

Text: Matthew 1:1-2:12

The Genealogy of Jesus, and Why It Is Important

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. 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. (Matthew 1:1-17)

As we discussed the last time I was able to teach, genealogies are very important in the Bible. In the case of the folks mentioned in Ezra Chapter 2, the importance was to determine eligibility to serve as priests. Here in the first chapter of Matthew (and also in the third Chapter of Luke), the writer is establishing Jesus' legitimate claim to be Messiah based on His fulfillment of the prophecies regarding His lineage. First of all, He will be of the tribe of Judah:

**10" The scepter shall not depart from Judah,
Nor the ruler's staff from between his feet,
Until Shiloh comes,
And to him shall be the obedience of the peoples. (Genesis 49:10)**

Next, He will be a descendant of David (and, thus, of Jesse), and therefore have legitimate claim to the throne of Israel.

12" When your days are complete and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your descendant after you, who will come forth from you, and I will establish his kingdom. 13" He shall build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever....16" Your house and your kingdom shall endure before Me forever; your throne shall be established forever." (2 Samuel 7:12-13, 16)

**1 Then a shoot will spring from the stem of Jesse,
And a branch from his roots will bear fruit.
2 The Spirit of the LORD will rest on Him,
The spirit of wisdom and understanding,
The spirit of counsel and strength,
The spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD.
3 And He will delight in the fear of the LORD,
And He will not judge by what His eyes see,
Nor make a decision by what His ears hear;
4 But with righteousness He will judge the poor,
And decide with fairness for the afflicted of the earth;
And He will strike the earth with the rod of His mouth,
And with the breath of His lips He will slay the wicked.
5 Also righteousness will be the belt about His loins,
And faithfulness the belt about His waist.
(Isaiah 11:1-5)**

This genealogy clearly establishes that Jesus aptly fulfills the requirements regarding His descent. Do keep in mind, though, that Jesus is still the eternal, preexistent God, and in a miraculous fashion He predated, created, and descended from David.

**6For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us;
And the government will rest on His shoulders;
And His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Eternal Father, Prince of Peace.
7There will be no end to the increase of His government or of peace,
On the throne of David and over his kingdom,
To establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness
From then on and forevermore
The zeal of the LORD of hosts will accomplish this. (Isaiah 9:6-7)**

**41Then He said to them, "How is it that they say the Christ is David's son? 42"For David himself says in the book of Psalms,
'THE LORD SAID TO MY LORD,
'SIT AT MY RIGHT HAND,
43UNTIL I MAKE YOUR ENEMIES A FOOTSTOOL FOR YOUR FEET.'" 44"Therefore David calls Him 'Lord,' and how is He his son?" (Luke 20:41-44)**

16"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)

An additional note regarding genealogies: even a cursory comparison of the list in Matthew Chapter 1 and that in Luke Chapter 3 will reveal that these genealogies differ significantly. There have been several explanations offered for this and I have neither the time nor the level of understanding needed to explore them thoroughly. The usual answer is that the list in Matthew traces Jesus' ancestry through Joseph (though Joseph wasn't His *real* Father), and Luke traces it through Mary. Scholars have and will continue argue that point. Still, *both* lists clearly establish Jesus as having descended from David (and, thus, from Judah).

Mary's Pregnancy, and Joseph's Initial Reaction

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. (Matthew 1:18-19)

Speaking in strictly human terms, and somewhat crudely so, Jesus was "illegitimate." It was no secret to the Jews that Joseph was not Jesus' biological father. In fact, the Jews accused Him of being the product of an immoral relationship between Mary and a Samaritan.

48The Jews answered and said to Him, "Do we not say rightly that You are a Samaritan and have a demon?" (John 8:48)

Upon finding Mary to be pregnant, Joseph knew that the full weight of the Law could be brought to bear upon her. In fact, given the assumption that Mary had become pregnant by committing fornication, he would have been well within his rights, according to the Mosaic Law, to have Mary stoned to death.

