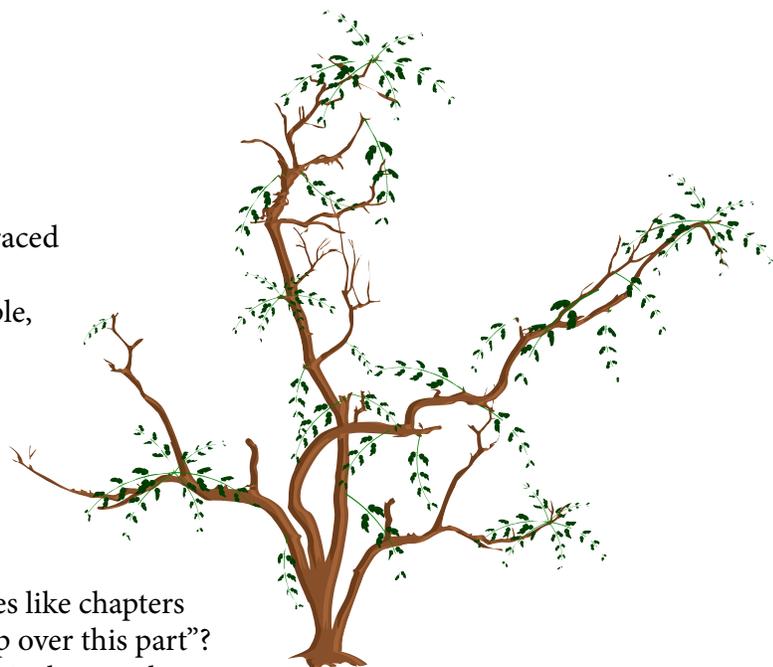


# Genealogies

Genealogy, by definition, is “a line of descent traced continuously from an ancestor” (New Oxford American Dictionary). However, to many people, a genealogy is just a meaningless list of names. This attitude seems to be especially prevalent when approaching a study of Scripture. It doesn’t take long to see the recounting of “generations” in God’s word.



Have you ever noticed all of the lists of names given in Genesis? Have you ever gotten to places like chapters 5-6 or chapters 10-11 and decided, “I’ll just skip over this part”? Don’t. The names may seem daunting, but God is the one that put them there. There are things we can learn from the structure of these families. In fact, God places such emphasis on generations, that the entire book of Genesis is written this way; *i.e.*, the whole literary structure is based on “generations.” Every section of the book begins with “these are the generations of ...” or something similar: Generations of heaven and earth (**Genesis 2:4-4:26**); Generations of Adam (**Genesis 5:1-6:8**); Generations of Noah (**Genesis 6:9-9:29**); Generations of sons of Noah (**Genesis 10:1-11:9**); Generations of Shem (**Genesis 11:10-26**); Generations of Terah (**Genesis 11:27-25:11**); Generations of Ishmael (**Genesis 25:12-18**); Generations of Isaac (**Genesis 25:19-35:29**); Generations of Esau (**Genesis 36:1-37:1**); Generations of Jacob (**Genesis 37:2-50:26**). These generations tell a story—the story of God’s plan.

Generations are not a part of Genesis only—God uses this approach throughout His word. Have you ever paid attention to the first nine chapters of **Chronicles**? Names—nothing but names for nine whole chapters. But again, God put them there, and He put them there for a purpose. Probably, the most prominent genealogies are those given in the early parts of the gospels of Matthew and Luke (**Matthew 1:1-17**; **Luke 3:23-38**). People tend to recognize their importance since they are, from two different perspectives, the “generations” of Jesus.

Certainly, there are lessons to be learned from a close inspection of any and all of the specific tables or lists of generations. Much more can be gained by coming to an understanding of just why genealogies are there at all. What general and useful observations can be made from genealogies—what do they show us?

## The Insignificance of the Individual

Men live and die, and as long as God sees fit for it to continue, this cycle will remain. Death is no respecter of persons—it comes to the faithful, like Abraham (**Genesis 25:8**), and to the wicked, like Amon (**2Chronicles 33:21-24**). Some people blame God when a loved one dies, but death comes to all. That is why preparation has to be made (**Hebrews 9:27**). The faithful are prepared to die (**James 2:23**; **Acts 1:9**). We can be prepared by obeying (**John 8:24**; **Romans 10:10**; **2Corinthians 7:10**; **Mark 16:16**; **Galatians 3:27**). We need to realize that the world can do without us, but more importantly, we need to realize that we can do without the world (**1John 2:15-17**).

## The Importance of the Individual

All individuals are important in the fact that God created man. Man is created in the image of God (**Genesis 1:27**)—man is endowed with a soul and God Himself breathed life into the physical body. Beyond that, men are also important for influence. Just think of the influence for good that only ONE Abraham had, ONE Moses had, ONE Stephen had. Each individual may not be a Paul, a Barnabas, or a Noah, but altogether uniting our various abilities (**1Corinthians 1:10; Philippians 2:2; Ephesians 4:16**), all being of the same mind and same judgement, we can upset the world for the Lord (**Acts 17:6**).

## The Close Relationship of Humanity

Each generation springs from the one preceding. We have a common origin. This ought to engender a spirit of brotherhood. It also reminds us of the responsibility of bequeathing what is proper to the next generation. Each generation ought to be helping to make the next one better. If we find fault in the current or upcoming generation, who are we really indicting? God always intended for one generation to help the next (**Psalms 78; Ephesians 6:4**).

## The Free Agency of the Individual

Men in the midst of a “good” family can still make bad choices. Remember Ahaz (**2Chronicles 28:1-50**), Manasseh (**2Chronicles 33:1-9**), and Amon (**2Chronicles 33:21-24**)? each individual has the freedom to choose—evil or good (**Joshua 24:15; Matthew 7:13-14; 11:28-30; Revelation 3:20; 22:18-19**). Conversely, individuals in the midst of a “bad” family can make good choices. Each individual is responsible (**Ezekiel 18:9**).

## The Knowledge of Thoughts and Actions

Little to nothing is known of the hopes, fears, sorrows, or joys associated with those whose names appear in the genealogies. However, we can be sure that God all is known to God (**Hebrews 4:13; John 2:25; Luke 16:15**). Seeing that our lives are laid open before God at all times, do not try to hide anything from Him. Let us conduct ourselves always in a way that pleases Him.

## The Common Redeemer for All

All who lived before Jesus the Messiah are dependent on Him for salvation (**Hebrews 10:1-14**). All who lived or will live after also depend on Him for salvation (**John 1:29; Acts 4:12; Ephesians 1:7**). This salvation is for all men—every generation, every nation and ethnicity (**Acts 10:34; 1John 1:7**). The necessity of obedience has already been noted. This is also common to all to receive salvation. Do you choose that right path in your generation?

—S. Scott Richardson Sr.