

# Matthew 1

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### Overview

As we moved through the book of Isaiah, we saw a development in the promises about the coming king.

- In ch. 1-12, he is a child prodigy: the son of a virgin who is “God with us” (7:14), a child who is “the mighty God” (9:6-7), a shoot out of Jesse’s blighted stump upon whom the Spirit of the Lord rests in sevenfold splendor (11:1-10).
- In ch. 40-57, he is the servant of the Lord, suffering unjustly for his people.
- In ch. 58-66, he is the triumphant Redeemer, victorious over all his adversaries as he restores Zion.

Matthew also begins with the child. Like Isaiah, he wants us to remember that this king comes “out of the stem of Jesse,” and the opening genealogy documents this relation.

*Application:* Whatever else we believe about the Lord Jesus, we must understand that he is a man. The law of Moses required kinship for two social relations: purchasing someone from bondage (Lev 25:48) and serving as king (Deut 17:15). Both of our Lord’s roles, the suffering servant of ch. 40-57 and the triumphant redeemer of 58-66, require that he be the child of ch. 1-12. This section assures us that our Lord has the qualifications to do both of these things for us.

This chapter has two parts. The first (vv. 1-17) is the genealogy of the Lord Jesus, emphasizing that he is the promised son of David. The second (vv. 18-25) is the description of his birth from a human virgin with divine paternity, establishing him as the son of God.

### 1-17, The Genealogy of the Son of David

We can see the main points in the heading (v. 1) and the conclusion (v. 17). These will help us make sense of several distinctive characteristics of the list:

- The inclusion of women, something unprecedented in the genealogies of the OT;
- The selectivity of some sections of the genealogy;
- The enumeration of the generations in the final third.

### Heading and Conclusion

**1 The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.**--We should note two things about the first verse in the book.

First, it is modeled on Gen 5:1, which reads in the LXX, “This is the book of the generation of men,” and then goes on, starting with Adam, to describe how the human race developed, down to the time of Noah. The MT calls it “the book of the generations of Adam,” naming it after its initial member, but the

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LXX names it after what it produces, and Matthew follows that model.

This heading (and the related “these are the generations of X) is a hallmark of Genesis, where it appears 11 times, introducing successive sections of the book. It appears only two other times in the OT, once at Num 3:1 (“the generations of Aaron and Moses”) and once in Ruth 4:18 (“the generations of Pharez.” The coming of the Lord Jesus marks a new beginning, and we will see other allusions to the Pentateuch in these early chapters. John’s gospel shares this emphasis: the first two chapters outline the first week after “the beginning” (John 1:1), just as does Genesis 1. The evangelists clearly recognize that the coming of Christ marks something new and discontinuous.

*Application:* The coming of Christ into the world marked a new era in God’s dealings with men. Similarly, his coming into our lives should mark a new era for us. “If any man be in Christ, he is a new creation” (2 Cor 5:17). Whenever we are tempted to live according to our old manner of life, let us remember that our Saviour has made all things new, and we are to exhibit that newness of life.

Second, the heading outlines the whole genealogy, giving the end (Jesus Christ), the starting point (Abraham), and the most important individual in the middle (David).

David is more in focus in Matthew (17 occurrences, 7 per 10k words) than in any other gospel (Luke is next with 13 instances and 5 per 10k). This is appropriate with a book that is focused on our Lord as the king, since it was to David (2 Sam 7) that God promised a **Davidic** descendant who would also be **God’s Son**, to rule over Israel, and even (psalms) over **all the earth**:

2Sa 7:11 Also the LORD telleth thee that he will make thee an house. 12 And when thy days be fulfilled, and thou shalt sleep with thy fathers, I will set up **thy seed** after thee, which shall proceed out of thy bowels, and I will establish his kingdom. 13 He shall build an house for my name, and I will stablish the throne of his kingdom for ever. 14 **I will be his father, and he shall be my son.**

Psa 2:7 I will declare the decree: the LORD hath said unto me, Thou *art* **my Son**; this day have I begotten thee. 8 Ask of me, and I shall give *thee* **the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession.**

Psa 89:20 I have found **David** my servant; with my holy oil have I anointed him: ... 25 I will set his hand also in the sea, and his right hand in the rivers. 26 He shall cry unto me, Thou *art* **my father**, my God, and the rock of my salvation. 27 Also I will make him *my* firstborn, **higher than the kings of the earth.**

This emphasis on David may help explain the main point of the summary:

**17 So all the generations from Abraham to David are fourteen generations; and from David until the carrying away into Babylon are fourteen generations; and from the carrying away into Babylon unto Christ are fourteen generations.**--Again, we should notice two things.

