

**The King Comes According to God's Plan:
Son of Abraham, Son of David, Son of God**

Matthew 1:1-17

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

² Abraham was the father of Isaac, and Isaac the father of Jacob, and Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers, ³ and Judah the father of Perez and Zerah by Tamar, and Perez the father of Hezron, and Hezron the father of Ram, ⁴ and Ram the father of Amminadab, and Amminadab the father of Nahshon, and Nahshon the father of Salmon, ⁵ and Salmon the father of Boaz by Rahab, and Boaz the father of Obed by Ruth, and Obed the father of Jesse, ⁶ and Jesse the father of David the king.

And David was the father of Solomon by the wife of Uriah, ⁷ and Solomon the father of Rehoboam, and Rehoboam the father of Abijah, and Abijah the father of Asaph,^[b] ⁸ and Asaph the father of Jehoshaphat, and Jehoshaphat the father of Joram, and Joram the father of Uzziah, ⁹ and Uzziah the father of Jotham, and Jotham the father of Ahaz, and Ahaz the father of Hezekiah, ¹⁰ and Hezekiah the father of Manasseh, and Manasseh the father of Amos,^[c] and Amos the father of Josiah, ¹¹ and Josiah the father of Jechoniah and his brothers, at the time of the deportation to Babylon.

¹² And after the deportation to Babylon: Jechoniah was the father of Shealtiel,^[d] and Shealtiel the father of Zerubbabel, ¹³ and Zerubbabel the father of Abiud, and Abiud the father of Eliakim, and Eliakim the father of Azor, ¹⁴ and Azor the father of Zadok, and Zadok the father of Achim, and Achim the father of Eliud, ¹⁵ and Eliud the father of Eleazar, and Eleazar the father of Matthan, and Matthan the father of Jacob, ¹⁶ and Jacob the father of Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom Jesus was born, who is called Christ.

¹⁷ So all the generations from Abraham to David were fourteen generations, and from David to the deportation to Babylon fourteen generations, and from the deportation to Babylon to the Christ fourteen generations.

- Matthew 1:1-17, ESV

Intro: A List of Names? How Boring!

Many of you know that I teach some high school classes on the side. It used to be my career, and now it's kind of my hobby. I've been a high school English teacher for 21 years now, and I love teaching students how to write and speak well. Like most English teachers, I like teaching writing much better than I like grading students' papers. One of things you teach students in writing or speaking is to make sure you have a really interesting and compelling opening: Tell a story, have a compelling quote from a recognized authority, give a surprising statistic, or something like that. Never in 21 years of teaching have I recommended that a student open a paper or a speech with a list of 42 names, most of which are hard to pronounce and unfamiliar, with a handful of well-known names sprinkled in.

Yet, this is now only how Matthew open his Gospel, but it's how God has ordained that the whole New Testament opens. 400 years of silence stand between the last words of Malachi in the Old Testament

and the first words of Matthew in the New Testament, and God breaks His silence and opens His New Testament with a list of 42 names, arranged in three groups of 14. So, why?

Many commentators note that Matthew's primary audience for his Gospel was Jewish people, and they note that Jewish people have always valued genealogies. Certainly, this is important, as Matthew's Jewish audience is important for understanding all of his Gospel. And yet, that explanation is really too narrow. Matthew's Gospel is not just "the most Jewish" and "written for a Jewish audience," but it is the first book of the New Testament because it serves as a bridge between the Old Testament and the New Testament (Matthew's Gospel has over 50 quotes from the Old Testament in its 28 chapters), and Matthew's genealogy builds this bridge from Abraham to David to Jesus, showing us – in a list of names – how all of God's purposes and promises for His people and the nations were fulfilled in Jesus the Son of David, the Son of Abraham, and the Son of God.

For us, Matthew's genealogy shows us how God keeps His promises and provides for the deliverance of His people and the blessing of the nations through the promised and long-awaited Messiah. It strengthens our faith in the promises of God as we live in a world where those promises often seem so far away.

A. God's Perfect Plan and Timing

Matthew arranges his genealogy of Jesus under two main covenantal promises and then in three historical groupings of 14 generations each. Matthew is demonstrating the perfect keeping of God's promises and the perfect timing of the fulfillment of those promises.

