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The Genesis of Jesus

The Good News of Jesus' Genealogy

Scripture: Matthew 1:1-17

Sermon Series: *Matthew*

Topic: Fulfillment

Introduction

What should you do when you come to the text of God's word and it doesn't seem to speak to you?

How should you think about holy Scripture when the purpose(s) for which it was written appears to be hidden from you?

How should you respond when what you find in Scripture surprises you?
What ought you to do when the Bible appears to contradict itself?

Review

Last week we began a new sermon series through the Gospel According to Matthew. We learned that Matthew is one of the earliest gospels to have been written and may even have been the first.¹ Matthew may have finished his gospel sometime around the middle of the first century, near the late 50's or early 60's. This would place his gospel to about 20 or so years after Jesus' ascension into heaven.

We also learned that Matthew was one of Jesus' Twelve Disciples. Thus he was an eyewitness to all of the events of Jesus' public life and ministry and would have known and had access to all of Jesus' family and friends from which to gain information needed in the writing of this gospel. Prior to meeting and being called by Jesus, Matthew was a **tax collector**. In first century Judea tax collectors were viewed by their fellow Jews as traitors and were utterly despised. However, being a tax collector most likely meant that he was very skilled with

¹ R. T. France, *Matthew: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 1, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1985), 31.

numbers, adept at keeping notes and paying attention to details, and almost certainly would have been fluent in Greek as well as Hebrew and Aramaic.

Not only was Matthew a tax collector, he was also a **total convert**. When Jesus called Matthew to follow him, he immediately obeyed "**leaving everything**,"² and followed this young rabbi. He then hosted a large dinner at his house³ in order to introduce all his tax collector and sinner friends to this amazing man named Jesus. Matthew was not ashamed of Jesus and he wanted his world to meet him.

Jesus and his Genesis

Thus, when we turn our attention to the opening words of his gospel, we discover that same focus. Jesus is the focus. Jesus is the one about whom Matthew is writing and he is the one whom Matthew would force us to consider. Matthew introduces us to the beginnings of Jesus. We might say "**the Genesis of Jesus**." Who is this Jesus of Nazareth? It is to Jesus that Matthew directs our attention with the opening words of his gospel.

Matthew 1:1 (ESV)

The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.

Matthew begins his gospel with the words, Βίβλος γενέσεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ...⁴ which if literally translated would be '**the book of the genesis of Jesus Christ**'⁵ (or 'the record of the beginning of Jesus,' or the 'origin of Jesus'). These words would have transported the original Jewish readers back to the opening words of their Hebrew Bible. Matthew's language would have taken them back to "the beginning" of the first book, the book of Genesis. Genesis is the "book of the beginning" of all creation, but now Matthew uses language that would recall God's creative work and power, but he centers our attention on Jesus. One begins to wonder, whether or not Matthew is directing his readers to consider whether or not God is beginning a new creation through Jesus!? It is the unavoidable conclusion that that is exactly what Matthew is doing. God is powerfully at work in Jesus doing a work that is equal in a spiritual scope and scale to the creation of the physical universe.

Gospel Good News

The word 'gospel' means 'good news.' Matthew begins his gospel with 'the record of the genesis of Jesus.' Matthew opens his gospel with a genealogy. When we come across genealogies as we read Scripture, I doubt any of us leap up with inward excitement saying to ourselves, "Glorious good news! A genealogy! Oh, how edified I shall be after reading this and

² Luke 5:28.

³ Luke 5:29-32.

⁴ Kurt Aland et al., *The Greek New Testament, Fourth Revised Edition (Interlinear with Morphology)* (Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1993), Mt 1.

⁵ Richard T. France, "Matthew," in *New Bible Commentary: 21st Century Edition*, ed. D. A. Carson et al., 4th ed. (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1994), 907.

meditating upon this holy list!" More likely we inwardly groan as we lament to ourselves saying, "Oh good grief, another long list of meaningless names!" However, this would *not* have been the response of faithful first-century Jewish readers. Matthew is writing good news ("gospel") and he began with a genealogy!