13"If any man takes a wife and goes in to her and then turns against her, 14and charges her with shameful deeds and publicly defames her, and says, 'I took this woman, but when I came near her, I did not find her a virgin,' ... 20"But if this charge is true, that the girl was not found a virgin, 21then they shall bring out the girl to the doorway of her father's house, and the men of her city shall stone her to death because she has committed an act of folly in Israel by playing the harlot in her father's house; thus you shall purge the evil from among you. (Deuteronomy 22:13-14, 20-21)

For some reason, however, Joseph elected not to go this route, and instead wanted to arrange for her exile. Perhaps she told him that she had conceived by the Holy Spirit and not by fornication, and he partly believed her. Or, the text does say that he was "righteous"—perhaps he simply did not want to have her condemned when he knew himself to not be perfectly sinless.

**10as it is written,
'THERE IS NONE RIGHTEOUS, NOT EVEN ONE; (Romans 3:10)**

In any case, Mary's pregnancy left Joseph with no desire whatsoever to follow through with the marriage.

A Change of Heart

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. 21"She 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." 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. (Matthew 1:20-25)

Following this revelation, Joseph obediently elected to follow through with his marriage plans. The angel indicated that Mary was guilty of no wrong, and was pregnant in fulfillment of the prophecy of Isaiah Chapter 7 regarding the virgin conception and birth. A prophecy in Psalms also was mentioned:

**8And He will redeem Israel
From all his iniquities. (Psalm 130:8)**

After this, Joseph resolved to follow through with the marriage, as he was commanded.

An additional note: please take notice of verse 25: he *kept her a virgin until she gave birth to a Son...* The Bible in no wise supports the Catholic dogma of Mary's perpetual virginity. In fact, the Bible clearly states that Jesus had brothers and sisters:

3"Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary, and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon? Are not His sisters here with us?" And they took offense at Him. (Mark 6:3)

I suppose the assertion that these were *step*-brothers and sisters of some kind from an earlier marriage of Joseph is plausible, but a stretch. Besides, if Mary remained a virgin perpetually, why does Matthew state that she remained a virgin *until*? If she maintained her virginity, why not say so plainly?

So, Jesus was born of a virgin, as the angel predicted, and so far in complete fulfillment of prophecy. The story continues.

The "Wise Men" Search for Jesus

1Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, magi from the east arrived in Jerusalem, saying, 2"Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we saw His star in the east and have come to worship Him." (Matthew 2:1-2)

Here is a good question: who were these magi, and why would they be interested in a Jewish King? Think for a moment, what major ancient kingdoms were immediately to the east of Judea? Babylonia, Media, Persia. What peoples ruled over the Jews during the captivity that ended in the book of Ezra that we just studied? The Babylonians, Medes, and Persians. Although we cannot be sure, it seems possible or even likely that these magi were not unlike the "magicians," etc. that were headed by Daniel during the captivity:

11"There is a man in your kingdom in whom is a spirit of the holy gods; and in the days of your father, illumination, insight and wisdom like the wisdom of the gods were found in him And King Nebuchadnezzar, your father, your father the king, appointed him chief of the magicians, conjurers, Chaldeans and diviners.

12"This was because an extraordinary spirit, knowledge and insight, interpretation of dreams, explanation of enigmas and solving of difficult problems were found in this Daniel, whom the king named Belteshazzar. Let Daniel now be summoned and he will declare the interpretation." (Daniel 5:11-12)

Such near-Eastern "wise men" would have had ample exposure to and likely respect for the Jews and their Scriptures. Being well-versed in Daniel's prophecies regarding the timing of Messiah's appearance, they would have been "on the lookout" for His coming:

25"So you are to know and discern that from the issuing of a decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until Messiah the Prince there will be seven weeks and sixty-two weeks; it will be built again, with plaza and moat, even in times of distress. (Daniel 9:25)

These “weeks,” commonly regarded as seven-year periods, add up to 483 years from the command to rebuild Jerusalem to Messiah’s appearance. That time was fast approaching. Even if this conjecture regarding the identity of the magi is *not* correct, the timing of Jesus’ appearance is still yet one more fulfilled prophecy.

