

The Genealogy of the King

Matthew 1:1-17

If I were to take a survey this morning of everyone here this morning and were to ask “What is your favorite text of Scripture?” no one would probably say, “*Matthew 1:1-17*.” Instead we are more likely to ask, “Why would Matthew begin his account of the life of Christ with a boring genealogy?” I want to suggest this morning that this text is one of the most important passages in the Bible! *Matthew 1:1-17* is one of the most important passages in the Bible because it is the thread that binds together the Old and New Testaments. In fact, this text is essential to properly understand the meaning of the Old Testament. One commentator called this text “a compressed retelling of the Old Testament story” (Nolland, 34).

Matthew carefully links the second part of the Bible with the first by citing at 61 direct quotes (Mark has 31, Luke 26, and John 16) and many other allusions from the Old Testament. Matthew uses the phrase, “to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet” ten times in his book. The gospel writer clearly identifies Jesus as the promised and long awaited Messiah. The evidence presented is overwhelming. Jesus is clearly presented as the fulfillment of all that the prophets of old were longing for.

The book of Matthew opens with the genealogy of the King. Every king has to have a royal lineage because his ancestry is the most important thing about him. Kings have to be in the regal line in order to qualify to be on the throne. Matthew begins with a family tree that traces the right of Jesus to reign. These opening verses are very important because Jewish people, who made up Matthew’s audience, were very interested in a person’s genealogy.

The New Testament rests upon the accuracy of this genealogy because it establishes the fact that the Lord Jesus Christ is of the line of Abraham and of the line of David. Both are very important. The line of Abraham places Him in the nation, and the line of David puts Him on the throne -- He is in that royal line. The genealogies were very important to the nation Israel, and through them it could be established whether a person had a legitimate claim to a particular line. For example, when Israel returned from the captivity, we find in the Book of Ezra, “These sought their register among those that were reckoned by genealogy, but they were not found: therefore were they, as polluted, put from the priesthood” (*Ezra 2:62*). It was possible in Ezra's day to check the register of the tribe of Levi and remove those who made a false claim.

Matthew is very purposeful in his genealogy. It is arranged in three sections of fourteen. One reason for this was not doubt to aid in memorization in a mostly oral society. In order to get his genealogy into these three sections of fourteen names each, Matthew omits four of the kings who were cursed in the Old Testament from the second section. Matthew draws on the genealogies of *Ruth 4:18-22* and *1 Chronicles 3:10-19* while adding the information from the intertestamental period. I believe that Matthew provides the royal lineage and Luke records the physical ancestry of Joseph.

The first sentence of the Gospel of Matthew introduces not only this genealogy, but the entire gospel. This sentence answers the question of: What is this book about? Answer: Jesus. And: Who is this Jesus? This sentence tells you almost everything you need to know about the identity of Jesus. The genealogy that follows is given by Matthew to prove the validity of what Matthew claims in this first sentence. Let’s read this genealogy and see together just who Jesus really is.

Scripture Reading and Prayer.

I. Jesus is the New Adam

The first two words of this verse in the Greek are Βίβλος γενέσεως which are translated as “The book of the genealogy” or “generation”. They could also be translated as “The book of Genesis.” Matthew deliberately parallels the beginning of the story of Jesus with the first book of the Bible. The exact same phrase is used in *Genesis 2:4* and *5:1*. In *2:4* (“These are the generations of the heavens and of the earth”), it is a summary statement of the preceding account of the creation of the heavens and the earth in *Genesis 1*. But the direct parallel which I believe Matthew has in mind and that he wants to remind his Jewish audience of when he pens this words is found in *Genesis 5:1* where it is written: “This is the book of the genealogy of Adam.” Matthew wants us to understand that with the coming of Jesus there is a new Genesis, a new beginning, a new Adam! But whereas *Genesis 5:1* says that God created Adam in the likeness of God. Matthew, by listing the physical ancestry of Jesus says that God has come in the likeness of man. In tonight’s message we will see why it is so important that God would become man.

Paul likewise draws this parallel in *1 Corinthians 15:45* when he says, “‘The first man Adam became a living being.’ The last Adam *became* a life-giving spirit.”

