

The Incarnation Part 5 - 'The Genealogy of Messiah'

by Charles Alexander

The sermon explores the significance of the genealogy of Jesus Christ in Matthew's gospel, highlighting its importance in revealing the end for which the Old Testament was written and the true humanity of the incarnate God.

Scripture: Psalm 2:6, Isaiah 7:14, Micah 5:2, Matthew 1:1, Galatians 3:16

Topics: "Christology", "Biblical Prophecy"

Description

Charles Alexander delves into the significance of Matthew 1:1, highlighting how Matthew, a former tax collector, meticulously crafted the genealogy of Jesus Christ, tracing His lineage back to David and Abraham. The genealogy serves as a foundation for understanding the Old Testament prophecies and the ultimate purpose of Christ's coming to earth. Through the careful arrangement of names and generations, Matthew reveals the divine wisdom and sovereignty behind the birth of Jesus, fulfilling ancient prophecies and establishing Him as the promised King and Savior.

Transcript

Matthew 1:1: The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham." This verse shows that the writer, Matthew the publican, Matthew the Apostle, had his eye upon the Old Testament. Whether or not he knew that his gospel would be the first in the New Testament, and would have priority over the other three, is doubtful. It is unlikely, because he died before John had written his gospel. However, it is probable that the Holy Spirit had a particular providential design in it all, in the manner in which Matthew opens his gospel with words that are reminiscent of the first verse of the Bible itself: "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.

Also of Genesis 2:4 : These are the generations of the heavens and of the earth when they were created.

So this is the book of the "generation" of Jesus Christ. That word applies not only to the gospel of Matthew in its twenty eight chapters; it refers to the whole of the New Testament, and is a fitting introduction to it. The book of the generation of Jesus Christ: this book which opens the New Testament has a very peculiar significance beyond that of the Old Testament; it reveals the end for which the Old Testament was written and for which God originally created the heaven and the earth. Those are the generations of divine creation in the book of Genesis. But this is the book of the generation of Jesus Christ: God made man,

God manifest in the flesh, the end of all creation, the crowning glory of all history, the reason for all things. The wisdom of God personified was revealed in Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham. Later we find that He was the Son of God, in a very special sense.

Now He is introduced to us as the son of David, the son of Abraham, and whatever the dispute may be as to the correct chronological order of the four gospels, which was written first, and which ought to come first, Matthew's gospel is singularly appropriate for the purpose of opening the New Testament, because of this verse and this chapter. Why does he say that Jesus Christ was the son of David, the son of Abraham? Why not the son of Noah? Why not the son of Adam? He was all this besides; His pedigree extends right back, as our pedigree extends right back, to the day of man's creation. But the inspired Matthew singles out two men in history: David and Abraham, the two men upon whom all Old Testament prophecies turned, and all the expectation of our Lord Jesus Christ is raised.

Abraham was the father of that covenant of faith, by whose seed all the earth was to be blessed. Christ is the true son of Abraham by whom all the earth was to be blessed and restored from Satan's dominion. Abraham had many sons, the most notable being Isaac and Ishmael, but the true son of Abraham is Christ, because He is the promised seed and He alone. Paul makes this clear in his great exposition of prophecy in the epistle to the Galatians. In Galatians 3:16 he says, Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, 'And to seeds', as of many; but as of one, 'And to thy seed', which is Christ. Now remember this, that the seed of Abraham is not Isaac, not Jacob, not the Jewish people at all. Paul gives us the key to prophecy: he says that Abraham has one seed, one man, one person to whom his promises are made, and that seed is Christ. It is only those who are in Christ who get the deliverance, in whom Satan's dominion is overthrown, who are released from bondage.

In the words of a well - known hymn:

Hail to the Lord's anointed, Great David's greater Son! Hail, in the time appointed, His reign on earth begun!"

And remember He is reigning on earth now, because He is reigning in heaven, for He who reigns in heaven reigns in the whole universe. There is no other king; there is no other power. You may say, "What about the power of Satan and the power of evil?" It is not a power in relation to His power. It is a power subordinate, which is controlled and directed by the power of Him who sits upon the throne, who must reign until all His enemies are made His footstool. If you did not already know that, you must know it now. Thank God that no power of evil can touch you, because He is the only power, out of all powers, reigning in heaven and on earth.

