

Matthew 1 • The Working of Providence and Promise

Introduction

It's normal for Christians to rush right through the first chapter of Matthew. After all, it's just a genealogy and a cute Christmas story, right? Actually this is a very serious chapter. So serious, in fact, that anyone who cannot fully understand and accept the greater things being taught here will not be able to fully understand and accept all the rest of the things to come in the whole of this Gospel. Paul says, "ALL Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness" (2 Ti. 3:16); that means even genealogies and the Nativity Narrative which we have largely allowed to be trivialized into a children's Christmas story. When Matthew wrote this Gospel, he started here for the purpose of establishing the truth of the whole Gospel, setting out to prove that Jesus was indeed the Messiah, the fulfillment of Scripture and it is as serious as the rest of his writing.

¹The record of the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah, the son of David, the son of Abraham:

²Abraham was the father of Isaac, Isaac the father of Jacob, and Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers.

³Judah was the father of Perez and Zerah by Tamar, Perez was the father of Hezron, and Hezron the father of Ram.

⁴Ram was the father of Amminadab, Amminadab the father of Nahshon, and Nahshon the father of Salmon.

⁵Salmon was the father of Boaz by Rahab, Boaz was the father of Obed by Ruth, and Obed the father of Jesse.

⁶Jesse was the father of David the king.

David was the father of Solomon by Bathsheba who had been the wife of Uriah.

⁷Solomon was the father of Rehoboam, Rehoboam the father of Abijah, and Abijah the father of Asa.

⁸Asa was the father of Jehoshaphat, Jehoshaphat the father of Joram, and Joram the father of Uzziah.

⁹Uzziah was the father of Jotham, Jotham the father of Ahaz, and Ahaz the father of Hezekiah.

¹⁰Hezekiah was the father of Manasseh, Manasseh the father of Amon, and Amon the father of Josiah.

¹¹Josiah became the father of Jeconiah and his brothers, at the time of the deportation to Babylon.

¹²After the deportation to Babylon: Jeconiah became the father of Shealtiel, and Shealtiel the father of Zerubbabel.

¹³Zerubbabel was the father of Abihud, Abihud the father of Eliakim, and Eliakim the father of Azor.

[Read v.1-17]

Q: How does the opening verse and the accompanying genealogy establish the primary theme and purpose of Matthew's Gospel?

A: As it was probably written to a mainly Jewish audience, the main purpose of this Gospel is to prove that Jesus Christ is the Messiah, who by definition must be established as "*the son of David*". The genealogy traced back to Abraham through Solomon and David is a very powerful proof to Jews. In fact, even non-Christian Hebrew scholars have affirmed this genealogy to meet their own standards of authenticity and credibility.

Q: How is Jesus the Messiah's relationship to David expressed in Scripture?

A: "...the root and the descendant of David..."

"I, Jesus, have sent My angel to testify to you these things for the churches. I am the root and the descendant of David, the bright morning star."

— Revelation 22:16

Q: What is meant by "root" and how does this compare with being "the descendant of David"?

A: He is "*the root*" in so much as He is God eternal and brought David into being – in other words, He is the "*Alpha*"; He is "*the descendant*" in that His humanity is linked to David by His physical birth – in other words, He is the "*Omega*".

*Paul, a bond-servant of Christ Jesus, called as an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, which He promised beforehand through His prophets in the holy Scriptures, concerning His Son, who was **born of a descendant of David according to the flesh, who was declared the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead**, according to the Spirit of holiness, Jesus Christ our Lord,*

— Romans 1:1–4

Q: Luke's genealogy differs because it is actually Mary's lineage. Why would Matthew choose to instead offer the genealogy of Joseph?

A: Joseph is Jesus' father in the eyes of the Law. To a predominantly Jewish audience this would be the greater concern to them.

(Continued on the next page.)

¹⁴Azor was the father of Zadok, Zadok the father of Achim, and Achim the father of Eliud.

¹⁵Eliud was the father of Eleazar, Eleazar the father of Matthan, and Matthan the father of Jacob.

¹⁶Jacob was the father of Joseph the husband of Mary, by whom Jesus was born, who is called the Messiah.

¹⁷So all the generations from Abraham to David are fourteen generations; from David to the deportation to Babylon, fourteen generations; and from the deportation to Babylon to the Messiah, fourteen generations.

Q: But why does Luke's genealogy not specifically mention Mary? Why does it appear to also run through Joseph?

