

Sermons on
Matthew

The Genealogy of Jesus
Matthew 1:1-17

With Study Questions

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The Genealogy of Jesus

Matthew 1:1-17

The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham: ² Abraham begot Isaac, Isaac begot Jacob, and Jacob begot Judah and his brothers. ³ Judah begot Perez and Zerah by Tamar, Perez begot Hezron, and Hezron begot Ram. ⁴ Ram begot Amminadab, Amminadab begot Nahshon, and Nahshon begot Salmon. ⁵ Salmon begot Boaz by Rahab, Boaz begot Obed by Ruth, Obed begot Jesse, ⁶ and Jesse begot David the king.

David the king begot Solomon by her *who had been the wife* of Uriah. ⁷ Solomon begot Rehoboam, Rehoboam begot Abijah, and Abijah begot Asa. ⁸ Asa begot Jehoshaphat, Jehoshaphat begot Joram, and Joram begot Uzziah. ⁹ Uzziah begot Jotham, Jotham begot Ahaz, and Ahaz begot Hezekiah. ¹⁰ Hezekiah begot Manasseh, Manasseh begot Amon, and Amon begot Josiah. ¹¹ Josiah begot Jeconiah and his brothers about the time they were carried away to Babylon.

¹² And after they were brought to Babylon, Jeconiah begot Shealtiel, and Shealtiel begot Zerubbabel. ¹³ Zerubbabel begot Abiud, Abiud begot Eliakim, and Eliakim begot Azor. ¹⁴ Azor begot Zadok, Zadok begot Achim, and Achim begot Eliud. ¹⁵ Eliud begot Eleazar, Eleazar begot Matthan, and Matthan begot Jacob. ¹⁶ And Jacob begot Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus who is called Christ.

¹⁷ So all the generations from Abraham to David *are* fourteen generations, from David until the captivity in Babylon *are* fourteen generations, and from the captivity in Babylon until the Christ *are* fourteen generations. (Matthew 1:1-17)

Introduction

Genealogies are the rage. We're looking for, or hoping for, something distinct or unique in our bloodline. In America's melting pot we have all become an amalgam of each other. In this human fusion we have lost a sense of who we are, so we're hoping to find it in our ancestry. Who knows what may turn up?

As fascinated as we all are in our own ancestry, we're usually not quite as enthralled with the genealogies of others, especially if we're ignorant of history. How difficult it is to have a political or historical conversation with somebody who doesn't know history. To find out your friend's great-great-great-grandfather fought in the Civil War doesn't mean much if you know nothing about the conflict.

I came to faith as a teenager and was given a Bible to read. They suggested I start with the New Testament. The first book in the New Testament is Matthew. So I started reading the passage above. You can imagine my thoughts. The book of genealogy wasn't much of a page-turner, especially if you don't know anything about the people mentioned. As time marched on I became fascinated, even blessed, by the very verses that at one time put me to sleep. I pray I can convey that blessing.

This morning I wish to accomplish three goals:

1. Give a brief history of the people and eras mentioned in the genealogy of Jesus.
2. Express the comfort derived from the genealogy.
3. Explain why there is a genealogy.

Since verse one relates to my third point I will start with the actual genealogy in verse two.

The Era—Promise, Deliverance, Conquest

Abraham begot Isaac, Isaac begot Jacob, and Jacob begot Judah and his brothers. ³ Judah begot Perez and Zerah by Tamar, Perez begot Hezron, and Hezron begot Ram. ⁴ Ram begot Amminadab, Amminadab begot Nahshon, and Nahshon begot Salmon. ⁵ Salmon begot Boaz by Rahab, Boaz begot Obed by Ruth, Obed begot Jesse, ⁶ and Jesse begot David the king. . . (Matthew 1:2-6a)

The era covered in this portion of the family tree could be referred to as *promise*, *deliverance*, and *conquest*. Abraham was given a great promise (which we'll speak of shortly), Amminadab (Aaron's father-in-law) lived during the exodus (deliverance from Egypt), and David was Israel's king during the pinnacle of their glory as nation.

The People

But what about these descendants of Jesus? Certainly *Abraham*, *Isaac*, and *Jacob* (the patriarchs) all had great moments of faith, yet at the same time they had deplorable lapses of virtue. Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son was a great act of faith, yet his lie regarding Sarah being his wife put her honor in jeopardy. He faithlessly engaged in conjugal relationships with Hagar resulting in devastating consequences. His son Isaac committed the same lie regarding his wife. Jacob was a con man from the very beginning. So the righteousness of the patriarchs certainly had its limits.