There is a strange and very dangerous opinion, amongst many of the Lord's people in these days, that though Christ may reign in heaven, Satan reigns on earth. If Satan reigns on earth then you may take it that Christ does not reign in heaven. Where is heaven anyway? You could not give it a location: you could not find any spot in the universe where the throne of Christ is, except here on earth. In the souls of His people: that is where His Kingdom is! That is heaven! Heaven is on a totally other dimension than the ones that we are thinking about. Heaven is not far away; a step will take us there. The opening of our eyes to the saving grace of Christ will enable us to see it. Paul found himself in heaven one day; he could not tell us whether he was in the body or in the spirit, but it made no difference. Heaven was where his body was, even though his body was upon earth. He says, "Whether in the body, or out of the body, I cannot tell." Our bodies do not need to go anywhere to be in heaven. With death we shall find ourselves already

there by the grace of God. Are you not glad, dear soul, that God is sovereign? Are you not overjoyed that no evil can overthrow you as a child of God?

The son of David, the son of Abraham, reigns in heaven, and therefore reigns everywhere. "All power is given unto me in heaven and on earth," said Jesus to His disciples after His resurrection. He who reigns in heaven must reign upon earth; Satan does not reign. "Now is the judgment of this world," said Christ as He went to the cross. "Now shall the prince of this world be cast out." Not some time in the future but "now" as He goes to the cross. By His death, He overcame death, and the one who had the power of death, that is the devil. Satan is cast out, as we read in the twentieth chapter of Revelation. He was cast down by the mighty Angel, into the bottomless pit, and that is where he is. You may well say that he seems to be at large? So he is, but what about the bottomless pit? The bottomless pit is the soul of the wicked; it is not a location somewhere stoked up with everlasting fire. These words are symbolic; Satan is cast out, cast down, bound and let loose. Let loose only in the sense of being bound, to do no more than the hand and council of God determines should be done by the power of evil. We are not at the mercy of Satan. He himself must go to heaven, to heaven's court, for permission to do anything that he does, as he had to do in the case of Job, and as he had to do in the case of Peter. Jesus said, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat. Some of us might feel that we are being sifted as wheat, and would fall, if it were not that the blessed Saviour has said, I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not. Remember your dependence upon Him; be very humble before Him for your welfare depends upon Him. Make sure that the disposition of your heart is right in His sight, lest you give place to the evil one and He permits it, He who has all power in heaven and in earth, that you might be sifted as wheat or tried as Job.

So Christ is the son of Abraham in the sense that to Abraham the promises were given, which were to be fulfilled in Christ, in terms of the everlasting covenant of faith and of grace, of righteousness, peace and truth. That by this instrument, sealed with the blood of the Saviour, the earth might be blessed, the kingdom established, and Satan's dominion overthrown. Why "the son of David"? Because David is the progenitor of that particular dynasty from which was to arise that King whose reign would be eternal, whose kingdom would never pass away.

The rich promises of God made to David were to be fulfilled in His Greater Son; not in Solomon, though he was a type of Him that was to come. A greater than David is here; a greater than Solomon is here; the greatest of all is here. David was raised to power and glory and majesty: he overcame all his enemies and left a kingdom of absolute peace to be reigned over for the significant period of forty years, by which time his son Solomon had succeeded him. He is a type of that kingdom over which Christ should reign, and of all the triumphs of Christ by His own merits, and by His own blood. You may well say that David let things down rather badly, especially in his later life. This was to prove that he was only a man and not a god, and to prove to the people of Israel that when their prophet arose to foretell that David would sit upon the throne, and have universal dominion, they might know it was another David, of whom King David was only the poor shadow.

When David wrote that glorious second psalm, he saw someone coming who was now and yet beyond now, someone who was God and man. Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion. I will declare the decree: the Lord hath said unto me, Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee. Ask of me, and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession. David knew when he wrote those words that he was not writing of himself, or of his son Solomon, but someone in the far distant future, someone who should come and fulfil that which man could never do, who would be righteous and the heir to all good, with the title to all dominions because of His merits.

So this is the book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham. Upon these twin pillars, the promised seed in Abraham and the promised king in David, rests the whole of Old Testament prophecy. It is to be understood that the whole of the Old Testament has ultimately to do with the son of David, the son of Abraham, in preparation for His appearing, and for the work that He would do. This was to undo the work of Satan who destroyed the human race, so far as its righteousness was concerned, by bringing about the fall of our first parents. In the words of the hymnist, Jesus, the second Adam, "to the fight and to the rescue came".

O wisest love that He who smote

In man , for man, the foe;

The double agony in man,

For man, should undergo.

So it is that flesh and blood were to destroy Satan. In the weakness of human nature the Son of God came forth, subordinating Himself to all evil, that He might bear it all upon himself; that He might receive the blame for all the sin, and bear it away in His own sinless body on the tree, to make expiation for a lost race and to raise us up from sin and death and shame.

