

The Gospel According to Matthew

By

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CHAPTER ONE

MATTHEW 1:1-17

THE first verse of this chapter gives the title to the section under consideration; while the last verse of that section summarizes its content. The first is undoubtedly the title of the genealogy of Jesus as it appeared in the Jewish records. The last is Matthew's summary of the content thereof.

It is not my purpose to dwell at any length upon the matter of the difference between this genealogy and that which we have in the Gospel according to Luke. There are, however, one or two matters that it may be well for us to note by way of introduction.

The first is that to which I have already twice drawn attention. The opening words, "**The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham,**" do not constitute the title to the Gospel according to Matthew, but the title of the genealogy of Jesus Christ as it is here given.

We shall take it for granted that this genealogy was taken from the legal records by Matthew in order to preface the Gospel in which he was about to present the One Whom he had come to know as the long-looked-for Messiah-King of his people.

My personal conviction is that this genealogy does not appear in our Gospel exactly as Matthew found it in the records. His concluding summary, in which he declares that these generations from Abraham to the Messiah fall into three cycles of fourteen, makes this improbable for the simple reason that there are conspicuous omissions. In the eighth verse between Joram and Uzziah the names of Ahaziah, Joash, and Amaziah are omitted, and in verse eleven Jehoiakim is omitted between Josiah and Jechoniah. I am inclined to believe that the former omissions were deliberately made for spiritual reasons.

It is noticeable that the evangelist says, "**All the generations from Abraham unto David are fourteen generations,**" and in that section there are no omissions.

But with regard to the subsequent divisions he says, "**from David until the carrying away into Babylon are fourteen generations; and from the carrying away into Babylon unto Christ are fourteen generations;**" not that they are all, but that he has named those chosen to complete the chain.

When it is remembered that those omitted first were the immediate descendants of the daughter of Ahab and Jezebel, we may have a clue to the principle of Matthew's selection.

It should finally be noticed that this genealogy does not say that Jesus was the son of Joseph. It is the genealogy of Jesus only because of His mother's marriage with Joseph, and in the Jewish records He appears as one born to Mary whose husband was Joseph.

I propose to glance briefly at the genealogy itself as given in the paragraph commencing with the second verse and ending with the sixteenth verse; and then to examine more carefully the title as given in the first verse, and the summary as given in the seventeenth verse.

These intervening verses are interesting for several reasons.

The first is that while they are entirely Jewish in outlook, they do nevertheless overleap the boundary of the Hebrew nation in a most remarkable way in the inclusion of Rahab; and they violate the prejudice of Judaism in the introduction of women. This violation is the more remarkable when we remember the character of the women whose names are introduced.

- The first is that of Tamar, a notorious sinner.
- The second is that of Rahab, a foreigner and a sinner.
- The third is that of Ruth, a foreigner, although received into the nation.
- The fourth is that of Bathsheba, through whose sin with David the shadow of shame for ever rests upon the royal line.
- The fifth is that of Mary the mother of the Lord.

Thus in this genealogy, consciously or unconsciously, there are signs and portents of the grace which is being brought to all men through the coming King.

Another point of interest is that of the closing declaration of the genealogy proper; "**Jacob begat Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus,**" which is entirely out of harmony with the method of obtaining all through until that point.

- It marks a separation to be explained by the story of the birth of Jesus which immediately follows.
- It emphasizes the fact that He was not the son of Joseph.

Thus 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. As we have said, the mystery is not explained here, but waits for the unveiling of the subsequent story.

Turning to the examination of the first verse, which constitutes the title of the genealogy, we are at once arrested by the fact that it emphasizes a relation between Jesus Christ and the two outstanding men in Hebrew history, namely Abraham and David.

In each case the relationship is distinctly affirmed to be that of sonship. He is the son of David, and the son of Abraham. Thus His connection with the Hebrew people is royal and racial. He is of the kingly line, and He is from the father and founder of the people. It may be as well at this point to draw attention to the fact that the genealogy given in Matthew corresponds exactly with that given in Luke between Abraham and David. The differences are found in the portion of the genealogy from David to Jesus.

The genealogy in Luke gives His lineal descent through Mary, and He was through her, son of David. Matthew therefore speaks of Him as son of David, and not as son of any of those who are in the genealogy of Joseph subsequent to that point.

The remarkable fact of this title is that it speaks of Jesus as son of David and son of Abraham.

Now the peculiar promise of God to each of these men, according to Old Testament history, was that of a son; and the immediate fulfillment in each case was in many senses disappointing. Therefore the son of Abraham, who came for the fulfillment of the ideals for which he stood in obedience to faith; and the son of David, who came for the fulfillment of the ideals for which he stood in obedience to faith; was neither Isaac, nor Solomon, but Jesus.

This fact is worthy of a somewhat closer examination in each case. Let us take them in the order of statement in the verse. The son of David to whom he looked for the fulfillment of his purpose of the establishment of the kingdom around the temple of the Lord was Solomon. His name, Solomon, the peaceful, suggested the principle of the kingdom. His greatest endowment was that of wisdom. His specific work was that of the building of the temple. His reign was characterized by peace and prosperity. Nevertheless the story of Solomon is one of disastrous failure.

In spite of the gifts of wisdom from on high he lived a life of unutterable and appalling folly. Even though he built the temple, he so contradicted all that for which it stood as to make it a center of form without power; and even though, through the goodness of God to him, for the sake of his father, the kingdom was maintained in peace and prosperity during the period of his life, he had sown it with seeds of disruption which bore harvest immediately after his death. Thus was David disappointed in his son after the flesh.