We haven't time to speak of all the antics of *Judah* and his brothers. As William Hendriksen puts it, some of them were "wicked almost beyond belief." Judah was probably the best of the lot. His willingness to be enslaved in order to free his brother Benjamin (Genesis 44) was a wonderful sacrifice on his part.

But then we have the beyond-soap-opera conditions of the births of Perez and Zerah. Their parents, Judah and Tamar, were father-in-law and daughter-in-law. She posed as a harlot and he (not knowing who she was at the time) took the bait. When she was found pregnant he was going to have her burned (Genesis 38:24). She had the necessary evidence, though, to implicate him so all was forgiven!!!

Tamar, who was likely a Gentile, was not the only harlot in the genealogy. *Rahab* was a Gentile and a harlot as well. By the grace of God she was brought to exemplary faith (Hebrews 11:31). One is hardly impressed with the cast of characters found in this genealogy.

This portion of the genealogy seems to ascend (or does it?) as it ends with David who was a man after God's own heart. This next portion of the genealogy lists the kings of Israel.

The Era—Kings

David the king begot Solomon by her who had been the wife of Uriah. ⁷ Solomon begot Rehoboam, Rehoboam begot Abijah, and Abijah begot

Asa.⁸ Asa begot Jehoshaphat, Jehoshaphat begot Joram, and Joram begot Uzziah.⁹ Uzziah begot Jotham, Jotham begot Ahaz, and Ahaz begot Hezekiah.¹⁰ Hezekiah begot Manasseh, Manasseh begot Amon, and Amon begot Josiah.¹¹ Josiah begot Jeconiah and his brothers about the time they were carried away to Babylon (Matthew 1:6b-11).

The era represented in this portion of the genealogy starts with David (the apex of Israel) and ends with captivity in Babylon.

The People

Even though David was a man after God's own heart and a courageous king and warrior, these attributes are not listed on Matthew's brief resumé. He was the king who "begot Solomon by her *who had been the wife of Uriah*." In short, the story goes something like this: he liked another man's wife so he took her, had his way with her, and killed her husband.

Solomon, we are told, loved the Lord (1 Kings 3:3), but also foreign women—a lot of them (1 Kings 11:1-14)—which resulted in the demise of the nation of Israel and the biggest church-split in the history of the world.

The remaining kings ruled over two of the twelve tribes of the divided kingdom. There was a mixture of good and evil kings. In an effort to be concise I will give only brief descriptions of these kings:

The good ones were *Asa, Jehoshaphat, Hezekiah, Jotham, and Josiah*. We read that these kings ". . . cried out to the Lord" (2 Chronicles 14:11), extolled the Lord (2 Chronicles 20:5-7; 2 Kings 19:15), "did what was right in the sight of the Lord" (2 Chronicles 27:1, 2), and so on. But generally their success in leading their kingdoms ended with their deaths. One is hard-pressed to find a string of righteous kings.

It is much easier to find a string of evil kings. *Rehoboam* was a megalomaniac. His famous line was

My father made your yoke heavy, but I will add to your yoke; my father chastised you with whips, but I will chastise you with scourges!
(1 Kings 12:14b)

Abijah, Amon, Joram, Ahaz, Manasseh, and Jeconiah, were "not loyal to the Lord" (1 Kings 15:3), "did evil in the sight of the Lord. . . served idols. . . and worshiped them." (2 Kings 21:20, 21) Some of them sacrificed the children on the grill of Molech (2 Chronicles 28:1-5). Uzziah "did what was right in the sight of the Lord" (2 Chronicles 26:3-5) until he became very famous. Then he got too big for his britches and the Lord struck him with leprosy (2 Chronicles 26:21; 2 Kings 23:10). Proverbs reveals what it would be like to be a subject under these kings.

Like a roaring lion and a charging bear is a wicked ruler over poor people.¹⁶ A ruler who lacks understanding is a great oppressor. . . (Proverbs 28:15, 16a).

The Era—Captivity

And after they were brought to Babylon, Jeconiah begot Shealtiel, and Shealtiel begot Zerubbabel.¹³ Zerubbabel begot Abiud, Abiud begot Eliakim, and Eliakim begot Azor.¹⁴ Azor begot Zadok, Zadok begot Achim, and Achim begot Eliud.¹⁵ Eliud begot Eleazar, Eleazar begot Matthan, and Matthan begot Jacob.¹⁶ And Jacob begot Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus who is called Christ¹⁷ So all the generations from Abraham to David are fourteen generations,

from David until the captivity in Babylon are fourteen generations, and from the captivity in Babylon until the Christ are fourteen generations. (Matthew 1:12-17)

This last era extends from Israel's captivity in Babylon to the time of Christ. They never again enjoyed the kind of kingdom under the reign of David.

