

Matthew 1

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[0 : 0 0] Now, the book of Matthew, the first book of the New Testament, is one of four that are called Gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. They all share a common theme, the good news of salvation through the life and death of Jesus of Nazareth. They all have much in common, but they've also got things that are different, for each of these disciples wrote their own individual perspective, and from their own individual background. And Matthew, sometimes called Levi, he was a despised tax collector, not a popular guy. He was converted and became totally committed to Jesus. Matthew was also very knowledgeable about the Old Testament, and that's evident if you read the Gospel of Matthew, about 50 direct quotations come from the Old Testament, 75 literally allusions are also found there that have their roots in the Old Testament. The reason for this fascination with the Old

Testament is that Matthew is primarily writing to Jews. Jews are in Matthew's mind when he is writing the Gospel of Matthew, and he's trying to convince his fellow countrymen of three propositions.

Proposition one, you know I'm a lawyer when I'm talking about propositions, I apologize. Proposition one, the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy means that Jesus can rightly claim to be the King of the Jews. Secondly, that Jesus is the Son of David. And thirdly, that irregularities in his lineage counter objections to his birth. Now, these three propositions would take us a huge amount of time to cover. And there's so much that I don't really have time to cover all of that today. So, I'm not going to deal with the first two points. But in a moment, we're going to think a little bit more about the lineage of Jesus. And how Matthew used that lineage as an evidential basis for the assertions that he makes in the Gospel about Jesus. This genealogy then is like a potted history of the

Gospel, of God's dealings with Israel. However, the basic purpose of the book of Matthew is to establish establish Jesus as Israel's Messiah. And that is evident from the very first verse. A record of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham. That sentence, that single sentence, constitutes the genealogy of Jesus in a nutshell. The sentence then expands on from there, and over the next 16 verses, we get a little bit more detail about Jesus' genealogy from Abraham to David, and then from David to Jesus. So, let's read together those first 17 verses of Matthew chapter 1.

The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham. Abraham was the father of Isaac, and Isaac, the father of Jacob, and Jacob, the father of Judah and his brothers. And Judah, the father of Perez, and Zerah by Tamar. And Perez, the father of Hezron, and Hezron, the father of Ram. And Ram, the father of Amadimadab, and Amadimadab, the father of Nashon, and Nashon, the father of Salmon. And Salmon, the father of Boaz by Rahab. And Boaz, the father of Obed by Ruth. And Obed, the father of Jesse. And Jesse, the father of David, the king. And David was the father of Solomon, and Solomon by the wife of Uriah. And Solomon, the father of Rehoboam. And Rehoboam, the father of Abijah. And Abijah, the father of Asaph. And Asaph, the father of Jehoshaphat. And Jehoshaphat, the father of Joram. And Joram, the father of Uzziah. And Uzziah, the father of Jotham. And Jotham, the father of Ahaz. And Ahaz, the father of Hezekiah. And Hezekiah, the father of

[4 : 34] Manasseh. And Manasseh, the father of Amos. And Amos, the father of Josiah. And Josiah, the father of Jeconiah and his brothers at the time of the deportation to Babylon. After the deportation to Babylon, Jeconiah was the father of Sheltil, and Sheltil the father of Zerubbabel, Zerubbabel the father of Abiud and Abiud, the father of Eliakim, and Eliakim the father of Azor, and Azor the father of Zadok, and Zadok the father of Achim, and Achim the father of Eliud, and Eliud the father of Eleazar, and Eleazar the father of Matan, and Matan the father of Jacob, and Jacob the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary, of whom Jesus was born, who is called Christ. So all the generations from Abraham to David were 14 generations, and from David to the deportation to Babylon, 14 generations, and from the deportation of Babylon to Christ, 14 generations.

I don't know if like you, but perhaps reading that feels a little bit like reading a Hebrew phone book, lots of names, names that some we recognize and some we don't, but what possible use could this lineage, this list of names have for us? What possible use could there be in starting the gospel of Matthew with this lineage? It's a terrible way to start a gospel, is it not? Can there be any utility, any purpose, any meaning in having this list of names at the start of the gospel of Matthew?