Some of us appear to be more interested in what will be in the news tomorrow morning. It doesn't matter dear friends; there is only one thing that really matters, and that is the redemption of the human race, through our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, and the mysterious patience of God in history, by which He is bringing these things to pass. We may be interested in other things, but it is this which should claim our attention, and in the hour of death and dying it will do so with full force. With our eyes closed to the darkness of this world, they will open upon the light of that eternal world, and we shall see the glorious face of our Immanuel, for whom some may have suffered much that they might see, and endured much that at last they might be blessed with the sight of His glorious face.

So the whole of the Old Testament, and it goes without saying the whole of the New Testament, rests upon these two pillars: the promised Seed and the promised King. We have also here the notice of the true humanity of the incarnate God, our Saviour, in the book of the generation of Jesus Christ the son of David, and the son of Abraham. Having thus noted how careful Matthew was in the preparation of his manuscript, as he sat down to write his gospel, we ought to be prepared to find the same scrupulous care in what follows. After all, it was significant that Matthew was no fisherman, like at least seven of the other apostles. He was called from the receipt of custom; he was an officer of the Inland Revenue, and tax officers were no more loved in those days than they are today. Matthew was one of these.

Matthew was a publican, the name given to a public person appointed to receive the revenues which the law imposed upon the citizens of the Roman Empire. Such a man had to be careful about his books, and Matthew was one of these men. Although the Lord could, in a moment, endue almost any man with the ability to do any particular task, He does not do things like that. He could have found another man, another Apostle Paul, could he not? Paul was an educated man, a foreign Jew from the Roman colony of Tarsus. He had dual citizenship: Roman and Jewish. He had a foot in two worlds, in Europe and in Asia, and God chose him even from the time of his birth. "God," he says, " who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by his grace to reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him among the heathen." God prepares His men for a long time, even before their birth. Long before they appear upon the earth He

knows them, and often gives us their name centuries in advance. So it is with Matthew; anyone would have been suitable, you might think, to write a gospel, but it was Matthew in particular who was chosen, because the Lord was preparing the way for a man to have access to the genealogy legally, as to who was the legitimate heir to the throne of Israel. Matthew had the names in his possession; he had access to the books, because he was a publican. He was a public person with authority, and the right to do certain things. God was preparing his man, and when God manifest in the flesh came by one day, He saw Matthew sitting at the receipt of custom, buried in his books. When Matthew lifted up his eyes and saw the stranger, who looked at him and said, "Follow me", he left his books and rose up and followed.

The Lord had every right to take him from his job, and give him a greater one. He knew him from before the foundation of the world, arranged for him to be a publican, to have access to books and records, because he was the appointed person to write the first chapter of the New Testament, and a good many other chapters besides. It was no easy thing to compile a genealogy of our Lord Jesus Christ, and His descent from Abraham, right until He was born of the Virgin Mary.

Because there are certain problems in this genealogy, there are critics who say there is something wrong with Matthew, and that there is something wrong with the Bible and the New Testament, because Matthew does not even follow faithfully his own Old Testament. They come to the conclusion, therefore, that the Bible contradicts itself. The problem of Matthew's genealogy, with its apparent omissions and errors which contrast with that of Luke, and its seeming contradictions, should in itself put us on our guard against trivial and ready to hand criticism of and apologies for the Bible. It is only as a problem is approached with deep reverence, the reverence due to the only accounts in the whole world of the dynastic and genealogical descent of the incarnate God, and His appearance in the human race, with readiness to probe, to learn, to search with patience, prudence and piety, that one could ever hope or expect to arrive at right conclusions, opening a door to a view of God's majestic and sovereign wisdom, and preparing the way for His own coming into the world.

Matthew divides his genealogy of Christ into three equal groups of fourteen generations. Why would he do that? Why fourteen generations? Why three groups? Because this is the genealogy of King David, whose name he mentions first before Abraham, although David came a long time after Abraham. David is the name that we are to look to, for the key to the genealogy. The name David consists of the Hebrew of the three letters "d,v,d." There being no "v" in those days (the Hebrew "w" being the letter for "v"), " d.w.d." makes the Hebrew name of David. In those days there were no numerical digits (0 to 9). They used letters instead, just like the Romans. The "d " in the Hebrew alphabet has the value 4, "w" has the value 6, and "d" again is 4. Add these three values together (4+6+4) and the total is 14. There being three letters, fourteen is repeated three times.

