

2. The Introduction of the King

In the first chapter of his account Matthew uses Jesus' genealogy to identify Him as the Messiah revealed in the Old Testament scriptures. While the genealogy in itself didn't provide to Matthew's original audience conclusive proof of Jesus' messianic identity, it did establish His Abrahamic and Davidic ancestry, both of which were essential for anyone claiming to be Israel's Messiah. If Jesus weren't descended from Abraham and David, there would be no point in further consideration of his messianic credentials.

In order to be the promised Messiah, Jesus must be a descendent of David, specifically through David's royal line that originated with his son Solomon. But this ancestry also highlighted the critical matter of God's cursing of David's royal line during the reign of Jehoiachin (Jeconiah). By doing so, God had set up a seemingly impossible situation: Fulfillment of the Davidic Covenant demanded the perpetuity of David's royal dynasty in the son promised in the covenant, but God cursed and severed that dynasty just prior to the destruction of Judah. *God's faithfulness to His promise to David demanded the continued existence of a line He had determined to cut off everlastingly.* But what appeared to be an irresolvable dilemma – a dilemma that demanded Israel's faith in her God until such time as He revealed the solution – was, in fact, nothing of the sort.

Matthew understood the long-standing dilemma and also the way in which Yahweh had resolved it. To fulfill both components of divine oath – the promise to David of an everlasting dynasty and dominion and the permanent curse on Jehoiachin's line, the Messiah needed to be a physical descendent of David, not of his royal line, but, nonetheless, a legitimate heir to David's throne. Jesus fulfilled this unique credential first by being a son of David through Nathan (Luke 3:23-31) rather than Solomon. But secondly, as the *adopted* first-born son of his father Joseph – who was descended from the line of the kings of Judah, Jesus had a legitimate claim to the throne of David. He was a royal descendent of David without being part of Jehoiachin's cursed line. By setting up a situation that could only be resolved in one way, God was, on the one hand, insuring that the list of messianic candidates would be minuscule, while, on the other, highlighting the fact that Jesus perfectly satisfied all of the particulars of messianic promise.

a. The Son of God

God had fulfilled His apparently contradictory oaths in a way no one probably imagined. But this resolution presented its own quandary: *If Joseph wasn't Jesus biological father, then who was?* This is the obvious first question that arises from Matthew's genealogical record, and he immediately answered it with his account of Jesus' conception and birth (1:18-25).

Jesus of Nazareth was a legitimate son of David through his mother, but He is the Son of God through divine conception. As Yahweh's chosen and beloved king, David was a "son of God," ruling over the Lord's kingdom in His name and authority and for His sake. But the messianic son of David is Yahweh's Son in a far more profound sense: In Him all the fullness of deity dwells bodily.

Jesus, the son of Mary, is the promised Immanuel (“God with us”) of Isaiah’s prophecy – the One in whom the house and throne of David were to be secured in accordance with the Davidic Covenant (cf. 1:22-23 with Isaiah 7:1-16). *Notably, the fact that Jesus is the prophesied Immanuel also reinforces His status as the divine Son of God, regal son of David, and covenant seed of Abraham:*

- 1) Isaiah’s Immanuel figure is the “child to be born to us and son given to us,” the child whose name is the name of deity: Mighty God and Father of Eternity; the divine Son whom Yahweh would send to take David’s throne and establish his kingdom in justice and righteousness forever (cf. 4:12-16 with Isaiah 9:1-7 and 2:1-6 with Micah 5:2; ref. also Psalm 2, 110).
- 2) But this Immanuel child is also the Root and Branch of David appointed by Yahweh to gather in and reconcile the remnant of Israel and Judah and the nations of the earth (Isaiah 11:1-12). By recovering the human race to God, this Davidide would fulfill His covenant oath of global blessing through Abraham’s seed (cf. Genesis 12:3, 26:1-4, 28:10-14).

b. The Shiloh of Judah

Jesus is the royal covenant son of David, but, that being the case, He is also the *Shiloh* of Jacob’s prophetic blessing (cf. 2:1-12 with Genesis 49:8-10).

