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Matthew 1:1-17



A RECORD OF the genealogy of Jesus Christ the son of David, the son of Abraham:

- ¹ Abraham was the father of Isaac,
Isaac the father of Jacob,
Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers,
- ² Judah the father of Perez and Zerah, whose mother was Tamar,
Perez the father of Hezron,
Hezron the father of Ram,
- ³ Ram the father of Amminadab,
Amminadab the father of Nahshon,
Nahshon the father of Salmon,
- ⁴ Salmon the father of Boaz, whose mother was Rahab,
Boaz the father of Obed, whose mother was Ruth,
Obed the father of Jesse,
⁵ and Jesse the father of King David.
- David was the father of Solomon, whose mother had been Uriah's wife,
- ⁶ Solomon the father of Rehoboam,
Rehoboam the father of Abijah,
Abijah the father of Asa,
- ⁷ Asa the father of Jehoshaphat,
Jehoshaphat the father of Jehoram,
Jehoram the father of Uzziah,
- ⁸ Uzziah the father of Jotham,
Jotham the father of Ahaz,
Ahaz the father of Hezekiah,
- ⁹ Hezekiah the father of Manasseh,
Manasseh the father of Amon,
Amon the father of Josiah,
- ¹⁰ and Josiah the father of Jeconiah and his brothers at the time of the exile to Babylon.
- ¹¹ After the exile to Babylon:
Jeconiah was the father of Shealtiel,
Shealtiel the father of Zerubbabel,

- ¹³Zerubbabel the father of Abiud,
Abiud the father of Eliakim,
Eliakim the father of Azor,
¹⁴Azor the father of Zadok,
Zadok the father of Akim,
Akim the father of Eliud,
¹⁵Eliud the father of Eleazar,
Eleazar the father of Matthan,
Matthan the father of Jacob,
¹⁶and Jacob the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary, of
whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ.

¹⁷Thus there were fourteen generations in all from Abraham to David, fourteen from David to the exile to Babylon, and fourteen from the exile to the Christ.

Original
Meaning

DURING THIS TIME the Mediterranean world experienced the famed *pax Romana* (Lat., "Roman peace"), a condition of comparative calm that originated with the reign of Caesar Augustus (27 B.C.–A.D. 14) and lasted at least to the reign of Marcus Aurelius (A.D. 161–180). The Roman historian Tacitus attributes the beginnings of this period of peace almost single-handedly to the immense powers of Augustus. But as Tacitus observes, the concord that Augustus inaugurated did not bring with it freedom for all of his subjects. Many throughout the Roman world hoped for change. He writes:

Nobody had any immediate worries as long as Augustus retained his physical powers, and kept himself going, and his House, and the peace of the empire. But when old age incapacitated him, his approaching end brought hopes of change. A few people started idly talking of the blessings of freedom. Some, more numerous, feared civil war, others wanted it.¹

Tides of revolution continually swirled just below the surface and periodically rose to disturb the *pax Romana*.

In one of the remote regions of the empire, where a variety of disturbances repeatedly surfaced, the hoped-for freedom finally arrived in a most unexpected way. A rival to Augustus was born in Israel. But this rival did not

1. Cornelius Tacitus, *The Annals of Imperial Rome* 1.4; trans. Michael Grant (rev. ed., New York: Penguin, 1976).

appear with fanfare, nor would he challenge directly the military and political might of Rome. Even many of his own people eventually became disappointed with the revolution that he would bring, because it was a revolution of the heart, not one of swords or chariots.

This was the revolution brought by Jesus, the long-awaited Messiah of Israel. Matthew's Gospel harks back upon a long history of anticipation within Israel. His recounting elucidates how Jesus' life and ministry fulfilled the promises of the Old Testament prophets, but also shows how Jesus disappointed many of the misplaced expectations of the people.

Jesus Messiah Brings a New Beginning for Humanity (1:1)

MATTHEW INTRODUCES HIS Gospel with language reminiscent of Genesis. The Greek word that the NIV renders "genealogy" in 1:1 is *genesis*² ("beginnings"), which is also the title of the first book of the Old Testament in the Septuagint (the LXX, the Greek translation of the Old Testament). In fact, an almost identical expression to Matthew 1:1 occurs in the LXX of Genesis 2:4 and 5:1 to narrate both the beginning record of God's creation and the first genealogy of God's human creatures. Moreover, in Matthew the expression functions not only as a heading for the genealogy in 1:2–17,³ but also for the beginning narrative of Jesus' infancy in 1:18–2:23.⁴ A case can also be made that the expression functions as a title for the entire book about Jesus that follows.⁵ Just as Genesis gave the story of one beginning—God's creation and covenant relations with Israel—so the Gospel of Matthew gives the story of a new beginning—the arrival of Jesus the Messiah and the kingdom of God (cf. also Mark 1:1).

Matthew's opening words ("Jesus Christ the son of David, the son of Abraham") had special importance to a Jewish audience, which traced its ancestry through the covenants God made with Israel. The heading, with Jesus' names and his ancestry, is packed with meaning.⁶

2. According to BDAG, 192, this word means "origin, source, productive cause, beginning," which in this context indicates "an account of someone's life."

3. Cundry, *Matthew*, 13.

4. Carson, "Matthew," *EBC*, 8:61, emphasizes that the recurrence of the noun *genesis* in 1:18 indicates that with the phrase Matthew focuses not just on the genealogy but on the more expansive "origin of Jesus Christ" in chs. 1–2.

5. W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison Jr., *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew*, Vol. 1: *Introduction and Commentary on Matthew 1–VII* (ICC, Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1988), 149–54, argue convincingly that the expression *biblos genesisos* is a title for the entire book. See also Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew* (PNTC, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 19.

