

Main Idea: In Matthew 1:1-17, we see a very special genealogy that shows us what God did to prepare the world for Jesus.

- I. In the genealogy, we see a list of names.
 - A. The genealogy highlights two people (1).
 - B. The genealogy mentions forty-two generations (2-16).
 - C. The genealogy covers three phases of history (17).
- II. In the genealogy, we discover life-changing truth.
 - A. It teaches us about God.
 - 1. He works with individuals.
 - 2. He works through a chosen family.
 - 3. He works by grace.
 - 4. He works according to His sovereign plan.
 - 5. He works through incarnation.
 - B. It teaches us about Christ.
 - 1. He is a real man.
 - 2. He is more than a man.
 - 3. He is the fulfillment of God’s covenant with Abraham (Gen. 12:1-3).
 - 4. He is the fulfillment of God’s covenant with David (2 Sam 7:12-13).
 - C. It teaches us about what we need.
 - 1. We need a Savior to rescue us.
 - 2. We need a King to rule us.
 - 3. We need Jesus.

In just two and a half weeks, Christmas will be here. But just who is this Christ who entered the world so many years ago? Many don’t know. And many who think they know really don’t know. And why does His identity matter in the first place? To answer these important questions, God has given us a special passage in His Word, a birth account written by Matthew. We’ll be looking at this special account this morning, and if the Lord allows, next week as well.

Scripture Reading: Galatians 4:4-7

In the fullness of time God sent His Son into the world. That’s an important statement. The One God sent came at just the perfect time. Indeed, the God who decreed the plan in eternity past, spent centuries preparing the world for His Son’s arrival.

When you have a baby, you most likely prepare for it. You get things ready. You organize, create the special room, decorate, send out announcements, and more. God the Father engaged in preparation as well. He prepared the world for Jesus.

We see that clearly in Matthew’s gospel. Matthew, who was one of Jesus’ twelve apostles, wrote this God-inspired account of Jesus’ life. And he began with, of all things, a genealogy.

Why? To us, a genealogy is just a quick way to get some preliminary information on the table, with the real story beginning after the list ends. That’s not the way the Jewish mind worked, as we’ll see. Matthew is actually sketching a picture with this genealogy, and it’s a picture he will add color to throughout the rest of his biography.

In Matthew 1:1-17, we see a very special genealogy that shows us what God did to prepare the world for Jesus. As we look at it this morning, we’re going to see two things. First, a list of names. But upon closer look, life-changing truth.

^{**}Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

¹ For a previous look at this passage, see the message preached at WBC in 2011.

I. In the genealogy, we see a list of names.

I'll read it in a moment, but for now, go ahead, just scan the names. A few familiar names, most not so familiar. I see Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, yep, heard of them. Then I see Abiud, Azor, Akim. I know nothing about them.

What's the point of a list of names? We'll get to that in a moment, but first, let me give you some handles so we can get a hold of this genealogy. The first handle—the genealogy highlights **two people**. The second handle—the genealogy mentions **forty-two generations**. And the third handle—the genealogy covers **three phases of history**.

A. The genealogy highlights two people (1). That's verse 1, "A record of the genealogy of Jesus Christ the son of David, the son of Abraham."

The first two words Matthew uses in the Greek are *biblos geneleos* (lit. 'the book of the birth' or 'the book of genesis'). The NIV translates, "A record of the genealogy of Jesus Christ." The ESV renders it, "The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ."²

You'll notice that right off the bat Matthew calls Him *Jesus Christ*. *Jesus*, that's His name (see 1:21), and *Christ*, that's His title, He's the Anointed One, the Messiah. He's the subject of this genealogy, this birth account, this entire book. We're about to meet the one called Jesus who indeed is the Christ, God's anointed Messiah.

And from the very start, Matthew connects Jesus with two great figures from Israel's past. He is "the son of *David*, the son of *Abraham*." Why does Matthew highlight Jesus' connection to David and Abraham?