The two covenant promises are God's promise to Abraham that through His seed, or offspring, all of the nations of the earth would be blessed, and then God's promise to David that God would build David a house – a kingly dynasty – that would last forever, through a king who would be the Son of David and who would reign forever.

The three time periods are the time from Abraham to David, which is the preparation for the Davidic dynasty, then the time from David to the exile, which is the time of the establishment of the Davidic dynasty, and then the time from the Babylonian exile to Christ, which is the time of the eclipsing of the Davidic dynasty and the waiting for the arrival of the Messiah. Each of the three time periods is defined as 14 generations by Matthew. Numbers, like genealogies, are very important in Jewish culture, but, more importantly, both genealogies and numbers are important in the Bible, in God's plan and purposes.

As soon as we realize that God made vitally important covenant promises involving an offspring of Abraham and an offspring of David, we should immediately see the importance of tracing the family line of Jesus back to both of these men, to show that Jesus is the fulfillment of these covenant promises. And God constantly uses numbers to define and describe His plans and purposes: Seven is the number of divine completion, as God finished the work of Creation in six days and then rested on the seventh, marking the seventh day as holy, the day of divine completion, of divine rest. Three is the divine number, as God is a Trinity – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – and the four living creatures around the throne of God cry out day and night – Holy, Holy, Holy. Some Bible scholars have pointed out that seven is the number of divine completion in part because you get seven by adding together three – the divine

number – with four, a common number of completion (like the four winds of heaven, the four directions, etc.)

Fourteen is twice seven, and three groups of fourteen is six groups of seven. Jesus thus comes at the end of six groups of seven, which are grouped into three groups, each having two sevens. Jesus comes at the end of six sevens, which means He is the completion of the work of God leading up to His coming. He is the end of the genealogical line. Once Jesus comes, the covenant promises made to both Abraham and David are fulfilled and genealogies now don't matter anymore. (But they can still be fun to study, as a curiosity.)

Yet, we should not miss the fact that the end of the six sevens is also the beginning of the seventh seven, which is why this comes at the beginning of Matthew's Gospel, and not at the end. Jesus isn't finishing, He's fulfilling, which means by completing the line of Promise, He is ushering in the New Age, the New Covenant, the seventh seven, the divine rest for the people of God. He is the fulfillment of the Old Testament promises, but He is also the first-born of the New Creation, the Second Adam, the head of a new humanity, made new in Him.

To help us see that Matthew is intentionally highlighting Jesus as the beginning of a new creation and the head of a new humanity, we only need to look at the first two words of Matthew, the first two words of the New Testament. In Greek, the first two words are *Biblos Geneseos*. One thing we know for sure from Matthew's Gospel is that he knew his Old Testament very well. If you think *Biblos Geneseos* sounds like it could mean "Book of Genesis," you're pretty smart! *Geneseos* is the Greek title of the first book of the Bible, which we translate into English as Genesis. It means genealogy, but it also means beginning or origin. So, "*The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ*" could also be translated as "*the record of the beginning of Jesus Christ*" or "*the record of the origin of Jesus Christ*".

Even more interestingly, these two words together – *Biblos Geneseos* – are found only two other places in the Bible – in Genesis 2:4 and in Genesis 5:1 –

"These are the generations [Lit, "this is the book/record/account of the beginning"] of the heavens and the earth when they were created, in the day that the LORD God made the earth and the heavens." – Gen 2:4

"This is the book of the generations of Adam. When God created man, he made him in the likeness of God." – Gen 5:1

So, the only two places where "*biblos geneseos*" is used in Matthew's Bible (which would have been the Greek Bible, just like we read an English Bible) is at the creation of the heavens and the earth and at the first genealogy, the genealogy of Adam. So, Matthew is using this language intentionally, for Jesus is the beginning of the new creation, the new and better Adam over a new genealogy of a new humanity.