First, note the symmetry that he emphasizes across these three periods. We saw something very much like this in our review of Daniel 9.<sup>1</sup> Daniel had been meditating on Jeremiah’s prophecy of the 70 years of captivity, which Moses in Leviticus explained as the result of neglecting the law of the sabbatical year. So the captivity issued from a period of 70 weeks of years. In response to his prayer, Gabriel

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<sup>1</sup> See notes on the introduction to Matthew.

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revealed that God had ordained another period of 70 weeks of years that would

Dan 9:24 make an end of sins, and ... bring in everlasting righteousness, and to seal up the vision and prophecy

Toward the end of this second 70x7 the Messiah comes. Daniel shows a symmetry between the monarchy and the time to the Messiah, and now Matthew does as well.

*Application:* These symmetries reassure impatient saints. God did not bring in the Messiah immediately when he promised him, but there was a balance; the wait from the time of chastisement was only as long as the period of decay, and in fact a bit shorter. God's calendar may not be known to us, but these symmetries in fulfilled prophecy assure us that it is well-ordered.

Second, consider the length of each period. Where did Matthew get "fourteen"? It is not simply an observation from the historical record. We'll see that Matthew has made some adjustments to make his list fit the scheme of 3 x 14. The best explanation I know is that he is using the numerical value of the name of "David" (Figure 1). We should understand his list, not as a claim (which would be wrong) about the absolute number of generations in each section, but more as a mnemonic: "See here: to trace the ancestry of the Messiah, David's son, note that David means 14, and remember these 3 x 14 steps."


David =   
4 + 6 + 4

Figure 1: The numerical value of the name "David"

*Application:* With this genealogy, Matthew is announcing that God has kept his promise. He promised David a son who would also be God's son and would rule over all the earth. Now that one has arrived. We should take special comfort from such records of fulfilled prophecy, that God will faithfully complete what he has promised us as well.

Now let's consider the three characteristics of the list that we noted above (Table 1).

## 3, 5 (2x), 6, 16, The Role of Women

The first thing we notice is the prominent role given to women in this genealogy. They are not named in the OT genealogies. And the ones that Matthew selects to highlight are not whom we would expect.

The fifth woman, Mary (v. 16), can hardly be omitted in view of Matthew's subsequent emphasis on the virgin birth. But how about Tamar(v. 3), Rahab (v. 5), Ruth (v. 5), and Bathsheba (v. 6)? Why not select Sarah, or Rebecca, or Leah, the great patriarchal mothers who were equally involved in this line of descent?

We can suggest three motives for Matthew's emphasis on these women. They are women, they are



	vv. 2-6	vv. 6-11	vv. 12-16
1	<sup>2</sup> Abraham	Solomon of <b>[Bathsheba]</b>	<sup>12</sup> Salathiel
2	Isaac	<sup>7</sup> Roboam	Zorobabel
3	Jacob	Abia	<sup>13</sup> Abiud
4	Judas ...	Asa	Eliakim
5	Phares ... of	<sup>8</sup> Josaphat	Azor
6	Esrom	Joram	<sup>14</sup> Sadoc
7	Aram	Ozias 	Achim
8	<sup>4</sup> Aminadab	<sup>9</sup> Joatham	Eliud
9	Naasson	Achaz	<sup>15</sup> Eleazar
10	Salmon	Ezekias	Matthan
11	<sup>6</sup> Booz of <b>Rachab</b>	<sup>10</sup> Manasses	Jacob
12	Obed of <b>Ruth</b>	Amon	<sup>16</sup> Joseph
13	Jesse	Josias 	<b>Mary</b>
14	<sup>6</sup> David the king	<sup>11</sup> Jechonias ...	Jesus

Table 1: Characteristics of the genealogies: Women (in red); gaps.

