



The Messiah from Moab

Matthew 1:1-6 with Ruth 4:9-17

Sunday, August 17, 2025, Aledo UMC

Gospel Lesson, Matthew 1:1-6

An account of the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah, the son of David, the son of Abraham.

² Abraham was the father of Isaac, and Isaac the father of Jacob, and Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers, ³ and Judah the father of Perez and Zerah by Tamar, and Perez the father of Hezron, and Hezron the father of Aram, ⁴ and Aram the father of Aminadab, and Aminadab the father of Nahshon, and Nahshon the father of Salmon, ⁵ and Salmon the father of Boaz by Rahab, and Boaz the father of Obed by Ruth, and Obed the father of Jesse, ⁶ and Jesse the father of King David.

Back in the fall of 2016, I was looking for a new challenge, and for a United Methodist minister, that usually means I'm looking for a new appointment. However, I wasn't interested in a new appointment at the time, but I happened to come across an opportunity to pursue a Doctor of Ministry at the University of Dubuque Theological Seminary, and that felt exactly like the kind of challenge I was looking for. So I applied and was accepted into "Leadership in a Changing Context" led by Professors Christopher James and Alan Roxburgh.

It had been 18 years since I had been in an academic setting, so that first year of my three-year cohort was a struggle. But it was also a struggle because when I read a book, I tend to argue with the author, probably because I thought I was smarter than them. And that's always a dangerous assumption.

The Law of Christ, 1 Corinthians 9:19-23, page 2

Anyway, I learned—but not soon enough—that neither Chris nor Alan wanted me to argue with the books they had assigned. They wanted me to learn from them because, for one thing, we live in a changing context. Plus, they were smarter than me.

And as a pastor, I serve in a changing context. Church is not the same today as it was when I first stood behind a pulpit forty-five years ago. It took me a while, but with a little help from REO Speedwagon, I learned to roll with the changes. I learned to shut up and listen. And four years later, I earned my degree. And now that I am a Doctor of Ministry, I can go back to arguing theology with the authors of the books that I read.

Not every book. But there have been a few.

I'm not alone. Do you know who else likes to argue with what authors have written? The Apostle Paul.

Paul has a really interesting approach to scripture. As we saw two weeks ago, Paul believes that "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness" (2 Timothy 3:16 NIV). And he's absolutely right. Scripture is God-breathed. It is sacred. But that doesn't mean it is "inerrant." Rather, scripture is "life-giving."

If Paul believed that scripture was inerrant, he would have never been able to say things like, "What is written kills, but the Spirit gives life," which is what he says 2 Corinthians 3:6. *What is written* refers to the Law, and Paul says that it kills.

Nor could Paul have said that God "canceled the detailed rules of the Law," which is what he says in Ephesians 2:15.

Nor could Paul have gotten away with totally dismissing the need for circumcision, as he does in Galatians 2. What all that means is that Paul was not afraid to argue with scripture.

And Paul's not the only one. But before I tell you who that other biblical author is, we have to set the stage with the Old Testament priest Ezra.

9:1 After these things had been done, the officials approached me (Ezra) and said, "The people of Israel, the priests, and the Levites have not separated themselves from the peoples of the lands with their abominations, from the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Jebusites, the Ammonites, the Moabites, the Egyptians, and the Amorites. ² For they have taken some of their daughters as wives for themselves and for their sons. Thus the holy seed has mixed itself with the peoples of the lands, and in this faithlessness the officials and leaders have led the way." ³ When I heard this, I tore my garment and my mantle and pulled hair from my head and beard and sat appalled. ⁴ Then all who trembled at the words of the God of Israel because of the faithlessness of the returned exiles gathered around me while I sat appalled until the evening sacrifice.

In other words, "You Israelites are supposed to be a holy people, but you've taken *foreigners* as wives? Canaanites, Hittites, and (I know you're going to gasp when I say this) even *Moabites!*"

Of all the inhabitants of the Ancient Near East, the Moabites were the worst because the nation of Moab was born out of an incestuous relationship. You can read about it in Genesis 19:30-38. Priests don't like incestuous relationships; they're cringe-worthy. Especially for someone who's self-righteous and sanctimonious and judgmental like Ezra.

The Law of Christ, 1 Corinthians 9:19-23, page 3

Ezra was kind of like Dana Carvey's Church Lady character on Saturday Night Live. Anytime Church Lady came face to face with someone whom she deemed to be a sinner, she'd rather passively aggressively pass judgment on them by saying, ***"Well, isn't that special!"***

Ezra learned that many of the Hebrew men of his day had married a non-Jewish woman, and Ezra's response was, "Well, isn't that special!"

But he didn't stop there. He intimidated the people—the men—to the point that they "sent away" their foreign wives and their children!

So now let us make a covenant with our God to send away all these wives and their children, according to the counsel of my lord and of those who tremble at the commandment of our God, and let it be done according to the law (Ezra 10:3).

And that was supposed to ignite a revival!

Marrying a foreigner is like getting a tattoo. It's one thing if someone says, "I was thinking of wrapping my leg with the tattoo of a snake. Do you think I should go through with it?" If you say, "No, I think it would be hideous," then okay, fine. You were asked for an opinion, and you gave it. You might even have quoted scripture to support your argument.

