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Matthew 1:1 - 1:17



Gospel of Matthew - Steve Gregg

In this teaching, Steve Gregg dives into the importance of Jesus' genealogy in Matthew 1:1-17. He highlights how the lineage of Jesus was traced back to Abraham and David, the two pivotal figures in Jewish history, and how this fulfilled prophecy in the Old Testament. Gregg also notes the inclusion of certain individuals in the genealogy, such as women and non-Jews, which was unusual for that time and speaks to how Jesus came to minister to all people. Additionally, Gregg touches on the significance of the numerology found in the Hebrew and Greek letters used in the genealogy.

Transcript

Today we'll be looking at the first chapter of the Gospel of Matthew. This is the beginning of our excursus into the Gospels to study the life of the most important person who ever lived. Indeed, a man who, if his own claims about himself are to be trusted, is God Himself.

Come down to die for the sins of humanity and knowing Him is the most important thing any of us can know because it is through the knowledge of Him that we can have salvation and we can have eternal life. And that's exactly what he said he came down to arrange for. But how did he do this? How did he arrange for it? What did he say in the meantime and what more is there to his life and teachings besides this one element? Well, that we will discover as we study through the Gospel of Matthew and the other Gospels as well.

Today we embark in the very opening of Matthew. And in the very first verse, actually in the very first 17 verses, we have a concern for the genealogy of Jesus. That means the pedigree, the family background, the line through which he came.

Now this is actually quite important, believe it or not, because it's very important that Jesus, if he is the Messiah of Israel, must have the right pedigree in order to qualify for the Messiah of Israel. Now we know that Jesus' real qualifications no doubt could be traced to the fact that he's the Son of God. But really his human lineage and his family line is very important because in the Old Testament, the prophets actually made specific

predictions as to the line through which the Messiah would come.

For example, in Genesis chapter 49, when Jacob was prophesying over his 12 sons, who became the heads of the 12 tribes of Israel, he said to Judah, who of course the tribe of Judah was named after, he said, Judah, you are a lion's whelp. And he said, the scepter shall not depart from Judah until he comes to whom it belongs. And unto him shall the gathering of the people be.

This is a reference to the Messiah who would come. And he was associated with Judah, the tribe of Judah. And the scepter, of course, is the emblem of rulership.

And Jacob said that the rulership of the nation would rest in the hands of Judah until the final king of the tribe of Judah would come, who is the one to whom the scepter really belongs. And that was a veiled reference to the Messiah who would come. So we know from that passage, which is Genesis 49.10, that the Messiah would be of the tribe of Judah.

Well, much later than that time, almost a thousand years later, there was a notable king who was in fact of the tribe of Judah, and his name was David. And on one occasion, this man David was talking to a prophet named Nathan, and he said, I'm contemplating building a house for God, meaning a temple. And Nathan was told by God to correct David in this.

And Nathan came to him and said, well, God doesn't want you to build a temple. God hasn't told you to build a house for him. But in fact, God promises he will build a house for you.

And by this he meant a dynasty, a household, a family line. And he says that after you die, David, this is in 2 Samuel chapter 7, Nathan said, after you have died, God will raise up one of your offspring through whom he will establish a kingdom forever. And there will be no end to it, and he will be my son, and I'll be his father, says God.

Now, these verses are quoted in the New Testament as being about Christ. But the belief that those verses are about Christ is not just a Christian belief. The Jews also understood before Christ ever came that this was a prediction that the Messiah would come from the line of David.

And therefore, an expression for the Messiah came to be used among the Jews even before Jesus was here. They called him the son of David. Now, of course, there were many people descended from David.

David had at least eight wives and many children. And by the time of Jesus, which was a thousand years after David, there were many people who were descendants of David in some respect. But there was one person to whom the Jews reserved the title son of David, and that was for the Messiah.

And it's interesting, Matthew opens his book with this statement, The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham. Now, David is in Jesus' lineage, and Matthew is about to show that by giving this genealogy. And he takes it back not only through David, so that the Messiah, Jesus, is seen to be the son of David, as the prophet said he would be, but he takes it back to Abraham as well.

Why is this? Well, because it's important to show that the Messiah was the fulfillment of the promise made to Abraham. You see, God, before he ever made any promises to David, in fact, a thousand years before David was born, God spoke to Abraham and said, Through you and through your seed, meaning your offspring, I will bless all nations. That was a promise made to Abraham.

