

The Genealogy of Jesus Christ

Matthew 1:1-17

Matthew was a tax collector who became a disciple of Jesus (Matt. 9:9; 10:3; Mk. 2:14). He writes the first book of the New Testament, historically believed by the church to be the earliest gospel. Matthew could read and write, and as a devout Jew it's likely that he wrote this account in the 30's, probably assembling parts of it from notes he took while following Jesus. He writes for a Jewish-Christian audience, constantly showing that Jesus is the new Israel who fulfills the Old Testament types. He reveals Jesus to us as the son of Abraham, son of David, and the son of God who came to redeem and save His people.

The Genesis of Jesus

The first two words of Matthew are *biblos geneoseos*, the "book of generations" that could also be translated "beginning" or "Genesis." The same wording occurs in Genesis 2:4 and 5:1, and references, parallels, and allusions to Genesis and the Old Testament are frequent in Matthew. There are genealogies in Genesis (Gen. 4, 5, 10, 11), but also Jesus' father Joseph is a dreamer like Joseph in Genesis. He too will go to Egypt in order to live, but then flee to fulfill what the prophet said, "Out of Egypt I called My Son" (Matt. 2:15; Hos. 11:1). Jesus enters the Jordan to be baptized as Israel did in the exodus from Egypt, and then He heads to the wilderness to be tempted for 40 days and nights. Whereas Israel sinned and perished in the desert after 40 years, Jesus resists temptation and overcomes the devil (Matt. 4). He then goes up on the mountain like Moses did to teach (Matt. 5-7) before heading into the promise land. Matthew tells the story of Jesus as a new Israel and the fulfillment of all that came before. The last book of Hebrew Scriptures is 2 Chronicles, and in the final passage God gives authority over of all earthly kingdoms to Cyrus and commands him to build Him a house in Jerusalem:

Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, so that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and also put it in writing, saying, Thus says Cyrus king of Persia: All the kingdoms of the earth the Lord God of heaven has given me. And He has commanded me to build Him a house at Jerusalem which is in Judah. Who is among you of all His people? May the Lord his God be with him, and let him go up! --2 Chronicles 36:22-23

Jesus gives similar directions to His disciples at the end of Matthew: "And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Amen" (Matt. 28:18-20). There's a similar pattern to the way the Old Testament and the Gospel of Matthew develop:

Matthew

Sermon on the Mount (5-7)

Ministry in Israel (9-12)

Parables of the Kingdom (13)

Eschatological doom, Eucatastrophe (25-28)

Old Testament

Law given on Sinai

Conquest

Wisdom of Solomon

End of Judah; exile & restoration¹

¹ Thanks to Peter Leithart, *The Four*, p. 127 for this structure.

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Son of Abraham, Son of David

Genealogies are important and meaningful in the Bible. This is how you know who is qualified to be a priest in order of Aaron or Zadok, or of royal descent from David. Matthew says these are the generations of Jesus, but then he begins with Abraham (v. 1). Abraham was promised to be the father of a multitude of nations, the one in whom all the families of the earth would be blessed (Gen. 17:4-8). Jesus is also the son of David, the king whom God would set up to build Him a house and reign in His kingdom forever (1 Chron. 17:11-14).. Matthew includes three groups of fourteen generations: from Abraham to David, David to the captivity in Babylon, and from Babylon to Jesus. This is rise, decline, fall and then hope for new beginning (v. 17). God blesses and guides Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph and eventually establishes the nation under David. Solomon begins well but then follows the gods of his foreign wives, and the kingdom splits under his son Rehoboam into Israel in the north and Judah in the south. The Assyrians capture the northern kingdom in 722 B.C. and Babylon takes Judah into captivity in 586 B.C. Yet still God preserves His people in Babylon (cf. Jer. 29:7), and eventually raises up Cyrus to rebuild the temple in 516 B.C. Isaiah prophesied, “There shall come forth a Rod from the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots” (Is. 11:1; Rom. 15:12). God was preparing to send His Son through generations and centuries, but few people would expect the messiah from the lowly person of Mary.

Four Women

Jesus is the son of Abraham and David, the descendent of patriarchs and kings. But Matthew also draws attention to four women in the genealogy. Tamar dressed up as a prostitute in order to sleep with Judah who had been her father-in-law because he refused to give his other son Shelah to her (v. 2; Gen. 38). Rahab was a prostitute in Jericho who hid the Israelite spies and saved her family (v. 5; Josh. 6:17, 22). Ruth the Moabitess married Boaz, and at one point she went to him at night and “uncovered his feet” (Ruth 3:7-14). She “who had been the wife of Uriah” is Bathsheba, whom David saw bathing on the roof, committed adultery with, and then murdered her husband Uriah (v. 6; 2 Sam. 11). These four women lead up to Mary who becomes pregnant outside of wedlock by the Holy Spirit, is nearly divorced by Joseph, and will be scorned her whole life (Matt. 13:54-58; Mk. 6:3; Lk. 4:22). When Jesus calls the Pharisees out on their sins, they essentially call Him a bastard: “We were not born of fornication; we have one Father—God” (Jn. 8:41). God does call the healthy to be healed, but the sick; He doesn’t seek out the righteous, but sinners in need of grace. Tamar believed in God’s promises. Rahab is exalted in Hebrew and James as premier example of faith and faithful action (Heb. 11:31; Jms. 2:25). Ruth clung to Yahweh and was the grandmother of David. Bathsheba was a faithful queen in Israel. And Mary was faithful to raise and serve her Lord. These are not the stories you tend to tell when introducing your family! It’s also notable that the four women were all outsiders, all Gentiles: Tamar and Rahab were Canaanites; Ruth was from Moab, descended from Lot and his daughter (Gen. 19); and Bathsheba married a Hittite. They became ancestresses—great, great, great etc. grandmothers—of the Lord Jesus Christ. As the incarnate son, Jesus came right into this broken world, knew the effects of sin, and redeemed us by dying on the cross. But He had always shown mercy and called sinful and broken people, victims and victimizers, to serve in His kingdom. These women are a type of the Christian church, the mother of us all, the bride who is loved and purified for the Christ the bridegroom (Gal. 4:26; Eph. 5:27; Rev. 21:2). Matthew is preparing us to read and understand his gospel as well as God’s kingdom that we are living in: “For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:26).