However, after the needle has done its thing, it's quite another thing to look at that fresh tattoo and say, "Good heavens! Why did you cover your leg with that hideous snake tattoo?" Why say that?

Once the tattoo is inked, she owns it. It's hers forever. She can't go back and undo what she's done—at least not without a lot of pain and agony. And the same thing applies here. Once these Israelites married Moabite women, you can't go back and undo what you've done. At least not without a lot of pain and agony. To demand that these men throw out their wives was cruel to the men and devastating to the women as well as their children. They no longer had anyone to support them. It cast them into abject poverty. In effect, Ezra was weaponizing the Word of God and creating spiritual abuse.

But it gets worse. In verse 2, Ezra is told that the "holy seed has mixed itself with the peoples of the lands." (Gasp!) The Book of Ezra lays the groundwork for ethnic cleansing. For white supremacy. Well, not white supremacy. Ezra is arguing for Hebrew supremacy. But one is the same as the other. And aren't we seeing some of that happening today?

Thankfully, not every man in Israel fell for Ezra's panicked preaching. As it happens, there had been a story circulating for some time about one of the descendants of David. And at about the time of Ezra, that story went viral. It's the story of Elimelech, his wife Naomi, and their two sons who settled in Moab.

Both sons married Moabite women and then tragically, Elimelech and his two sons died, leaving Naomi alone. Or so it would seem. One of her daughters-in-law, named Ruth, remained faithful to Naomi. The two moved back to Judah where the elder woman helped Ruth to marry a "nice Jewish man" named Boaz. In turn, Boaz fathers a son with Ruth, and the boy is named Obed. "He became Jesse's father and David's grandfather" (Ruth 4:17b).

The Law of Christ, 1 Corinthians 9:19-23, page 4

The purpose of the Book of Ruth was to tell us the wonderful story of how Ruth found love after her first husband died.

But the Book of Ruth was also written as a challenge to Ezra. It was written to counter Ezra. In essence, the Book of Ruth declares, “Do you want to know what kind of so-called evil things happen when ‘holy seed is mixed with foreign seed?’ You get the greatest king our nation has ever known.”

The message of the Book of Ruth is that just because someone is an outsider, that doesn’t automatically mean they’re bad. In fact, that Moabite widow just might hold the key to our future.

Jesus, of course, was known as the Son of David. But that also made him the Son of a Moabite. He had Moabite blood running through his veins. Jesus was our Messiah from Moab! And it also makes Jesus the Savior of the world—not just the Hebrew people.

The Bible says that Jesus “bore our shame” (Hebrews 12:2). He literally did so, because he bore in his body the DNA of those shameful Moabites.

What does your family tree look like? Jesus knows what it’s like to have an embarrassing cousin like Eddie Johnson. Jesus knows what it’s like to live with an embarrassing family secret. He knows what it’s like to have skeletons in the closet. So if you’ve ever been embarrassed by your family or your heritage, Jesus knows what you’re feeling because he also has a checkered family heritage. That’s because the story of Jesus is the story of humanity. And that’s why an unnamed author preserved the story of Ruth.

But just as important as telling us the backstory of Jesus, the Book of Ruth was written as a challenge to the religious authorities who held to an untenable interpretation of the Law of Moses. Remember, Paul says that the Law kills. Those leaders didn’t care that the Law kills. They were insistent on getting their interpretation of scripture, regardless of the hurt it imposed.

We need the Book of Ruth. If you read the Book of Ezra without the Book of Ruth, you just might go down a very dangerous, judgmental path. We need to know how to read—and question—the Word of God.

When it comes to the broad strokes, the Bible does tell what to think and believe. The Bible is clear that God created the universe and all that is therein. That God created both you and your neighbor in the image of God. That God loves both you and your neighbor regardless of color. That God loves humanity so much that God sent Jesus Christ incarnate into the world to redeem it through his sacrificial death. That, in return for all that God has done for us, God expects us to “live in the love of Jesus.”

However, when it comes to the fine strokes, the Bible does not tell us what to think or believe. There is room for interpretation. That’s because God’s goal was to create an intelligent people blessed with the gift of free will. If the Bible were to tell us exactly what to think and what to believe, then there would be no reason to think, and God would be creating a cult. And that’s not God’s purpose.

As Christians, we are allowed to question the Bible. After all, the Bible questions itself. Paul challenges the Law. Ruth challenges Ezra. The Bible does not agree with itself from

The Law of Christ, 1 Corinthians 9:19-23, page 5

cover to cover. Just look at Ezra and Ruth. One forbids marrying Moabite; the other celebrates marrying a Moabite.

But somehow, as Paul and Moses and Ruth and Ezra and all the others searched the Word and challenged the Word and were challenged by the Word, they learned to live for God and walk with God.

And that's what it's all about. The Bible was written to make us think. It takes a sacred, God-breathed book to do that. And the more we search the scriptures, the more we discover that the Law indeed does kill, but God is always present with his grace and he gives life.