To answer that we must know our Old Testament. In Genesis 12 God promised Abraham that through his seed all nations of the earth would be blessed. Then later in 2 Samuel 7 God promised David that he would have a son who would be king forever. We'll investigate those promises a little later, but for now, let's not miss the obvious. Matthew begins his gospel record emphasizing that Jesus is that *seed*, that Jesus is that *son*.

B. The genealogy mentions forty-two generations (2-16). Again, I'll read the list in a moment, but basically it goes like this, "Abraham was the father of Isaac, Isaac the father of Jacob, Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers," and so forth, through Perez, Hezron, David, Uzziah, and others, all the way to Jacob the father of Joseph, "the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus."

So do the math. Jesus' ancestry back to Abraham includes forty-two generations. Well, I should say forty-two generations, give or take. That's because there are links in this chain that Matthew omits. For instance, in verse 9 Matthew says Jehoram was the father of Uzziah. But actually he wasn't his father. If you check out 1 Chronicles 3:10-14, you'll discover that Matthew left out three names (and sixty years of history) between Jehoram and Uzziah. He doesn't even mention Ahaziah, Joash, and Amaziah.

Some say Matthew left out the names by mistake. I'm convinced he did so intentionally, for reasons we'll discuss momentarily. But to us, it does seem strange. How could he call Jehoram the father of Uzziah if he wasn't his dad? The answer is, the phrase Matthew uses, "the father of," (Greek *gennaō*) doesn't always mean a literal father. For instance, we just saw that Jesus was the *son of David* and the *son of Abraham*, but of course, that doesn't mean these men were

² You could take the phrase in three ways. It could be simply an introduction to the genealogy in 1:1-17. Or it could be an introduction to the entire birth narrative in chapters 1-2. Or it might even serve as an intro to the whole book.

His actual *father*. D. A. Carson explains the phrase can mean something like “was the ancestor of.”³

So two people, forty-two generations, and one more handle...

C. The genealogy covers three phases of history (17). Matthew finishes his genealogy with this summary in verse 17, “Thus there were fourteen generations in all from Abraham to David, fourteen from David to the exile to Babylon, and fourteen from the exile to the Christ.”

There are the three phases. From Abraham to David—that’s 2,000 BC to 1,000 BC. From David to Judah’s exile in Babylon—that’s 1000 BC to 586 BC. And from the exile to Christ—that’s 586 BC to around 5 BC when Christ was born. So phase one covers 1,000 years, phase two around 400 years, and phase three around 600 years.

What’s more, Matthew says there were fourteen generations in each of the three phases. Actually, there were fourteen generations in each phase *as presented by Matthew*. We’ve already seen that he didn’t include every link in the chain.

What’s the point of the symmetry? Maybe it’s for memorization purposes. Barclay explains, “It [this genealogy] is in fact what is technically known as a mnemonic, that is to say a thing so arranged that is it easy to memorize.”⁴ Remember, this is hundreds of years before there were any printed books. Few people would have direct access to Matthew’s written account. When you went to church, you heard someone read the Scriptures to you, so to retain it, you had to memorize it.

So maybe it’s a memory aid. And while that may be true, I’m convinced there’s something else going on here, something intentional, something *evangelistic*. As R. T. France points out, Matthew in his gospel likes to arrange things in groups, usually groups of three or seven. Here he arranges this genealogy in three groups of fourteen (seven times two).

What’s going on with this number 14? And to throw another twist into the question, why do the first and last groups contain only thirteen generations? France says it shows that Matthew’s observation is “theological rather than statistical.”⁵ In other words, this is a very special genealogy. Matthew isn’t just giving us names. He’s trying to teach us something here, something life-changing.