So there would be a seed or an offspring of Abraham through whom God would bless all nations. It was much later that this person was identified with the Messiah and said to be the son of David. Now, when Matthew says this is the genealogy of Jesus Christ, who is the son of David, he's using a term that means the Messiah.

When he says the son of Abraham, he's pointing out that Jesus is the seed of Abraham through whom the promises that God made to that ancient patriarch would be fulfilled. Now, this would have a very potent meaning and effect upon Jewish readers because Abraham and David were their favorite characters. And, of course, the promise made to Abraham and the promise made to David that their offspring would somehow come and save his people was a very profoundly treasured promise among the Jews.

So when Matthew is writing to Jewish people, as I believe he was, and he says this man Jesus was the son of David, he was the son of Abraham, he's harking back and appealing to a very deeply rooted sentiment that God had promised to send a son of Abraham and a son of David to save his people. Now, after having said that Jesus was the son of David and the son of Abraham, Matthew goes on to give more particulars about the genealogy. Beginning at verse 2, he says, Abraham begot Isaac, Isaac begot Jacob, and Jacob begot Judah and his brothers.

Of course, this was the founding of the nation of Israel. Israel came from Judah and his brothers. They were the sons of Jacob.

Jacob was also named Israel. So they were the sons of Israel or the children of Israel. And their offspring came to be called the children of Israel and because there were 12 sons who brought forth this race, they were called the 12 tribes of Israel.

So we read here that Abraham begot Isaac, Isaac begot Jacob, that is Israel, and Jacob begot Judah and his brothers. Now, Judah is mentioned separately because it is his line that will be followed here, not the other 11 brothers of his. Verse 3 says, Judah begot Perez and Zerah by Tamar.

Perez begot Hezron, Hezron begot Ram, and Ram begot Amminadab. Interestingly, Amminadab is mentioned in the Old Testament as being the father-in-law of Aaron, the first high priest. Now, Aaron himself was not of this line.

Aaron was of the tribe of Levi. That's different than the tribe of Judah. We're here studying the tribe of Judah.

But when Aaron married, he did not have to marry within his tribe. He did not marry a woman of the tribe of Levi. He married a woman of the tribe of Judah.

And her father's name was Amminadab. This man was also in the lineage of Jesus. Eventually, if you go back far enough here, according to Matthew 1.4, Ram begot Amminadab, and Amminadab begot Nashon, and Nashon begot Salmon.

Now, we don't know much about Salmon, but we know something about his wife. In verse 5, it says, Salmon begot Boaz by Rahab. Now, Rahab, of course, is a well-known character from the book of Joshua, chapter 2. She spared the spies who were spying out the land of Canaan and sent them home safely.

And for this, she was herself spared along with her family. She was not a Jew. She was a Canaanite, but she apparently converted to Judaism.

And then she married a man of the tribe of Judah named Salmon. And together they had a family. And from their lineage came Boaz.

Now, we know something about him, too, because Boaz figures in the story of Ruth. It says in verse 5 here, Boaz begot Obed by Ruth. Now, Ruth, of course, has a book devoted to her all by itself in the Bible.

She was a Moabite woman who married this man, Boaz, and her son, by him, was named Obed. Now, Obed is not very well-known in Christian history, but his son is, and his grandson is even more so, because Obed begot Jesse, and Jesse begot David, the king. So, we can see that Ruth was the great-grandmother of David.

And Rahab was also in David's lineage, if you go back far enough. Now, it says in verse 6, David, the king, begot Solomon by her who had been the wife of Uriah. That's a reference to Bathsheba, of course.

Solomon, who was one of David's sons, became the next king after him. And Solomon begot Rehoboam. Rehoboam begot Abijah.

Abijah begot Azah. Azah begot Jehoshaphat. Jehoshaphat begot Joram, and Joram begot Uzziah.

Uzziah begot Jotham. Jotham begot Ahaz, and Ahaz begot Hezekiah. Hezekiah begot Manasseh.

Manasseh begot Ammon, and Ammon begot Josiah. Then, continuing in verse 11, Josiah begot... I'll have something to say about these men in a moment. In verse 11, Josiah begot Jeconiah and his brothers about the time they were carried away to Babylon.

And after they were brought to Babylon, Jeconiah begot Shealtiel, and Shealtiel begot Zerubbabel. Zerubbabel is well known as the man who was the first governor of the Jews when they came back from the exile in Babylon and rebuilt the city of Jerusalem in the temple. Zerubbabel, verse 13 says, begot Abiud.