A: When the Old Testament Law was established to determine how lands and inheritance would pass from one generation to the next, it was initially imparted from father to son. But in Numbers 26-27 we have the case of Zelophehad who had no sons but only daughters. The Law was amended by God through Moses so that families with no sons would not lose their inheritance to the son-in-law's family. Luke's genealogy reflects that Mary was the oldest daughter with no brothers. On her wedding day, the Jewish practice was for her father on that very day to legally adopt his son-in-law to meet the requirements of the Law. In the Hebrew way of thinking, Joseph from that point forward is seen as a son of Mary's father as much as any biological son. Notice that Scripture does not use the terms "father-in-law", "son-in-law", "grandfather", "granddaughter", etc. Lineage and relationships were handled differently than in modern, Western cultures.

Q: What does this genealogy prove about the way God has been at work in the world?

A: "Providence" is God's control of circumstances in order for His will to prevail and to ensure His purposes are fulfilled.

Q: How is this a testimony to Satan's ineffectiveness against God's will?

A: Consider how often in Scripture the theme involves Satan's attack on the seed line in order to prevent Christ's coming. He not only attacked Israel in general in an effort to wipe out the seed line, but at various times attacked individuals along the way. At one point it would appear that all in the royal line had perished save for Joash alone (2 Ki. 11).

Point: *This is not a boring, administrative document but an actual record of God's faithfulness to preserve the children of Abraham as the conduit through whom Christ would come into the world.*

Q: Is there anything practical that can be gleaned from this genealogy?

A: Thomas Fuller made this observation from v.7-8...

1. "Rehoboam the father of Abijah" – that is, a bad father begat a bad son.
2. "Abijah the father of Asa" – that is, a bad father begat a good son.
3. "Asa the father of Jehoshaphat" – that is, a good father begat a good son.
4. "Jehoshaphat the father of Joram" – that is, a good father begat a bad son.

"I see, Lord, from hence, that my father's piety cannot be entailed; that is bad news for me. But I see also that actual impiety is not always hereditary; that is good news for my son." – Thomas Fuller

Q: What might be significant about the four women mentioned prior to Mary?

A: They all graphically illustrate the grace of God at work. (See Rom. 5:20)

1. Tamar (v.3) was guilty of whoredom. (Gen. 38)
2. Rahab (v.5) was both a harlot and a Gentile foreigner. (Josh. 2; Heb. 11:31)
3. Ruth (v.5) was Moabitess, a Gentile originally excluded from the nation of Israel. (Ruth)
4. Bathsheba (v.6) was a partner with David in unspeakable sin.

Q: Is there something mysterious or hinting of a deeper spiritual meaning in that this genealogy comports to even groups of fourteen?

A: As genealogy's grew longer and longer it became normal to condense them to mainly reflect the major figures in one's heritage. It was common to use such a format to make it easier to memorize. This is the normal way genealogies were handled in ancient times.

Q: How does this compare to a modern-day Jew's genealogy?

A: In reality, no Jew today is in possession of a legal genealogy because those records were irretrievably lost when the Temple was destroyed in 70 AD. Jesus Christ is the only Jew alive today who can prove His rights to the throne of David.

Application: Every genealogy in Scripture is teaching something greater spiritually and not merely providing information. In spite of man's failures and Satan's attempts, by God's grace His providence has ensured that His promises and plan is to be fulfilled not just in general, but specifically through Jesus alone. This genealogy is a testimony to His involvement not just in the past, nor the present when Matthew wrote this Gospel, but for the future.

*"Who has performed and accomplished it,
Calling forth the generations from the beginning?
'I, the LORD, am the first, and with the last. I am He.' "*
— Isaiah 41:4

*Declaring the end from the beginning,
And from ancient times things which have not been done,
Saying, 'My purpose will be established,
And I will accomplish all My good pleasure';*
— Isaiah 46:10

*So will My word be which goes forth from My mouth;
It will not return to Me empty,
Without accomplishing what I desire,
And without succeeding in the matter for which I sent it.*
— Isaiah 55:11

¹⁸Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: when His mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child by the Holy Spirit. ¹⁹And Joseph her husband, being a righteous man and not wanting to disgrace her, planned to send her away secretly.

[Read v.18-19]

Q: What did it mean to be "betrothed"?

A: Marriage at that time was a much longer process, and what we might consider today to be an "engagement" was, at that time, a legally binding part of the marriage process. This is best proved by the fact that in v.19 Joseph is specifically called "*her husband*", not her "fiancé" or some kind of equivalent.

Q: According to a strict interpretation of the Old Testament Law, what should have happened to Mary?

A: According to Dt. 22:23-24 she should have been stoned. Apparently by this time the Jews no longer enforced this law and instead allowed for a divorce.

Q: Why does it here specify he "planned to send her away secretly"? Why is that significant?

A: Because the divorce process (Dt. 24:1) normally required providing it in writing in the presence of two or three witnesses which would inevitably lead to public humiliation. Joseph was reluctant to allow the

process to add to an already unseemly situation.