II. Jesus is the Savior

The very name Jesus *Yeshua* or “Joshua” means “Jehovah is salvation”! This is highlighted in the birth narrative when we are told that the angel has instructed Joseph and Mary to name the child Jesus “for He shall save His people from their sins” (v. 21). Jesus came for a purpose and that purpose was to save sinners. Paul writes in *1 Timothy 1:15*, “This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.” Are you a sinner? Then rejoice that Christ came to save sinners!

III. Jesus is the Christ

This was not Jesus’ last name! It is a title meaning the “anointed one.” In the Old Testament kings, prophets and kings were all anointed. It is fitting then that Jesus, the ultimate prophet, priest and king, would be known as the anointed One. He is the prophet who Moses said would come and the ultimate lawgiver who is able to produce obedience in His people. He is the king to whom every knee shall bow. But He is the priest who offered not the blood of bulls and goats but His own blood on the cross of Calvary.

IV. Jesus is the Son of David

In *2 Samuel 7* we first learn that this coming one will be a Descendent of King David himself. There were hints of the Deliverer’s royal nature before this in the prophetic word from Jacob to Judah in *Genesis 49:8-10*.

Judah, you are he whom your brothers shall praise; your hand shall be on the neck of your enemies; your father’s children shall bow down before you. Judah is a lion’s whelp; from the prey, my son, you have gone up. He bows down, he lies down as a lion; and as a lion, who shall rouse him? The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh comes; and to Him shall be the obedience of the people.

Some might have thought that David himself was the fulfillment of this prophecy, but in *2 Samuel 7:12-14* the prophet Nathan delivers this word from God to David near the end of his life:

When your days are fulfilled and you rest with your fathers, I will set up your seed after you, who will come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. (13) He shall build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. (14) I will be his Father, and he shall be My son.

One who can truly be called the Son of the Father (see *Hebrews 1:5*) will rule forever! This promise to David is expanded upon by the Old Testament prophets. Isaiah writes in *Isaiah 9:6-7*,

For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end, upon the throne of David and over His kingdom, to order it and establish it with judgment and justice from that time forward, even forever.

Throughout the Old Testament and the intertestamental period, the expectations for a Messiah increased! The expectation was for a mighty deliverer. A mighty warrior, like King David who would come and defeat their oppressors. Matthew is here identifying that Jesus is exactly that kind of Messiah. He is the “Son of David,” a mighty warrior-king. But this mighty warrior-king Messiah was also the suffering servant Messiah. In Christ both strands of Messianic prophecy converge. The first century Jew could not comprehend how the mighty King of Isaiah 9:6-7 could also be the suffering servant of Isaiah 53, but Matthew shows us how. As Jesus stood before Pilate, Matthew records him asking, “Are you the king of the Jews?” to which Jesus replied, “It is as you say.” (27:11). Matthew also records the words of the mocking soldiers as they jeered, “Hail, King of the Jews!” (27:29). Finally, Matthew shows how the Davidic King is also the Suffering Servant by recording the words which were nailed like Jesus to the cross: “This is Jesus the King of the Jews.”

V. Jesus is the Son of Abraham

Of course as the descendent of David, Jesus would also have to be a descendent of Abraham. But Matthew’s point is more than to merely point out Jesus’ Jewishness but rather to identify Him with the promise made to Abraham regarding his Seed. In *Genesis 12:1-3*, God promised then Abram: “I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you ... and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.” After being prepared to offer his son Isaac, Abraham was again promised by God in *Genesis 22:18* that “In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed.” This promise was repeated again to Abraham’s son, Isaac in *Genesis 26:4*, “And I will make your descendants multiply as the stars of heaven; I will give to your descendants all these lands; and in your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed.” The apostle Paul also understood Jesus to be the fulfillment of the promise to Abraham that through his seed all the nations of the earth would be blessed in *Galatians 3:16*. There he plainly states,

Now to Abraham and his Seed were the promises made. He does not say, “And to seeds,” as of many, but as of one, “And to your Seed,” who is Christ.