Abiud begot Eliakim, and Eliakim begot Azor. These are very unknown persons because they lived during a time of Jewish history when there was not much history being written. They lived in what we call the intertestamental period, between the time that Malachi was written and the time Matthew was written.

And we don't have any biblical record of that period except this genealogy of these men. Verse 14, Azor begot Zadok. Zadok begot Achim, and Achim begot Eliud.

Eliud begot Eleazar. Eleazar begot Mathan. Mathan begot Jacob.

This is a different Jacob, of course. And Jacob begot Joseph, the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ. Now, there's a summary statement in verse 17.

He says, So all the generations from Abraham to David are fourteen generations, from David until the captivity of Babylon are fourteen generations, and from the captivity in Babylon until Christ are fourteen generations. Now, I want to make some comments about this genealogy. It may have been somewhat tedious listening to those names.

Some of them we know almost nothing about, though there are some interesting high points in it, not the least of which are four women who are named in this genealogy. Tamar, mentioned in verse 3. Rahab, mentioned in verse 5. And Ruth, also mentioned in verse 5. And then in verse 6, there's mention of her who had been the wife of Uriah. That's Bathsheba.

Now, ordinarily, Jewish people did not include the names when they recorded the lineage and the genealogy of someone. They did not ordinarily record the names of the mothers. In fact, even this genealogy, as a rule, does not do so.

It's very uncommon to ever mention a mother in a genealogy, and that's not because of some kind of male chauvinism. It simply is because the mother did not contribute to the lineage in the same way the father did. The father's name and inheritance and so forth is what the children carried on, and therefore the male children carried on the lineage in the name of their father and their grandfather and great-grandfather, whereas the female children, when they got married, took on the name of their husband and therefore became part of that lineage of their husband's ancestry.

And therefore, it's not really a thing against women. It's just a matter of following the actual male lineage back to the original ancestors that genealogies usually do not bother to mention who the mothers were. But here we have four exceptions.

There are four women who are mentioned. And the very inclusion of women in this genealogy is a radical departure on the part of Matthew from the normal Jewish practice. And we would ask, why did he do this? Well, there are several other things to observe.

One is that all the women he named were apparently Gentiles. Now, it's possible that Bathsheba was not a Gentile. We don't know if she was a Gentile or not.

But she may have been. She was married to a man named Uriah the Hittite. The Jews were forbidden to marry Hittites.

The Hittites were Canaanites. And among the people that the Jews were not permitted to marry were the Hittite, Canaanites. Now, Bathsheba's first husband was a Hittite, Uriah the Hittite, which may suggest that she was not a Jew.

But whether she was a Jew or not, we know the other three women were not. Tamar lived at a time when there was no Jewish people, so she wasn't a Jew. She married from some Canaanite background into the family of Jacob.

She didn't marry Judah, but she had children illegitimately by him. And then there's Rahab. We know that she was a Canaanite.

She was of the town of Jericho. She was not a Jew. And then there's Ruth, and we know that she was a Moabitess.

She was from Moab. She was not a Jew. So, whether or not Bathsheba was a Jew, and I suspect she was not, certainly three out of the four women were Gentiles, and perhaps all four were.

So, we have not only the mention of women in the genealogy, but of Gentile women. Now, there's more. These women had something else in common.

All of them, except Ruth, were known for their sexual immorality. Tamar impersonated a harlot, or a whore, a prostitute, and she slept with her father-in-law, and that's where her children came from. Now, that is a disgraceful thing.

Likewise, Rahab, before she met the spies, was conducting herself in the trade of a prostitute. She's Rahab the harlot. She was a prostitute also.

And then, of course, you have her that had been the wife of Uriah. You have Bathsheba. She's best remembered for the fact that she committed adultery with King David when she was still married to her first husband.

And later, after her husband was dead, she became his wife, David's wife. But three of these four women have sexual scandalous backgrounds. Now, what can we deduce from this? Matthew does not give all the mothers' names, but the mothers' names he does give are Gentiles, generally speaking, and those who have a scandalous background.

What I believe we can read into this, without much fear of being wrong, I think, is that Matthew departed from the ordinary procedure, which is normally to give only the men's names, in order to emphasize three things. One, the Messiah was not just for men, he was not just for Jews, and he was not just for the morally upright. When God ordained the way that his Son would come into the world, he was not afraid to use women.