II. In the genealogy, we discover life-changing truth.

Now it’s time to read. Follow along as I read the genealogy in Matthew 1:1–17 (NIV):

“A record of the genealogy of Jesus Christ the son of David, the son of Abraham: ² Abraham was the father of Isaac, Isaac the father of Jacob, Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers, ³ Judah the father of Perez and Zerah, whose mother was Tamar, Perez the father of Hezron, Hezron the father of Ram, ⁴ Ram the father of Amminadab, Amminadab the father of Nahshon, Nahshon the father of Salmon, ⁵ Salmon the father of Boaz, whose mother was Rahab, Boaz the father of Obed, whose mother was Ruth, Obed the father of Jesse, ⁶ and Jesse the father of King David. David was the father of Solomon, whose mother had been Uriah’s wife, ⁷ Solomon the father of Rehoboam, Rehoboam the father of Abijah, Abijah the father of Asa, ⁸ Asa the father of Jehoshaphat, Jehoshaphat the father of Jehoram, Jehoram the father of Uzziah, ⁹ Uzziah the father of Jotham, Jotham the father of Ahaz, Ahaz the father of Hezekiah, ¹⁰ Hezekiah the father of Manasseh, Manasseh the father of Amon, Amon the father of Josiah, ¹¹ and Josiah the father of Jeconiah and his brothers at the time of the exile to Babylon. ¹² After the exile to Babylon:

³ D. A. Carson, p. 65.

⁴ Barclay, p. 13.

⁵ R. T. France, p. 75.

Jeconiah was the father of Shealtiel, Shealtiel the father of Zerubbabel,¹³ Zerubbabel the father of Abiud, Abiud the father of Eliakim, Eliakim the father of Azor,¹⁴ Azor the father of Zadok, Zadok the father of Akim, Akim the father of Eliud,¹⁵ Eliud the father of Eleazar, Eleazar the father of Matthan, Matthan the father of Jacob,¹⁶ and Jacob the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ.¹⁷ Thus there were fourteen generations in all from Abraham to David, fourteen from David to the exile to Babylon, and fourteen from the exile to the Christ.”

So there it is. What do you see when you look at those names? Look carefully. If you see them as Matthew intended, you’ll see more than just names. You’ll see names that *aren’t* there. You’ll see names that *shouldn’t* be there. And most of all, you’ll see (or hear) Matthew preaching the gospel to you.

“Preaching the gospel?” you say. Yes. There’s only one message that gives people the way to heaven, but there’s more than one way to present that message. In this case, Matthew uses a genealogy.

E.g.—

By use of a genealogy, Matthew presents us with three gospel truths.

A. It teaches us about God. We learn some incredible things in these seventeen verses about God and how He works. I see at least five lessons.

1. *He works with individuals.* There are now nearly eight billion people on the planet, but God sees individuals. And He not only sees them, He works with them. He’s involved in their lives.

What’s true of the individuals in this genealogy? Each one has a story to tell, and without exception, in each case the story is scarred by sin.

Look at Abraham. Instead of trusting God, Abraham lied about his wife. So did Isaac. Then there’s Jacob, who deceived his own dad on his deathbed. Judah hired a prostitute. David committed adultery and murder. Solomon had a thousand women in his life and he followed them into idolatry. Rehoboam listened to bad counsel and split the nation. Asa stopped trusting the Lord at the end of his life and died with diseased feet. Ahaz built a replica of a pagan altar and put it in the Lord’s temple. Manasseh filled Jerusalem with innocent blood.⁶ Amon worshiped idols and was assassinated.

And these are the good guys! Of course, there is no such thing as a “good guy” in God’s eyes. We’re all sinners, but thanks be to God. He works with sinners, and by His grace recues individuals and uses their lives for His glorious purposes.

2. *He works through a chosen family.* The world says there are many ways to God, but that’s not what God says. Three thousand years ago He made it perfectly clear that there’s only one way back to Him, the way He designed. The Lord chose one man, an idol worshipper named Abram, and saved that man, and gave him a new name. Then He gave that man a miracle son, and through that miracle son He formed a family, and turned that family into a nation called Israel, and through that nation He sent into the world the hope of all nations, Jesus.