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Gentiles, and they illustrate the power of God's forgiveness..

First, the very presence of any **women** in the genealogy reminds us that in Christ,

Gal 3:28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.

Some accuse the Bible of suppressing women. In fact, to this day, based on an ancient teaching in the Talmud,<sup>2</sup> orthodox Jews pray each morning, "Blessed art thou, O Lord our God, King of the Universe, who has not made me a woman," grouping women with slaves and Gentiles as inferior to the free Jewish male.

The inclusion of these women in the genealogy of Messiah directly challenges this viewpoint. From the outset, Matthew emphasizes their role in the gospel. He begins with the virgin birth, recalling the ancient promise that the one who would bruise the head of the serpent would be the seed of the woman (Gen 3:15). At the end of the gospel, he shows us the women, but none of the male disciples, faithfully standing by at the crucifixion and coming to anoint his body. In documenting how the Son of God is born, he reminds his readers of the role that women played.

*Application:* The role of women in the church is different from the role of men, but we err if we consider it inferior. We should recognize and rejoice in the special gifts that women bring to the body of Christ and the work of the gospel.

Second, all four of these women were probably **Gentiles**. We know that Rahab of Jericho and Ruth of Moab were.

How about Tamar? The narrative in Gen 38 emphasizes Judah's departure from his brethren (the only source of Abrahamic women) and commerce among the pagans. He marries a Canaanite woman, the daughter of Shuah, and when he chooses Tamar as a wife for his firstborn, there is no hint that he has returned to the small community around Jacob. When she decides to seduce her father-in-law, she imitates the practice of a cult prostitute, suggesting her familiarity with the pagan religion. In all likelihood, Tamar was a Canaanite as well.

That leaves "the wife of Uriah," Bathsheba. Uriah was a Hittite, one among several gentiles who were particularly close to David (including his personal guard, the Cherethites and the Pelethites). By focusing on her husband rather than Bathsheba herself, Matthew emphasizes her Gentile connection.<sup>3</sup> Bathsheba may have been a Gentile by birth,<sup>4</sup> or perhaps by this marriage she was understood to have become a Hittite.

Each morning the orthodox Jew thanks God, not only for not making him a woman, but also for not making him a Gentile. This attitude is reflected in the history of the early church, which was predominantly Jewish. The discussion in Acts 15 shows that many Jewish believers felt that Gentiles

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2 Yoel Kahn, "On Gentiles, Slaves, and Women," in L.A. Hoffman, *My People's Prayer Book: Birkhot Hashachar* (Jewish Lights Publishing), pp. 17Ff, cites Rabbi Meir in the Babylonian Talmud (Men. 43b) as the source of the prayer.

3 In marrying a Hittite, Bathsheba violated Deut 7:3, cf. v. 1.

4 Bathsheba's grandfather was Ahitophel, David's counselor (compare 2 Sam 23:34 and 2 Sam 11:3), which may explain his treachery against David when Absalom rose against him. But we don't know whether Ahitophel was an Israelite, or (like Uriah) a foreigner who became loyal to David. His name does not disclose any Jewish connection, but means "brother of insipidity" or "impiety," suggesting some irregularity.

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had to convert to Judaism before they could be recognized as followers of the Messiah. Again, Matthew's women remind us that this is not God's intention. By identifying Gentiles among the Lord's ancestors, Matthew prepares the ground for a king who will rule not only over Israel, but over all the earth. God commanded through Moses that Israel was not to take a king who was not one of them:

Deu 17:15 *one* from among thy brethren shalt thou set king over thee: thou mayest not set a stranger over thee, which *is* not thy brother.

So God has ordained that the one who will rule over the Gentiles will have Gentiles among his ancestors.

*Application:* Some people react negatively to the focus on Israel's restoration in the day of the Lord, as though it makes Gentiles racially inferior. Matthew's women remind us that our Lord is kin to Gentiles as well as to Jews.

