



## Matthew 1—Commentary Notes\*

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### A. Introduction

Chapter one of the Gospel of Matthew records the genealogy of Jesus Christ and His birth, revealing that Jesus is indeed the Messiah whom God promised. Most people tend to overlook this section<sup>1</sup> (1:1-17) while reading through the chapter because they do not realize the importance of Jesus's genealogy. The very purpose of Matthew in writing this Gospel was to show the Jews that Jesus was the promised Messiah (Christ) of the Old Testament. Therefore, even before giving the account of the Messiah's birth, Matthew traced Jesus's genealogy all the way back to King David and to Abraham. This was to prove that Jesus was the son of David and the rightful King who was to inherit David's throne and rule (2 Sam 7:16). Furthermore, Jesus is the Savior whom God had promised Abraham and the One through whom all people on earth would be blessed.

The birth of the Savior or Messiah (1:18-25) is a fulfillment of God's promise in Genesis 3:15 that the seed of the woman "will crush your [the serpent's] head." It is also the fulfillment of Isaiah 7:14 that "[t]he virgin will conceive and give birth to a son." This is in accordance with the genealogy of "Mary, of whom was born Jesus" (1:16). God chose Joseph and Mary to raise the incarnate Jesus Christ because they feared God. We will see their godly examples of wholehearted faith and obedience.<sup>2</sup>

### B. Outline

- I. 1:1-17 Proving the Kingship and the Complete Humanity of Jesus Christ through His Royal Genealogy
- II. 1:18-25 Proving the Full Divinity of Jesus Christ through His Conception by the Holy Spirit and His birth from a Virgin

### C. Content

- I. 1:1-17 **Proving the Kingship and the Complete Humanity of Jesus Christ through His Royal Genealogy**

In the very first verse of the book, Matthew noted its central theme and character: Jesus Christ. With the genealogy of Jesus, Matthew connected Jesus to two important covenants in Jewish history: God's covenant with Abraham (Gen 12; 15) and God's covenant with David (2 Sam 7). This proves that Jesus is the fulfillment of these two covenants. If anyone were to claim that he was the king of the Jews, a Jew would naturally ask: Does his genealogy prove that he is a rightful descendant of David? This is why Matthew answered this important question<sup>3</sup> at the beginning of his book by presenting his audience with the genealogy of Jesus. There are a few characteristics of this record that are worth noting:

#### 1. The Importance of Genealogies

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\* Translator Note: These Commentary Notes were originally compiled in Chinese and translated into English for use by Chinese Christian Fellowship International's (CCF International's) English classes. All sources listed in the table (only listed in English when applicable) at the end of these notes were used and consulted in the original Chinese compilation. Please refer to the table for the references of each numbered annotation. For more information on the sources consulted, please contact CCF International. All biblical references are taken from The Holy Bible, New International Version® NIV® Copyright © 2011 by Biblica, Inc.® Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

In the Old Testament, Jews place great emphasis on their genealogies because they valued the purity of their bloodline. For example, in order to be eligible for priesthood, one must be able to trace his genealogy to Aaron without any discontinuity.<sup>4</sup>

## 2. Differences Compared to Other Genealogies

We will compare the genealogy in Matthew with that of Adam in Genesis and that of Christ as recorded in Luke's Gospel.

### 1) Compared with Adam's Genealogy in the Genesis Account

Genesis 5 records the genealogy of Adam, who is the first man in the Bible. It is easy to notice that every verse includes a repeated phrase of hopelessness: "then he died." "The first Adam" passed on his sinful nature to all his descendants, therefore, all of them paid its wage—death. The Gospels of Matthew and Luke record the last genealogy of the Bible—that of Jesus, who is the "Last Adam." He came into the world to save His people from their sins (1:21) and to give them life and fullness of hope through resurrection (Rom 1:17; 5:12-19; 1 Cor 15:22, 45). In Genesis, we also see a type of the salvation of Christ—the ark. And Matthew's account provides us the reality of God's salvation—Jesus Christ.