- 1) As the time of his death approached, Jacob gathered his sons – the ones in whom the Abrahamic covenant “seed” would assume its ordained national status (ref. Genesis 12:2, 17:1-7, 15-16; cf. also Genesis 15:13-14 with Exodus 3:1-10) – in order to pass on to them the patriarchal blessing. Among those sons, Jacob assigned preeminence to Judah. God had promised Abraham a royal seed (Genesis 17:6, 15-16), and now his grandson Jacob was identifying his own son Judah as the focal point of that regal legacy. The scepter of kingship was to reside with Judah and would not depart from his line of descent until it came to rest on “Shiloh” (probably signifying in Hebrew, “*the one to whom it belongs*”).
- 2) Saul was the first king of the covenant kingdom, and his illegitimacy was, from the outset, attested in the fact that he was of the tribe of Benjamin. David – Saul’s successor and the Lord’s choice for Israel’s ruler – was of the regal tribe of Judah, and so it was that every subsequent ruler of Yahweh’s covenant kingdom was a son of David (note again that the later sub-kingdom of Israel wasn’t reckoned as part of David’s kingdom). The Lord had placed the scepter into Judah’s hand and it would remain there until the appearance of David’s promised seed – the One to whom the kingdom and its dominion belong. With Jesus’ birth, that time had now arrived: Bethlehem – the ancestral city of David – had attained its prophesied glory by bringing forth the Davidic ruler appointed to shepherd the Lord’s people (cf. 2:1-6 with Micah 5:1-5; ref. also Micah 4:1-13).

c. The True Israel

Matthew presents Jesus of Nazareth first as a covenant descendent of Abraham and then as the prophesied Shiloh of the tribe of Judah. As such, He is the royal covenant son promised to David. But beyond that, Matthew shows Him to be the fulfillment of Israel itself, just as Isaiah had prophesied concerning the coming Messiah (49:1-7). But Matthew did so, not by directly connecting Jesus with Isaiah's prophecy, *but by presenting features of His life as a recapitulation of Israel's national life as the "son of God" (2:7-4:11).*

- 1) Matthew's first example of this is his account of Jesus' family's flight to Egypt when Herod was seeking His life. He presents Jesus' return to Israel from Egypt following Herod's death as amounting to His own "exodus" as God's true covenant son "Israel" (cf. 2:13-15 with Hosea 11:1).

The heart of Israel's identity was its status as Yahweh's chosen and beloved son (Exodus 4:22), and Hosea drew upon this unique relational privilege to show the nature and seriousness of the nation's departure from their God (cf. Isaiah 1:1-4, 30:6-11, 63:1-10). But whereas Israel's "life out of death" through the Exodus resulted only in increasing covenant unfaithfulness culminating with destruction, the exodus of the new Israel – the true and fully devoted covenant Son – would bring recovery and the fulfillment of the Abrahamic promise of global blessing.

- 2) The second point of recapitulation involved Jesus' baptism. Though John's baptism was a baptism of *repentance*, Jesus understood that He needed to undergo it in order to "fulfill all righteousness" (3:13-15). This passage has troubled many because it appears to call Jesus' righteousness into question. John himself, knowing Jesus to be the promised Messiah, sought to restrain Him from being baptized. John saw no unrighteousness in Him and therefore no need for repentance, and yet Jesus declared that it would be a violation of righteousness for Him not to be baptized.

The answer lies in understanding "righteousness" in this context, not as moral rectitude, but conformity to the mind and purpose of God. Jesus needed to be baptized in order to fulfill His foreordained and prophesied identification with Israel. *Fulfilling all righteousness meant fulfilling the full scope of the divine purpose and promise as recorded in the Scripture*, and the Scripture had prophesied that the Messiah would accomplish His saving work as the True Israel: the true covenant son of Abraham and of Abraham's God. "All Israel" was going out to John to be baptized, and so it was necessary that this covenant son fully identify with Yahweh's people by doing the same (3:5-6; cf. also Mark 1:5-6; Acts 13:23-24). Isaiah had prophesied that the Lord's forerunner would introduce His messianic Servant "Israel" (49:1-6; ref. also 40:1ff), and John's baptism, along with God's own testimony, fulfilled that promise.

- 3) Matthew's third example demonstrating Jesus' role as the fulfillment of Israel involves His time of testing immediately following His baptism. Just as the nation of Israel had embarked upon a season of testing in the wilderness following its formal designation as Yahweh's "son" at Sinai, so Jesus, the Son, was led by the Spirit into the Judean desert to undergo His own testing (4:1-11). And like Israel, Jesus' testing came at the point of His sonship: Would this Son of God – the Lord's new Israel – honor His unique privilege as Yahweh's only-begotten and fulfill His filial obligation of submissive faith and devotion? Or would He, too, yield to doubt, fear and disobedience provoked by uncertain and difficult circumstances (cf. Exodus 24:1-18, 32:1, with Numbers 13:1-14:35)?

Not merely the parallel circumstance of His testing, but also its *substance* and Jesus' *response* show that He was being tried as God's new Israel.