Abraham’s seed is the Lord Jesus Christ!

Three Important Lessons from this Genealogy

The Overruling Providence of God

Again and again in this genealogy we see how the purposes of God often go counter to the expectations of man. Abraham is chosen out of all the people on earth to be the Father of the nation through whom the Messiah would come. Isaac, the child of God's provision, was chosen to continue that line and not Ishmael, the child of man's scheming. Jacob, and not the first-born Esau continues the line. Judah, not the first-born Rueben, or the more well-known Joseph, is included in the line of the Messiah-King. Tamar's twin sons: Perez and Zerah are both listed in the genealogy, but only Perez is a part of the line of Jesus indicating once again God's sovereign purposes. David himself was not the oldest in his family or the one which Samuel thought looked the most regal, but he was God's choice. Again and again this genealogy highlights the divine prerogative of God in the outworking of human history.

There is a curse upon the lineage of Jeconiah (no one of his seed should ever sit upon the throne in Israel according to *Jer 22:24-30*), were it not for the fact of the virgin birth Jesus would not be able to sit upon the throne.

In a similar way, all humanity was under a curse. In the Garden of Eden, Adam lost the right for a human being to rule on the earth, but Jesus came .

The Overwhelming Grace of God

Five women are included in this genealogy. This is very unusual. Most genealogies only contained the name of men. Remember the Pharisee's daily prayer that thanked God that they were neither a Gentile, a slave, or a woman. Of the five women contained, four were probably Gentiles (Rahab, Ruth, Tamar, and Bathsheba). At least three were guilty of sexual immorality (Rahab the harlot, Tamar the incestuous prostitute, Bathsheba the adulteress, and Matthew possibly means to include Ruth who as a Moabite was a descendent of the incestuous relationship between Lot and his daughter).

I heard of a man who spent \$500 to obtain his genealogy, then \$2,500 to suppress it! But there is no suppression in the genealogy of Jesus. The inclusion of these women shows that the gospel of grace provided through their descendent Jesus would be for all genders, all races and all backgrounds. The gospel is for both male and female, Jew and Gentile, rich and poor, even the vilest of sinners Jesus can and will save. The inclusion of these women in the genealogy of our Lord shows the overwhelming grace of God.

The Overarching Promise of God

Beginning in *Genesis 3:15* God had promised that one day the "Seed of the woman" would come and crush the head of the serpent. That promise was expanded upon to Abraham when he is told by God that through his descendent all the nations of the earth would be blessed. This promise was repeated to Isaac, Jacob, and Judah. The promise was extended to King David when he was told that one of his descendants would sit enthroned as King forever. This promise is expanded upon through the prophet Isaiah to include the virgin birth and Micah to describe the place of the birth as Bethlehem. This is the main message of this genealogy by Matthew. God has kept His Word. He has sent the long promised Messiah who is the Seed of the Woman, the Seed of Abraham, and the Seed of David. The true King has come!

Conclusion: These themes, which continue throughout the book of Matthew, all come together once again in the closing verses of the gospel. In these final verses, Matthew has the virgin born Son of God declaring His universal authority as the Davidic King and His purpose to have "disciples of all the nations" as the Abrahamic Heir.

And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. ¹⁹ "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ "teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, *even* to the end of the age." Amen. **Matthew 28:18-20**

Matthew is very interested in the content of Jesus' teaching. The gospel is arranged in five sections linked to five distinct groupings of Jesus' teachings. I think Matthew does this to parallel Jesus as the New Covenant Prophet and Lawgiver to Moses as the Old Covenant Prophet and Lawgiver who wrote *five* books: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. I will discuss this important parallel and contrast in upcoming sermons, but for now my point is merely that Matthew's interest in preserving Jesus' teaching is connect to what Christ commands in the Great Commission, which is the teaching of Christ's commands to all nations. You see the Great Commission is about more than just sharing the facts of the gospel, it is about doing that and continuing to teach people to observe all that Christ has commanded. In a very real sense, preaching through the Gospel of Matthew is an opportunity for me to fulfill the Great Commission. By preaching this Gospel, I will be teaching you to observe all that Christ has commanded you.