Consider how important the introduction is to any great piece of literature. We all know the opening sentences of great books.

- "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times..." from *A Tale of Two Cities*, by Charles Dickens.
- "Call me Ishmael," from *Moby Dick* by Herman Melville.
- "In a hole in the ground there lived a hobbit," from *The Hobbit* by J.R.R. Tolkien.
- "Once there were four children whose names were Peter, Susan, Edmond, and Lucy," from C.S. Lewis' *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*.
- "Down in the village of La Mancha..." from *The Adventures of Don Quixote* by Miquel de Cervantes.
- "As I walked through the wilderness of this world, I lighted on a certain place where was a den..." from *The Pilgrim's Progress* by John Bunyan.

Matthew began his gospel with a genealogy of Jesus. Thus, in ways that may seem difficult for us to understand, Matthew saw this as a piece of information of utmost significance and deep importance. He knew this would be good news for Jews who would have picked this up and read it. We then must strive to answer why. We must strive to see why this genealogy is good news!

Good News of Messiah

The answer is there for us, if we have eyes to see, in the very first verse. In this first verse, Matthew gives us an outline of where he is going. "...**Jesus Christ the son of David, the son of Abraham.**" Notice the use of the word 'son' here. In this context, it means 'the descendant of.' Jesus is both the son of David and the son of Abraham. If he is the son of David, then he most certainly is the son of Abraham since David was a son of Abraham.

You'll also note here that Matthew is explicitly indicating to the reader that the material he will be presenting will be a **summary**. Just as Jesus is not the immediate son of David, neither was David the immediate son of Abraham, nevertheless, they were all members of the same family tree. These are true statements, but they are summary statements. What Matthew clearly means is that Jesus is an actual descendant of David and that David was an actual descendant of Abraham. Matthew will tell us why the mention of these two names are good news.

Good News: Jesus is Christ

But first, we see the good news that Jesus is the Christ! The term “christ” is not Jesus’ last name, but rather a title. ‘Christ’ is the Greek translation of the Hebrew word ‘messiah,’ which means “*the one who has been anointed.*”⁶ In the Old Testament (OT) the word is used of kings or prophets who were chosen by God, and thus were anointed with oil, in order to demonstrate God’s choice.

The oil connotes God’s abiding presence and power, to accomplish the purposes for which he called the chosen one. As we progress through history the term ‘messiah,’ came to refer to the one true king of Israel who would fulfill all of God’s promises to Israel and deliver the people of God from all their enemies and establish an everlasting kingdom. Thus, this genealogy is good news because Jesus is the Christ, the one who fulfills all of God’s ancient promises.

Good News: Jesus, Son of David

Two particular promises are in view. Matthew notes this by referencing two men, David and Abraham. Upon hearing these two names the Jewish reader would have recalled God’s promise, or his covenant, with each man. God made incredibly good, gracious, and sweet promises to each of them. In response to David’s desire to build God a house (i.e. a temple), God sweetly said to David,

2 Samuel 7:12-16 (ESV) ¹² When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. ¹³ ... I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. ¹⁵ ...my steadfast love will not depart from him... ¹⁶ And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me. Your throne shall be established forever.”

God made a promise to David that his throne and his kingdom would be established forever. That fulfillment began under the reign of David’s son Solomon. However, Solomon did not live forever and neither did any of the subsequent kings. Thus, God’s promise points to a descendant of David who would never die but rather would reign forever, bringing all of God’s promises to fulfillment.

The term ‘*son of David*’ is used by Matthew 10 times, and in all but three of them it is found on the lips of those crying out to Jesus for healing from sickness or deliverance from demons. The phrase calls to mind the true descendant of David, who like David would be a good shepherd to lead, protect, and provide for the people of God. The term ‘son of David’ points to the fact that Jesus is the fulfillment of God’s gracious promise to David.

⁶ Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 542.