And yet, while Jesus is the beginning of a new creation and a new humanity, He is such as the fulfillment of the Old Covenant promises. The New Covenant is not so much a replacement of the Old as the planned fulfillment of the Old. It's not that God said, "Well, I tried this whole Jewish people, nation of Israel, Davidic dynasty thing, and it didn't work, so now I guess I'll send my Son to be the Savior. Plan A failed, so now we need to go to Plan B." No, Jesus was the plan of God all along, and that's why it's

critical that we see that the One who comes as the beginning of a new creation and a new humanity is Himself the Son of David and the Son of Abraham.

B. God's Covenant Promise: Son of David

Matthew begins with the title “Son of David,” even though Abraham comes first and the covenant with Abraham is almost a thousand years older than the covenant with David because “Son of David” was probably the most common Messianic title in Israel in the first century. “Son of David” was a more nationalistic Messianic title, calling forth images of a Messiah who would re-establish Israel’s greatness as a nation and would lead them to freedom from their Roman oppressors. After all, David led Israel to victory on the battlefield even before he was king, and his reign ushered in the Golden Age of Israel, when his son, Solomon, reigned over a unified Israel which enjoyed regional supremacy and peace. “Son of David” was an expression of national hope for a return to those glory days.

Jesus is the Son of David, but in a way that is both different from and superior to the expectations of the Jewish people in the first century. They were looking for a mere human being who would be a great military leader and king. Yet the very words of the promise God made to David should have shown God’s people that the Promised One would be so much greater:

I will give you rest from all your enemies. Moreover, the LORD declares to you that the LORD will make you a house. 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 He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. ¹⁴ I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son. When he commits iniquity, I will discipline him with the rod of men, with the stripes of the sons of men, ¹⁵ but my steadfast love will not depart from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away from before you. ¹⁶ And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me. Your throne shall be established forever.” – 2 Samuel 7:11-16, ESV

“I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever.” No mere human being can sit on a throne over a kingdom forever.

What about this language of “When he commits iniquity, I will discipline him with the rod of men, with the stripes of the sons of men”? Surely this can’t be about Jesus, because Jesus never committed any sin, right? No, He didn’t, but Jesus became sin for us by taking our sin upon Himself, and that’s when God disciplined His own dear Son with the rod of men and the stripes of men on a Roman cross.

And so the Promised Son of David would be the Son of God who would reign forever on His throne over His kingdom. He shall reign forevermore!

In this way, the Son of David would be greater than David. Jesus Himself pointed this out, later in Matthew’s Gospel, in Matthew 22:

⁴¹ Now while the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them a question, ⁴² saying, “What do you think about the Christ? Whose son is he?” They said to him, “The son of David.” ⁴³ He said to them, “How is it then that David, in the Spirit, calls him Lord, saying,

⁴⁴ “The Lord said to my Lord,
 “Sit at my right hand,
 until I put your enemies under your feet”?”

⁴⁵ If then David calls him Lord, how is he his son?” ⁴⁶ And no one was able to answer him a word, nor from that day did anyone dare to ask him any more questions.

- Matthew 22:42-45, ESV

So, the Son of David was always promised to be greater than David. But Matthew also wants to remind his readers that the Son of David was also the Son of Abraham. The same Messiah who would come to fulfill the covenant promise to David would fulfill God’s covenant promise to Abraham, and this would mean so much more than just national independence and prosperity.

C. God’s Covenant Promise: Son of Abraham

God’s promise to Abraham was not that he would be the father of a great nation that would enjoy prosperity and peace, but that through his offspring all the nations of the earth would be blessed. God’s covenant with Abraham was first made in God’s call of Abraham in Genesis 12, but it is repeated in Genesis 15, 17 & 22.

The first time the covenant promise is given is in Genesis 12:

Now the LORD said to Abram, “Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. ² And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. ³ I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.” – Genesis 12:1-2, ESV

God makes the promise one last time, most clearly, on Mount Moriah, after Abraham was willing to sacrifice his own son, Isaac, the long-awaited son of God’s promise. God spared Isaac and spared Abraham:

But the angel of the LORD called to him from heaven and said, “Abraham, Abraham!” And he said, “Here I am.” ¹² He said, “Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him, for now I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me.” ¹³ And Abraham lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, behind him was a ram, caught in a thicket by his horns. And Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering instead of his son. ¹⁴ So Abraham called the name of that place, “The LORD will provide”; as it is said to this day, “On the mount of the LORD it shall be provided.”