Now you see how Matthew is very careful indeed to construct the genealogy of the King upon the name of the King, for He was the great David that was to come. This is no ordinary genealogy; it is the genealogy of the incarnate God, great David's greater son. The first division is from Abraham to David the king, and covers the history of Israel, giving a formative period of that nation. The second division is from Solomon to Jechonias, so there is an entire dynastic period when the kings reigned over the elect nation. After that there was nobody to reign, because that was the time of the captivity in Babylon, after which, although the line of David continued, they did not continue upon the throne. There never was another king in Israel until Christ came, at the end of the third period of fourteen generations. The third division, Salathiel to Christ, was the period of the nation's humiliation, during which no king reigned. But the tribes awaited the coming of One who was to set up an eternal kingship, and exercise a heavenly dominion which should never pass

away. Wonderful isn't it! Three fourteens perfectly balanced in the genealogy. But the critics come along and say that Matthew only succeeded in doing that because he left out some of the names. It is true; five kings are omitted. Ahaziah, Joash and Amaziah are excluded, as though they had not been, but these were the third and the fourth generation of Jehoram's marriage to a heathen wife. Jehoram, who was son of Jehoshaphat, married the daughter of Ahab and Jezebel, that heathen villain, so conspicuous in the Old Testament story, and that wickedness was not expunged. That poison was not eradicated from the family of David until the third and fourth generation, according to the second commandment of God. Therefore, with the full approval of those in his day who also had access to the genealogies, no-one ever raised a dissenting voice until the ignorant critics of our day.

The approvers recognise the propriety of all that Matthew did. These kings have no place in the records, and were deliberately left out of Matthew's account, and their omission leaves the perfect number of fourteen. In fact, in the last fourteen you will only find thirteen generations. There are thirteen names, and he says there are fourteen. And the critics rub their hands over the fact that Matthew had only thirteen names in his last division, when he says there are fourteen.

But there are fourteen; one of them is a woman, and her name was Mary. She was not heir to the throne, but Joseph, the man to whom she was espoused, was number thirteen, and Mary's name follows: "Jacob begat Joseph, the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ." Here was a new generation, a strange generation added to the family of David, so that Mary's son was legally entitled, by her marriage to Joseph, to the throne, and to the dynasty which was no longer challenged. It took the addition of a woman's name to make it valid. You see, Matthew's genealogy is no ordinary genealogy!

God was preparing the way in such a fashion that He inspired Matthew, controlled by the spirit of God, to arrange everything. The division of the names and the generations were so ordered that people who approach the word of God in humility and piety, and subordinate their own minds and their own proud reason to the wisdom of God, which is not according to the wisdom of man, begin to see the working out of God's design. It was prophesied that God would be made flesh and appear among men by a line of the human race which included Abraham, David and the ultimate successor of David. This came to pass at a time when there was no representative of David upon the throne, the latest claimant being a carpenter in Nazareth who was unable to do anything about it.

When we consider that He who was to come in such low humility, in order to take upon Himself, not the majesty of the human race, but the scorn and the scoffing of mankind, to be despised and rejected, "a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief," and by this means to establish an eternal throne, we should expect that something strange and mysterious would be at work in God's meticulous preparation. But when you contemplate the troubled line of David, the sin which entered in, the power of the evil one, now that the appointed season when He who was to come was drawing near, where would He be found? In the womb of the virgin; she who was espoused, contracted in marriage, to Joseph, the legitimate descendant of David the king.

That there should be a census at the time, and the Roman governor should compel and require all heads of households to go to the cities to which they belonged, was God ordained. So they went from Nazareth to Bethlehem, for that is where Joseph belonged. According to marriage laws at that time, the contract of marriage was as binding as a marriage, even though the marriage had not been completed and the ceremony had not been held. This was contracted for in advance, and there was no escape from it. So Mary belonged to Joseph, even though the marriage ceremony had not yet taken place. She was

espoused and therefore as much his wife in the eyes of the law as ever she could be; consequently she was a fully fledged member of the family of David. She came from outside the family and into the line of descent by marriage. It is remarkable that Mary and Joseph should be at Bethlehem at precisely the right time. The prophet Micah had foretold that out of this insignificant town would come forth the One who was destined to be "ruler in Israel."

Now we see the wonder of it; the careful measurement of time, allowing for the omissions from the genealogy of those men who were cast out because of sin and alliance with the heathen; the addition of Mary the woman, the virgin, into the last of the divisions in order to complete it, that the divine measurement, rather than man's measurement might be complete, and be complete in such a way that when we behold it, we marvel. This, after all, was the finger of God, and He who came was none other than that One of whom it was written, "Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call His name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is 'God with us'." He is your Saviour, He is your King, He is your only hope, He is your righteousness and your peace; He is the Appointed One, for ever and for ever. Make thy peace with Him O sinner, and quickly, because He is returning again, and we know not when.

Amen

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