Good News: Jesus Son of Abraham

God also made an amazing promise to Abraham. In response Abraham's willingness to obey God's command to offer up his son, God promised Abraham,

Genesis 22:16-18 (ESV) "By myself I have sworn, declares the LORD, because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, ¹⁷ I will surely bless you, and I will surely multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore. And your offspring shall possess the gate of his enemies, ¹⁸ and in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, because you have obeyed my voice."

Because Abraham was willing to give back his son to God, God the promised to give to Abraham a son through whom blessing would spread throughout the world, "**to all the nations of the earth.**" If you flip to the end of this gospel, then you will find these words on the lips of Jesus, giving command to his disciples teach all nations about him and his commands.

Both of these promises to these two very fallible men⁷ are amazingly gracious. Neither Abraham nor David deserved the blessing contained in these promises. Matthew is here explaining that Jesus is the offspring of David who will "forever establish David's throne" and he is the offspring of Abraham through whom "all nations of the earth will be blessed."

Thus, this good news! Jesus is the fulfillment of God's promises to both Abraham and David. But only if it is true. The gospel of Jesus can truly only be good news if Jesus actually is a descendant of David and Abraham. Fulfillment is merely hope until it can be actually demonstrated to have come to pass. Thus, Matthew begins with this genealogy of Jesus.

Good News for the Binumarien

It is possible for genealogies to be good news. It was certainly good news for the Binumarien tribespeople of Papua New Guinea. The story is told in the book *Hidden People*⁸, by Lynette Oates, but can also be read in an article that tells the story.⁹ I shared this story a year and a half ago, but it's worth telling again.

In the 1970's a young family with Wycliffe Bible Translators moved to Papua New Guinea to live among a the Binumarien tribe. They learned the language and began translating the Gospel of Matthew, but they, like most of us, ignored the first 17 verses of Matthew, which is Jesus' genealogy, and started with the birth of Jesus in verse 18. The translation of the whole book took about a year and throughout that time the tribe remained open but skeptical about Jesus. They doubted that He was a real person.

⁷ When God called Abraham he was an idolator (Josh. 24:2) and David was an adulterer and a murderer (2 Sam. 11).

⁸ Lynette Oates, *Hidden People: How a Remote New Guinea Culture Was Brought Back from the Brink of Extinction* (Albatross Books, 1992). Available here: <https://wycliffe.org.au/store/hidden-people/>.

⁹ Source: <https://creation.com/binumarien-people-find-bible-true> accessed 24 September 2022.

Finally, the translation of Matthew was complete, complete that is except for the first seventeen verses. So the missionary and his language helper worked their way through the boring genealogy of Jesus. As they worked, the missionary noticed that his helper was unusually quiet, but very attentive to their work. When they finished, the helper rose to leave and told the missionary that there would be an important tribal meeting that night and that he must come and bring the portion they had just translated. The missionary was curious. This was unusual behavior, but he agreed to attend the meeting.

When the missionary arrived at the meeting house, it was packed. In fact, he had never seen so many of the tribe gathered together in one place before. All eyes were on him and there was an odd tension in the room. The language helper asked him to read the passage out loud that they had translated that morning. The room grew silent. The missionary started to read. "These are the ancestors of Jesus Messiah, a descendant of King David and of Abraham..." As he read, the tribal people began to stir and move closer and closer to him. Slowly they pressed in around him until they were all touching him. They were straining to look at what he was reading. The missionary was completely surrounded and he grew increasingly nervous. He wondered if what he was reading somehow offended them. Then he finished reading and slowly looked up. All eyes were wide open and transfixed on him.

One man, with a deep look of incredulity, asked, "Why didn't you tell us of this before?" The missionary didn't know how to respond. Another man said, "No one bothers to write down the ancestors of spirit beings. Only real people record their genealogy." Another concluded, "Jesus must be a real man on this earth then. He's not just white man's magic." Then the chief responded, "Then what the missionary has taught [about Jesus] us is true."