Finally, these stories emphasize the **sinfulness** of those in the Messiah's ancestry. Tamar and Rahab played the harlot, and Bathsheba yielded herself to seduction. No such impurity is ascribed to Ruth, but as a Moabitess she would have worshipped other gods before she turned her devotion to Naomi's God. Of course, we can identify numerous sinners among the men in the list as well, including Judah and David, who drove Tamar and Bathsheba into sin. Matthew reminds us that this king comes from a sinful people. If he is to introduce the righteous kingdom of God from which the wicked will be excluded, he must first make provision for forgiving his people's sin.

*Application:* Sometimes we are discouraged by our sin, and feel defeated by it. Matthew's women (and many of his men as well) remind us that our Lord's people are not perfect, but they are forgiven. He expects us to gain victory over sin as we mature, but he never turns away the repentant sinner who comes to him in faith.

### Selectivity

A second characteristic that invites attention is the selectivity of the list, particularly in its second segment, which covers the kings of the Davidic dynasty from Solomon down to the captivity when the monarchy ended. Comparison with 1 Chronicles 3 shows four omissions: the kings Ahaziah, Joash, and Amaziah between Joram and Uzziah, and Jechoiachim between Josiah and Jeconiah.

The omission of steps in a genealogy is not unprecedented. "Begot" and "son" are broad enough to include descendants more remote than an immediate son. An impressive example is seen in comparing Ezra 7:1-5 with 1 Chr 6:3-14. Ezra 7:3 omits six generations that fall between Meraioth and Azariah, but are documented in 1 Chr 6:7-9.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> In addition, though Ezra 7:1 presents Ezra (who lived around 450 BC) as the son of Seraiah. 1 Chr states that it was Seraiah's son Jehozadak who went into captivity in 586 BC. If Ezra were the brother of Jehozadak, he would be 130 years old at the time he returned to Jerusalem. More likely he was the son or even grandson of Jehozadak. For further instances of abbreviated genealogies, see William Henry Green, "Primeval Chronology," *Bib. Sac*, April 1890, pp. 285-303, reprinted in W.C. Kaiser, *Classical Evangelical Essays*, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1972. The long gap in Ezra 7 may be explained as haplography, due to the repetition of several names in 1 Chr, but Green includes other examples (e.g., Moses' grandsons serving in David's cabinet) that suggest that the purpose of genealogies was not completeness, but representativeness.

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One can think of various reasons that these individuals might have been excluded in Matthew's list,<sup>6</sup> but perhaps his main motive is to achieve the structure of 3x14 that emphasizes David.

### ***The Enumeration in 12-16***

A third feature that invites our attention is that the third list includes only 13 men, not 14 as do the other two lists. This would not be an issue, except that Matthew has insisted on the structure of 3 x 14.

Various solutions have been suggested, involving textual corruption (the generation of Jehoiakim got dropped out, so that Jechonias should belong to the third list), or a relaxed attitude toward counting generations (see the notes). But the simplest (Gundry) is probably that Matthew intends us to include Mary in the last list. The other women are mentioned simply in connection with the father: e.g.,

Mat 1:5 Salmon begat Booz of Rachab; and Booz begat Obed of Ruth

But Matthew could not write this of Mary, because (as the next section clearly shows), it was definitely *not* the case that "Joseph begat Jesus of Mary." Instead, he writes,

Mat 1:16 And Jacob begat Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ.

Unlike the other women, Mary is not just a footnote, but stands in the main line of the genealogy. If it is unusual to mention women at all, having a woman as part of the backbone is completely unexpected. But, as the next section will show, that is exactly what happened. Mary derives her place in the Davidic line from Joseph, but the Messiah descends physically from her, not from Joseph.

*Application:* In much of christendom, Mary is exalted to a stature unwarranted by Scripture, held to be without original sin, and described as "co-redemptrix" alongside her Son. While we should be cautious about such unbiblical assertions, we should also be careful not to diminish the position that God graciously did give her in his plan of salvation. Gabriel calls her "highly favored" (Luke 1:28), a title on a par with that which he gave Daniel (9:23) of "greatly beloved," and of the characterization of John as "the disciple whom Jesus loved" (John 21:7).