Of course, in every generation, there were women. And therefore, Jesus was not afraid to associate with women in ways that Jews normally did not. Even his disciples were scandalized or offended when they found him talking to a woman at the well in John 4. Because Jews were not to talk to women or associate with women outside the home.

And yet, Matthew freely shows that Jesus was associated with women by having mothers, and grandmothers, and great-grandmothers. But also, the women that he was associated with were Gentiles, and were sinful Gentiles. They weren't necessarily religious Gentiles, they were prostitutes and such.

Now, what Matthew, I think, is trying to get across is that God, in sending the Messiah, did not simply restrict his activity to those who were Jews, or who were male, or who were morally upright like the Pharisees. And this was sort of a slap in the face to the Jewish mentality, that God would use Gentiles, immoral Gentiles even, in order to bring his Son into the world. Now, that doesn't mean that God approves of the immorality.

What it means is that Jesus, in his ministry, associated with people of these classes. Women, Jews, excuse me, Gentiles who were not Jews, and also, of course, sinners. He was called a friend of sinners.

And this is introduced as early as the time when Matthew gives Jesus' family background. Now, one thing I should point out is that when it says that, so and so begat so and so, it doesn't necessarily mean that it was a single generation between these two men. For example, in verse 8, it says that Well, if you look back in the Old Testament, you'll find there were three generations between Joram and Uzziah.

There was Ahaziah, Joash, and Amaziah. And they are left out of this reckoning. Likewise, in verse 11, it says, Well, not precisely, not literally, because between those two was Jehoiakim.

Josiah begat Jehoiakim, who begat Jeconiah. And likewise, in verse 12, it says But in 1 Chronicles 3, verse 17 through 19, we read that And he was the father of Zerubbabel. Now, what we see then is that Matthew abbreviates or compresses the genealogy.

He doesn't give every generation. Nor does he necessarily need to, in order to be honest. We find in the Old Testament, many of the genealogies were compressed or they were highlights.

It was not the purpose of Matthew or of most genealogists in the Bible to give a comprehensive list of every name and every generation. It was more their desire to show what line it went through by highlighting some of the most important names that were in that person's lineage. Now, in this case, Matthew seems to have deliberately limited the number of names in order to make the summary statement of verse 17.

Because he says, Now, that's not literally true, of course. It's only true in terms of how he wrote it. Because he left out several generations here and there.

Now, Matthew was not being dishonest, by the way. Nor was he mistaken. The information that he left out was common knowledge.

Anyone could read the Old Testament and get that information. He was not trying to fool anyone. Nor was he mistaken.

He was following the normal practice of the day to abbreviate genealogies. And probably for the sake of memorization, he pointed out you could sort of remember the genealogy of Jesus in three groups of 14 names. And there were 14 from Abraham to David, 14 from David to the captivity in Babylon, and 14 after that until Christ came.

Now, why Matthew would wish to abbreviate this or make it into three groups of 14, we can't say for sure. We can point out that 14 is twice 7, and 7 was a very holy number to the Jews. But that may not be significant here.

One thing may be more likely to have influenced Matthew in doing it this way is that 14 is the numeric number of the name David in the Hebrew. The Hebrew letters, as well as Greek letters, were used also for numerals. And therefore, every name and every word had a numeric value.

And if you would take the numeric value of the name David in Hebrew, it is 14. And perhaps just as Matthew opened his book by pointing out that Jesus Christ is the son of David, he may have closed his genealogical treatment with that emphasis, too. He mentions David twice in verse 17.

And the use of the word 14 or the number 14 may be in order to highlight or to underscore the association with David, that Jesus is the Messiah, the son of David, the one that David was told would come. Now, there's something else about this genealogy that's interesting, and that is that Jeconiah, who's mentioned in verse 11, was cursed in Jeremiah 22, 28 through 30, and said no son of his would ever be king of Israel again. But, you see, Jesus didn't come literally through this line.

This is the line of Joseph, who is not Jesus' biological father. Jesus' mother was Mary, and she did not have this curse on her line. But Joseph did come through the kingly line of Judah, and giving Jesus his legal standing in society by adopting Jesus as his son, he put Jesus in the position where he could actually be considered the most rightful king of the Jews.

When the wise men came in the next chapter, they said, where is he who is born king of the Jews? We'll talk more about that later. But the genealogy of Jesus is a royal genealogy, and that is what Matthew points out, because the Messiah is a royal person. He is the king that God has sent to rule not only Israel, but all the world.