Well, Matthew is setting out the foundations of identifying to the Jews who their king is. He sets out the royal line going back to David, Israel's greatest king, and then going back further to Abraham, Israel's father. And in doing so, he points to Jesus as the son of David, who, as Isaiah prophesied, the shoulders of government would rest upon him, and the one who is the fulfillment of all the promises that were made to Abraham, who would be the father of many nations. Jesus is the inheritor of those promises. I had no control over the items of praise that we would sing this morning, but when we sing about Jesus the risen king as our first item of praise this morning, I was thrilled to read that, because that is just exactly the very point of what Matthew was trying to preach here. Jesus is the king, and in essence, what Matthew is doing is setting out why he believes that Jesus Christ to be a king, whenever you read the book of Matthew. Whenever you read the book of Matthew, always have in your mind the idea that this is the book about the king. The book sets out the identity of the king here in chapter one. It talks about the character of his kingdom. In the Sermon of the Mount, he gives his manifesto for the kingdom, and he concludes with the suffering and the victory of the king.

At the start of this book, we are trying to work out the identity of this king, and we need to know that this king has the right credentials. The last prophet, Malachi, died 400 years before, and then the next words that we have from heaven are those that are given to Elizabeth and to Mary from the angel. So this genealogy acts like a bridge from the Old Testament to the New Testament, and in setting out that genealogy over 42 generations, Matthew does it in a way to aid the memory of the reader. He skips a generation here or there, but he does not lose his primary focus.

His desire is to impress upon the reader who the rightful heir to the throne is, and thereby bring Christ into the spotlight. This time, there are hundreds of people all across Palestine claiming to be the Messiah. They all claim to be the one who would lead Israel. Matthew wants to say why Jesus is the only one who could ever fulfill all the prophecies of the Old Testament. And so this passage set out over 17 verses, verse 1, the caption, verses 2 to 16, the content, and verse 17, the conclusion.

[9 : 11] There are three divisions, 2 to 6, give the first 14 generations, the patriarchal period. Verses 6b to 11, David to Jeconiah, the Davidic kings, and then from 12 to 16, Jeconiah in captivity, down to the birth of the Messiah, a timeline for the whole of the Old Testament, and that you can hang the whole of the history of the Old Testament upon it. A poetic way of thinking about this was written by a commentator from the 17th century who says, in the first 14 generations, we have the father of Abraham and the patriarchs rising, looking forth as the morning. In the second, we have it flourishing under King David and his successors in the midday sun, and in the third, we have it declining and growing less and less, dwindling into the family of a poor carpenter. And then Christ shines forth out of it the glory of the people of Israel. So it's evident here that with this lineage that Jesus Christ, the Son of Man, has his roots deep in the soil of humanity. So this lineage I'm going to suggest to you has three important facets. Firstly, it includes the failed and the flawed. Secondly, it includes some notable females. And thirdly, it includes foreigners. So the failed and the flawed, notable females, and foreigners. I had mentioned earlier that Matthew has been selective in writing his genealogy. But in being selective, he's not making an error. It's not an accident. Rather than he's trying to make a point, he's trying to act like a memory device so that one can recount the lineage, that without looking at this, you could just reel it off. And partly, that's to include some very notable failures. I come from, I grew up in Lewis. I moved to Edinburgh. I have Northwest Highlands stock all through me. My children go to the Gaelic school. I am fascinated by my lineage. It's a

Lewis thing sometimes, I think. And perhaps inspired by shows like Who Do You Think You Are? I've researched my family tree. I can give you my patronomic. Neil, McKinyuch, McDonald, McAllen, McAllister, McLouie, McDonald, McIntell, McCloud. I had patronomic that takes my family back to the late 18th century.

I can trace my wife's lineage back to Somerset in southwest England, who served to America in the 17th century. On an indirect line, I can trace my way back to Robert the Bruce. I can trace my way back to Malcolm Cairnmore. I can trace my way back to Alfred the Great. I'm happy to tell you about these ancestors. Makes me feel quite good. I'm less keen to tell you about the scoundrels and the drunks and the gamblers and the failures in my family. But in setting out the genealogy of Jesus, Matthew tells you the whole story and nothing but the story. He wants the truth to be known and he wants us to know that the roots of this Jesus of Nazareth lie deep in the soil of humanity, even sinful humanity.

And we need go no further than the list of kings where he mentions some pretty notorious sinners, idolaters, adulterers, murderers, violent persecutors of the righteous.

