

# Who is this Jesus?

## Matthew 1:1-17

*Dale Evans*

Genealogies have become big business in our culture. People want to know “from whence they came.” From small, niche businesses have grown huge websites that, for a price, will help you to find your family tree. I am guessing that among you, some have used these sites to discover who your ancestors are. I hope that worked out for you. I have always wanted to trace my ancestry. I know that my family has Welsh, Irish and German roots on both sides. My dad used to say he was told his family was “Irish and Dutch and don’t amount to much.” This is pretty much what I know.

However, genealogies are very important in the Bible. Genealogies provide a way to give a summary of history. Each name had a story or even stories to go with them. The Old Testament authors used genealogies to demonstrate the line of the Christ, the promised seed in Genesis down to Abraham and his family and beyond. Probably in light of this, genealogies were very important to Jewish people. They were necessary to certify their tribe and to maintain their tribal and family lands. Since all legitimate priests had to be Levites and all legitimate kings had to be from the tribe of Judah, they were necessary for the priesthood and the kings.

The Gospel according to Matthew opens with a genealogy. Not the way modern literature instruction would teach one to start writing. Its arrangement is simply a list of people in 3 stylized sets, which obviously is not intended to do what normal Jewish genealogies do. It is a true listing but it is full of surprises.

What is Matthew doing by opening this biography the way he does? One writer is very helpful in highlighting the opening 4 chapters of the book.

Ancient biographies could open with the subject’s public vocation, as in Mark, but often began by rehearsing the background of the central character. Such background might include a noble or prominent ancestry (Mt 1:1-17), virtuous parents (1:18-25), childhood background that introduced themes relevant to the subject’s later public activity (2:1-23), the attestation of others to the person’s character (3:1-17), including that of the person’s adherents (4:18-25), and qualifying tests through which the person’s character was proved (4:1-11). Such introductory comments set the tone for the whole of the work that would follow. (Keener, *Logos Application*)

The Gospel of Matthew is meant to draw in both Jew and Gentile. A Jewish person would recognize the importance of the opening genealogy. A Gentile person would recognize the standard biographical features. From the very beginning, the book is working to take the two threads and begin to weave them together into a melodic line: the King is here, the kingdom has begun and it will be a forever kingdom for all peoples who come to it by faith.

The Gospel of Matthew is known, even by non-evangelicals, for its amazing literary artistry. But the Gospel's style and form is not there merely to entertain, and entertaining it is, but the structure highlights its intended emphasis and meaning. So, before reading this genealogy, let's think about what God is asserting and teaching in this opening section of this captivating presentation of Jesus, the Christ.

### **Its Place**

Why would you put a genealogy like this here?

#### **At the beginning...**

Why here at the beginning before you say much of anything else? Matthew is providing a bridge, a connection between the old covenant and the new covenant. In doing so, it establishes that the opening part of the book starts in Jerusalem and will broaden until at the end of the book it launches into the entire world. Jesus then is the culmination of the Old Covenant lineage, the old Jerusalem. He is also the beginning of the New Covenant kingdom and family the new Jerusalem.

#### **As a biography...**

Jewish biographies put great stock in genealogies. Again, it was critical for asserting the tribal and family rights to the land and even occupation. This often led to a kind of tribal and genealogical pride. It was very important for a Jew to be able to say, "I know where I come from. I know who my family line are."

Since Jesus is being presented as the king, it is important to establish His pedigree. Jesus must clearly be a Jew. He must clearly be of the tribe of Judah. He must clearly be from the line of David. Here at the beginning of the book, Jesus is attested in the Jewish way to be the King of the Jews. Later, at the end of the book in Matthew 27:37, he is attested to be the King of Jews by the Gentiles by the inscription nailed over his head on the cross:

"And over his head they put the charge against him,

which read, ‘This is Jesus, the King of the Jews.’”

## **Its Purposes**

What is Matthew accomplishing with this genealogy?

### **To connect Jesus to the Covenants**

In Matthew 1:1, Jesus is asserted to be the son of Abraham and the son of David. The genealogy will prove that to be so. This not only connects Him to these two important people in Jewish history, but also to what they brought about and what they represent. Jesus is the ultimate fulfillment of the covenant made to Abraham. The Abrahamic Covenant promised a seed, a descendent, that would bring blessing to the entire world. Isaac was the near, immediate fulfillment, but was obviously inadequate. Jesus is presented as the final and more complete fulfillment. Jesus is also the ultimate fulfillment of the covenant made to David. The Davidic covenant promised an eternal king ruling over a perfect kingdom. Solomon was the near, immediate fulfillment, wise but obviously ineffective. The Gospel of Matthew presents Jesus as the full and final fulfillment, the wise, glorious, eternal king.

