

ROOTS

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By Pastor Stan
Matthew 1:1-17

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INTRO.

-- Today, we're starting a series in the Gospel of Matthew. I have preached many sermons from passages in Matthew but have never preached through the book entirely.

Let's do a brief introduction before we look at the first verses.

-- The first four books in the NT (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John) are "gospels," a term that literally means "good news." These Gospels are not biographies that tell about Jesus' life; rather, they are books that tell the good news that the Savior has come in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. Apart from Jesus' birth, the Gospels focus on Jesus' three-year ministry and on His final week, leading up to His crucifixion death, burial, and resurrection.

Each of the Gospels presents a particular portrait that emphasizes a certain aspect of who Jesus is, for example:

John presents Jesus as "the Son of God," emphasizing Jesus' deity.

Luke presents Jesus as "the Son of Man," emphasizing that the One who was fully God became fully human in the person of Jesus.

Mark presents Jesus as "the Suffering Servant," emphasizing that Jesus came as a servant who would give His life as a ransom for sinners.

Matthew presents Jesus as "the Sovereign King," emphasizing that Jesus is the promised Messiah who would come as the descendant of David and would reign forever as King of kings and Lord of lords.

-- Matthew starts this portrait of Jesus with a genealogy. Unless you're a Mormon genealogies probably don't seem all that exciting to you, especially biblical genealogies, which seem to be nothing but a list of hard-to-pronounce names. For most of us, when we come to a genealogy in the Bible we practice our speed reading. But that would be an unfortunate mistake with Matthew's genealogy. Matthew is very intentional in the presentation of this genealogy and has some rich insights to offer to us in it.

Cf., Matthew 1:1-17

-- In this genealogy Matthew gives us a marvelous picture of God's sovereignty and an intriguing insight into Jesus' identity.

I. God's Sovereignty

-- Let's begin by exploring how this genealogy pictures God's sovereignty.

A. Displayed in His Directing of Human History

-- God's sovereignty is displayed in the way He directed human history to fulfill the promise of a Savior.

Cf., vv. 1-2

-- Starting with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the genealogy proceeds through 46 individuals leading up to the birth of Jesus. Then Matthew concludes in v. 17.

v. 17

-- When the ESV says that so-and-so "was the father of" so-and-so, a more literal translation would be that so-and-so "fathered" (or as the old KJV said "begat"). Now, in Jewish genealogies to say that someone "fathered" someone doesn't necessarily mean that the person born was a literal son - it could have been a grandchild or great-grandchild. In the Hebrew way of thinking you "fathered" someone as long as they were one of your descendants. So Matthew leaves out one or more generations in places. He does that so that he can have exactly 14 generations in each section of the genealogy. We'll see why the number 14 is so important later on.

B. 3 Key OT Eras

-- For now, let's look at the 3 key OT eras that Matthew identifies in verse 17.

1. Abraham to David

-- This was the "Pre-Monarchy Era," which included the time of the Patriarchs, the Exodus from Egypt, the conquest of the Promised Land, and the leadership of judges like Samson and Samuel.

2. David to the Exile

-- This was the "Monarchy Era," which started with the Golden Age of Kings David and Solomon and was followed by national decline that began with a civil war that split the nation into Northern and Southern Kingdoms and ended with the Northern Kingdom's destruction at the hands of the Assyrian army and the destruction of the Southern Kingdom by the Babylonians and the deportation of the Jews to exile in Babylon.

3. Exile to Christ

-- This final era started with the return of the Jews to their homeland and included the rebuilding of Jerusalem and the Temple, the ministry of the last OT prophet (Malachi), and 400 years of waiting until heaven's silence was broken with the angelic announcement that the promised Messiah was about to be born.

C. God Is Directing It All.

-- What we need to understand here is that God was directing all of this.

-- **Ephesians 1:3-4a** Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, **⁴** even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world

-- God omnisciently foresaw the fall of Adam and decreed to send His Son, the second person of the Trinity, to rescue sinners from the consequences of Adam's disobedience. The OT is the record of how God directed the events of human history to accomplish that decree, which was made before the world existed.

-- As Matthew indicates, God fulfilled that plan by directing the lives of individuals through succeeding generations starting with Abraham, whom God chose to be the patriarchal ancestor of the Savior.

-- But God directed not only the lives of individuals but also the affairs of entire nations and empires. The Egyptian, Assyrian, Babylonian, Persian, Greek, and Roman empires ruled the world; but they were nothing more than instruments to serve the purposes of the sovereign God.

-- Everything that happened throughout these eras unfolded according to the eternal plan of God. And He was directing everything towards the birth of Jesus, who is the focus of all history. We recognize that truth every time we write the date. We say that it is 2016, which means that it is 2,016 years since what? The Birth of Jesus. All dates before that event are called "B.C." (Before Christ), and all years since that event are called "A.D." (not After Death" but "Anno Domini," Latin for "the year of the Lord," that is, since His birth). God has sovereignly set Jesus at the center of history.

-- And that brings us to the second but primary purpose of Matthew's genealogy - to present evidence about Jesus' identity.

