



CAPITOL COMMISSION™

Matthew 1: The Birth of the King

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With this handout, we begin our chapter-by-chapter study through the Bible book of Matthew. Matthew is an incredibly rich account of the life and teachings of Jesus Christ, and if you join us in studying it you will be encouraged. I suggest you first read the prior handout, which is an introduction to this book, and then read Matthew chapter 1 and these notes. Of course, if you are able, I hope you will also join us at our weekly Capitol Bible Study (see bottom of page for times).

CHAPTER THEME:

Matthew 1 shows that Jesus was the promised Messianic King of the Old Testament and the Eternal God, as proven by both his human lineage and his divine birth.

1. THE KING'S HUMAN GENEALOGY (VS. 1-17)

Matthew opens his gospel account with the genealogy of Jesus.¹ Though this section undoubtedly strikes many contemporary readers as boring and irrelevant, to Matthew and his original Jewish readers this was the perfect way to begin.

The Jewish people had always valued genealogies. Their ethnic and national heritage was based on family heritage. Their country was originally divided into sections based on family trees (see the Old Testament book of Joshua). Their priests were required to trace their family line back to Aaron, and a priest's wife had to trace back five generations. Even transferring property required knowledge of one's family tree (Ruth 3-4).²

Matthew included this genealogy for a much more important purpose though. Through this list, he demonstrated Jesus' royal pedigree and accompanying right to rule as King. Jesus is shown, through his legal father Joseph, to be a direct descendent of the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and the greatest kings in the nation's history, David, and David's son, Solomon.

Furthermore, Jesus' lineage demonstrated that he met a foundational requirement for the Jewish Messiah – that he be a direct descendent of King David. God had long-before promised that one of David's descendents would rule over Israel and establish his eternal kingdom (2 Samuel 7:12-16). First century Jews were well aware of this prophecy and were eagerly anticipating the coming king. It was thus essential for Matthew to show that Jesus was of Davidic descent.^{3,4}

Jesus Descended from Sinners

One of the most striking things about Jesus' family tree is that it includes many obvious sinners. Though some of them later repented of their transgressions and demonstrated great faith, and many were among the most respected leaders in the nation's history, they were all far from perfect.

- *Abraham* lied twice about his wife, Sarah (Genesis 12:11-19; 10:1-18).
- *Jacob* in his early years was a deceiver (Genesis 27).
- *David* committed adultery and murder (2 Samuel 11).
- *Solomon* had 700 wives, in opposition to the Lord's command (Deut. 17:17), many of whom led him away from God (1 Kings 11).

The list also contains women, which was unusual for Jewish genealogies. Four women are mentioned.

- *Tamar* (v. 3) was a Canaanite daughter-in-law of Judah whose husband had died. Desperate to have children, she tricked her father-in-law Judah into thinking she was a prostitute so he would have sexual relations with her and produce offspring. (Genesis 38)
- *Rahab* (v. 5) was a prostitute who turned to God in Jericho (Joshua 2, 6).
- *Ruth* (v. 5) was a righteous woman who submitted to the one true God, but she was also a Gentile and a Moabite. The Moabites descended from Lot's daughters who lured him into incestual relations to produce offspring. (Gen. 19:30-38, Deut. 23:3)
- *Bathsheba* (v. 6) is not named in the original text but is referred to as "the one of Uriah." King David committed adultery with her, had he` husband Uriah killed, and then took her as his own wife.⁵

CAPITOL BIBLE STUDIES

LEGISLATORS: WEDNESDAYS @ 7:30 A.M., ASSEMBLY RULES CONFERENCE ROOM (3171)

STAFF/LOBBYISTS: WEDNESDAYS @ 12:00 NOON, ROOM 125

CALIFORNIA

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Matthew did not include everyone he could have in his genealogy, but skipped some generations.⁶ So, why did he choose to include so many known sinners? There are many possible answers to consider. First, despite their faults, many of these people were great heroes to the Jewish people. Second, many of them, though not all, did repent of their sins. Third, their inclusion shows God's providence in maintaining Christ's family line. Fourth, their names and stories served as a reminder to the Jewish readers of their nation's checkered history and need for a savior. Finally, and most importantly, this list powerfully demonstrates that God is merciful to sinners, a fact which was no doubt especially meaningful to a redeemed tax collector like Matthew!

2. THE KING'S DIVINE GENEALOGY (VS. 18-25)

While verse 1-17 show Jesus legal right to rule as King, verses 18-25 show his divine origin and therefore his God-given right to rule as Messiah. This is demonstrated through the virgin birth and fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy.

Even Jesus' name speaks of his divine identity. The angel told Joseph to "call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins" (vs. 21). Jesus was actually the Hebrew name "Yeshua," from which we get the English name "Joshua". It means "Yahweh (Ye) Saves (Shua)!"⁷ Note that the term *Christ* (Greek = *Khristós*), is a translation of the Hebrew term "Messiah," which means "the anointed one." So, every time someone speaks the Lord's name, even as a curse word, they are declaring the good news that God saves us through His Anointed One, Jesus!

For those who doubt the virgin birth, consider this: "The supernatural birth of Jesus is the only way to account for the life that He lived. A skeptic who denied the virgin birth once asked a Christian, "If I told you that a child over there was born without a human father, would you believe me?" The believer replied, "Yes, if he lived as Jesus lived." The greatest outward evidence of Jesus' supernatural birth and deity is his life."⁸

APPLICATION:

1. Jesus is King and worthy of our worship.

I remember touring Israel many years ago. A highlight was visiting the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem, an ancient

cathedral built on the traditional site of Christ's birth. Like millions before me, I entered through an unusually low doorway, called "The Door of Humility," which reminds all visitors, no matter how great they may be, that they must bow in the presence of the eternal King. It's a good reminder.

2. The King is willing to save

Many in the Capitol have told me that they don't feel good enough to even visit the Capitol Bible Study. Yet, Jesus' own family tree is riddled with folks who might make excellent guests on a raunchy daytime talk show, and Jesus himself said, "I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners" (Matthew 9:13). Jesus Christ is the king of grace, and will accept all who come to him by faith, regardless of their past.

3. The King is able to save.

Jesus' was both human and divine, as shown by his miraculous virgin birth. He was uniquely "God with us" (v. 23)! As a result, he was the only one who could die to atone for the sins of all who call upon Him, even sinners like you and me. I hope you are personally trusting in this King.

¹ Matthew 1:1 reads in the original Greek, "*Biblos geneleos,*" or "the book of the genealogy." Words related to our word "genealogy" also appear in verses 17 (*geneai*) and 18 (*genesis*).

² John F. MacArthur, *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary, Matthew 1-7* (Moody, 1985), 2-3. Warren Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary, Volume 1* (Victor, 1989), 13.

³ "It is both interesting and significant that since the destruction of the Temple in A.D. 70 no genealogies exist that can trace the ancestry of any Jew now living. The primary significance of that fact is that, for those Jews who still look for the Messiah, his lineage to David could never be established. Jesus Christ is the last verifiable claimant to the throne of David, and therefore to the messianic line." (MacArthur, 11)

⁴ Interesting to note that heritage still matters even in our country, as some today challenge President Obama's right to lead because they doubt that he was born in the U.S. as required by our constitution.

⁵ MacArthur, 7-9

⁶ Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, (Eerdmans, 1992), 22.

⁷ *The Expositor's Bible Commentary, Volume 8*, (Zondervan, 1984) p. 76.

⁸ MacArthur, 22.