

The Benefit and Blessing of Genealogies (Pt. 1)

Ezra 2:1

February 12, 2012

Rev. Greg L. Price

I have never heard anyone say, “Oh, we have finally come to considering a long genealogy in our sermon series. I’m so excited.” Genealogies are more likely to be simply skipped over, or at least given little or no attention. Perhaps, it is not simply the fact that there are so many names in genealogies that we consider them to be boring, but perhaps it is also the fact that so many of those names are very challenging to pronounce that keep us from reading and considering biblical genealogies. And dear ones, we will derive little or no benefit and blessing from biblical genealogies if we do not understand their significance and the reasons why the Spirit of God has included them within the pages of Holy Writ. After all, dear ones, God even intends biblical genealogies to be useful and profitable for us when the Apostle Paul declares:

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 perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works [2 Timothy 3:16-17].

In the sermon this Lord’s Day (which is Part 1, with Part 2 to follow), we will be considering the benefit and blessing of biblical genealogies, and why we should not fail to give them the attention they deserve as being inspired by the Holy Spirit for our profit.

The main points for the sermon are the following: (1) The Purpose and Use of Biblical Genealogies and Registries (Ezra 2:1); (2) Observations about a Specific Registry of Families (Ezra 2:1ff). We will cover the first main point in the sermon this Lord’s Day, and will conclude the sermon with the second main point in the next sermon.

I. The Purpose and Use of Biblical Genealogies and Registries (Ezra 2:1).

A. In Ezra chapter 2, we come to one of those long lists of names, a registry of names, and a genealogy of ancestors. Before considering the right and profitable uses of genealogies, let us first consider 3 examples of wicked and erroneous uses of genealogies and registries.

1. The first example of a wicked and erroneous use of genealogies and registries is that found in the Mormon Church, which keeps vast records of individuals, tracing their roots from ancestor to ancestor for many generations in order to carry out the abominable practice of baptizing for the dead.

Because all on the earth do not have the opportunity to accept the gospel during mortality, the Lord has authorized baptisms performed by proxy for the dead. Therefore, those who accept the gospel in the spirit world [i.e. after death—GLP] may qualify for entrance into God's kingdom [cited in the Mormon book, entitled, *Guide to the Scriptures*].

Baptizing for the dead, promotes the heretical doctrine that the dead will have a second chance to receive a Mormon “Christ” (which is actually a false Christ, who is not eternally co-existent with the Father, nor is of the same substance with the Father, nor is equal in power and glory with the Father), and that the dead will allegedly have a second chance to receive a Mormon “gospel” (which is actually a false gospel that is based upon the works of men rather than upon the free grace of God and imputed righteousness of Jesus Christ, which is received by faith alone). Dear ones, biblical genealogies are not given so that the living might be baptized for the dead.

a. Mormons derive this heretical doctrine of baptism for the dead from a misinterpretation of 1 Corinthians 15:29: “Else what shall they do which are baptized for the dead, if the dead rise not at all? Why

are they then baptized for the dead?” What is this baptism for the dead that Paul here mentions?

(1) I submit that those in 1 Corinthians 15:29 who “are baptized for the dead” have not been baptized with water by way of a proxy baptism on behalf of those who are dead in order to give them another chance in the afterlife. As the biblical account concerning the wicked rich man and the righteous beggar (Lazarus) illustrates, nothing could alter the torment which the wicked rich man began to suffer after he died. He even appealed to Abraham to allow the righteous Lazarus to touch his tongue with one drop of water to assuage his thirst for a fleeting moment, but to no avail.

(2) The Bible is very clear: “It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment” (Hebrews 9:27). There are no second chances after death. There is the judgment, wherein the Lord will graciously vindicate all those who are His sheep, and who rest by faith alone in the righteousness of Jesus Christ alone, apart from the works of the law; and at the same time the Lord will righteously condemn to the lake of fire all those who are goats and rest in their own righteousness and works (which in God’s sight are all as filthy rags according Isaiah 64:6). Dear ones, I appeal to you (adult, young person, and child alike), rest not in your own works of righteousness (whether in your baptism, reading the Bible, praying, professing to be a Christian, or in your faith, your repentance, or your staying out of trouble with those in authority over you). These are all things that Christians should do. However, they are not to be rested in as the ground of our salvation. Don’t compare yourself with others so that you look at others as worse sinners and more deserving of God’s wrath than yourselves. Rather compare yourself with God’s holy Law, and confess how far you fall short of God’s righteous standard in thought, word, and deed. Beat your chest and cry out to God, “Be merciful to me a sinner.” Receive by faith alone Christ and His perfect righteousness as your own righteousness and the only righteousness

upon which God will look and declare you justified and forgiven before His holy throne. Dear ones, that is our only hope of eternal salvation.