### 2) Compared with Jesus's Genealogy in Luke's Account

Matthew's genealogy traces the line of Joseph, who is the earthly father of Jesus. This goes back to the descendants of Solomon and to King David. Luke's account (Luke 3:23-28) traces the lineage of Mary to Nathan, who was also a son of King David (Luke 3:31; 1 Chr 3:5). Even though Nathan did not inherit the throne, he was nonetheless an offspring of King David. Luke's genealogy does not mention any woman and records Heli as Joseph's father (Luke 3:23). In reality, Joseph's paternal father was actually Jacob (Matt 1:16). According to Jewish traditions, Heli was considered Joseph's father because Joseph married Mary, and Heli was the father of Mary.<sup>5</sup>

When Jerusalem was destroyed in AD 70 by the Roman general Titus, all Jewish genealogies were burned. The genealogies recorded by Matthew and Luke became the only ones left of David's descendants. Furthermore, no one could ever again claim that he is the "Messiah." The main purpose of all Old Testament genealogies was to keep authoritative records in order to demonstrate how God fulfilled His promises from long ago. He selected a tribe from His chosen people to accomplish His plan of salvation (Gen 3:15; 49:10). Ever since Jesus Christ completed this work of salvation, the Bible no longer records any other genealogies (such as that of Paul or those of any other Jews). In addition, from that point on, God today only recognizes the genealogy of those who are born "in Jesus through the Holy Spirit." God's way was for every sinner to establish a personal relationship with Him, through believing in His Son, Jesus Christ. It is a relationship of "trust and obedience" and through which one can become a member of God's family. Everyone enters into "the genealogy of God" from "the genealogy of Adam" through a direct and personal faith in Christ (i.e., born again through the Holy Spirit). No one can be saved by simply being the child, son-in-law, grandchild, or great-grandchild of a Christian. The Book of Life in the Book of Revelation is, therefore, our genealogy as the family of God.

## 3. The Three Periods in the Genealogy

These three periods are based on Jewish history. Matthew did not record the name of every individual—contrary to common practice today, which seeks to ensure scientific accuracy. These names were carefully selected for their special significance. For each of those periods, fourteen names were mentioned. This could be for the purpose of symmetry or for easier memorization. In a Hebrew genealogy, the words "son" and "begot" represent direct family members and not necessarily the generation of the son.<sup>6</sup> Jews traditionally like to discuss numerology for the purpose of remembering numerical information. They also use

numbers to represent events and other things. This could be another reason for the fourteen generations in each period. For example, the Hebrew name of “David” is represented by numbers 4, 6, and 4, which add up to be 14. Perhaps the usefulness of this representation was to reveal the very purpose of this genealogy: to identify *the* descendant of David.

- 1) The First Period: It covers the patriarchal history from Abraham to David (1:2-6). David unified Israel as one strong nation to become a powerful people at that time. This patriarchal period lasted about one thousand years.
  - 2) The Second Period: It covers the history from David to the time the Jews were exiled to Babylon. It records Israel’s shame as a nation, and its pain and sufferings (1:6-11). This period lasted about four hundred years and the names recorded are mostly that of kings.
  - 3) The Third Period: It covers the history from the return of Jewish remnants to the birth of Jesus Christ, spanning approximately six hundred years. The majority of names recorded are priests,<sup>7</sup> but some are not.
4. The Names of Women in the Genealogy

The most amazing thing about the genealogy in Matthew’s Gospel is that it includes names of five women. A typical Jewish genealogy usually only records the names of men and never any women. Jewish women did not possess any legal rights. They were despised and perceived as mere possessions—to be discarded in any way that pleased their fathers or husbands. A Jewish man’s traditional morning prayer gives us great insight into the social status of women at that time. He would begin each day by thanking the Lord that he was not born a Gentile, a slave, or a woman. Therefore, for there to be even one (let alone five) female names recorded in this genealogy, especially in that of the Messiah, is indeed quite remarkable. It becomes even more exceptional when we look at the backgrounds of each of these women and what they had done in the past. Three of them were of ill repute. Let us look closer at their stories and reflect on how God chose them to be the earthly ancestors of Christ. What a great honor God bestowed upon them!<sup>8</sup>