In the next section, we will learn more about her distinctive role in the coming of the Messiah.

### ***Conclusion to the Genealogy***

"The book of the generation of Jesus Christ" establishes our Lord as the legal descendant of David, qualified to occupy the throne God promised to his royal ancestor. The whole structure of the list emphasizes this relation to David and his kingdom. That kingdom was the goal to which Israel's history moved from its beginning with Abraham. Due to the sin of the nation, it unraveled during the very monarchy that should have expanded it, leading to the Babylonian captivity. But now God is raising it up, as the prophets promised, and Jesus the son of Mary is the fulfillment of the ancient promises.

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<sup>6</sup> Ahaziah is the son of Athaliah the daughter of Omri king of Israel, who after her son's death destroyed all the royal seed she could find (2 Kings 11:1) and took the throne to herself. Gundry suggests that her son and the next two generations are excluded because of the curse "unto the third and fourth generation" (Exod 20:5). But this does not explain why Jehoiakim was excluded, and there were other wicked people who are included in the list.



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### 18-25, the Virgin Birth of the Son of God

Having established that Jesus is the son of David and the son of Abraham, Matthew now recounts the events that constitute him the son of God, as promised to David. The story is extremely simple. Two verses set the stage, we learn of God's revelation and command to Joseph's dream, and then he concludes by reporting Joseph's obedience.

#### 18-19, The Background

**18 Now the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise: When as his mother Mary was espoused to Joseph, before they came together,--**We are accustomed to a two-step process in marriage: a relatively informal engagement, followed after a delay by the

formal marriage and consummation. The Jews also had a two step process (Table 2), but most of the formality was in the engagement (here called "espousal").

Unlike modern engagements, this was viewed as binding. Joseph and Mary have entered this relationship, but not yet consummated the marriage, when these events took place.

**she was found with child of the Holy Ghost.**--Luke records how the angel Gabriel came to tell Mary that she would be the mother of the Messiah, and how she obediently yielded herself to the Lord's purposes. Matthew passes over all these details. His focus is not on Mary, but on Joseph, through whom the legal title to the throne passes to Jesus.

Matthew's point in these verses is to emphasize that the father of this child is not Joseph, but the Holy Ghost. Five statements in these eight verses make this point:

- 18 "before they came together"
- 18 "of the Holy Ghost"
- 20 "of the Holy Ghost"
- 23 "a virgin shall be with child"
- 25 "knew her not."

The first and the last tell us that the father was not Joseph. v. 23 tell us that it is in fact no human father. The second and third tell us that it is someone called "the Holy Ghost." On this side of Pentecost, this term is familiar to us, but it is almost never used in the LXX.<sup>7</sup> In the OT, the common term is "spirit of God," which emphasizes even more than does "Holy Spirit" that it is God who fathers the child.

The idea that the Spirit of God begets the Messiah is another echo of Genesis. The very first mention of the Spirit in the Bible is in relation to the creation, where we find him brooding in creative power over the unformed deep:

Gen 1:2 And the Spirit of God moved [hovered] upon the face of the waters.

<sup>7</sup> The only exceptions are Dan 5:12; 6:3 (MT, LXX v. 4) of the "excellent spirit" רוח יתירה that was found in Daniel. It is possible that this is meant to refer to the "spirit of the holy gods" 5:11, cf. 4:8, 9, 18. But this is in any case a late usage, anticipating what had become the common expression by the time of the NT.

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“Move,” a rare word, is used in Deut 32:11 of an eagle fluttering over its nest to protect its young. Rashi, a famous medieval Jewish commentator (1040-1105), uses it to describe a dove hovering over her nest in the same way. In the context of Gen 1, the word shows the protective and preparatory care of the Spirit for the work of creation to follow. The comment of Umberto Cassuto, a unbelieving Jewish commentator, on Gen 1:2 is remarkable: “In the case of the earth, which was still an unformed, lifeless mass, the paternal care of the Divine Spirit, which hovered over it, assured its future evolution and life.” He assigns the Spirit a “paternal” role in watching over the formation of the infant earth, parallel to the role he has in begetting our Savior and watching over him during his gestation.

