

Matthew 1

October 6, 2024

Lesson Summary

Main Passages

Matthew 1

Session Outline

1. The Genealogy (Matthew 1:1-17)
2. The Nativity (Matthew 1:18-21)
3. The Prophecy (Matthew 1:22-25)

Theological Theme

The genealogy of Jesus is an important bridge from the Old Testament to the New Testament and the fulfillment of messianic prophecy.

Call to Action

The long-promised Messiah has come, and His name is Jesus. Do you know Him?
Have you surrendered to Him?



Leader Guide

Matthew 1

Introduction

When was the last time you looked at a familiar story from a different viewpoint? Maybe you read a favorite book to your kid or listened to them read it to you. Maybe you revisited a Bible story to share with others. This can also happen when you listen to someone who is new to faith talk about the Bible. Revisiting familiar events and accounts something gives opportunity to consider them with a fresh perspective.

It has been said, “familiarity breeds contempt.” We can easily overlook the opportunity to learn from something we have heard before. But it’s foolish for us to overlook the value of certain Scriptures because they are familiar. Today, we are studying one of the most known passages of the Bible. Commit now to being open to what God wants to say to you through these verses.

- ❓ When has looking at something from a different perspective helped you see or experience it in a new way?
- ❓ Why do you think the idea, “familiarity breeds contempt,” is often true?

Session Summary

Matthew’s account of Jesus’s arrival on earth is focused on Jesus as King. Beginning with the genealogy of His earthly father showed that Joseph was from the line of Abraham and David. The genealogy of Jesus fulfilled prophecy regarding the line of the Messiah.

Jesus’s genealogy also illustrates that God fulfilled His plan to bring about the Messiah from broken, common people. This is a reminder to that Jesus came for all. We can be encouraged even when we feel insignificant or disqualified due to our failures. If those in the lineage of our Lord were blessed to be named in connection to Jesus, He also can use us for His glory when we obey Him and surrender our lives to Him.

1. The Genealogy (Matthew 1:1-17)


The New Testament opens with the genealogy of Jesus Christ in Matthew 1. Matthew was written by the disciple of Jesus, named Matthew, who was a tax collector before he was called to follow Christ. The fact that Jesus chose someone like Matthew to be one of His closest friends and disciples is a reminder that Jesus did not just come for the most popular or beloved people who have it all together. Tax collectors were hated and not esteemed by the Jewish people. They were often looked at as traitors because they carried out the orders of Rome and often took advantage of their position to line their own pockets.

When a genealogy appears in Scripture, we may be tempted to fast forward or skim right over that portion of the text because we don't see the relevance, or the names are hard to pronounce. We must remember every word of the Bible is important to God, or it would not be included. This list of Jesus's ancestors is like a bridge from the Old Testament to the New Testament connecting the people of God to the long-awaited Messiah.

 What is your typical response when you come up a list of names in Scripture like this one? Why?

When listing our own ancestors, we are likely to focus on the most important, impressive, or well-known names in our lineage, but that is not what God did here. One unique aspect of this genealogy is the inclusion of several women. This was highly unusual in ancient culture as women were often disregarded. But we see God includes and values both men and women.

Another notable piece in this genealogy is that there are men and women listed who had scandalous pasts and mistakes, and some who were Gentiles, those outside of God's chosen people, the Jews. Through this, we are reminded the Lord has always had a plan for all the people of the earth and not just the Jewish nation. Even though Matthew wrote this book primarily to the Jews, he made clear that God's redemptive plan was for both Gentiles and Jews. He also stressed some key Jewish figures in the lineage of Christ as proof that Jesus was the Messiah the Jews had longed for.

 What does the varied backgrounds and stories of those included in this genealogy teach you about God's heart?

Matthew

Matthew began his story by recounting selected events surrounding Jesus' birth (about 4–6 BC). The genealogy establishes Jesus's ancestry, showing that He was a legitimate descendant of David and rightful candidate for the messianic throne. The rest of Matthew's "infancy narrative" is comprised of five quotations from the Old Testament and the stories that illustrate how those texts were fulfilled in Jesus.

Matthew anchored Jesus as a descendant of the Patriarchs of the faith so it would be conclusive that Jesus fulfilled the prophecy they had been waiting to see fulfilled. Connecting Jesus to the Abrahamic covenant highlighted His kingship and gave evidence of His identity as Immanuel, God with us. The way that Matthew referred to fourteen generations may be more of an idiom than a precise number. The genealogy is organized to flow for the sake of memorization as was common in Jewish culture.



Application: Which name in this list stands out to you most and why?