This genealogy, that to us seems so unimportant and boring, to the Binumarian people provided sufficient evidence to conclude that Jesus was a real person, that the Bible is true, and that Jesus is God's Son and mankind's Savior.

The Genealogy

After this introductory verse, Matthew begins a pattern of writing that he will carry throughout this entire genealogy. The pattern is A was the father of B, B the father C, C the father of D, and so on. Notice the text.

- ² Abraham was the father of Isaac,
Issac the father of Jacob,
Jacob the father of Judah (& his brothers)
- ³ Judah the father of Perez (and Zerah by Tamar)

and Perez the father of Hezron,
Hezron the father of Ram,

Surprisingly Matthew interrupts the pattern Judah (v. 3) after listing Perez. He interrupts the pattern by naming the mother, which in this case is Tamar (who gave birth to twins by Judah, Zerah being the twin of Perez). The introduction of a woman into the genealogy is a surprise and is “most un-Jewish.”¹⁰ Jewish genealogies did not name mothers, but rather recorded family descent by listing only the name of the father. However, Matthew is breaking with the accepted custom. Not only does he do this here, he will do it four other times.

There are a total of five women included in this genealogy; Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, “the wife of Uriah” (being Bathsheba v.6), and Mary. In the case of each of these five women the circumstances surrounding each of them giving birth is exceedingly unusual and in some cases even scandalous. Tamar, Rahab, and Ruth were all Gentiles. Imagine the fact that there are Gentiles incorporated into the family heritage of the Savior of the Jews!

Tamar was almost certainly a Canaanite¹¹ woman. Judah, against the command of God, chose her as wife for his oldest son. Thus, Tamar was daughter-in-law of Judah. Later, she pretended to be a prostitute and tricked him into sleeping with her.¹²

Rahab was a Canaanite prostitute who lived in Jericho but who put her faith in the God of Israel and helped Israelite spies scout out the city. She was saved from being destroyed with the others of her city and abandoned her former occupation upon being accepted into Israel. She then married and became great-grandmother of king David.

Ruth was a Moabite woman. The Moabites descended from the incestuous relationship of Lot with his two daughters and fought against Israel upon their exit from Egypt. Thus God prohibited any Moabite from entering into corporate worship to the tenth generation.¹³ Ruth left Moab and moved to Bethlehem where she met and married Boaz and then became grandmother to king David.

The fourth woman to be mentioned isn't even named in the text, but rather she is simply referred to as “the wife of Uriah” (v.6), who we know to be Bathsheba. She was an Israelite, but she married Uriah who was a Hittite. The Hittites were one of the nations that God commanded Israel to remove from the Promised Land and that God prohibited from intermarrying with the people of Israel. Bathsheba was mother Solomon.

¹⁰ James Montgomery Boice, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2001), 15.

¹¹ R. T. France, *Matthew: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 1, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1985), 79.

¹² She did this because Judah had failed to keep his promise to give her his youngest son, after her first two husbands, Judah's older two sons, had both been her husbands and both had died at the hand of God. Gen. 38.

¹³ Deut. 23:3.

Why All the Women?

What is Matthew doing? Why does he mention these four women? There are likely several reasons.

1. Perhaps Matthew is considering the history of God's great and gracious work among his people and he, being a tax collector and an *outcast*, is noting that all along the way the sweet God of Israel has included many outcasts like himself in his grand providential governance of Israel. Maybe Matthew wants the outcasts to know that they are neither unseen nor forgotten by the God.
2. Perhaps, by mentioning Gentile women, Matthew is preparing his Jewish audience for the coming truth that Jesus is not only the savior of the Jews, but *he is also the savior of the Gentiles* as well. Jesus is not merely a Jewish, national savior, but he is also the savior of all nations, of all who would come to him in faith.
3. Or perhaps Matthew is preparing us for the unusual circumstances surrounding the birth of Jesus. By noting four women who became pregnant by very abnormal circumstances, maybe Matthew is readying us for the abnormal way in which Mary became pregnant with Jesus (to which we will turn next week!).
4. Or maybe, after having watched Jesus, listened to his teaching, and observed his life, perhaps he has realized that women too are just as much a part of God's great and gracious plan as are men?
5. Or maybe Matthew is doing a little bit of all four?