- 1) Tamar (1:3; Gen 38) – She was the Gentile daughter-in-law of Judah, who was the son of Jacob. Judah had promised to give Tamar to his third son to be his wife. (The tradition at that time was that the younger brother was obligated to marry his older brother’s wife should the older one die.) However, Judah did not keep his promise and acted in unrighteousness. Even Though Tamar was treated unfairly, she desired to be a part of God’s chosen people and to have a part in His promises. It would have been very acceptable for her to remain with her own people after the death of her husband and to remarry. However, she chose to remain in the family of Judah—the Israelite tribe from whom God had promised that the Messiah will come. What Tamar did required courage, faith, and great sacrifice (i.e., the risk of being stoned to death or denied by her father-in-law). This was why her name was included in the genealogy of Jesus. We cannot judge her actions by the laws of Moses. She used inappropriate means (by pretending to be a prostitute conceiving a child through her father-in-law, Judah,) and this was based on the influence of her local culture and her limited understanding of God. Later on, because of her act of faith, God blessed Tamar with what she had hoped for. Judah also repented and acknowledged responsibility for his sin. Jesus came to the world so that all sinners—Jews or Gentiles—may enter God’s family through faith in Christ. Tamar was a great example of such faith and for this, she was included in the genealogy of the Messiah.
- 2) Rahab (1:5; Josh 2; 6:17) – She was a Gentile as well and a prostitute in the city of Jericho. She was supposed to perish with Jericho because of the evil deeds in the land of Canaan. However, when Rahab heard of the great and mighty deeds that God had done for His Israelite people the, she chose to believe in this God, protected the Israelite

spies, and became identified with the people of God. She risked her life to demonstrate her faith in God. The scarlet cord, which hung from her window (which is a sign of protection for all who entered her house), foreshadowed the precious blood of the Lord Jesus—that whoever trusts in Him may not perish at the wrath of God’s judgment. God remembered Rahab’s faith and included her name in the genealogy of Christ.

- 3) Ruth (1:5; Rut 1) – Ruth was a Gentile and a Moabite. Deuteronomy 23:3 says: “No Ammonite or Moabite or any of his descendants may enter the assembly of the Lord, even down to the tenth generation.” Ruth’s people were hated by the Jews.<sup>9</sup> Nevertheless, by marrying Boaz, she became a member of the nation of Israel and an ancestor of Christ. Ruth loved her mother-in-law Naomi. She chose to leave her own country and to identify with the people of God (Ruth 1:16). God rewarded her with great honor. She became the great grandmother of King David and an ancestor of the Messiah.
- 4) Uriah’s wife (1:6; 2 Sam 11–12) – This section of the genealogy does not mention Bathsheba’s name, but simply addresses her as Uriah’s wife. God remembered the injustice and unfair treatment that Uriah received. The Bible records Uriah as a loyal soldier to his country. The son, who is born from David and Bathsheba’s immoral relationship, did not survive. Later on, David confessed, repented from his sins, and received God’s discipline and punishment. God forgave him, and blessed him and Bathsheba with another son, Solomon. This was an example of God’s mercy and His forgiveness of our trespasses in Christ. God does not repay us what our sins deserve, nor does he despise our broken and contrite hearts. If we confess our sins, God will forgive our sins. This is an undeserving but true blessing from God.
- 5) Mary (1:16) – The way this fifth woman, Mary, is mentioned in the genealogy drastically differs from the others. Biblical genealogies always follow the line of the patriarch in that the fathers beget sons. However with Mary, the Scripture says: “Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ.” This is to direct the readers’ attention to the fact that Christ was born of Mary alone. It was prophesied that “a virgin will give birth” (Isa 7:14). Jesus was born of Mary through the Holy Spirit and was called the “seed of the woman” (Gen 3:15).<sup>10</sup> This passage in 1:18-25 gives account of the birth of Jesus from the virgin Mary (Luke 1:26-38).