Now I should point out there are actually two genealogies in the NT. Luke also gives a genealogy in Luke 3:23-38. But a quick comparison reveals some differences. For starters, while Matthew’s moves forward from Abraham to Jesus, Luke’s goes backwards from Jesus through Abraham all the way to Adam. When you compare the names in the two lists, you’ll see close agreement from Abraham to David. But from David on, the lists follow two different lines. Matthew goes through David’s son Solomon. Luke goes through David’s son Nathan.

⁶ See 2 Kings 21:16

If they're identifying the same person, Jesus, why are the two genealogies different? One possible solution is that Luke is giving the genealogy of Mary, while Matthew is giving Joseph's. One problem, however, is that Luke seems to specify that he is giving the genealogy of Joseph (Luke 3:23). One solution to this is that Joseph had two fathers. How could that be? It could be some sort of levirate marriage situation. It could be that Mary had no brother to carry on her father's name, so her father (Heli) adopted Joseph. This would give Joseph two genealogies connected to David, one by birth, the other by adoption.⁷

R. T. France says, "A more probable explanation of the difference is that while Luke records the actual physical genealogy of Joseph, Matthew records the line of succession to the throne, the 'official' genealogy. This would not necessary pass from father to son, but would remain in the family."⁸

So is one genealogy Joseph's, and the other Mary's? Or are they both Joseph's, but one by birth and the other by adoption? It's hard to be sure. But what we can be sure of is that Jesus is the descendant of King David, which puts Jesus in the necessary line to be Israel's king.

See the hand of God in all this, my friend. How does God work? Both Matthew and Luke want us to know that God has purposed to work through a chosen family to provide the Savior this sinful world needs.

3. *He works by grace.* Matthew includes the names of four women. That's odd. He didn't need to. We don't need to know who the mothers were to trace the line from Jesus back to Abraham, but Matthew goes out of his way to introduce us to four women. There's the mother of Perez in verse 3, the mother of Boaz in verse 5⁹, the mother of Obed in verse 5, and the mother of Solomon in verse 6. Ironically, it's likely that all were non-Jews. Tamar was a local Canaanite lady (Gen 38:11, 13-14). Rahab was also a Canaanite, from Jericho. Ruth was a Moabitess. Bathsheba, though perhaps a Jew herself, was the wife of a Hittite.

Barclay is right when he remarks, "If Matthew had ransacked the pages of the Old Testament for improbable candidates, he could not have discovered four more incredible ancestors for Jesus Christ."¹⁰

Think of it this way. In biblical times most Jewish genealogies did their best to show that a person's ancestry was free from Gentile contamination. But Matthew seems to go out of his way to emphasize that there was non-Jewish blood in Jesus' lineage. As Frederick Dale Bruner remarks, "King David himself had a Canaanite great-great-great grandmother, a Jerichoite great-great grandmother, a Moabite great-grandmother, and a Hittite 'wife.' Matthew wants the church to know that from the start, and not just from the Council of Jerusalem (Acts 15), God's work has been interracial, and that God is no narrow nationalist or racist."¹¹

So we're learning how God works, and it's not by bloodlines. It's not by merit either. In point of fact, think about who's *not* listed in this genealogy. You don't see Sarah, or Rebekah, or Rachel, or Leah, the four model matriarchs of Jewish history. Instead, you see Tamar, Rahab, and Bathsheba, three women guilty of sexual sin, and Ruth, a woman from a nationality that began in incest.

⁷ For a good summary of why there are two genealogies, see <https://zondervanacademic.com/blog/why-are-jesus-genealogies-in-matthew-and-luke-different>

⁸ R. T. France, p. 72.

⁹ The NIV says "whose mother was," but the Hebrew is simply "out of." The ESV says "by Rahab."

¹⁰ Barclay, p. 17.

¹¹ Frederick Dale Bruner, p. 6.

