

## **JOSEPH – THE EARTHLY FATHER OF JESUS**

Joseph – Meaning: remover or increaser

Joseph, the earthly father of our Lord Jesus lived at Nazareth in Galilee. He is called a “just man.” He was by trade a carpenter.

Joseph was betrothed to Mary and was made aware of her pregnancy through the Angel Gabriel. He took her to his own home. Soon after this the decree of Augustus required that they should proceed to Bethlehem, some 80 or 90 miles from Nazareth for the census.

He is last mentioned in connection with the journey to Jerusalem, when Jesus was twelve years old. It is probable that he died before Jesus entered on his public ministry. This is concluded from the fact that Mary only was present at the marriage feast in Cana of Galilee. His name does not appear in connection with the scenes of the crucifixion along with that of Mary.

Joseph’s ancestry – According to the Jewish Bible, one requirement for the messiah is that he must be a descendant of King David. In Jeremiah 33:17, God says that the royal House of David will never lack a man to sit on the throne of Israel. The Christian Bible, recognizing this vital requirement, spends almost 2 chapters to establish the genealogical record of Jesus as going back to King David.

Joseph was in the line of King David and therefore held a legal right to the throne. However, because he descended from the cursed Jechonias also called Jeconiah and Jehoiachin, he would have been disqualified by God from taking the throne. However, Mary’s son would not.

To better understand the genealogy of Jesus, it is important to know some of the notions Jews had regarding ancestral records. This section discusses property rights, prophecies, and Jewish use of the word son.

### **Property rights**

Jews carefully maintained accurate genealogical records. They did so primarily because property rights in Israel were linked to family heritage. When the Jews settled in Israel, the tribes were given portions of the land as an inheritance. Families within each tribe were given parcels of that land. The land could be farmed, developed, or sold. Every 50 years a dispossessed family could lay claim to the parcel of land which their ancestors had received when it was originally distributed.

Individuals who could not trace their family had no inheritance in the nation of Israel. They were treated as dispossessed foreigners. This factor alone contributed strongly to the Jewish preoccupation with genealogies.

### **Prophecies**

Prophecies also contributed to Jewish interest in genealogies. God had promised several people that the messiah would be one of their descendants. To prove this descent, it was important to maintain accurate genealogical records.

### **Use of the word “Son”**

The Jews did not use the word son in a limited sense, as we do today. Matthew 1:1 states Jesus was the “son of David, the son of Abraham.”

This appears to indicate that David was the father of Jesus, and Abraham was his grandfather. A Jew would have understood that Matthew did not mean there was only one generation between these men; but that Jesus was a descendant of David, who was a descendant of Abraham. This fact is born out in the verses that follow (Matthew 1: 2-17). In the Jewish mind, the word son could be applied to one who was not a literal, first generation son, as is commonly understood today. It could mean a descendant, which could be a grandson, great grandson, or some of a more distant generation. Sone could also be used to describe kinship without sonship.