

The Genealogy and Birth of Jesus Christ

by John F. Walvoord

The sermon explores the genealogy and birth of Jesus Christ, establishing his claim to be the King of Israel and the Saviour of the world.

Scripture: Isaiah 7:14, Matthew 1:1-23

Topics: "Jesus Christ", "Messianic Prophecy"

Description

John F. Walvoord preaches on the royal genealogy presented in the Gospel of Matthew, emphasizing the evidence that Jesus Christ is the true Son of David, the Son of Abraham, and the Son of God, fulfilling the role of the Messiah and Savior. The genealogy establishes Jesus' legal claim to be the King of Israel and addresses any doubts regarding His legitimacy, particularly through the supernatural conception and virgin birth. The threefold division of the genealogy highlights key figures from Abraham to Jesus, showcasing the continuity of the Messianic line and emphasizing Jesus' rightful place as King and Savior.

Transcript

Royal Genealogy, 1:1-17

The first Gospel opens by presenting the evidence that Jesus Christ is indeed the true Son of David, the Son of Abraham, the Son of God, and is the true Messiah of Israel and the Saviour of the world. Such a far-reaching claim must be supported by the best evidence. Accordingly, Matthew presents in an orderly way first the genealogies establishing legal claim of Jesus Christ to be the King of Israel. Then it accounts for the supernatural conception and deity of Jesus Christ by explicitly detailing the virgin birth. In the process, the genuineness of His claim to be the King of Israel is demonstrated, and the damaging suspicion that Christ was illegitimate, a slander propagated by unbelievers, is completely answered. This material, as well as the rest of Matthew 1-2, is found only in this gospel.⁸

The opening words, "The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham," are intended to provide an introduction to the genealogy, not to the book as a whole. This introduction clearly demonstrates that Matthew's purpose in writing the gospel is to provide adequate proof for the investigator that the claims of Christ to be King and Saviour are justified. For this reason, the gospel of Matthew was considered by the early church one of the most important books of the New Testament and was given more prominence than the other three gospels.

As presented by Matthew, the genealogy begins with Abraham and concludes with Joseph, described as the husband of Mary but explicitly excluded from being the actual father of Jesus Christ. In the phrase "of whom was born Jesus," whom is a feminine pronoun, referring to Mary. By contrast, the genealogy of Luke 3:23-38 is usually interpreted as giving the genealogy of Mary.

The genealogy is divided into three divisions of fourteen generations each. In making this division, some names are omitted, such as the three kings, Ahaziah, Joash, and Amaziah, who are included in the line in 1 Chronicles 3:11-12. Also of interest is the fact that the names recorded in Matthew 1:13-15 are not found in the Old Testament but may have been recorded in the registers of families available at the time of Christ. The deliberate editing of the genealogy to provide three divisions of fourteen generations each was by design, probably for literary symmetry, although some have pointed out that the numerical value of the Hebrew consonants in the word David add up to fourteen. A further problem appears because the last section has actually only thirteen names. Complicated explanations are not wanting.⁹ Suggested answers include a textual omission of Jehoiakim or the possibility that Jesus is considered the fourteenth.

The threefold division is explained by Matthew himself in 1:17. The first division is the generations from Abraham to David, including Abraham as the first in the line of promise and culminating in David as the king. The second group of fourteen are kings who trace the line from David to Jeconiah, and the third division, the continuity of the line through the captivity to Jesus Christ.

An unusual feature of the genealogies is the prominence of four women who normally would not be included. Each of these had an unusual background. Tamar (1:3) got in the line by playing a harlot (Gen 38:11-30). Rahab, a harlot rescued from Jericho because she delivered and sheltered the spies (Jos 2:6; 6:25), is declared by Matthew to have been the wife of Salmon, the father of Boaz. There is no Old Testament support for Matthew's statement.

Another Gentile was included in the Messianic line in the person of Ruth, the subject of the beautiful book in the Old Testament. She, alone of the three women, although a Gentile, had an unspotted record. The fourth was Bathsheba, the mother of Solomon, who had formerly been the wife of Uriah, whose relationship to David began with adultery and resulted in the murder of her husband (2 Sa 11:1-12:25). No explanation is given for the emphasis of these facts in the genealogy which many Jews would love to have forgotten. Possible reasons include the preparation for the prominence of Mary as the culmination of the line and also to put Jewish pride in its place for having falsely accused Mary. Taken as a whole, genealogies support the conclusion that Christ is a genuine son of David and Abraham through Mary, a King with a right to rule, with His legal title through Joseph, and His deity supported by His supernatural conception without a human father.

Supernatural Conception and Birth of Jesus, 1:18-25

To put to rest any question or false accusations against the virtue of Mary or the nature of the origin of Christ, Matthew explicitly describes the relationship between Joseph and Mary. Joseph was legally betrothed to Mary and is described as her "husband" in Matthew 1:16. Betrothal was legally equivalent to marriage, and the relationship could only be broken by divorce or death. The relationship preceded actually living together as man and wife.

In this waiting period, according to 1:18, Mary was found pregnant. She had not revealed her experience with the angel, recorded in Luke 1:26-38. Obviously, Joseph knew nothing about it, and possibly Matthew himself, when writing this account, did not have this information, as the gospel of Luke was probably

written later than the gospel of Matthew. Joseph considered the consummation of the marriage impossible and contemplated a quiet divorce rather than a public disclosure and scandal.

At the beginning of the narrative, Matthew at once declares that the child is "of the Holy Ghost" (1:18) and then describes how this fact was revealed to Joseph. An angel sent by God appeared to him in a dream, addressing him as "Joseph, thou son of David." He is instructed not to be afraid of taking Mary as his wife, as the child had been conceived by the Holy Spirit. Further, Joseph is informed that when Mary's Son is born, He should be called Jesus, meaning Saviour, "for he shall save his people from their sins."

Matthew goes on to support the doctrine of the virgin birth by quoting Isaiah 7:14, which prophesied that a virgin, literally, "the virgin," should bear a son whose name would be Immanuel, meaning "God with us." Matthew clearly claimed not only that Christ was born of a virgin but that this was anticipated by the prophecy of Isaiah as being the method by which God would become man.

In obedience to the angelic vision, Joseph took Mary as his wife but "knew her not" until after Jesus was born. Normal interpretation of this expression would indicate that Joseph and Mary did not have physical union until after Jesus was born, but that thereafter, they had a normal married life with children born to them. The alternate explanation, that the brothers of Christ were children of Joseph by an earlier marriage, while possible, is less probable. The perpetual virginity of Mary was not necessary to the divine purpose, although a useful device in exalting Mary beyond what the Scriptures justify.

Although liberal critics have spared no efforts to assail the account given in this first chapter of Matthew, unquestionably, the record as given was accepted literally by the early church and is supported by the rest of the New Testament, including the account of Luke. Every reason ever advanced for denying the historicity of Matthew has carried with it the premise of rationalistic rejection of the supernatural and determined prejudice against the claims of Jesus Christ to be the God-man. Faith in the accuracy of such a record induced early believers to die as martyrs rather than renounce their faith in the virgin-born Son of Mary.

8 W. Graham Scroggie, *A Guide to the Gospels*, pp. 260-61. Scroggie notes that of the 1068 verses in this gospel, 387 whole verses and parts of 23 other verses, 410 in all, are peculiar to it, which is more than a third of the whole gospel.

9 Cf. R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Matthew's Gospel*, pp. 30-33.

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