b. I would submit that 1 Corinthians 15:29 speaks not of being baptized with water on behalf of the dead, but rather being baptized with blood (as faithful witnesses and martyrs who shed their blood for Jesus Christ and His truth, just as the Lord Jesus uses the word “baptized” in Luke 12:50 and Mark 10:38-39). Those who are baptized with blood (as faithful witnesses and martyrs of Jesus Christ) are baptized “with respect to” the dead, not on behalf of the dead (although the Greek preposition, *huper*, may be translated “on behalf of”, it may also be translated “with respect to” as is the sense of the preposition in Romans 9:27; 2 Corinthians 8:23; 2 Corinthians 12:8; Philippians 1:7; 2 Thessalonians 2:1, as just a few examples). Thus, I submit that Paul in teaching the Corinthians about the bodily resurrection of the dead, asks, if the Christian dead do not rise again bodily, what are we to say about those faithful martyrs who have been baptized with their own blood with respect to joining those who are dead? Are even these who have given their lives for Christ to remain in the grave? Are they baptized with blood in vain (just to remain in the grave)? God forbid! This is, in fact, the context of what immediately follows in 1 Corinthians 15:30-32 (i.e. suffering persecution in shedding one’s blood as a faithful witness and martyr for Christ). This, I submit is the actual meaning of baptism for the dead as used by Paul, which then condemns the practice of the Mormons, who collect endless genealogies in order to perform proxy baptisms for those who have died.

2. The second wicked and erroneous use of genealogies and registries is that found in the Church of Rome, which teaches the blasphemous doctrine that one who is living may perform various works of righteousness on behalf of dead ancestors in setting them free from alleged purgatorial fires under which they suffer. The Council of Florence (1439) declared:

[We define] likewise, that if the truly penitent die in the love of God, before they have made satisfaction by worthy fruits of penance for their sins of commission and omission, their souls are purified by purgatorial pains after death; and that for relief from these pains they are benefitted by the suffrages of the faithful in this life, that is, by Masses, prayers, and almsgiving, and by the other offices of piety usually performed by the faithful for one another according to the practice [*instituta*] of the Church [<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/04653a.htm>].

For the same reasons given above against baptizing for the dead, so likewise there is nothing that we can do (nor ought we to try to do because we have no warrant from God's word to do so) that can alter the suffering of the dead (not to mention that a place called "purgatory" is nowhere taught in Scripture). What a wicked system of works righteousness is this that your money and works of piety here on earth can set free from suffering those who are your ancestors (and those who are not your ancestors).

3. The third and final wicked and erroneous use of genealogies and registries is that found in 1 Timothy 1:4:

Neither give heed to fables and endless genealogies, which minister questions, rather than godly edifying which is in faith: so do.

a. The Apostle Paul exhorts Timothy and those in the Church of Ephesus to give no heed or hearing to those Jewish converts, who place an undue attention on tracing their genealogies (and physical lineage) to the patriarchs, prophets, and kings, and who suppose that their physical lineage and genealogy qualify them to be treated with great honor and privilege on that account alone, or qualify them as being holy and righteous on that account alone. That, too, is a sinful use of genealogies, for a mere physical genealogical relationship to a patriarch, prophet, or king from the past does not guarantee doctrinal orthodoxy or godliness in a descendant that follows (nor does a genealogical relationship to Luther, Calvin, Knox, or to the Covenanters do so either). This seems

to have been one of the constant failings of the Jews (i.e. to consider physical lineage and genealogy to be more important than spiritual lineage and following in the footsteps of faithful ancestors that preceded them, who embraced the Lord by faith alone and walked in the paths of godliness and truth). That is simply trusting in the godliness of one's ancestors as one's righteousness rather than trusting in Christ as one's only righteousness.

b. As one considers the genealogy of the kings of Judah, one will quickly see that one's physical descent alone does not guarantee a spiritual descent. King Jotham "did that which was right in the sight of the LORD" (2 Chronicles 27:2), but his son, King Ahaz, "did not that which was evil in the sight of the LORD" (2 Chronicles 28:1). Likewise, righteous King Josiah was followed on the throne by his sons (Jehoiakim and Jehoiachin), who were both wicked kings and did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord (2 Chronicles 36:5,9). Thus, even in a very short registry of the kings of Judah, one can easily see that mere physical descent does not guarantee faithfulness, orthodoxy, or godliness.

(1) The importance of teaching and instruction on the part of parents is of great value and is a God-ordained duty, but it is so clear that we cannot rest our faith or salvation in our mere physical descent from faithful ancestors. Salvation is of the Lord. Our children (to whom God offers His promises of salvation in their baptisms) must be born of the Spirit and must receive those promises of salvation by faith alone, rather than merely trusting in the faith of their parents or in the faith of their genealogical ancestors with a particular blood-line (John 1:12-13).