Q: Given the Old Testament penalty for adultery, what might be telling about Joseph's plans in light of his being described as "a righteous man"?

A: Some might interpret "righteous" as someone who strictly adheres to the letter of the Law, but here provides a picture of **biblical** righteousness which takes into account the love and treatment of others. Joseph was truly and biblically "righteous" because of the biblical application of love to his actions.

Application: Joseph was as extraordinary a man of faith as Mary a woman of faith in this situation, someone who put into practice the greater principles of love through the Law. Biblical righteousness still seeks the opportunity to express love even when enforcing the consequences for transgressions of the Law.

²⁰But when he had considered this, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife; for the Child who has been conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. ²¹She will bear a Son; and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins."

²²Now all this took place to fulfill what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet: ²³"BEHOLD, THE VIRGIN SHALL BE WITH CHILD AND SHALL BEAR A SON, AND THEY SHALL CALL HIS NAME IMMANUEL," which translated means, "GOD WITH US."

[Read v.20-23]

Q: To what degree did Joseph linger over this problem?

A: The word translated "considered" does not fully convey the full extent to which Joseph anguished and dealt with the problem. The word does not simply mean to bring to mind but to do so with agitation of spirit. It is the same word used when Jesus was said to "know" another's thoughts (Mt. 9:4, 12:25) or when the writer of Hebrews describes God's Word as being able to "judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart". (Heb. 4:12) It is not settling for appearances but earnestly seeking the truth of a matter.

Point: Joseph as an example of a biblically righteous person was not content with seeing things as they appeared but to know for sure the situation from the inside out, to ascertain the core causes and absolute truth.

Q: What would it mean for Joseph to "not be afraid"? What might be the consequences for him personally?

A: He would have to share in and bear Mary's reproach. Although Joseph might not personally hold anything against Mary, the stigma from others would most certainly follow.

Q: How might Joseph actually be bearing the reproach of Christ Himself?

A: It is suggested in John 8:41 that the Jews actually slandered Christ's birth, intimating that He was born of fornication. Unbelievers, like Satan, attack the truth of the virgin birth in order to deny the truth of God's Word and work through Christ.

"You are doing the deeds of your father." They said to Him, "We were not born of fornication; we have one Father: God."

— John 8:41

Q: What is the actual, historical context of Matthew's quote in v.23 from Isaiah 7:14?

A: In Isaiah 7 we are provided with the account of Ahaz the King of Judah coming under attack by the kings of Aram and the northern kingdom of Israel. God sends Isaiah to Ahaz to comfort him and asks Ahaz to ask for a sign to prove God's promise of deliverance, but Ahaz says, "I will not ask, nor will I test the Lord!" (Is. 7:12) God follows this up by making the promise of this sign – the birth of the Messiah to a virgin – completely unconditional. God is reaffirming to Joseph the same unconditional promise He made through Isaiah to the whole of Israel. But neither does

Joseph test the Lord either but, like Ahaz, accepts Him at His Word. (Compare this to Zechariah's questioning the angel at the news of a "normal" birth in Luke 1.)

Application: *Whereas the genealogy expresses the working of God's providence throughout history, herein is expressed the working of God to fulfill His promises. These two methods of God's working are complimentary and in support of each other, not mutually exclusive.*

²⁴And Joseph awoke from his sleep and did as the angel of the Lord commanded him, and took Mary as his wife, ²⁵but kept her a virgin until she gave birth to a Son; and he called His name Jesus.

[Read v.24-25]

Q: How does Joseph's follow-up actions affirm his stated character as "a righteous man"?

A: He is immediately and completely obedient to God's Word in all things, both in strict adherence to the Word and well as in its greater application of love and treatment of Mary.

Q: What is biblically significant about naming Him "Jesus", the Greek equivalent of "Joshua"?

A: There are two well-known Joshuas in Scripture who foreshadow Christ: the leader who led Israel to take possession of the Promised Land (a picture of salvation and the work of the Savior) and the high priest of Zechariah 3. It is a dual picture of Christ the King and High Priest.

Application: *True followers do not stand idly by thinking that everything will be made right by God's intervention whether through providence or promise – they are willing and obedient participants in His will.*

Overall Application

If we cannot accept the full premise and teaching of the first chapter of Matthew's Gospel, we cannot accept fully what follows. The birth of Christ was not only brought about by the providence of God's grace and the fulfillment of His unconditional promises, but the participation of those yielded to His Word above their own feelings. This is essentially the very same thing that is replayed in every Believer's life as they come to know, grow, and live according to God's Word and ways. He brings some things about according to His providential intervention, some things according to the unconditionally promises He has made, but in all things requires our obedient participation according to the greater working of His Word.