Take one, for example, Manasseh. This is how he's described in the second kings. Manasseh, the king of Judah, has committed these detestable sins. He has done more evil than the Amorites who preceded him and has led Judah into sin with his idols. Therefore, this is what the Lord, the God of Israel says, I am going to bring such disaster on Jerusalem and Judah that the ears of everyone who hears it will tingle. I will stretch out over Jerusalem the measuring line used against Samaria and the plum line used against the house of Ahab. I will wipe out Jerusalem as one wipes a dish, wiping it and turning it upside down, all because of Manasseh's sin. It's not astonishing that people like Manasseh find themselves in the lineage of the messianic line. By contrast, let me tell you about Perez, the son of Judah, who was the father of Hezron. Hezron, the father of Ram. In effect, they are nobodies. Nobodies. There is nothing of any real significance in scripture about them. Nothing makes them stand out in any distinguishing way. There is no profitable reason to mention their names whatsoever because not much, frankly, came from them, except they find themselves in the messianic line.

[14 : 08] It brings to mind the word of Paul in 1 Corinthians. Not many mighty, not many noble, but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise. God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong. God takes the light in the zeros. He takes the light in the failed and the flawless to bring them into his family. Secondly, let's think about some of the notable females in this lineage. Now, the fact that women are mentioned at all is, frankly, a bit weird. During Roman times, women were not considered to be reliable witnesses. So, why would you refer to them? Indeed, in genealogies, women are not normally mentioned at all. It's all through the male line that is mentioned. However, Matthew takes a different approach. He mentions five women, and amazingly, three of these women are of ill repute.

I want to suggest that Matthew must have had a very special purpose for going out of his way to mention these ladies. You may recall that during his earthly life that Jesus often endured slurs from his enemies to the effect that he was an illegitimate child. In John 8, 41, the enemies of the Lord say, we are not illegitimate children, implying, you are. It's apparently common knowledge that Jesus was not in Joseph's child, leading the enemies to conclude that some other man must have fathered him. In a way, Matthew is countering those objections to the circumstances of Jesus' birth with women like Tamar and Rahab and Bathsheba in the Messianic genealogy. All adulteries, all part of the Messianic line. In effect, he's saying to the gossips, you want to eliminate Jesus the Messiah because you don't know who his father was. And yet, King David was descended from women like Tamar and Rahab. And in fact, King David himself committed adultery with

Bathsheba. So these women are included, these females are included in this line. And thirdly, his lineage includes foreigners as well. Jewish people had always had a strong sense of independence, sometimes for the right reasons and sometimes for altogether wrong reasons.

God had commanded them not to intermarry and not to interact with foreign nations because he wanted to protect them from being influenced by foreign gods.

The temptation that idolatry brings. Israel always took things too far and became exclusionary towards all the Gentiles. Instead of sharing their knowledge of God with outsiders, they kept the truth to themselves. It's instructive then that Matthew highlights two foreigners in the genealogy of the Messiah. Rahab, who was a Canaanite, and Ruth, who was a Moabite. And these nations both had been long-standing enemies of the Jews, and yet God includes them in the ancestry of his son.

[17 : 27] Why does Matthew mention the failures and the females and the foreigners in the genealogy? If Jesus is going to be seen not only as a Jewish Messiah, but also as a saviour of the world, then the inclusion of all people, righteous and unrighteous, men and women, Jews and Gentiles, is critical. Jesus has his roots deep in the soil of humanity. He has no advantage over us in terms of his ancestry. He has no status. He has no wealth. He has no advantages in terms of education. Jesus was just like one of us. But Matthew is also intent on communicating that Jesus was more than a man.

His lineage, his genealogy starts and ends with a supernatural birth. The first entry in the genealogy proper is this. Abraham was the father of Isaac. The simplicity of that statement hides a fantastic miracle. For Abraham and his wife Sarah did not become pregnant till he was nearly 100 and she was about 90. They were both long past childbearing age. But if the birth of Isaac was supernatural, that is nothing as compared to the birth of Jesus. It's one thing to reactivate reproductive organs of an old couple so that they are able to conceive. It's an entirely different class of miracle for a woman at that time to fall pregnant without the involvement of a man at all. Although the text in those difficult parts, Matthew is very clear at setting out who the parents of the child are. So for example, Tamar and Judah are the parents of Perez and Zerah. David and Bathsheba are the parents of Solomon.

However, if you look at verse 16, Matthew is equally clear. Here in verse 16, Matthew uses the form of whom in Greek, which is the feminine singular. The significance of that is that Jesus was born of Mary, not of Mary and Joseph. The virgin birth is confirmed later on in the chapter. Look at verse 18.

