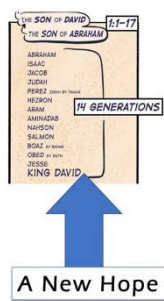


Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the long anticipated Messiah, Jesus Christ our Savior and our Lord, amen.

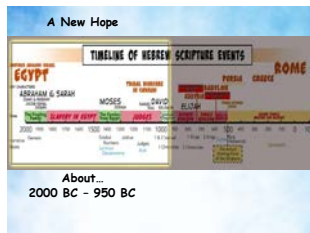
Wow! Who can stand to read through such a list of names from so long ago that are so hard to pronounce? I'm so happy and excited to be able to preach about all these people today. They are our family. They are our heritage. They are our story... I found this very witty Pastor on line, Rev. Dr. Steve Thomason. He has spent his adult life illustrating the entire Bible. Every story, every song, every historical event. His website goes by the title The Cartoonist's Guide to the Bible. He has some extremely funny and yet very interesting perspectives on the scriptures. I'm really happy I found his site before I had to preach on these first 17 verses of Matthew's Gospel. I mean who could preach on the genealogy of Jesus... Talk about a boring way to start the new year... I know Matthew started out this way for an important reason, but sometimes important still equals boring... So, in an effort to make this list of ancient, hard to pronounce names more understandable and dare I say fun to ponder, it might help to look at the epic story of how Jesus came to be, from the perspective of a great trilogy. Matthew does point out this genealogy is divided into three parts... Probably the most famous trilogy ever is the franchise created by George Lukas called Star Wars. In the first Star Wars movie we were introduced to the Force, which apparently has a dark and a light side. This is much like the universe we live in... In the first installment of

God's Trilogy we're introduced to God's chosen people. Here we find the heroes of the first part of the trilogy of God's story. Abraham is the recipient of God's blessing and in this first part God's people grow and finally, under King David, become a single great nation blessed by God to be a blessing and to bring hope to all the nations of the world.



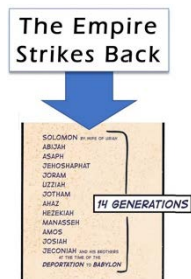
(SLIDE) In the first 14 generation of the Jesus genealogy, we move from Father Abraham to King David. George Lukas gave the first Star Wars movie the Subtitle Episode IV, A New Hope. What a great title for the first 14 generations of Jesus' genealogy. Let's call

this first part of our trilogy "God's Chosen People-A New Hope for the World." So far, the tribes are united under King David. Things are looking pretty good.



(SLIDE) Here's the timeframe for this part of the trilogy... In the Lukas Star Wars Trilogy, the second installment was Subtitled "The Empire Strikes Back".

That's pretty much the story line that happened during the timeframe of the second period or the next 14 generations. Here's what I mean...



(SLIDE) This middle section goes from the reign of King Solomon to the Jeconiah brothers who ruled at the time when Israel

and Judah were defeated and the people were deported to Babylon. Here's the rough timeline for these second fourteen generations.



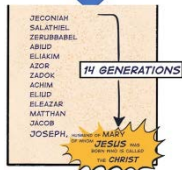
(SLIDE) During this time, things quickly go wrong

after David dies. The Kingdom is overpowered by selfishness, pride, greed, and power. They are literally

defeated by invading empires and all seems lost. Sound familiar?

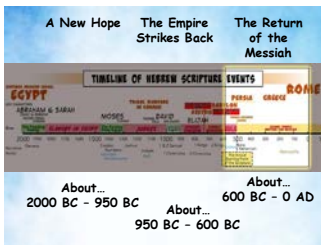
In the Lukas Star Wars trilogy, the third leg of the trilogy was subtitled, “The Return of the Jedi.” In the genealogy of Jesus and the saga of God’s plan for the salvation of the world, we’ll call this part, “The Return of the Messiah”.

Return of the Messiah



(SLIDE) I can say return of the Messiah, because He was around at the beginning as the “Word of God” who created the whole thing from the get-go. The people have now been waiting for centuries to welcome a new king like David, the anointed one. The Messiah--

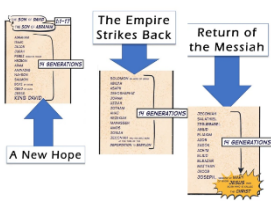
Jesus is that king. The period of the Return of the Messiah went from roughly 600 years before Jesus’ birth to that unforgettable night in Bethlehem some 2000 years ago.



