same man as Uzziah, the son of Amaziah, in II Chronicles 26. Other details in both accounts verify this (he ascended the throne at sixteen, and his mother was Jecholiah of Jerusalem).

The book of Matthew, written in Greek, uses the Greek equivalents of these Hebrew names. In ancient Hebrew, the vowels are not written. This omission of vowels can easily lead to confusion when the consonants of names in lists like Matthew’s genealogy are similar.

This confusion of names sets up an intriguing situation. If the “Uzziah” or “Ozias” of Matthew 1:8 is the king variously called “Jehoahaz,” “Azariah,” or “Ahaziah,” and not the “Azariah” or “Uzziah” of II Kings 15:1 and II Chronicles 26:1, it means three kings in a row have been left off Matthew’s list.

For our purposes, we will continue on the assumption that the kings excluded from Jesus’ family tree are Joash, Amaziah, and Uzziah. In Part Two, we will consider what the Bible says about these three men. Our study will perhaps help us understand why God chose to leave them out and learn a vital lesson for ourselves.