¹⁵ And the angel of the LORD called to Abraham a second time from heaven ¹⁶ and said, “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.”

- Genesis 22:11-18, ESV

It is significant that this final pronouncement of the covenant promise is the one most clearly focused “*in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed*” and that God gives it right after Isaac, the promised son of Abraham, carried wood on his back up the slope of Mount Moriah, where he would lay himself down as a willing self-sacrifice (Abraham did not force Isaac to get on the altar), and so the father was offering up the son, but the son was also freely offering himself. On the way up the mountain, Isaac had asked his father, “Where is the lamb for the sacrifice?” Abraham had answered, “God himself will provide the lamb.” God provided a ram that day, not a lamb, but He also promised that on that mountain, He would provide – “*On the mount of the LORD it shall be provided*” can also be more literally translated “*On the mount of the LORD He shall be seen.*”

And just as the promised Son of David was One who is greater than David and David’s Lord, so also the promised Son of Abraham was one who was greater than Abraham and One whom Abraham longed to see:

56 Your father Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day. He saw it and was glad.” 57 So the Jews said to him, “You are not yet fifty years old, and have you seen Abraham?” 58 Jesus said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am.”

I believe it was on Mount Moriah on that day recorded in Genesis 22 that Abraham rejoiced that he would see the day when the Lord would provide the Lamb of God, and He would be seen – the One greater than Abraham, the One Abraham trusted and saw by faith.

D. Every Promise Kept: Son of God

The Promised One who comes as Son of David and Son of Abraham is no less than the Son of God, God in the Flesh. Matthew will make this even more clear later in this chapter, as we’ll see on Christmas Eve. Here in the genealogy, it’s hinted at by the strange way Joseph is included at the end:

and Jacob the father of Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom Jesus was born, who is called Christ.

It’s not “*Jacob the father of Joseph the father of Jesus, who is called Christ,*” because, of course, Joseph is not Jesus’ natural, biological father. Some people have criticized the Bible here and have said that Matthew establishes Joseph’s genealogy but not Jesus’, so Matthew proves that Joseph was the Son of David and the Son of Abraham but not Jesus. But Jesus was given to Joseph as his son, though He was by nature the Son of God. He was legally, covenantally, by adoption and by inheritance right, the Son of Joseph, even as He was by nature and origin the Son of God. Jesus was given to Joseph to be his firstborn son.

And yet He needed to be so much more than the natural-born Son of Joseph or Son of David or Son of Abraham. He had to be the Son of God, divinely given, sent from heaven to earth, so He could be the heir of all things, the eternal king, the gift of God.

“*For unto us a child is born, unto us a Son is given . . .*” - Isaiah 9. What son? Is He one who is merely the Son of David and the Son of Abraham? No. “*For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, so that whoever believes in Him will not perish but have eternal life.*” – John 3:16

So, God makes precious promises to His people, and then He fulfills the promises in the gift of His only Son.

Conclusion: Whose Promises Can You Trust?

Christmas is a time of year full of many promises. The truth is that all of the promise of the Christmas season will only be partially and fleetingly fulfilled in this life, in this “most wonderful time of the year.” We’re also heading into an Olympic year and a Presidential election year, both of which are occasions of great promises. We’ve grown cynical to the promises of politicians, and so when we’re staring at trillion-dollar deficits and a national debt quickly approaching \$25 Trillion and politicians are promising us free health care and free college and a secure retirement for all, we’re understandably skeptical.

But we live our lives on the basis on promise, those promises we truly believe. We believe the promise that our car will run and take us where we need to go, so we get in a turn the key. We believe the promise of our boss to pay us, so we go to work.

This Christmas season, whose promises can you trust? Sometimes people have the best intentions, but they just can’t keep their promises – it proves to be too costly or too hard. God has made some spectacular promises: To take away our sin, adopt us into His family, give us eternal life, and a place with Him forever. And even though it cost Him an unspeakable price, even though it was unbelievably hard for Jesus, God has kept His promises. This strange list of names proves that. Will we trust Him?

What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? - Romans 8:31-32, ESV