### **To authenticate Jesus as the Messiah**

Matthew presents Jesus as the promised Messiah. Christ or Messiah is not so much Jesus' last name. It is a title. It means: “anointed one.” Now, the whole Bible's basic structure is that of promise leading to fulfillment, to bring about fullness. The Old Testament wove a thread beginning with Genesis 3 about a promised one who would come to restore brokenness, heal diseases, overcome wickedness, teach wisdom, forgive sin and reign as sovereign for good, forever. This is all captured in the idea of “messiah”. Jesus will make this assertion in both word and deed over and over again. The disciples understood what Jesus was claiming. The religious leaders of the day understood what Jesus was saying. They just didn't believe him. Here, in this genealogy, the Gospel of Matthew clearly shows how Jesus hits the lineage target – that is, Jesus is a descendant of both Abraham and David. Jesus has “the correct scriptural pedigree to be the Messiah.”

### **To certify Jesus as truly human**

This section makes certain that we understand that Jesus is fully human. He has a human lineage. He was born in the line of human fathers who begat human sons. Matthew is deeply concerned that we believe and understand Jesus' true and full humanity. Why is this important? Because in the next section, the announcements

prove that Jesus is Divine. He is God with us in what has already been proven to be a true humanity.

## **Its Phases**

Matthew's genealogy is structure into three groups or phases. Each one represents 14 generations. Many commentators and writers detect significance to the three sets of stylized fourteens based on combinations of three, four and seven. While interesting, will not go into those details. Even the organization seen in the three sections likely has meaning but is debated as to their intention. For our purposes this morning we will leave you with the comment, "it has significance." I am not going to spend the time to elaborate or defend a particular opinion here.

And, notice to accomplish this structure, the Gospel has used the convention that "father of" indicates a "descendent of", not merely the "direct parent of." The genealogy seems to be based on 1 Chronicles 1:27-3:19. But its structure is highlighted at verse 1 at the top and verse 17 at the bottom. It is about Jesus being the son of David and the son of Abraham.

Let us now read the account.

### **Abraham to Jesse (v.1-6a)**

The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ,  
the son of David, the son of Abraham.  
<sup>2</sup>Abraham was the father of Isaac,  
and Isaac the father of Jacob,  
and Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers,  
<sup>3</sup>and Judah the father of Perez and Zerah by Tamar, and Perez  
the father of Hezron,  
and Hezron the father of Ram,  
<sup>4</sup>and Ram the father of Amminadab,  
and Amminadab the father of Nahshon,  
and Nahshon the father of Salmon,  
<sup>5</sup>and Salmon the father of Boaz by Rahab,  
and Boaz the father of Obed by Ruth,  
and Obed the father of Jesse,  
<sup>6</sup>and Jesse the father of David the king.

Many well-known Bible characters appear in this group. It opens with the patriarchs and lists the generations down to Jesse, the father of King David. We were introduced to most of these

individuals and their stories as we worked through the Book of Genesis and less recently from the Book of Ruth.

### **David to the Deportation (v.6b-11)**

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

These names are less familiar to us. We are not so familiar with the kings Judah. This group begins with David and so is the proof that Jesus is legitimately suited to be the king. He is in the right tribe and from the right family. Solomon is well known. His sons split the kingdom with Rehoboam becoming the king of the 2 southern tribes which were called Judah. Israel was the ten northern tribes, and they are not in consideration here. The genealogy pointedly lists Jechoniah as the last king of Judah at the time of the deportation of most the people into Babylon to begin the seventy years of exile because of their infidelity to the old covenant.

### **The Deportation to Joseph (v.12-16)**

12And after the deportation to Babylon:  
Jechoniah was the father of Shealtiel,  
and Shealtiel the father of Zerubbabel,  
13and Zerubbabel the father of Abiud,  
and Abiud the father of Eliakim,  
and Eliakim the father of Azor,  
14and Azor the father of Zadok,  
and Zadok the father of Achim,  
and Achim the father of Eliud,  
15and Eliud the father of Eleazar,  
and Eleazar the father of Matthan,

and Matthan the father of Jacob,  
<sup>16</sup>and Jacob the father of Joseph the husband of Mary,  
of whom Jesus was born, who is called Christ.

First of all, notice that he doesn't say "on the return from the deportation." And second, the chronology in 1 Chronicles that the gospel seems to be following ends with Zerubbabel. He is a significant character in Ezra, Nehemiah as well as the post-exilic prophetic books of Haggai and Zechariah. Why might Zerubbabel be important as a breaking place from the genealogical record in 1 Chronicles? Well, turn to Zechariah 4:1-10 and see.

And the angel who talked with me came again and woke me, like a man who is awakened out of his sleep. <sup>2</sup>And he said to me, "What do you see?" I said, "I see, and behold, a lampstand all of gold, with a bowl on the top of it, and seven lamps on it, with seven lips on each of the lamps that are on the top of it. <sup>3</sup>And there are two olive trees by it, one on the right of the bowl and the other on its left." <sup>4</sup>And I said to the angel who talked with me, "What are these, my lord?" <sup>5</sup>Then the angel who talked with me answered and said to me, "Do you not know what these are?" I said, "No, my lord." <sup>6</sup>Then he said to me, "This is the word of the LORD to Zerubbabel: Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the LORD of hosts. <sup>7</sup>Who are you, O great mountain? Before Zerubbabel you shall become a plain. And he shall bring forward the top stone amid shouts of 'Grace, grace to it!'" <sup>8</sup>Then the word of the LORD came to me, saying, <sup>9</sup>"The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this house; his hands shall also complete it. Then you will know that the LORD of hosts has sent me to you. <sup>10</sup>For whoever has despised the day of small things shall rejoice, and shall see the plumb line in the hand of Zerubbabel.