Jesus Christ, the Son of David after the flesh, but the Son of God as the resurrection finally attested, came for the overcoming of all the failure which characterized the life and reign of Solomon.

With an infinite wisdom He proceeded to the building of the temple which cannot be destroyed; and laid the foundation for the establishment of the Kingdom in peace and prosperity from which all that offends will finally be cast forth.

The son of Abraham to whom he looked for the fulfillment of the promise of God, that from him there should spring a nation which should be the medium of blessing to all the nations, was Isaac. His name, Isaac, *laughter*, was to Abraham for evermore a witness of the merging of the human and the Divine, in that he was born because “**Sarah received strength to conceive seed . . . when she was past age.**”

Through him there was given to Abraham that seed which consisted of sons who, to his vision, were destined to carry forward the enterprises of God. The one influence which he exerted was that of the power, which he retained by faith, of blessing his sons after him.

Nevertheless the story of Isaac is one of disappointment, both in the weakness of his own character, and in the appalling failure of his sons through the long succession of the ages; and in the fact that they failed to enter into the true meaning and value of the blessing he pronounced. Thus was Abraham disappointed in his son after the flesh.

Jesus, the son of Abraham after the flesh, but in the mystery of His Person able to say, “**Before Abraham was, I am,**” came to realize and fulfil all the purpose which had failed through Isaac and his seed after him. He was the true son of Abraham both human and Divine, and there sprang from Him so many as the stars of heaven for multitude, and as the sand, which is by the seashore, innumerable, to carry out the purposes of God.

Thus Jesus Christ, the Son of David and Son of Abraham, came in the fulness of the time to overcome the failure of Solomon the son of David and Isaac the son of Abraham; and to establish the throne and to perfect the nation. In the summary with which the section ends three crises in the history of the people are mentioned.

- The first is that original movement connected with the call of Abraham; his obedience and consequent founding of the new race on the principle of faith.
- The second is connected with David, the king after God’s own heart; whose appointment was nevertheless the outcome of national failure in that they clamored for “**a king like unto the nations,**”
- The last is that of the carrying away into captivity to Babylon of the people whose very existence in the economy of God was intended to be a force antagonistic to everything of which Babylon was the embodiment.

The three cycles culminate in Christ, and that fact suggests His relation to all. As we think of them and of Him, we are impressed by the threefold fact of relationship in each case which may be described as:

- Identity of principle,
- Superiority of realization,
- Correction of failure.

The relationship between Abraham and Christ is first that of identity of principle.

The principle on which Abraham acted when he left Ur of the Chaldees, and throughout the whole of his life, in so far as it was in accord with the Divine will, was that of faith. The whole life and ministry of Jesus, on the plane of His humanity, was true to the selfsame principle; and as it has often been pointed out, the writer of the letter to the Hebrews gives Him precedence of Abraham in this matter, as he declares Him to be the Author, or File-leader of faith.

The difference is at once seen in the absolute superiority of His realization of this principle of faith. In the life of Abraham we have accounts of deflections issuing in disgrace, and almost in disaster. In the life of Jesus there was no doubt, and consequently no deviation from the path of obedience.

Moreover, and principally, the relation between Christ and Abraham is that of His correction of the failure. In His case the city of God is not only looked for, but built; the glory of God is not only sought, but manifested.

The relationship between David and Christ is first that of identity of principle in the matter of kingship.

David's loyalty to the Lord was the condition of his royalty. It was because of his fidelity to Him in circumstances of difficulty that he came at last to full and glorious crowning. In the case of Jesus all that was imperfectly foreshadowed in the experience of David was absolutely fulfilled. Loyalty to the will of God was the master passion of His life, and created the majesty and might of His regal authority.

The superiority of realization is even more marked in this case than in the former. David's deflections from loyalty not only tarnished the escutcheon of his royalty, but limited the extent of his authority. The absolute abandonment of Jesus to the acceptable will of His Father created the luster of His crown, and ensured that limitlessness of empire which enabled Him to say, "**All power (authority) is given unto me in heaven and in earth.**"

The final and gracious fact of relationship between Christ and David is that of His assured establishment of the Kingdom, and the vindication of the glory of God.

The relationship between the carrying away into captivity and Christ is again that of identity of principle.

These people passed under the yoke of a nation full of pride and rebellious against God's government. Christ was born under the yoke of Rome, amid His people, in days when their independence was lost. The very surroundings of His birth were created by the fact that His mother with Joseph her husband were traveling in obedience to the edict of the Emperor that all the world should be enrolled.

His infinite superiority is seen in the quiet dignity of His submission through all the days of His earthly life, as He rendered to Caesar the things that belonged to Caesar; and in that fine triumph over the outward yoke of Caesar, as He rendered to God the things that belong unto God.

The final fact of relationship between Christ and the captivity is that of His breaking of all the bonds resulting from sin, and leading the exodus of all such as trust Him.

Thus in this genealogical paragraph humanity's aspirations and incompetencies are represented in these generations; and aspirations and incompetencies alike look wistfully to Him.

The founder and the king look to Him as Son for the fulfillment of purpose.

- Faith, which by comparison with sight has seemed feeble through the passing of the centuries, waits His vindication.
- Government which has perpetually failed waits His administration.
- Captivity which has sighed and sobbed in its agony waits His emancipation.

What can He do? We will pursue the story presently, and in the meantime crown Him in hope;

“Hail to the Lord’s anointed:
Great David’s greater Son!
Hail, in the time appointed,
His reign on earth begun!
He comes to break oppression,
To set the captive free,
To take away transgression,
And rule in equity.”

~ end of chapter 1 ~

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