2. The Nativity (Matthew 1:18-21)

The details about the Jesus's earthly parents are also important to understand. While the nativity story in Luke 2 gives more specifics of the birth of Christ, Matthew focused on where Jesus came from and how these events happened from the perspective of Joseph. Much can be learned by approaching these events from the viewpoint of Joseph.

A typical marriage in Jewish culture during that time had three stages. Engagement could happen when the two parties were quite young and was often arranged by the parents. This was the initial promise of eventual marriage. Next was the betrothal which made the engagement official and binding. During this stage a man and woman were known as husband and wife. A betrothal was only broken by divorce and typically lasted for one year with the final stage of marriage occurring at the end of the year.


Mary and Joseph were betrothed when Mary learned she was carrying Jesus. During betrothal, the man and woman were not physically intimate, so it was weighty (and seemingly impossible) when it was found that Mary was with child. Imagine how shocking it was for Joseph to hear this news. He likely went through a range of emotions. Scripture tells us he was a just man and wasn't looking to punish Mary or seek revenge of any kind for what was assumed to be infidelity. With a plan in place to treat her kindly but not to complete their marriage, Joseph resolved to divorce her quietly.




What do these verses show you about Joseph and his character, even before he knew everything that was taking place? What can we take away from this?

With his mind weighed down by the situation at hand, Joseph was visited by an angel in his dreams. Although he made what he considered to be good and just plans for dealing with the pregnant Mary, God had other plans entirely. The angel addressed Joseph as a son of David, a highlight

that should have caught his attention. Joseph's connection to the line of David was key to fulfilling the promises about the coming Messiah.

 When was a time you thought you had a good plan but realized God had a better plan for you?


God laid out His plan for Joseph and gave him the next steps. To call the angels announcement to Joseph overwhelming is likely a drastic understatement. As a Jew, Joseph would have been taught the signs of the Messiah's coming and would have connected the dots when the angel told him to name the child Jesus, who would save the people from their sins.

 Application: Where are you currently seeking God in a confusing situation? How can you trust Him, even if you can't see what He's doing clearly?

3. The Prophecy (Matthew 1:22-25)


Matthew declared all this had come to pass so that Scripture and prophecy could be fulfilled just as the Lord promised. This reinforces that a divine plan was unfolding, and Joseph had been chosen to play a role in these events that would change the world forever.

Both Mary and Joseph had to wrestle with their own fears and insecurities to trust that the Lord knows what He is doing, and they were the His chosen instruments to bring about the coming of the Messiah.

 How can you relate to feeling insecure and unqualified to be used by God for His plans? Where are we putting our confidence when we do this?

Many of us find ourselves like Joseph, facing unusual or surprising situations, and we come up with what seems to be a good and even righteous plan in our minds. But how do you respond when the Lord speaks and directs you in a different way? Joseph heard from the angel and responded in obedience because he trusted God's plans were better than his own. We have that same opportunity on a regular basis.

In response to the dream, Joseph obeyed every detail the Lord revealed to him through the angel and didn't delay. Joseph took Mary as his wife and refrained from being with her, so she remained a virgin until after the birth of Christ. He submitted to the Lord and was used by God to bring about His will and plans including, including naming the child Jesus.

 Where is God inviting you to join His plans today?

Joseph understood the importance of the angelic messenger who visited his dreams. We may think if an angel miraculously spoke to us, we would also respond like Joseph. But God has given us His Spirit who continues to speak into our lives each day. The amazing truth is God chooses to use ordinary people like Mary, Joseph, and you to do His will on this earth. He sent the long-awaited Messiah as God with us, and He saves all who trust in Him. Joseph chose to trust God over his own plans and that made all the difference.

- Application: Where do you need to step out in faith, displaying trust in Jesus and not yourself or your own plans?

Conclusion

There is much to be learned from revisiting the story of Jesus's birth in Scripture. Matthew gave an account of the lineage of Jesus which only further legitimized His fulfillment of the Messianic prophecies of the Old Testament. This chapter also focused on the perspective of Joseph and gives insight into the kind of man God chose to father His own Son during Jesus's time in human flesh.

Joseph was a man of honor and respect who had planned one course of action with his pregnant bride to be but chose to believe and obey the Lord when given different instructions. He did exactly as the angel commanded him and is an example in how to trust God even when circumstances are highly unusual or when you feel like the least likely person to be used by God.

- What new perspective have you gained by revisiting Matthew 1 today?
- How can we as a group encourage one another to trust God over our own thoughts and plans?
- How can you seek a gospel conversation with another person by sharing the events surrounding Jesus's birth?

Prayer of Response

Thank the Lord for giving you examples like Joseph and using ordinary people to bring about His great plans. Ask for wisdom to see the opportunities before you to partner with Him in sharing Jesus with those around you.