What's going on here? As Bruner observes, "One gets the impression that Matthew pored over his Old Testament records until he could find the most questionable ancestors of Jesus available in order, in turn, to insert them into his record and so, it seems, to preach the gospel—the gospel, that is, that God can overcome and forgive sin, and can use soiled but repentant persons for his great purposes in history."¹²

Martin Luther said, "Christ is the kind of person who is not ashamed of sinners—in fact, He even puts them in His family tree!"¹³

That's how God works, my friend. *By grace.* To borrow from Bruner again, "Matthew is teaching us that Jesus came not only *for*, but *through*, sinners. God did not begin to stoop into our sordid human story at Christmas only; he was stooping all the way through the Old Testament."¹⁴

This is the way God has always worked, and saved. Not by merit, but grace.

Yet there's more. We learn that God works with individuals, through a chosen family, by grace, and fourthly...

4. *He works according to His sovereign plan.* Quite frankly, sometimes you can't see it. If we had been transported back right into the middle of this story, say in Salmon's day, or Abijah's day, or Zadok's day, and were asked, "What's God up to in the world?" we probably would have said, "Based on what I'm seeing now, not much." But God was at work, generation after generation, moving His plan step by step closer to fulfillment.

In fact, one of Matthew's favorite phrases in the early chapters of his book is, "This was to fulfill what the Lord had spoken through the prophet."¹⁵

It reminds me of what William Cowper said in his hymn...

*God moves in a mysterious way
His wonders to perform;
He plants His footsteps in the sea
And rides upon the storm.
Deep in unfathomable mines
Of never failing skill
He treasures up His bright designs
And works His sovereign will.*

The fact that God is sovereign is one of His most encouraging attributes. He is in total control even when it appears He isn't. So we can trust Him. He knows what He is doing.

And this brings us to the pinnacle lesson for Matthew. How does God work? With individuals, through a family, by grace, according to His sovereign plan, and...

5. *He works through incarnation.* "In the fullness of time, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman (Gal. 4:4)." God didn't just *send* someone to earth. God *came* to earth, and He came in human flesh in the person of His Son, the God-man, Jesus the Christ.

This brings us to the heart of the gospel message Matthew is preaching through this genealogy. First, we learn about God. That's where the gospel begins. But who is this person that God sent into the world? Look at the genealogy. It tells us clearly.

B. It teaches us about Christ. Four insights.

¹² Bruner, p. 6.

¹³ Martin Luther, quote taken from Bruner, p. 8.

¹⁴ Bruner, p. 6.

¹⁵ Observation by R. T. France, p. 68.

1. *He is a real man.* The Greeks said the gods would never take on human flesh, but Matthew wants us to know that the true God did. “Of whom was born Jesus,” says Matthew in verse 16. And we’ll see some of the details of His birth next week, the Lord willing, as we ponder the birth narrative in verses 18ff. Christ was indeed a *real* man.

Of course, that’s not the full story, for...

2. *He is more than a man.* In verse after verse we’ve seen the phrase “the father of, the father of, the father of,” but when we get to the end of the genealogy, we see Matthew break the pattern. Notice verse 16 again, “And Jacob the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ.”

That’s significant. Matthew wants us to know that Jesus was not the biological son of Joseph. He was born *of Mary*, but not as a result of a union with Joseph. G. Campbell Morgan explains, “On the first page of the gospel Jesus is presented as connected with a race which nevertheless could not produce Him. He came into it, was of it; and yet was distinct from it.”¹⁶

So who then was the father? An angel answered that very question for Joseph, when he said in verse 20, “Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.”

Who is Jesus Christ? First, He is a real man. But secondly, He is more than a man for He is the God-man. But why did He come? That’s our third insight.

3. *He is the fulfillment of God’s covenant with Abraham (Gen. 12:1-3).* I mentioned earlier that God made a promise to Abraham. Let’s take a moment now to look at that promise in Genesis 12:1–3:

“The LORD had said to Abram, ‘Leave your country, your people and your father’s household and go to the land I will show you.’² ‘I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing.’³ I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.”

Allow me to repeat that last line. *All peoples on earth will be blessed through you.* That’s what God told Abraham He would do. He would bless, not just the Jews, but *all peoples* in the world. And He would do it *through you.* And that’s what He did when He sent the son of Abraham into the world. Jesus the Christ is the fulfillment of God’s covenant with Abraham.