6. The expressions "son of David" and "son of Abraham" stand in apposition to "Jesus Christ," indicating that the titles are a further explanation of Jesus' identity.

In common practice a person had a single personal name, which often carried some religious significance. This book is about "Jesus" (*Iesous*), which is his historical, everyday name, the name normally used in the narrative of the Gospels. This name is Yeshua in Hebrew (meaning "Yahweh saves," cf. Neh. 7:7), which is a shortened form of Joshua (*yehošua'*), "Yahweh is salvation" (Ex. 24:13); this name will come to have profound notions of salvation associated with it in Jesus' life and ministry (cf. 1:21).⁷

"Christ" (*Christos*) is a title, derived from the Hebrew *mašiah* ("anointed"), that harks back to David as the anointed king of Israel. The term came to be associated with the promise of an "anointed one" who would be the light of hope for the people of Israel. God had promised David through Nathan the prophet that his house and throne would be established forever (2 Sam. 7:11b–16)—a promise now seen as having been fulfilled in Jesus as the Messiah. The full name using the transliterated form (i.e., "Jesus Christ") is accurate and traditional, but in common usage it can be misunderstood to be something like a first and last name.

"Son of David" is an important expression in Matthew's Gospel (9:27; 12:23; 15:22; 20:30–31; 21:9, 15; 22:42, 45). Matthew uses the name of this great king seventeen times, more than any other book of the New Testament. King David was the revered, conquering warrior of Israel's history. The wording "son of David" expresses a promised figure who would perpetuate David's throne, thereby pointing to the Messiah's lineage and royal expectation (see 2 Sam. 7:11b–16). But it also evoked images of a Messiah who would come conquering—a mighty warrior like David who would destroy Israel's enemies and reestablish the throne in Jerusalem and the kingdom of Israel as in the golden days of David.

But Jesus is also "the son of Abraham." In tracing the ancestry not only to David but also to Abraham, Matthew holds a light of hope to the entire world. The covenant God made with Abraham established Israel as a chosen people, but it was also a promise that his line would be a blessing to all the nations (Gen. 12:1–3; 22:18).⁸

Consequently, the introduction of this Gospel with its ancestry of Jesus offers an important key to interpreting Matthew's message. Jesus' ministry brought fulfillment of God's covenant to the particular people of Israel (e.g., 10:6; 15:24), but it also brought fulfillment of God's promise to bring universal

7. Cf. Birger Gerhardsson, "The Christology of Matthew," in *Who Do You Say That I Am? Essays on Christology in Honor of Jack Dean Kingsbury*, ed. Mark Allan Powell and David R. Bauer (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1999), 16–17.

8. See, e.g., M. Daniel Carroll R., "Blessing the Nations: Toward a Biblical Theology of Mission from Genesis," *BBR* 10 (2000): 17–34, Richard J. Erickson, "Joseph and the Birth of Isaac in Matthew 1," *BBR* 10 (2000): 35–51.

hope to all the nations (cf. 21:43; 28:19). This latter theme becomes increasingly pronounced in the Gospel and rises to a climax in the concluding commission (cf. 28:18-20).

Jesus Messiah's Genealogy (1:2-17)

GENEALOGIES WERE IMPORTANT in the ancient world and played an especially significant role for the Jews. According to the Old Testament (e.g., 1 Chron. 1-9), God's people kept extensive genealogies, which served as a record of a family's descendants but were also used for practical and legal purposes to establish a person's heritage, inheritance, legitimacy, and rights. Knowledge of one's descent was especially necessary, if a dispute occurred, to ensure that property went to the right person.⁹

Matthew most likely draws on some of the genealogies found in the Old Testament¹⁰ and uses similar wording. For the list of individuals after Zerubabel, when the Old Testament ceases, Matthew probably uses other records that have since been lost. Sources indicate that extensive genealogical records were extant during the first century,¹¹ with some of the more important records of political and priestly families kept in the temple. Later rabbinic tradition, for example, tried to establish the descent from David of a near contemporary to Jesus, Rabbi Hillel, through a genealogical scroll that was purportedly located in Jerusalem.¹² The official extrabiblical genealogies were lost with the destruction of the temple and Jerusalem in A.D. 70, though private genealogies were retained elsewhere.

Luke gives a genealogy of Jesus as well (see Luke 3:23-38).¹³ There are several basic differences between Matthew's (1:2-17) and Luke's list. (1) Matthew gives a descending genealogy, beginning with the earliest ancestor, Abraham, placed at the head and citing later generations in forward lines of descent (i.e., moving from father to son), culminating with the birth of Jesus. This is the more common form of Jewish genealogy in the Old

9. Cf. Marshall D. Johnson, *The Purpose of Biblical Genealogies with Special Reference to the Setting of the Genealogies of Jesus*, 2d ed. (SNTSMS 8; Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1988).

10. E.g., Gen. 4:17-18; 5:3-32; 10:1-32; 46:8-27; 1 Chron. 1:34; 2:1-15; 3:1-24; Ruth 4:12-22. See John Nolland, "Genealogical Annotation in Genesis as Background for the Matthean Genealogy of Jesus," *TynBul* 47 (May 1996): 115-22, who suggests that Matthew studied the Genesis genealogies and patterned his own after them.

11. E.g., Josephus, *Life* 6; *Contra Apion* 1:28-56.

12. *Genesis Rabbah* 98:8; *j. Ta'anit* 4:2; see Anthony J. Saldarini, *Pharisees, Scribes and Sadducees in Palestinian Society: A Sociological Approach* (Wilmington, Del.: Michael Glazier, 1988), 204-6.

13. For discussion, see Raymond E. Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah: A Commentary on the Infancy Narratives in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke*, rev. ed. (ABRL; New York: Doubleday, 1993), 84-95.