(2) Dear ones, we must be ever so careful that we as Covenanters do not possess a dead orthodoxy that simply looks back to the faith of our Covenanter ancestors, and adheres to their doctrine and worship simply because they were great men,

learned men, godly men, and courageous men. No, no, no! Simply to answer the questions of our children with merely, “This is what Samuel Rutherford, George Gillespie, Richard Cameron, James Renwick, or David Steele believed”, will only teach them to give a popish trust to the authority of men, rather than a Divine trust in the absolute authority of God revealed in Holy Scripture. Our orthodoxy in doctrine, worship, government, and discipline must be alive and fresh, and must be founded upon the Spirit of God speaking in the infallible, unchangeable Word of God in Scripture, and must be believed and received with confidence that God has spoken in His Word (“Thus saith the LORD”). Only when our faith in Christ (as our Prophet, Priest, and King) and in His revealed gospel truth is our confidence and certainty will our orthodoxy (and what we faithfully believe) be alive, and our orthopraxy (and what we faithfully practice) not be a mere outward “form of godliness”, but rather a sacrifice of loving and thankful obedience for all that Christ has freely given us.

c. Because Paul states that the Christians in Ephesus were not to give heed to “fables and endless genealogies” (1 Timothy 1:4), this would also likely refer to the many fables and stories of the rabbis that were added to genealogies of the Old Testament (and embellished the names of men of faith with various rabbinical stories), and which were treated as having authority by virtue of a mere oral tradition rather than by virtue of the authority of God’s revelation in Holy Scripture. In such a case, it is elevating mere human tradition (in the form of fables taught by the mere authority of man) equal to or greater than that of Divine revelation found in God’s Holy Word. In either case, this Jewish abuse of genealogies was not a lawful and profitable use of biblical genealogies.

B. Having now considered the wicked and erroneous uses of genealogies, let us spend the remainder of our time considering the lawful and right uses of genealogies.

1. In biblical times and among ancient civilizations, genealogical information was one of the most valuable parts of the inheritance which a man received from his father (and genealogies were recorded and memorized because they were so valuable); for it told a man who he was, where he was from, and what his inheritance was. The faithful who heard the Scripture read to them did not fall asleep at the reading of the genealogies. For one's genealogy was his passport in society. People in biblical ages did not have a first, middle, and last name. They had a name (such as David), and then a father's name (the son of Jesse), or the name of ancestors (as the son of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob). Genealogical information was not limited to the Old Testament, but was likewise carried over into the New Testament as well (where we see the genealogies of Christ in Matthew 1 and Luke 3; of Anna, the prophetess, who was said to be of the tribe of Asher according to Luke 2:36; and of Paul, the apostle, who declared himself to be of the tribe of Benjamin as we see in Philippians 3:5—now neither Anna nor Paul knew they were of the tribe of Asher or Benjamin without knowing their genealogical relationship through all of their ancestors that preceded them, all the way back to the sons of Jacob).

2. Biblical genealogies fall into 3 main categories according to their purpose: (1) familial; (2) legal-political; and (3) religious. However, a particular genealogy in Scripture may serve all three purposes just mentioned, which is what is seen in the genealogical registry found in Ezra chapter 2 (as we shall see in the following sermon). Dear ones, in spending the time that we are spending on the matter of biblical genealogies, my hope is that you will approach the reading of biblical genealogies with a renewed understanding, faith, and love for Christ and His inspired Word.

a. First there are **familial genealogies**, which were primarily concerned with the passing of an inheritance to children and with the privileges of the firstborn son (who became the leader of the family after the death of the father and who received a double portion of the inheritance). The rights and privileges of a particular son, and the resulting genealogy in passing on those familial rights and privileges to succeeding generations is very evident in the respective genealogies of Ishmael and Isaac, and of Esau and Jacob. When you read such family genealogies, let your thoughts turn to the truth that you who trust in Christ alone have been adopted into the very family of God, so that you are the heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Jesus Christ, the Son of God. In the registry of God's family, you have the rights and privileges of the sons of God, and inherit as your birthright all that Christ has inherited (Romans 8:17).

b. Second, there are **legal-political genealogies**, which were primarily centered on claims to a hereditary office (such as the royal line of King David in 2 Chronicles), but other examples also include establishing genealogies for land organization (such as the division of the land among the tribes of Israel in Joshua 13-19), military service (such as the list and number of families which were able to go to war in Numbers 1).

(1) Dear ones, when you read of the registry of kings that proceed from David, remember that Jesus Christ has made you kings and conquerors to rule over all your enemies (even over the world, the flesh, over death, and over the devil). Remember even as you battle your fears, your temptations and sin, and all that stands in opposition to the kingdom of Christ that you are more than conquerors through Christ who loved you (Romans 8:37). Even when we are persecuted and lay down our lives for Christ and His truth, we yet overcome the devil (Revelation 12:11) by our justification, our testimony, and our death.