*Application:* We should be encouraged by the powerful and attentive work of the Spirit in forming the physical Jesus in Mary. It is parallel to what he does for us. One of his functions is to cause us to walk in God’s statutes (Ezek 36:27). The end-point of his work is that “Christ [is] formed in [us]” (Gal 4:19), and the mature, Christ-like believer is called “spiritual” (1 Cor 2:15), one in whom the Spirit’s work is complete. Let us yield ourselves to his work as Mary did, and rejoice that God has allowed us, as he allowed her, to bring forth Christ to the world he came to redeem.

**19 Then Joseph her husband, being a just *man*, and not willing to make her a publick example, was minded to put her away privily.**--His character as “just” (that is, abiding by the law) conflicts with his love for Mary. Deuteronomy 22 lays out a detailed set of rules for what was to be done in the case of sexual impurity, either before or within marriage. Table 3 Shows the possible cases. The only case that leaves the women neither dead nor married to her illicit lover is 22:25-27, which must be the case that Joseph assumes here.

Section	Woman's Status	Woman Guilty?	Consequences
22:13-21 The Wife Accused	Married		
15-19		No	Husband fined; may never put her away
20-21		Yes	Wife executed by stoning.
22:22 The Adulteress Discovered	Engaged	Not Stated	Wife and illicit partner executed.
22:23-24 Defiled in the City		Presumed Yes	Man and woman both executed.
22:25-27 Defiled in the Country		Presumed No	Only man executed; woman goes free.
22:28-29 Single Girl Defiled	Single	Not Stated	Man must marry woman; can never put her away.

Table 3: Cases of fornication in Deuteronomy 22

### 20-23, The Dream

**20 But while he thought on these things, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream,**--There are different ways that God reveals his will to his people.

- They may meet an angel who appears to them as a person, as did Abram in the plains of Mamre, or as Mary did when Gabriel told her of the coming birth of the Messiah..
- They may discover it in meditating on the Scriptures, as did Daniel in Dan. 9.
- A prophet may come to them, as Isaiah did to Ahaz in Isa 7, or they may consult a prophet, as did Hezekiah in Isa 37.
- They may see a vision while awake, as Daniel did in Dan 8.



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- Or they may have a dream, as did Nebuchadnezzar in Dan 2.

It's interesting to contemplate why the Lord may have chosen a dream in Joseph's case. As a godly Jew, he would no doubt have taken special delight in the history of the patriarch after whom his parents named him. He would know that God revealed himself to the Joseph of Genesis by dreams (Gen 37), and that Joseph had special skill in interpreting the dreams of others (Gen 40, 41). In fact, Gen 37, 40, and 41 contain the densest concentration of the word "dream" of any chapters in the Bible.

*Application:* Imagine how thrilled Joseph would be by this experience. The message is a hard one: Joseph will no doubt be criticized for tolerating what others view as an impure wife. But the Lord tailors his revelation to the needs and personality of the recipient. Truly, he is not a God who hides himself. If we are interested in hearing what he says, we should be assured that he is more than able to make his will clear to us.

**saying, Joseph, thou son of David,--**The angel emphasizes what we already know from vv. 1-17, that Joseph is a son of David.

**fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife:--**It would be a disgraceful thing to support a wife who is sleeping around with other men. His own reputation would be damaged, and the legitimacy of his offspring would be cast into question.

**for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost.--**To allay these fears, the angel tells him authoritatively that Mary has not been unfaithful to him. Her condition is a mark, not of impurity, but of incredible submission to the will of God.

**21 And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS:--**The actual command to Joseph is not to marry Mary, but to name the child. He is already obligated by betrothal to marry Mary. The only way he could avoid this existing responsibility would be if she were unfaithful, and the angel has just informed him that this is the case. The command, rather, is to name the child, thereby recognizing Jesus as a legitimate member of his own family. We would say that he is adopting Jesus.