Matthew is uncovering through this Jewish, human genealogy a treasure. The downward spiral into exile ends with a great promise. We saw some of these symbols in the series on the churches in John's Revelation. Here we find additional background connecting that series with Matthew (top and bottom of the New Testament). In Zechariah we are told it is not by human might nor by human power that the great mountain of rubble be cleared for the rebuilding of the temple. Rather, it will be established by the Spirit. What Zerubbabel accomplished was just the beginning, the true Capstone of the Kingdom will come and God will reappear in his

temple. When He comes then will the kingdom rise amid the proclamation of "Grace, grace to it." The last fourteen names in the genealogy will come to their close as Jesus, the Christ comes. And then... oh, and then...but we have the rest of the Gospel yet to read!

### **Its Principles (v. 17)**

<sup>17</sup>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.

### **Jesus came at exactly the right time**

One commentator has said:

...Matthew's structure has theological value. He has intentionally selected names (real historical people who are really part of Joseph and Mary's line) and arranged them to make the same theological point that Paul made in Galatians 4:4a: "But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son" (cf. Hebrews 9:26). In other words, God has designed history around the birth of Jesus. (O'Donnell, p.32-33)

That moment in Palestine at that year in Joseph and Mary's life - at that exact year, month and date Jesus came. The Bible's focus is not so much on a precise date of Jesus' birth, which we actually do not know. But we do know that he came at exactly the right time. All of history was designed around Jesus' coming as man, God incarnate. At the end of three sets of fourteen generations from Abraham to Joseph, Jesus came.

### **Jesus came in exactly the right way**

He was born. He came as a baby. He had parents. His humanity was received from His mother. He was not like the myths and legends of half-god humans so popular in the Roman and Greek mythologies. He was and is and forever will be, God and man.

### **Jesus came from exactly the right family**

The genealogy proves it. He is descended from Abraham. He is descended from David. He is a Jew. He is of the tribe of Judah. He is in the royal line of David.

## **It's Peculiarities**

There are some very surprising things in this genealogy. It introduces some interesting and surprising things that would normally be passed over. This is particularly noticeable because Matthew selects people in the stylized three sets of fourteen. So, the inclusion of certain people is a peculiarity that is worth thinking about.

#### **It has five women in it**

And what women! Tamar was an adulteress. Rahab was a prostitute from pagan Jericho. Ruth was Moabite, their descendants were not allowed near the assembly of the Lord. Uriah's wife, Bathsheba, was the woman David had seduced and whose first child had died, but through whose subsequent son Solomon the royal line was traced. These are the women introduced into the genealogy to prepare us for the climax of them all – Mary! Matthew could not have found a more amazing selection of women wherever he had looked within the pages of his Bible.

#### **It has four Gentiles in it**

Tamar was a Canaanite. Rahab was a Canaanite from Jericho. Ruth was a Moabite. Bathsheba was at least the wife of Uriah, who was a Hittite. This is significant. There are three maybe four Gentile women in Jesus' line. All of whom have questionable "pasts".

#### **It is has wicked kings in it**

Look at the list of wicked kings here – e.g., Rehoboam, Abijah, and Ahaz. Ahaz was probably the most wicked king in Judah's history. These were kings known and scorned for their wickedness, their idolatry, immortality, foolishness, and destructive leadership.

#### **It has immoral people in it**

Look at the so-called "righteous" men of old – like Abraham who lied about his wife. There is Judah who came up with the idea to sell his brother Joseph into slavery and who was, after his own admission, worse than Tamar. What about David with his adultery and murder, two permanent marks on his background check? Look at Solomon with his polygamy and idolatry or even good Hezekiah with his pride in being good. And you thought your family tree is a mess. It's as if Matthew intentionally puts a criminal lineup before us. Why would he do this? Because Jesus, the righteous One, came to save sinners, both Jews and Gentiles. The genealogy is full of not just theoretical sinners a la the doctrine of depravity. These are actually people who did astonishingly wicked things. Yet, they were believers in the Old Testament sense.



Furthermore, we are being prepared to be introduced to two people who were slandered as being immoral. Yet, the Bible attests to their innocence even as they carefully, wisely, and through much hardship, accepted the will of God for them.

## **Reflect and Respond**

What if this text is incorrect, wrongly contrived, or not true?

Jesus is not the Messiah and all His claims to be the fulfillment of the Old Testament are false.

Jesus is not truly human, and the incarnation is a sham and lie.

Jesus did not fulfill the Covenants and the whole New Testament is simply wrong.

Jesus is not qualified to be our Savior and we are lost, in our sins and going to hell.

But this text is true. Praise God! Jesus is the son of Abraham. Jesus is the son of David. Jesus is the Messiah. Jesus is our Savior and our Sovereign.