Memory Verse

“She will give birth to a son, and you are to name him Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.” — Matthew 1:21

Additional Resources

- *Exalting Jesus in Matthew by David Platt*
- *Be Loyal by Warren Wiersbe*
- *Matthew by Stuart Weber*

Disciples Multiplying Disciples



Historical Context of Matthew

Purpose

Matthew probably wrote his Gospel in order to preserve written eyewitness testimony about the ministry of Jesus. Matthew's Gospel emphasizes certain theological truths. First, Jesus is the Messiah, the long-awaited King of God's people. Second, Jesus is the new Abraham, the founder of a new spiritual Israel consisting of all people who choose to follow him. This new Israel will consist of both Jews and Gentiles. Third, Jesus is the new Moses, the deliverer and instructor of God's people. Fourth, Jesus is the Immanuel, the virgin-born Son of God who fulfills the promises of the OT.

Author

The author did not identify himself in the text. However, the title that ascribes this Gospel to Matthew appears in the earliest manuscripts and is possibly original. Titles became necessary to distinguish one Gospel from another when the four Gospels began to circulate as a single collection. Many early church fathers (Papias, Irenaeus, Pantaenus, and Origen) acknowledged Matthew as the author. Papias also contended that Matthew first wrote in Hebrew, implying that this Gospel was later translated into Greek.

Clues from the Gospel itself support its ascription to Matthew. First, both Mark 2:14 and Luke 5:27 identify the tax collector whom Jesus called to be his disciple as "Levi." This Gospel, however, identifies Levi as "Matthew." Matthew, a Hebrew name meaning "gift of God," appears to be the apostolic name that Jesus gave to Levi after he chose to follow Christ, much as Simon was named "Peter" by Jesus after his confession of faith (16:18). The use of "Matthew" in this Gospel may be Matthew's personal touch, a self-reference that gives us a clue about authorship.

Setting

The date of composition for Mark is best inferred from the date of Luke and Acts. The abrupt ending of Acts which left Paul under house arrest in Rome implies that Acts was written before Paul's release. Since one of the major themes of Acts is the legality of Christianity in the Roman Empire, one would have expected Luke to mention Paul's release by the emperor if it had already occurred. This evidence dates Acts to the early 60s. Luke and Acts were two volumes of a single work, as the prologues to these books demonstrate. Luke was written before Acts. Given the amount of research that Luke invested in the book and the travel that eyewitness interviews probably required, a date in the late 50s is reasonable. If Luke used Mark in writing his own Gospel, as seems likely, by implication Mark was written some time before the late 50s, perhaps the early to mid-50s. Thus, despite Matthew's dependence on Mark, Matthew may have been written any time beginning in the mid-50s once Mark was completed. The earliest historical evidence is consistent with this opinion, since Irenaeus (ca AD 180) claimed that Matthew wrote his Gospel while Peter and Paul were preaching in Rome (early AD 60s).

Special Features

This Gospel was written from a strong Jewish perspective to show that Jesus is the Messiah promised in the Old Testament.

Extended Commentary

Matthew 1

1:1 The title of this genealogy introduces several important themes in Matthew. Jesus is identified as the Christ, Messiah, the King anointed by God to rule over his people. This is reiterated by identifying Jesus as Son of David (v. 20; 2:2; 9:27; 12:3, 23; 15:22; 20:30–31; 21:9, 15). OT prophecies like 2Sm 7:16 and Is 9:2–7 foretold that Messiah (the “anointed one”) would be a descendant of King David. Jesus’s Davidic lineage shows that he meets this qualification. Though the genealogy is otherwise arranged in chronological order, Matthew shifted “Son of David” ahead of Son of Abraham to lay emphasis on the royal title.

The title “Son of Abraham” implies that just as Abraham was the father of national Israel, Jesus will be the founder of a new spiritual Israel. The phrase an account of the genealogy of Jesus is unusual. OT genealogies are consistently named after the earliest ancestor in the lineage because the Jews considered that person to be most significant since everyone else derived from them. That Matthew names his genealogy after Jesus, the final descendant in the lineage, implies that Jesus is more important than anyone who preceded him.

1:2–6 Matthew mentioned four women in his genealogy, all of them Gentiles. Tamar was a Canaanite. Rahab was from Jericho. Ruth was a Moabitess. Uriah’s wife Bathsheba was probably a Hittite. The mention of these women signals God’s intention to include Gentiles and women in his redemptive plan. Several kings are named also, but only David is explicitly given the title King. This highlights that the Son of David (Jesus) will likewise be a kingly figure.

