

Chapter 3 Backstory

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Matthew's Good News Chapter 1, verses 7-11

Can we get better results without God?

(Matthew divides the story of God's people into three time periods of fourteen generations each. The second period includes the fourteen generations from David until the Jews were captives in Babylon.)

The fourteen generations from David to Jechoniah are the story of people who repeatedly reject the grace of God. Instead, they choose gods they think they can control to give them wealth and power. The gods they chose were gods of human sacrifice and ritual abuse of young women. These generations were not wavering between two peaceful ways of life. They were either waiting on the only true God, or they were serving false gods. The true God had freed them, provided for them, and promised them a better kingdom to come. The false gods demanded the sacrifice of their children, their integrity, and their freedom, in hopes of getting what they thought they wanted. Usually, people chose the false gods.

David fathered Solomon, who enjoyed a much broader reign and far greater wealth than any Hebrew king before or since. Yet Solomon was not the ultimate king. He turned away from the God who had so greatly blessed him. As a result, only a fragment of his kingdom ended up in the domain of his son.

Solomon fathered Rehoboam, who arrogantly ignored his elders and abused his people, and he lost all but one of the twelve tribes of his nation. Rehoboam fathered Abijah, a faithless king with a short, chaotic reign. Abijah fathered Asa, a remarkably faithful king who defended his people. Asa fathered Jehoshaphat, who enjoyed a long, peaceful reign. Jehoshaphat fathered Joram, who returned to the corruption of Abijah and was a failure as a commander. Joram fathered Uzziah, who had a long, honorable reign. But he became arrogant in the end, and was humbled by leprosy. Uzziah fathered Jotham, who reigned honorably, even though his people were corrupt.

Uzziah fathered Ahaz, who took corruption to new levels, even sacrificing his children to false gods by burning them alive. He shut down the Temple to keep people from worshiping God, and he gave the Temple treasures to the king of Assyria as a bribe. He hoped all this would make him successful, but it didn't. Ahaz fathered Hezekiah, who purified the temple and led nationwide reform. His reign survived the threat of the all-consuming Assyrian Empire.

Hezekiah fathered Manasseh, who overturned all that his father had accomplished. Manasseh aggressively spread paganism throughout the country and in the Temple

itself. Manasseh fathered Asa, who had a short reign so corrupt that his people killed him and turned the country over to his son Josiah.

Josiah saw how paganism was destroying his people and began to tear it down shrine-by-shrine. While workers were cleaning out the Temple they found the written words of God and took them to the king. Josiah led a nationwide renewal of the ancient covenant with God.

Josiah fathered Jehoiachin (also called Jechoniah), who was spreading paganism when the Babylonian Empire overwhelmed his country. Babylon destroyed the royal city of Jerusalem and burned down its Temple. The conqueror took the youth of the nation as captives, so that the next two generations would grow up in Babylonian culture--right back in the place Abraham had left 1400 years before.

The Babylonian captivity is a blunt statement to people who repeatedly throw away their God-given freedom, thinking that they can do better by worshipping the oppressive idols of money, sex and power. In Babylon they could see it: You don't get God's results without the true God. These people ended up back where they started. Literally and culturally, they were back in Babel. Without God, they were not one step closer to fulfillment. We never get what we really want by giving up on God.

The good news is that God does not give up on us.

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