Through the five women mentioned in the genealogy of Christ, we see God’s grace to us through Jesus Christ—the King as prophesied in the Old Testament.

1. The salvation of Christ broke down the wall, which separated the Jews and Gentiles. By including these Gentile women—Tamar, Rahab, and Ruth—in the genealogy of Jesus, God clearly demonstrates that the Lord Jesus is the Savior of all. In Christ—whether Jew or Gentile, we are all equal in the family of God.
2. Christ also removed the inequality between men and women. A woman’s name would never appear in a traditional Jewish genealogy. Yet, there are five women in that of Jesus. The contempt of women was lifted. Even though men and women differ in their roles, in the order of the family unit and in the church, both are equal in spirit before God. Both are valued by Him and equally important in the kingdom of God.

This passage records forty-six names, a time period that spans over two thousand years. These people had different personalities, spiritual lives, and experiences, and they all had flaws. Some were men of faith, such as Abraham, Isaac, and David. While others, like Hezron, Aram, Nahshon, and Akim, are unknown beyond their names. There were even notorious evil men included, such as Manasseh and Abijah. God’s work in history is never limited by the sins or imperfections of men. He

is able to use anyone to accomplish His plan. God can also use you and me to accomplish His will today.<sup>11</sup>

We have learned that Jesus came to the world to take away our sins and to make us a new creation (Eph 2:5; 2 Cor 5:17) in spite of anything we have done. Are we still troubled by our past, not knowing that Christ has come so that we may be coheirs in the light with all saints (Col 1:12)? How shall we respond to God after what we learned in this passage?

## **II. 1:18-25      Proving the Full Divinity of Jesus Christ through His Conception by the Holy Spirit and His Birth from a Virgin**

The Gospel of Matthew briefly mentioned the birth of Christ and the naming of Jesus. Luke's Gospel also gives the account of the birth of the Lord Jesus and includes further details, such as how the angel appeared to Mary and foretold of her pregnancy through the Holy Spirit (Luke 1:26-38). We will dive into more detail in the next lesson. God entrusted the birth of Jesus—a most holy and important matter—to Joseph and Mary. They became the most blessed, but at the same time paid a great price for their faith and obedience.<sup>12</sup>

1:18-20 Joseph and Mary's obedience. When we read this passage, we may be puzzled by 1:18-19 "Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together...Joseph had in mind to divorce her quietly." In order to understand what happened, we must read this passage from the perspective of the Hebrew tradition of marriage. There were three stages to a Jewish marriage. First, parents from both sides would enter into an agreement of marriage with plans of engagement to follow. Second, After everything was agreed upon, the couple would move forward into the second stage, in which the bride and the groom were considered as husband and wife in marriage but continued to live with their respective parents for another year before they could consummate their marriage. This waiting period of one year was to prove the bride's loyalty and chastity to the groom. If the bride was found to be pregnant during this time, it testified to her unfaithfulness, and their betrothal would end in divorce. Third, if in this one year however, the bride proved to be chaste, the groom would visit the bride's home with a great procession and take her home to be his wife and thus consummate their marriage. This is the background we must understand when we read this passage. When Mary was found to be with child, she and Joseph were still in the waiting period before consummation.