1:7–16 Matthew’s genealogy agrees with the genealogies of 1Ch 1–3 and Lk 3:23–38 from the generation of Abraham down to David. After David, Matthew’s genealogy agrees with that of 1 Chronicles except for a few intentional gaps, but departs significantly from Luke’s. Some interpreters argue from this that one or both of the NT genealogies is inaccurate. However, Jews in David’s line carefully preserved their genealogies because they knew from the OT prophecies that one of their descendants would be the Messiah. David’s descendants also had the privilege of providing firewood for the altar in Jerusalem (m. Ta’an. 4:5). Naturally, they kept careful records to demonstrate their Davidic descent and preserve their privileges. Evidence in Josephus (Life 1) and rabbinic texts suggests that genealogical archives were kept in public registers.

Scholars suggest several ways in which the genealogies of Matthew and Luke may be harmonized. First, one may preserve the genealogy of Jesus through Mary and the other through Joseph. Second, the custom of levirate marriage resulted in a child having different biological and legal fathers. Perhaps one genealogy follows the biological line while the other follows the legal. Third, one genealogy may trace David’s legal descendants who would have reigned if the Davidic kingdom had continued, while the other lists descendants in Joseph’s specific line. A combination of these approaches is also possible.

In English, it is difficult to identify the antecedent of the first occurrence of the pronoun who in v. 16. However, in Matthew’s Greek, the pronoun is feminine. Thus, although the rest of the genealogy focuses on fathers and only rarely mentions mothers, Matthew identified a human mother but not a human father of Jesus, thus implying Jesus’s virginal conception.

1:17 Matthew’s arrangement of Jesus’s genealogy into three sets of fourteen generations is probably an example of gematria, a system that assigns numerical value to letters of the alphabet (e.g., A = 1, B = 2, etc.) in order to communicate a subtle message. In Hebrew, the numerical value of the letters composing the name David is

fourteen. Thus Matthew's artistic arrangement probably highlights Jesus's Davidic lineage. If Matthew did intentionally use gematria, this supports the view that he originally wrote his Gospel in Hebrew, for the gematria functions in the Hebrew version of the genealogy but not the Greek.

1:18 The words of Jesus Christ are in an emphatic position in the Greek text, implying that the circumstances of Jesus's birth differed from those of everyone else in the genealogy. Although several of those people were conceived by miracles, they all had a human father. Only Jesus was born of a virgin. Mary had been engaged to Joseph. However, ancient Jewish engagement was as legally binding as marriage. The couple did not live together or engage in sexual intercourse. But the engagement could only be ended by divorce (thus, Joseph's decision in 1:19). Before they came together means that Joseph and Mary had not yet had intercourse. Joseph thus assumed that Mary had been unfaithful. Pregnant from the Holy Spirit means that Mary's pregnancy was a miracle performed by the Spirit, not that God assumed material form and physically impregnated her. This makes Jesus's conception dramatically different from Greek myths that speak of children born to gods who lay with women.

1:19 Joseph did not want to humiliate Mary publicly because he was a righteous man. His peers most likely expected him to expose her apparent sin, but true righteousness is characterized by compassion and mercy, an important theme for Matthew (5:6–7, 21–26, 38–48).

1:20 God spoke to Joseph through dreams, just as he did to his OT namesake (Gn 37:1–11). The title son of David reminded Joseph of his royal lineage and prepared him for the announcement of Messiah's birth. On conceived ... from the Holy Spirit, see note at v. 18.

1:21 Jesus is the Greek form of the Hebrew name Joshua which means "Yahweh saves." The angel explained that Jesus's name revealed his purpose: He would rescue sinners from the punishment they deserve. This salvation would be experienced by his people, identified as those who follow Jesus.

1:22 Spoken by the Lord through the prophet implies that God was the ultimate author of the messages spoken and written by the prophets. The grammar that Matthew uses to introduce the quote from Is 7:14 (see Mt 1:23) suggests that the angel quoted this verse to Joseph during his announcement. Some interpreters argue that Matthew mishandled Is 7:14, but he seems to have handled it just as the angel did, which means his usage is backed by angelic authority.

1:23 The name Immanuel (God with us) implies Jesus's deity. Mary's virgin-born Son would be God himself living among his people. The Immanuel of Is 7:14 is to be identified with the person described in Is 9:2–7 and 11:1–9.

1:24–25 These verses emphasize Joseph's absolute obedience to the angel's instructions, a prevalent theme in these early chapters (2:13–15, 19–21). Joseph is a model of the obedience that should characterize Jesus's disciples (5:19–20). Did not have sexual relations with her confirms again that Jesus was the product of a virginal conception.¹

References

1. Charles L. Quarles, "Matthew," in *CSB Study Bible: Notes*, ed. Edwin A. Blum and Trevin Wax (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2017), 1497–1498.