- First, each of Satan's three distinct temptations has a parallel in Israel's testing: Israel, too, had been tested with respect to its faith in God's provision, protection, and good purpose and the nation had repeatedly shown itself to be a faithless and disobedient son (cf. esp. Exodus 14:8-14, 15:22-16:5; Numbers 13:25-14:11).
- Jesus, on the other hand, succeeded where Israel had failed. The direct contrast between the Lord's two "Israels" is emphasized in the fact that Jesus answered Satan's challenges precisely at the point of Israel's unbelief. Each time He responded to the devil with words from the book of Deuteronomy (8:3, 6:16, 6:13) – words drawn from a discourse of Moses, God's chosen mouthpiece, detailing Israel's covenant obligation as Yahweh's "son" and the consequences of its failure (ref. Deuteronomy 5:1-11:32).

d. The Servant of Yahweh

Jesus' baptism expressed His full alignment with His people, first as the fulfillment of Israel, but also as the Lord's Servant appointed to reconcile and restore His people to Himself (cf. 3:1-3 with Isaiah 40:1-11). The One declared to be the unique Son of God was also the messianic Servant prophesied as possessing the Lord's Spirit as a full and perpetual endowment (3:16-17).

Isaiah was the primary revealer of the Servant of Yahweh and he expressly associated Him and His work with the indwelling Spirit (cf. 42:1-9, 49:1-10 and 52:13-53:12). It was in the power of the Spirit that Jesus went up from the Jordan and entered upon His work as the Lord's Servant, initially proclaiming and substantiating the presence of the kingdom by supernatural signs of the Spirit (cf. Isaiah 61:1-3; Luke 3:14-21; ref. also Matthew 12:9-28) and then offering Himself up in the Spirit in His sacrificial work of atonement (cf. Isaiah 53:1ff, 59:16-21 with Hebrews 9:13-14; cf. also John 1:29-34).

Previous to his account of Jesus' baptism, Matthew had already indirectly indicated Christ's identity as the Servant of the Lord by his interpretation of Herod's slaughter of the young children in the vicinity of Bethlehem (ref. 2:1-12, 16-18). When the magi who sought the newborn King of the Jews refused to obey Herod's directive to return to him with Jesus' location, he took matters into his own hands. If Herod couldn't isolate this perceived threat to his throne, he'd destroy him by casting a wide net.

Inspired by the Spirit, Matthew saw in this mass killing the antitypical fulfillment of the former slaughter of the sons of Israel at the hands of the Assyrians. Rachel was the mother of Joseph, and his son Ephraim was the leading tribe of the northern sub-kingdom of Israel. Thus God often referred to the entire sub-kingdom under the name "Ephraim" (cf. Isaiah 7:1-9; Hosea 4:16-5:15, 6:1-4, 11:1-12; etc.). So it was in Jeremiah's prophecy concerning Israel's desolation and future restoration: God had destroyed the northern kingdom of Israel, leaving Rachel weeping for her children who were no more (31:15). But in her agony Yahweh called her to stop weeping because He would restore her sons at the appointed time. Though Ephraim (Israel) had despised his covenant Father and departed from Him, the Father's love for His "son" had never diminished; He would yet have mercy on him (31:16-20; cf. Hosea 1:10-11; 11:1ff).

Rachel's loss and bereavement were to be rewarded with the restoration of her children, but only in connection with the coming of the Branch of David and the Lord's new covenant (cf. Jeremiah 31:20-40, 33:14-26). Following in His father's steps, this regal son of David would restore and reconcile the houses of Israel and Judah, but He would go further, gathering together with them all the Gentile nations of the earth (ref. again Isaiah 11:1-13, 49:1-6; also Ezekiel 37:1-28; Amos 9:11-15). Thus Matthew's understanding of the prophetic fulfillment in Herod's actions: *Continuing, as it were, her ancient loss, the covenant matriarch Rachel was again moved to weeping as she watched the destruction of her children by a ruthless world power. Yet God had declared through Jeremiah that her loss was His pledge of recovery and reconciliation. Rachel's covenant children would again be restored to her when the Branch of David was revealed to both houses of Israel. The death of the innocents at Bethlehem signaled that that day had come.*

e. The Last Adam

Finally, Jesus' temptation also highlights His status as the Last Adam. For, even as Israel's testing as God's "son" anticipated another Israel to come, it also looked back to Eden. Adam – the "son of God" (cf. Genesis 1:26-27; Luke 3:38) – had himself endured the devil's temptation; he, too, had been tested at the point of his sonship and failed the test. The image-son was left estranged from his Creator-Father, but God promised reconciliation in another Man. Israel – son of God and Abrahamic seed appointed to restore all men to the knowledge of the Creator – typified that promised Restorer. The prophetic pledge of another Israel merely advanced the archetypal oath that Eve would be the mother of all the living.