(SLIDE) In God’s perfect timing, the Messiah

comes and God’s plan for the redemption of the world is

finally coming to fruition. God has broken into our world in order to save all of God's creation.



(SLIDE) I thought this comparison to the George Lukas

Star Wars trilogy was so witty and yet so right on the money as far as helping us understand the great movements of God's

history in dealing with His creation. The ancestry of Jesus gives this newborn baby not just legitimacy, but also illustrates how God's plan has been in place since the beginning. This Messiah can trace his ancestry all the way back to Abraham. Yet, we know his lineage goes much further, all the way back to the beginning of the cosmos. **(SLIDE)**



In our family, PJ has started to dabble in finding out about her ancestors. As most of you know she has become acquainted with her biological mother, Mama Jane, her Aunt Gwladys, and several other biologically related family members about 2 years ago. Since then she has really expanded her sphere of known family as well as so many ancestors... Back in her school days when the teacher assigned a Family Tree project she was sad because her friends all had large family trees with many branches, and hers was just her, her adopted mother and father, and perhaps one or two others who she had met growing up. A month or so ago she showed me all the biologically related family members she has discovered using Ancestry.com. I'm not a paid commercial actor, nor am I on

the payroll for Ancestry.com, but once her Aunt Gwladys found us, it was like the dam burst wide open. In the past two years her family tree went from this...



(SLIDE)

To this...



(SLIDE)... Pretty amazing. This slide doesn't even

include all of the children of these aunts and uncles or the grandchildren of them... We've even met some of these

Aunts and Uncles and many of their children who aren't shown in this picture. It's amazing and wonderful to see how this person whom I've known and loved for all these years, who had no idea she was a member of this huge family, suddenly has more aunts, uncles, cousins and other relatives than you can shake a stick at...

With such a large family also comes a family history that goes along with it.

Here's one example of what we've discovered so far... Many years ago a set of uncles, two brothers, decided it would be a good idea to rob a gas station. The two brothers got caught and put in jail. That jail couldn't hold these two and they soon escaped and drove off in the town's police car. They were later apprehended again and eventually had to face the music...

The Bible is full of stories like that about all of Jesus' relatives. The good, the bad, and the ugly; they're all part of the family Jesus was born into. All 42 generations from Abraham to Joseph, not to mention all those ancestors who lived long before recorded history going all the way back to Noah and even further back to Adam and Eve... The story of Jesus is really the story of humanity from the beginning until now. The Star Wars Saga didn't end with the Return of the Jedi. There have been at least 3 or 4 more movies and several TV shows that have spun off from the original trilogy. The story of God's interactions with His creation didn't stop with Jesus' birth either. Jesus' long line of family members just keeps getting bigger and bigger!



(SLIDE) Today we added one more child to the

Family of God's people. Eleanor joined that long list of fathers, mothers, sons, and daughters who are grafted onto

the family tree of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. From this day forward, Eleanor will always be a Christian. It's now a part of her DNA and nothing will ever separate her from Jesus Christ. That's how strong and binding the ties of Baptism are. Saint Paul famously wrote to the Church in Rome, "For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Rom.

8:38-39 NRS) In her Baptism, Eleanor has the absolute assurance that no matter what, Jesus will never leave her or let her down. Matthew wanted to make this fact explicitly clear. Just 5 verses after this extensive genealogy Matthew tells us Jesus' name is Emmanuel, which means God With Us. At the very end of his Gospel Matthew put those exact words coming from the mouth of Jesus. After he's been crucified and raised from the dead and right before he ascends back into heaven to rule with Our Heavenly Father, Jesus says, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

May we understand the great movements in God's epic story of creation and redemption as being our family story too. May the overarching narrative of the Bible help us to see the great love with which God embraces us every day. And may God's family tree continue to expand until it includes all of humanity and all of creation itself. Thanks be to God for including us in that enormous Family and for giving us the opportunity to welcome Eleanor as one more of God's precious and Holy Children. Amen.