Yet there’s more.

4. *He is the fulfillment of God’s covenant with David (2 Sam 7:12-13).* I mentioned earlier that in verse 8 Matthew left out three names between Jehoram and Uzziah: Ahaziah, Joash, and Amaziah. Why? He doesn’t tell us, so it’s just conjecture, but a couple of reasons come to mind. One reason is to aid in memory. He’s structured the genealogy in three groups of fourteen, so he has to make some cuts. There’s another cut in verse 11 where he leaves out Josiah’s son Jehoiakim and doesn’t mention Zedekiah.

But it’s not just a memory aid. As I mentioned earlier, Matthew wants us to ponder the number 14. Why? What’s up with the number 14?

In the ancient world, words had a numeric value (it’s called *gematria*). In this case, the numerical value of the name of David in Hebrew is 14 (D=4, W=6, D=4; you didn’t count the vowels). When we think about Jesus, Matthew wants us to think about David, King David.

That may indicate why Matthew leaves out Zedekiah in this genealogy. The royal line doesn’t flow through Zedekiah, but through Jeconiah (also called Jehoiachin). And that too may be why he drops Ahaziah, Joash, and Amaziah from the list, for those three wicked kings were connected to wicked Ahab and Jezebel and Athaliah who put the royal line in jeopardy.

¹⁶ G. Campbell Morgan, p. 8.

Matthew wants us to think about the royal line of David. Why? Why does Matthew want us to see that Jesus belongs to David's line? To answer that question we must go back to the promise God made to David 1,000 years earlier in 2 Samuel 7:12–13, “When your days are over and you rest with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, who will come from your own body, and I will establish his kingdom.¹³ He is the one who will build a house for my Name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever.”

He has come, says Matthew. The final king, the King of kings, has come!

But someone might object, saying, “Wait. Okay, so Joseph was in the line of David. I see that. But Jesus wasn't Joseph's biological son. Matthew makes that clear. So does this promise apply to Jesus?”

Good question, and the answer is, *yes*. How could it? Adoption. In the ancient world and even today, an adopted son possessed the full rights of the adoptive father. Granted, Joseph wasn't Jesus' biological father, or he would have passed on the sin nature to Jesus, just like your father did to you. But Joseph was Jesus' adoptive father, and as such, all legal rights belonged to Jesus. Which is why again and again the Gospel writers refer to Jesus as “the son of David.”

But there's one more element in any solid gospel presentation. First, we need to hear about **God**, who He is and what His assessment is of our sin and what He has done about it. Second, we to hear about **Christ**, and who He is, and why He came. But then we need to hear what all this has to do with us. And that's the third subject Matthew addresses in this genealogy.

C. It teaches us about what we need. What do we need?

1. *We need a Savior to rescue us.* We're just like Abraham, and Tamar, and every other person listed in this genealogy, including Mary. We're sinners, which means we're cut off from God. But that's why He sent His Son. “You are to give Him the name Jesus,” said the angel in 1:21, “because He will save His people from their sins.”

Friends, we need a Savior, and we have what we need. Have you opened your heart and life to the One God sent to rescue you? There are no exceptions. We all need a Savior to rescue us. Acts 4:12 says, “Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved.”

But there's something else we need...

2. *We need a King to rule us.* To rule *us*, meaning you and me individually. But also, to rule *us*, meaning the world. That's because left to ourselves, we self-destruct. But God sent, not just the Savior, but *the King*. That's what we need. We need a King to rule us.

Friends, when you receive Jesus, you're not receiving a pocket Genie. You're submitting your life to the King of kings.

Let me make it as personal as I can, as Matthew would want us to do. Here's what I need, and you need, every one of you. We need a Savior to rescue us, and we need a King to rule us. And what we need God provided for us in one person.

3. *We need Jesus.*

Closing Song: *Praise Him! Praise Him!* #106, all three verses