This is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about. His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit. A few verses later, the angel speaks to Joseph and says, do not be afraid to take home Mary as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. And a few verses later, the virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son. One simply cannot maintain the authority of Scripture and at the same time deny the virgin birth.

Matthew is clear at the start of the passage as he is at the end. In the caption at verse 1, is like an overture of all that is to come. A proclamation that Jesus Christ has come into the world, that Jesus, Jehovah, is salvation.

[20 : 39] Messiah simply means the anointed one. The Messiah is the one who is anointed with the Holy Spirit. He alone has power to save his people. He is anointed as a prophet to preach the gospel.

He is anointed as a priest to make atonement for his people. He is anointed as a king to rule. So we see in the first verse, Jesus is the central subject of all human history. He is the highest aim of the Bible.

The whole purpose of the Bible is about promoting the Lord Jesus. He is the anointed one, the divine saviour, the expected one, the promised one, the fulfillment of the promises to Abraham and to David, the mighty counsellor, the prince of peace, the king of kings.

The Father spent 2,000 years preparing humanity for the entrance of Christ into the world. And to miss this Christ means that you are out of step with God. The whole history, the whole of history is focused on Christ. And that means if you are not within that focus, you're an outsider, an orphan outwith the family of God. To know Christ is to be in step with him, to be in sync with the central thrust of the whole of Scripture.

And sometimes we may feel, nobody sees me. Nobody sees me. My presence isn't noted on this earth. I'm a nobody. But if you are in alignment with God, God has his eye upon you.

[22 : 15] If you are distant from Christ, then you're a long way outside the kingdom. And that's all in the first verse, in the first name of the New Testament. In the last verse of the New Testament, the name given in Revelation 22, 21 is Jesus.

Jesus, the beginning and the end, the Alpha and the Omega. And what is the central thought of the whole Scripture is the magnification of the Lord Jesus Christ, his praise and glory.

So this genealogy contains slaves and kings, men and women, homeless and settled, those in prison and those who are free. It has the flawed, it has the faulty, the failed, the foreigners, people leading second chances, and those who are simply nobodies.

And I would suggest to you this is a picture of the church. People from different backgrounds, sometimes shady, often knowing brokenness, always conscious of their need for saving grace, who the Lord has grafted into his family because they have faith in Jesus as their own saviour.

Let me finish with a story. This story was told to me by a minister many years ago.

[23 : 35] His name was Moshe. He was a Jew who had fled Nazi Austria and had come to faith in Jesus Christ. And he talked once about visiting an old man on his deathbed.

The old man was massively convicted of sin. How could he ever be good enough to be accepted by Jesus, to be accepted of that sacrifice of Christ to cope with his sin?

And that night, that man dreamed a dream of the patriarchs walking into heaven. He saw Abraham and Isaac and Jacob walking in.

He looked at himself and he said, well, I know Abraham or Isaac or Jacob. I could never measure up to these guys. And still, that procession carried on and he saw prophets walking in.

He saw disciples from the New Testament, the apostles walking in. Still, he fell short. He saw a parade of witnesses all down through Christian history entering into heaven.

[24 : 42] He measured himself and he said, I don't need that. I'm not like them. And then he saw a man.

His face was twisted and ugly. He was wearing rags. He clearly had been a man who had done terrible things, had paid the price, and he was walking in too.

And Moshe said that the verse that came to him was in 2 Chronicles, chapter 33. The Lord spoke to Manasseh and his people, but they paid no attention.

So the Lord brought against them the army commanders of the king of Assyria, who took Manasseh prisoner, put a hook in his nose and bound him with bronze shackles and took him to Babylon.

In his distress, he sought the favour of the Lord as God. He humbled himself greatly before the God of his ancestors. And when he prayed to him, the Lord was moved by his entreaty and listened to his plea.

[25 : 50] And so he brought back, brought him back to Jerusalem and to his kingdom. And then Manasseh knew that the Lord is God. Manasseh was able to walk in and to be right with God.

And the old man knew that if Manasseh could, then he could, that Christ's sacrifice would cover his sins as well. My friends, this morning, the Lord Jesus Christ, the anointed Messiah, the king of eternity, offers you forgiveness.

He calls you by name. He says that he loves you. He desires for you to be part of his family, to no longer to think who you might be, but to know your identity in Christ as one of God's family, of someone who has experienced that forgiveness and acceptance and love into the family of God.

Amen. Let the Lord just, let's bow before the Lord for a moment. Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you.