The People

There is very little said about these people. This may be due to the fact that they were in captivity. What is significant, however, is that God kept His promise to preserve the seed.

We notice that the lineage is through Joseph rather than Mary. Joseph is not called the father of Jesus but rather the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus. Though, not the natural father of Jesus, Joseph was the legal father of Jesus.

The three sets of fourteen generations most certainly omit certain ancestors. There are numerous possible reasons for this: easier to remember for catechism, specific aspects of the individuals, categorizing the eras in history, etc.

The Comfort

Whether or not this next point is something Matthew had in mind I can't say with certainty. But the ignoble history (murderers, prostitutes, gentiles, etc.) of Christ's genealogy may have brought great comfort to someone like Matthew. Matthew was an Israelite tax collector. People like him were considered sell-outs of their own people and were thought of in very base terms. Matthew will later record his own conversion.

As Jesus passed on from there, He saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax office. And He said to him, "Follow Me." So he arose and followed Him. ¹⁰ Now it happened, as Jesus sat at the table in the house, *that* behold, many tax collectors and sinners came and sat down with Him and His disciples. ¹¹ And when the Pharisees saw *it*, they said to His disciples, "Why does your Teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?" ¹² When Jesus heard *that*, He said to them, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. ¹³ But go and learn what *this* means: *I desire mercy and not sacrifice!* For I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance." (Matthew 9:9-13).

Surely the humiliation of Christ and his identification with sinners began with His ancestry. The Christian faith was not designed for those who consider themselves to be the moral elite. It is designed for sinners. And a brief perusal of whom God chose to use in Christ's lineage powerfully proves this point.

In Christ's genealogy, and in His life, Christ draws close to sinners and they to Him.

Then all the tax collectors and the sinners drew near to Him to hear Him. ² And the Pharisees and scribes complained, saying, "This Man receives sinners and eats with them." (Luke 15:1, 2)

One might ask how we reconcile this with what John writes about Jesus.

And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.

²⁰ For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. (John 3:19, 20)

If sinners hate the light, why were they drawn to Christ? Certainly Jesus never sought to comfort sinners in their sins (that is, He never condoned sin but always called for repentance). He exposes sin! The only answer to the apparent conundrum is grace. Sinners draw near to Christ, not to be comforted in their sins, but to be forgiven of and delivered from their sins. May the loaf and the cup ever provide that grace!

Why a Genealogy?

The genealogy ends with Jesus being called *the Christ*, which brings me to my final point. The Christ means the Anointed One. In the Old Testament the *prophets* (1 Kings 19:16), *priests* (Leviticus 4:5, 16), and *kings* (1 Samuel 24:6, 10) were *anointed* to their offices. These offices foreshadowed the promise of God to send a Savior, a Deliverer, a Messiah. This Savior, God incarnate (in the flesh), would be the mouthpiece of God, the sacrifice for men and the reigning King.

This gospel begins

The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham. . . (Matthew 1:1)

Abraham is promised that through his seed will come a great nation, a protected nation, and a nation through which all the families of the earth will be blessed (Genesis 12:1-12; 22:18). This nation is the church (1 Peter 2:9) and the blessing is justification by faith in Christ (Galatians 3:8, 9). Christ is the King of this nation.

David is promised that this King will sit upon his throne (Acts 2:25-31). He then speaks of the superiority of Christ the King.

For David did not ascend into the heavens, but he says himself: "The Lord said to my Lord, 'Sit at My right hand, ³⁵till I make Your enemies Your footstool.'" (Acts 2:34, 35)

Perhaps more than any other book in the Bible, Matthew reveals the nature of that King and His kingdom. May God grant us, in our study, grace to fathom such glorious things!

Questions for Study

1. Why would the genealogy of Jesus be of little interest to most people (page 1)?
2. What era in history does the first portion of Christ's genealogy cover (page 2)?
3. Discuss the characters in this era. Who were they and what were they like (page 2)?
4. What era in history does the second portion of the genealogy cover (page 3)?
5. What were these kings like (page 3)?
6. What era in history does the third portion of Christ's genealogy cover (page 4)?
7. Why was Joseph called the husband of Mary rather than the father of Jesus (page 4)?
8. What comfort might have Matthew derived from this genealogy (page 4)?
9. How do you reconcile sinners being drawn to Jesus with those who practice evil hating the light (page 5)?
10. Why do you suppose this gospel starts with a genealogy (page 5)?