The Structure: Three 14's

Matthew structures his genealogy in three sections, starting with Abraham and working down to Jesus. The first two sections are taken from 1 Chron. 1-3 and Ruth 4:12-22.

- The first is from Abraham to David (v.2-6).
- The second is from Solomon to the deportation into Babylon (v.6-11).
- The third is from deportation to Joseph (v.12-16).

Verse 17 provides a summary of the whole genealogy by noting that there are fourteen generations from Abraham to David, fourteen from Solomon to the deportation, and fourteen from the deportation to Jesus. Matthew has selectively chosen the names to include in each section. He has not included every single descendant. For example, when you compare Matthew's list with Luke's (3:23-38), you will discover that at least one name has been left out.¹⁴

¹⁴ Compare Matt. 1:3 with Luke 3:33.

Similarly, the four generations that Matthew lists from Perez to Amminadab covers at least 430 years. Perez was born before Israel entered Egypt¹⁵ and Amminidab was alive during the wandering in the wilderness¹⁶ and we know that Israel spent 430 years¹⁷ in slavery in Egypt. Thus, it is almost certain that some names have been intentionally omitted. Also, the six generations listed by Matthew from Nashon to David span a time of at least 400 years and therefore, it is possible that some names have also been omitted here also.

The Greek verb translated “was the father of” (*gennaō*) does not require immediate relationship but often means some thing like “was the ancestor of” or “became the progenitor of.”¹⁸

In the second section, from David to the deportation to Babylon (v.6-11), in v.8, three kings have been omitted between Joram and Uzziah.¹⁹ In v.11, Jehoiakim, son of Josiah, has also been omitted even though he reigned as king for only 3 months.²⁰

The final section, from the deportation to Jesus uses names and lists to which we no longer have extant access. However, this was not the case in the first century. The Jewish historian Josephus (c. A.D. 37-100) makes reference to “public records” from which he was able to gather his own genealogical data. Thus, though these lists are lost to us, they were accessible to Matthew and Luke at the time they wrote.²¹

Why Skip Some Names?

This leaves us with the question, *why would Matthew do this?* Clearly this is intentional. What he has done is too obvious to be an oversight and this gospel was too well accepted for this to be deceptive. This gospel was written during the late 50’s or early 60’s and unanimously accepted by the early church as true and of indispensable value by the early church and those who lived during the first century. None of the early church fathers doubted this gospel or accused Matthew of deception or shoddy research. This gospel was universally accepted and used as a teaching tool for new Christians. If the early church and those closest to the writing of this document saw it as true and helpful and beneficial, then we should not stumble over what may appear to us to be an incomplete record.

However, the most likely answer to why Matthew selectively chose 14 generations to mark each section comes from the practice of *gematria*, which was a rabbinic tool of interpretation. This

¹⁵ Gen. 46:8, 12.

¹⁶ Num. 1:7; 15:7.

¹⁷ Ex. 12:40.

¹⁸ D. A. Carson, “Matthew,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, vol. 8 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984), 65.

¹⁹ Ahaziah, Joash, and Amaziah (2 Kings 8:24; 1 Chronicles 3:11; 2 Chronicles 22:1, 11; 24:27).

²⁰ 2 Kgs. 23:34; 24:6, 14-15; 1 Chron. 3:16.

²¹ Carson, “Matthew,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, 63.

practice used numbers to aid in teaching biblical truth. For example, the numerical value assigned to David's name is 14. In Hebrew only consonants are used, thus D+V+D is represented by 4+6+4=14, since D is the fourth letter of the Hebrew alphabet and V is the sixth. When you add those numbers together, you arrive at a total of 14. Thus, Matthew selectively chose 14 names from each section to trace Jesus' genealogy from Abraham to David, from David to the fall of the dynasty, and from the fall of the dynasty to Jesus. He also may have done this to help make it easier for people to memorize these names. Thus, Matthew is not mistaken. He is simply selective.