II. Jesus' Identity

-- cf., v. 1

A. Jesus Is the Fulfillment of Promises to Send a Messiah.

-- Matthew starts his genealogy by referring to Jesus as "the son of David, the son of Abraham."

1. The first promise and prophecy of a Messiah (Savior) occurs immediately after Adam and Eve's sin in the Garden. Speaking judgment to the Serpent, God promises that one of the woman's descendants will be a Savior who will deliver a crushing defeat to Satan.

2. Then as you proceed through the OT God makes a covenant with two men that this promised Savior will be their descendant: Abraham and David.

a. Chronologically, the first covenant and promise was with Abraham.

Genesis 12:3 And I will bless those who bless you. And the one who curses you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed.

Genesis 22:18 In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed.

-- Matthew's genealogy starts with Abraham to show us that Jesus fulfills the promise that the Messiah would be a descendant of Abraham.

b. Then centuries later God chooses the great King David to be the specific Abrahamic line through whom the Messiah will come.

2 Samuel 7:16 Your house and your kingdom will endure before me forever;

your throne shall be established forever.

-- Now, Matthew has deliberately arranged this genealogy to demonstrate that Jesus is David's descendant. Not only does Matthew give the names of those who form a direct line from David to Jesus, Matthew also reinforces that connection between David and Jesus in the structure of the genealogy.

Look again at verse 17.

v. 17

As we've already seen, David divides the genealogy into three sections, and he lists 14 descendants in each section. Again, as I pointed out earlier, if you included the name of every descendant you would have more than 14 names in each section; so Matthew has selectively condensed the genealogy so that there are exactly 14 names in each section. Why is the number 14 so important? That goes back to something practiced by the ancient Hebrews called gematria, assigning numeric values to letters and words. A letter would have a certain numeric value determined by its place in the alphabet. For example, in English "A" would have a value of 1, "B" a value of 2, "C" a value of 3 and so on. So if you add together the numeric value of the letters in the name "David" (d-v-d only because the Hebrew alphabet doesn't have any vowels) the total is 14 - so 14 is the numeric value of the name David. Furthermore, the 14th person in the genealogy is David. So Matthew is emphasizing to his Jewish readers in as many ways as possible that Jesus is the one who fulfills the promise that one of David's descendants would be the Messiah and King who would reign forever.

B. Jesus Is Both Man and God.

-- One more brief observation about Matthew's genealogy is that it identifies Jesus as being both man and God, both human and divine.

Cf., v. 1, "the genealogy of Jesus Christ"

1. Jesus' Humanity

-- Jesus is an earthly name, and the genealogy emphasizes Jesus' human nature, that He is descended from a line of real human ancestors. In fact, there is some dirty laundry that is hung out for public display in this genealogy. Take, for example the women mentioned here. Listing women in a Jewish genealogy was rare, but what is really unusual are the women that Matthew chooses to include.

Tamar (v. 3b) – Judah and Tamar were not husband and wife. Tamar was Judah's daughter-in-law, who tricked Judah into having sex with her, which resulted in the birth of twin boys, Perez and Zerah. So Perez, the result of an incestuous affair, is one of Jesus' ancestors.

Rahab (v. 5a) – Rahab was a Gentile prostitute in the city of Jericho. Because she protected the Jewish spies, she was spared when the city was destroyed and became the wife of a Jewish man and became the ancestor of a man named Boaz who will marry a woman named Ruth, who is also named in the genealogy.

Ruth (vv. 5b-6) – Ruth was also a Gentile, a Moabite to be exact; the Moabites were pagan enemies of Israel and under a curse of God and forbidden for a while to worship at the Tabernacle, but Ruth ended up marrying a Jewish man named Boaz and became the grandmother of King David.

Bathsheba ("Uriah's wife") (v. 6b) – Connected to David in the genealogy is "Uriah's wife," who, of course, was Bathsheba, and she is in this genealogy as a result of adultery and murder.

-- By including such scandalous connections in Jesus' genealogy Matthew is showing us that Jesus identified with fallen humanity, that His grace would be available to all kinds of sinners, and that He would be a Savior for all peoples, Jews and Gentiles.

2. Jesus' Deity

-- Matthew also points to Jesus' deity.

Cf., v. 1

-- "Christ" is not Jesus' last name. It is a title.

Cf., v. 16

-- The title Christ is the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew word Messiah, and both terms point to Jesus' deity. We see the truth of Jesus' deity in the precise wording in the verse. Throughout the genealogy Matthew has repeated the same pattern: "was the father of...was the father of...was the father of..." But when he comes to Joseph, Matthew changes. Instead of saying "Joseph was the father of Jesus," Matthew says, "Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom Jesus was born." And the phrase "of whom" is a feminine gender in the Greek, meaning that it can refer only to Mary.

The point Matthew is making is that legally Jesus is Joseph's son and can trace His ancestry back to David and Abraham, but biologically Jesus is not Joseph's son - Jesus' only biological parent was Mary.

CONCLUSION

Now, Matthew is ready to start telling us the amazing story of Jesus' coming to earth. But that's for next week.