Even though this passage does not describe Joseph in detail, we can imagine the impact on Joseph when he discovered that Mary was pregnant. His response clearly demonstrates that Joseph must have been a righteous man in the sight of God. In planning to do the right thing, Joseph was kind and compassionate. He did not wish to harm Mary even for the sake of justice. Therefore, he chose not to publicly reveal Mary's pregnancy at the city gate lest Mary be stoned to death (Deut 22:23-24). Instead, Joseph took time to consider the proper execution of this matter. He contemplated divorcing Mary quietly and did not act hastily upon his decision. This became an opportune time for God to reveal His will. In Joseph's mind, there were only two choices: to divorce Mary quietly or to have her stoned to death. However, God had a third option: to marry her (1:20-23). This was probably not what Joseph would have chosen under the circumstance.<sup>13</sup> Nevertheless, when Joseph heard what the angel said in the dream, he did not become concerned about being misunderstood by others. He laid down his own reputation and immediately, he trusted and obeyed God's directive without any hesitation. He took Mary "as his wife" and later named the baby "Jesus." Joseph did not question God or require an explanation of how such a thing could be. He simply trusted and obeyed God's command.<sup>14</sup>

The Bible provides limited details concerning Joseph (Matt 1:18-25; 2:13-23; 13:55-56; Mark 6:1-3; Luke 2:1-7, 16, 33-50): he was a carpenter, he had at least seven children, and he was a man who feared God. He most likely died before Jesus's crucifixion (John 19:26-27). Joseph's faith and obedience to God was great. He was willing to be a part of God's plan for salvation and paid a great

price with Mary for their obedience to God. Their sacrifice was rewarded with the privilege of being able to raise the perfect incarnate Son of God. Oh what blessed parents they become!

There are three key points concerning the birth of Christ: (1) conceived by the Holy Spirit, (2) fulfillment of prophecies, and (3) the name of the Lord.

1. Conceived by the Holy Spirit. “Before they came together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit” (1:18b). Many do not understand why Jesus had to be conceived by the Holy Spirit and be born of a virgin. Some cannot believe that the Holy Spirit can cause one to become pregnant. Jesus “being born of a virgin” is central to our Christian faith because only in this way can Jesus be the Son of God, not born from human flesh and lust. Thus, He did not inherit the sin nature of Adam. He is fully God.<sup>15</sup> Therefore, Jesus being “born of a virgin” was a sign through which the author expressed “God with us,” just as God proclaimed to King Ahaz and all the Israelites in earlier times through the prophet Isaiah (Isa 7:14). Yet how could the Holy Spirit create a new life in a woman’s womb? He is the Spirit of life and according to the Scriptures, He always played a role in creation (Job 33:4). Psalm 104:30 says, “When you send your Spirit, they are created.” When Genesis 2:7 mentions the creation of Adam, it says, “The Lord God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.” Therefore, it was not a difficult thing for God to create new life in the virgin Mary. The Holy Spirit brought forth life in Mary because of her faith in God’s Word. By the same token, when we believe in Jesus Christ, we receive the Holy Spirit in our hearts, through whom we also experience spiritually, a new birth.<sup>16</sup>
2. Fulfillment of Prophecy. Christ’s birth was to “fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet[s]” (1:22-25). The prophecies concerning the Messiah were not mere one-time utterances by one person at a certain time in the Old Testament. Rather, they were given numerous times throughout the ages.<sup>17</sup>
  - 1) God’s earliest revelation of His salvation plan for mankind (Gen 3:15),
  - 2) God’s promise to Abraham (Gen 12:3; 22:18; Gal 3:16),
  - 3) God’s promise to Moses (Deut 18:18),
  - 4) God’s promise to David (2 Sam 7:12-15),
  - 5) Isaiah’s prophecies (Isa 7:14; 9:6-7), and
  - 6) Micah’s prophecy (Mic 5:2).

We have the first occurrence of the key verse of Matthew in 1:22, which the author continues to emphasize throughout the Gospel: “All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet.” The two Old Testament prophecies found in Isaiah 7:14 are referenced by Matthew in this chapter and they all have to do with the birth of the Messiah. First, the prophecy states, “The virgin will conceive” (1:23). “Virgin” also has the meaning of “young woman” in Hebrew. God very clearly tells us in this chapter that this prophecy was fulfilled in Mary, who was a virgin and who conceived by the Holy Spirit and not by Joseph. Second, the prophecy states, “And they will call him Immanuel.” The Bible provides a direct translation: “Immanuel” means “God with us.” Consider these two verses: in 1:21, the angel told Joseph that “you are to give him the name Jesus,” and in 1:23, “they will call him Immanuel.” From this, we know that the names of Christ—Immanuel and Jesus, are connected.