And when he says in v.17 that "*all the generations from Abraham to David were fourteen...*" and to the deportation and to Jesus, he simply means all the generations that he has chosen to include in his recounting of Jesus' ancestry. This genealogy is not intended to be exhaustive, but rather memorable and teachable. Thus, he structured it in a memorable way.

Matthew vs. Luke?

Finally, when you compare Matthew's genealogy with Luke's, you will notice significant differences. Some have even claimed that the differences are irreconcilable. As you know by now, Matthew begins with Abraham and works his way down to David and from David down to Jesus. Why? Because Matthew was demonstrating that Jesus is the fulfillment of God's promises to Abraham—that one of his descendants would bring blessing to all nations, and to David—that one of his descendants would reign on his throne forever. Matthew is writing to prove both. Thus, when Matthew arrives at David, you will notice that he traced the line of descent through the royal line of descent concerning the throne. Matthew's concern was primarily who inherited the right to reign. Thus, he moved down from Solomon to Joseph.

Luke's intention was very different. Luke begins with Jesus, not Abraham, and works his way back, in fact all the way back to Adam. However, Luke seems to be tracing the *biological* heritage of Jesus, which again goes back to David, but through Nathan (another of David's sons²²) rather than Solomon. The point is that either way you trace Jesus' lineage, he ends up legally being the descendant of David (and thus necessarily also of Abraham). Some scholars believe that what Luke is doing is actually tracing the lineage of Mary, though this is not immediately obvious from a prima facie reading of the text.

One Last Observation

In verse 16 Matthew makes it abundantly clear that Joseph is not the biological father of Jesus. After tracing the royal lineage down from David to Joseph, Matthew again breaks with his pattern. He does not say, "Joseph was the father of Jesus." Instead, he writes,

Matthew 1:16 (ESV) and Jacob the father of Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom Jesus was born, who is called Christ.

²² Solomon's older brother (1 Chron. 3:5).

Jesus was born “of Mary” without any biological help from Joseph, though Joseph adopted Jesus and raised him as his own son. This miraculous birth is what Matthew will next give his attention to in the verses that follow.

Conclusion

So why is this genealogy included at the beginning of Matthew’s gospel, such good news?

First, because Matthew is overjoyed that Jesus is the **Christ**, the one whom God anointed to fulfill all God’s promises to his people.

Second, because Jesus is the legal **son of David** who alone is the resurrected, living fulfillment of God’s promise to David, to put one of his descendants on the throne of David forever, and thus fully establish the kingdom of God.

Third, because Jesus is the **son of Abraham** who brings blessings to all nations. This is why Jesus’ last words recorded by Matthew is the command to make disciples of all nations, by baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit and teaching them to obey all that Jesus commanded.

Fourth, this genealogy is good news because it is filled with unworthy, unrighteous outcasts whom God has graciously chosen to include in his grand plan to redeem the lost and bring back the wanderers.

So what should you do when you come to texts that don’t seem to speak to you?

Stop. Pray for understanding. Read it again and again and again. And realize that if it doesn’t immediately speak to you, then perhaps it’s for someone else, or for you at a later time. Keep digging and meditating on it. There’s always more to God’s word than is first apparent.

How should we think about Scripture for which we can’t see the purpose?

We should admit that God’s purposes are often hidden for a time and then later revealed in the fulness of time. God is not obligated to reveal anything to us, much less to expect him to reveal everything to us all at once. But in his great kindness he does reveal truth to us. He reveals to us what he wants us to know. If we are faithful to him, then he will reveal more to us later on.

How should we respond when the Bible appears to contradict itself?

Have more faith in the intelligence of God than you do in the intelligence of man. The apparent fault or contradiction is not in the word of God, but rather in our imperfect and partial understanding. We should faithfully humble ourselves under God’s word while patiently and faithfully seeking answers, rather than arrogantly assuming our knowledge is full and complete.