(2) Dear ones, when you read the registry of the tribes of Israel who were allotted their land in Palestine, meditate on that heavenly land that has been graciously and freely allotted to you in the Covenant of Grace, which is reserved for you in heaven (Hebrews 11:13-16; 1 Peter 1:4). Do you not see that the earthly inheritance of the land to the tribes of Israel speaks to the heavenly inheritance of land which has already been purchased for you and is reserved for you in heaven (as it were with your name on it). Remember these truths as you read the biblical genealogies, and you will soar with the eagles.

c. Third, there are **religious genealogies**, which were used to establish membership in the Aaronic and Levitical priesthoods (note that in Ezra 2:61-62 some were excluded from the priesthood for the very reason that they could not produce the genealogical records to show their descent from Levi, the priestly tribe, and from Aaron, the priestly family).

(1) In certain cases, genealogies distinguished the godly seed (and line of God's Covenant of Grace) from the worldly seed (and line of man's Covenant of Works).

(a) These lines are especially distinguished in the genealogy of Cain (in Genesis 4) who sought to worship God according to his own plan of salvation by offering fruits and vegetables instead of shedding the blood of a sacrificial substitute as did Abel from the genealogy of Seth whose descendants called upon the name of the Lord (Genesis 4:26), walked with God (Genesis 5:22), and were (Noah and his family) preserved in the flood that destroyed the whole earth (Genesis 6-9).

(b) Dear ones, there are religious genealogies that I believe are necessary even today in order to know and identify those churches that are the daughters of the Whore of Babylon, who have followed Rome in her man-centered salvation (salvation through the work of man or through the graces in man), in her man-centered

worship (worship appointed by man, rather than appointed by God, such as the abomination of her mass in re-sacrificing Christ for the sins of people, in worshipping before images, in praying unto saints, in celebrating holy days not instituted by God etc.), and in her man-centered government (wherein the headship of Christ over His Church here on earth is usurped by the pope, who blasphemously claims to be the head of the church on earth). Dear ones, we must be sure and follow in the genealogical footsteps of only that faithful covenanted, reformed Church that has embraced the pure and free gospel of Jesus Christ, and that has defended and practiced the doctrine, worship, and government of Christ in opposition to the Whore of Babylon. Thus, when we read the religious genealogies found in Scripture, let us be exhorted to walk in the steps of those faithful witnesses of Christ and in the steps of that faithful covenanted, reformed Church that came out of the Romish Church and has testified against all her abominations and errors.

(2) One last religious use of genealogies that I want to mention (and the most important use of genealogies) is in tracing the genealogy of Jesus Christ from Adam to Noah, from Noah to Abraham, from Abraham to David, and from David to Christ. Dear ones, Christ's genealogy demonstrates that He is the second Adam, the son of Adam, the Son of Man. By virtue of the incarnation, the eternal Son of God assumed to His Divine person a human nature, and was conceived by the Holy Spirit within the womb of the virgin Mary, so that He might fulfill all righteousness as a man, and so that He might suffer the wrath of God for sinners, who were chosen by God in Christ Jesus before the foundation of the world (Ephesians 1:4). Thus, dear ones, our very justification, forgiveness of sin, victory over sin and all our enemies, and everlasting life is necessarily connected to the genealogies of Jesus Christ. The next time you read a biblical genealogy, rejoice in the fact that Jesus Christ is one of you—He is the Son of Man (and fully man), and forever will be a man. That is not to deny His deity, but it was necessary for Him to

become a man that He might fulfill all righteousness and pay the penalty of hell for sinners like you and me. And as a man, the Scripture teaches that He is touched with the feeling of your infirmities, and with your temptations. And the humanity of Christ (albeit it, sinless humanity) becomes one of the most important reasons we are commanded to flee to Christ (Hebrews 4:15-16). Beloved, may your reading of biblical genealogies never be boring or humdrum again. May biblical genealogies turn you to Christ with unceasing praise and thanksgiving for the richest and vastest inheritance ever bestowed upon undeserving sinners.

Copyright 2012 Greg L. Price. Distributed by Still Waters Revival Books

(<http://www.swrb.com>) by permission of the author, Greg L. Price. More free online written Reformation resources by Greg Price (John Calvin, John Knox, Samuel Rutherford, *et al.*) are at <http://www.swrb.com/newslett/newslett.htm> and more free audio (MP3) Reformation resources by Greg Price (and many other Puritans, Covenanters, and Reformers) are at <http://www.sermonaudio.com/go/699> or at <http://www.sermonaudio.com/swrb>.