Herod’s Reaction to the “Wise Men”

3When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. 4Gathering together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. 5They said to him, "In Bethlehem of Judea; for this is what has been written by the prophet:

*6'AND YOU, BETHLEHEM, LAND OF JUDAH,
ARE BY NO MEANS LEAST AMONG THE LEADERS OF JUDAH;
FOR OUT OF YOU SHALL COME FORTH A RULER
WHO WILL SHEPHERD MY PEOPLE ISRAEL.'"*

7Then Herod secretly called the magi and determined from them the exact time the star appeared. 8And he sent them to Bethlehem and said, "Go and search carefully for the Child; and when you have found Him, report to me, so that I too may come and worship Him." (Matthew 2:3-8)

There are several things that we can gather from this exchange. First and foremost is the contempt that Herod and other Jerusalem authorities had for Christ. They understood the Scriptures, and viewed Him as a threat. As John said:

11He came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him. (John 1:11)

We also see that Jesus’ birth fulfilled yet another prophecy: that of His being born in Bethlehem.

Then there is the matter of this “star.” Lots of ink has been used in the attempt to identify this as a supernova, planetary alignment, or other natural occurrence. I am having increasing difficulty accepting that. First of all, God was using this for a clearly supernatural purpose—why does it have to be explained as a co-opted natural phenomenon? God has done plenty of miracles that are unexplainable by natural laws. Why should this be different? Second, if it *was* a supernova or other celestial occurrence, why were the magi the only ones that saw it? Verse 7 certainly seems to indicate that Herod had not seen it. Also, it apparently wasn’t visible for the entire length of the magi’s journey—if it had been, they would have skipped Jerusalem and gone straight to Bethlehem. Finally, as we’ll see in the next passage, the star *went on before them* (verse 9). I’m pretty sure that celestial bodies do not move in a way or at a (perceived) speed that seems to actually *lead* people down a short, 6-mile road from one city to another. Be it an angel or other method of God’s providence, to me this star seems to be purely miraculous.

The “Wise Men” Find Jesus

9After hearing the king, they went their way; and the star, which they had seen in the east, went on before them until it came and stood over the place where the Child was. 10When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. 11After coming into the house they saw the Child with Mary His mother; and they fell to the ground and worshiped Him. Then, opening their treasures, they presented to Him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. 12And having been warned by God in a dream not to return to Herod, the magi left for their own country by another way. (Matthew 2:9-12)

So, the magi arrive. The family is clearly not in the stable anymore, but I seriously doubt that the magi arrived *years* after Jesus’ birth. For one thing, neither the Matthew nor the Luke stories allow for such a long stay in Bethlehem—the flight to Egypt (Matthew 2:13-15) and subsequent return to Nazareth (Luke 2:39) can’t have occurred so late. Also, King Herod died in 4 B.C.—while it is generally accepted that our calendars are a bit off, I’ve never seen the date of Jesus’ birth pushed back past 5 B.C. I see no reason why the appearance of the “star” that initiated the magi’s trek couldn’t have occurred prior to Jesus’ birth. In any case, the distance from Babylon or Persia to Judea isn’t that great, and the trip from Jerusalem to Bethlehem could have been undertaken in an afternoon, even at that time. Considering that Mary would have been in her “days of purification” for 40 days before presenting Jesus in the Temple (Leviticus 12:1-4), it is even conceivable that these men left when He was born, and arrived within the 40 days prior to Jesus presentation in the Temple (Luke 2:22).

But, I digress. The point is, they came. And, they came with very fine, costly gifts. Popular tradition states that the gold signified Jesus’ royalty, the frankincense His priesthood, and the myrrh His burial. Perhaps it did, perhaps not. Regardless, the magi thought this humble Child was worthy of the finest possible gifts. Why? Because the Scriptures state that Messiah is the eternal God Incarnate. The magi knew that Jesus was worthy of the very best worship and gifts that they could provide.

**6For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us;
And the government will rest on His shoulders;
And His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,**

Eternal Father, Prince of Peace.

**7There will be no end to the increase of His government or of peace,
On the throne of David and over his kingdom,
To establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness
From then on and forevermore
The zeal of the LORD of hosts will accomplish this. (Isaiah 9:6-7)**

The same is true today, and I hope that each of us will stop and consider Who Jesus is, what He has done, and what we owe Him. He is Lord, and we must believe and acknowledge Him as such if we expect to spend eternity with Him (Romans 10:9-10). The magi bowed the knee to Jesus Christ. Will we?