

Advent

Promises Kept

Matthew 1:1-17

- The biblical genealogies are never merely lists of names. The genealogies in God's Word help tell the story of the Divine plan to redeem sinners by the life and work of Jesus the Christ. The significance of this plan unfolded through the ages is signaled in God's promise to put enmity between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent (Genesis 3:15). From that point on the Bible tells the story of the Lord's faithfulness to his promise to crush the serpent through a wounded Savior.
- Though they tell the same story and reveal the same Christ and the same salvation, each of the four Gospels are unique in their own way. John begins with a beautifully worded theology of Christ. Mark is short and action packed. Luke is filled with empathy and human interest. Matthew's account seems specially tailored for a Jewish audience. The readers are assumed to have a knowledge of Israel's history and God's law. Matthew goes into greater detail concerning the life Christ's disciples are commanded to live. The Sermon on the Mount explores the searching demands of God's moral law. There is more about the last judgment in Matthew's Gospel.
- Matthew "begins with a forbidding list of unknown names, and it deals at length with matters of law and tradition, of the fulfillment of the Jewish Scriptures, and of Jesus' confrontations with the Jewish leaders of his day"¹ By beginning his account with the genealogy, Matthew is demonstrating that Jesus' life is rooted in history. He is reporting on actual persons and events. But the genealogy is recorded in such a way as to reveal the theological significance of Jesus' life and works. He was not simply a man who lived and died. Jesus is the fulfillment of God's promises to his people.



1. Jesus the Christ

Vv. 1 & 17

- Matthew "bookends" his genealogy of Jesus with references to Jesus as the Christ. The term Christ means *anointed one*. It is the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew *Messiah*. Both terms as they are applied to Jesus the Son of God indicate that he is the one who will accomplish all that God has promised to save his people from their sin.
- Contemporary Christians seem to have little understanding or appreciation for the title Christ often times mistaking it for Jesus' last name. However, for the Jewish reader, waiting for the fulfillment of what God had promised in his covenants with Abraham and David, the title Messiah (Christ) was thrilling. The Christ would deliver the people from their captivity to sin. He would redeem them from the curse of sin. He would come to crush the serpent (Genesis 3:15).

2. Jesus the Son of David

Vv. 1 & 6

- Before mentioning David in the order of the genealogy, Matthew names Jesus with one of his most important titles: Son of David (vs. 1). This is a reminder to the people of Jesus' messianic role. Following the anointing of David by the prophet Nathan and the death of Saul, God's forms a covenant with David:

¹ R.T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007) pg. 15.

“I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son” (2 Samuel. 7:14a). God warns that he will discipline David’s offspring if he commits iniquity. But God also promises that his steadfast love will not depart from David as it was taken from Saul (2 Samuel 7:14b–15). Finally, God promises David, “And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me. Your throne shall be established forever” (2 Samuel 7:16). David’s prayer of gratitude is found in 2 Samuel 7:18–29. In this prayer, he refers to God’s promise as “instruction for mankind,” indicating that this covenant will involve the destiny of all mankind (2 Samuel 7:19).²

- By beginning his Gospel with the genealogy of Jesus Matthew demonstrates a keen interest in showing his readers from the outset that the birth of Jesus was the fulfillment of God’s promises to send a Savior to his people. Jesus’ family tree proves that he is the Son of David, the fulfillment of biblical prophecy, the King who will reign upon an eternal throne:

“Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this” (Isaiah 9:7).

3. Jesus the Son of Abraham

Vv. 1 & 2

- Just as Matthew does with David, he places the title Son of Abraham upon Jesus (vs. 1). As the promised seed of Abraham, Jesus is the fulfillment of the Covenant of Grace; the promise that God will save his people by grace through faith alone. “And he brought [Abraham] outside and said, ‘Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them.’ Then he said to him, ‘So shall your offspring be.’ And he believed the LORD, and he counted it to him as righteousness” (Genesis 15:5-6). And: “I will make you exceedingly fruitful, and I will make you into nations, and kings shall come from you. And I will establish my covenant between me and you and your offspring after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you” (Genesis 17:6-7).
- Matthew begins Jesus’ genealogy with Abraham the father of all the faithful. Abraham began life as a pagan. But God chose him and saved him by grace through faith. Through Abraham God promised to make a great nation through whom all the nations would be blessed. Jesus is the One who brings salvation to all the nations and peoples of earth. It is significant that the four women mentioned in Jesus’ genealogy were gentiles. Following his resurrection, Jesus called his disciples to make disciples of “all nations” (Matthew 28:19).

4. Jesus the Savior of Sinners.

- All the great names of the covenant are found in Matthew’s genealogy of Jesus. From those names we can reproduce the history of Israel from beginning to end. One famous name succeeds another: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, David and the kings of Judah. Those names both precede and follow that of Jesus the Christ. The great forward movement of salvation history culminates in Jesus. He is God’s covenant of grace kept. The gracious promise that God made to Abraham, that he applied further to David, is brought to fruition in the life and work of Jesus the Christ. Matthew’s genealogy would have been potent for first century Jews who had been taught to long for the Messiah.
- Of note are the rather scandalous figures in Jesus’ genealogy. There is Tamar who seduced and had the child of her father-in-law Judah, “the wife of Uriah” (Bathsheba) who reminds us of David’s outrageous sin, and Rahab the harlot. Ahaz was one of Israel’s ungodly kings (2 Kings 16). The exile to Babylon which was in conjunction with the division of the kingdom was, up to that point, the greatest catastrophe in the history of Israel. This event along with the names of rather notorious sinners reminds us that our Lord came into the world to save sinners.
- What is more, not only is it unusual that Matthew would name women in the Lord’s genealogy but the four women named were not Jews: Tamar and Rahab were Canaanites, Ruth was a Moabite, and Bathsheba was the wife of a Hittite. This should remind us that Jesus came as Savior to the world, not just to the Hebrews. Jesus is the Messiah of all the nations and peoples. Matthew’s account records the visit of the Magi who were astrologers from the east. They were pagan gentiles who were, by God’s grace, among the first to worship the Messiah.

² Keith Mathison, *The Davidic Covenant*, Table Talk Magazine, March 5, 2012