Jesus Christ came in the flesh to be among His people. The Lord Jesus was the very presence of God. He came into the world and experienced what we experienced. He promised to be with us in our daily testing and trials (Heb 2:16-18). However, do not forget this: when a man rejects this Savior, who is “God with us,” the consequence is going to be dreadful! The work of saving people from their sins is that those who were once against God, may now be with Him. Without first being saved from sin, one will not desire God’s presence nor will one experience the blessings of God’s presence.<sup>18</sup>

3. The Name of the Lord. “She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus” (1:21a). Luke 1:31 also says the same thing when the angel appeared to Mary: “You are to give him the name Jesus.” “Jesus” is the Greek form of the Aramaic name “Joshua,” in meaning “Yahweh saves.” Through this name, God clearly revealed that the work of Christ was to “save His people from their sins.” “Save” or “saved” is a crucial word for Christians. The Apostles said that those who believe are saved through the Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 2:21; 4:12). Being “saved” is a sharp contrast with our previous state of being “lost.” It is what we are in Christ after we believe. Jesus said that it is sin to reject God our Creator and its consequence is the judgment of God’s wrath (Matt 3:7; 13:41-42; John 3:36; 8:24). It is God’s mercy that causes our conscience to acknowledge our sin. He enlightens us to recognize that life is empty and meaningless. When we put our trust in Jesus Christ, God places all of our sins upon Christ, and saves us from the bondage of sin and a life of hopelessness. The word “save” has another meaning—“to set free, to deliver.” Therefore, Christ not only saves us from sin, He also delivers us from the power of sin (Rom 6:6-7) so that we can have new life in Christ and live a life of victory over sin by the Holy Spirit. We are thus restored to a healthy spiritual life from our past weaknesses brought by sin.

Before Jesus came into the world, people’s idea about God was ambiguous and often erroneous. They often try to know God by guessing and searching. But when Jesus came, He manifested God the Father so that when men saw Jesus, they saw the Father (John 1:18; 14:9). From Jesus, we see God’s holiness, kindness, righteousness, mercy, wisdom, and power. The purpose of Jesus’s coming was to save us. When we were in sin and suffering, we could not save ourselves from the punishment of sin. No matter how good we are, we cannot do away with our sinful nature. Only Jesus can solve the problem of sin. He came not to help us to save ourselves but to become our Savior and to rescue us from the power of the punishment of sin. If you are willing to thank Christ for dying on the cross for your sins, to believe in Him, and to yield the ownership of your life to His authority, you will immediately receive a new life in Christ.<sup>19</sup>

Through Joseph’s initial reaction and response after hearing Mary’s pregnancy, we can learn that God always has the best solution to all of our problems. He has ways that are beyond what we can think of ourselves. We must pray and ask God for His wisdom to help us to make the right decision in difficult situations.

#### **D. Conclusion**

The hope and eager anticipation of every generation for the arrival of the Messiah is clearly seen through the genealogy of Jesus. Abraham and King David waited for the Son of God to fulfill His promises. Yet, with the passing of generations one after another, faith gradually dwindled with what was not seen—as they continued to wait for God to prove Himself. Regimes rose and fell as they continued to wait for God’s revival. Men in captivity wept in sorrow and sighing, and hoped for God to rescue. What would God do?

Christ the Anointed, the promised Son of David, born in the fulfillment of time.  
He established His throne on earth, ruled with righteousness and done away with sin.  
He set the captives free, caused the blind to see, announced God’s gospel of peace.<sup>20</sup>

Christ came to the world for sinners. He came to be our Savior and our Immanuel!

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## List of Sources Consulted

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#6. 摩根解經—馬太福音	活泉	6: #4.p15
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