This action will open Joseph to possible further disgrace. The neighbors in Nazareth were not sympathetic to the notion that Jesus was someone special. If Joseph and Mary told them of the virgin birth, they would probably not have believed it. If Joseph accepts the child as his own, they will see that, not as an adoption, but as acknowledgement that he behaved inappropriately with Mary before the marriage. In being truly righteous by honoring his betrothal and obeying the angel, he opens himself to the accusation of unrighteousness.

*Application:* Because of the perverse nature of the world in which we live, we must sometimes choose between the appearance of righteousness and true righteousness. When we face such a choice, let us remember, as Joseph did, that while man looks on the outward appearance, God looks on the heart (1 Sam 16:7). If the purpose of our righteousness is to please men, it is no righteousness at all. Let us do what is right in the sight of God, whatever men may think.

The angel emphasizes Joseph's Davidic descent, and then commands this Son of David to adopt Mary's son into his family. By this adoption, our Lord becomes heir to the throne of David. Something like the same logic lies behind Luke 3, which also gives Joseph's genealogy, though with some differences that

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can be explained by the custom of levirate marriage.<sup>8</sup>

Other texts make clear that our Lord is physically descended from David, e.g.,

Acts 2:30 Therefore being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him, that **of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh**, he would raise up Christ to sit on his throne;

Rom 1:3 his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, which was made of the seed of David **according to the flesh**;

So it must be that Mary, the only human parent of our Lord, is herself descended from David, but that is nowhere explicitly stated.

Matthew makes two points.

- Like Luke, he emphasizes is that though Joseph was not our Lord's physical father, he was the channel through which legal title to the throne passes to Jesus.
- On five subsequent occasions, he reports that the crowd recognizes Jesus as the son of David, and his opponents never challenge this identification:

9:27 (blind men) *Thou Son of David*, have mercy on us.

12:23 (in synagogue on Sabbath) And all the people were amazed, and said, Is not this the **son of David**?

15:22 (Canaanite woman) Have mercy on me, O Lord, *thou Son of David*;

20:30, 31 (two blind men) Have mercy on us, O Lord, *thou Son of David*.

21:9, 15 (triumphal entry) And the multitudes that went before, and that followed, cried, saying, Hosanna to the Son of David:

**JESUS.**--There are two ways that a name can attain significance. First, many Hebrew names are actually sentences, and have an intrinsic meaning in themselves that is sometimes significant. This intrinsic meaning lies at the heart of renamings such as those of Abraham, Sarah, and Jacob/Israel. Second, if someone is given a name that has previously been held by someone else, the history and character of the earlier person will come to mind. This notion lay at the root of the protest that met Zechariah when he named the baptist "John": "There is none of thy kindred that is called by this name" (Luke 1:61). Both motives are involved in the naming of our Lord.

Let's start with earlier holders of the name. This Greek name ἰησοῦς is not new. It appears 247 times in the LXX, with reference to two individuals. 209 times it is the translation of the name of Moses' helper, whom we call "Joshua," and who succeeded Moses in leading the nation into the promised land. 35x it refers to the high priest during the time of the restoration, after the exile. Only three instances (2 Kings 23:8; 1 Chr 24:11; 2 Chr 31:15) refer to other people.

By its association with the two prominent OT Joshuas, the name raises expectations for the child.

- Like Joshua Moses' minister, he will be a leader of the people, a second Moses.

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<sup>8</sup> The theory that Luke 3 gives Mary's genealogy dates only to the 15<sup>th</sup> century. The fathers (Eusebius HE 7.1.17, citing Africanus) take both genealogies to be of Joseph.

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- Like the high priest at the time of the return from Babylon, he will serve a priestly function, reconciling the people to God.

Now we turn to the intrinsic meaning of the underlying Hebrew name, *yeho-shua* (Figure 2). The first part, *yeho*, is an abbreviation of the name of God, YHWH (“Jehovah”). The second is derived from the verb “to save,” and here is probably to be understood as the noun “salvation,” so the name of all three people (Moses’ minister, the post-exilic high-priest, and our Lord) means “Jehovah is Salvation.” The name is closely related to that of the prophet Isaiah, where the verb takes its regular form, “Jehovah will Save.”

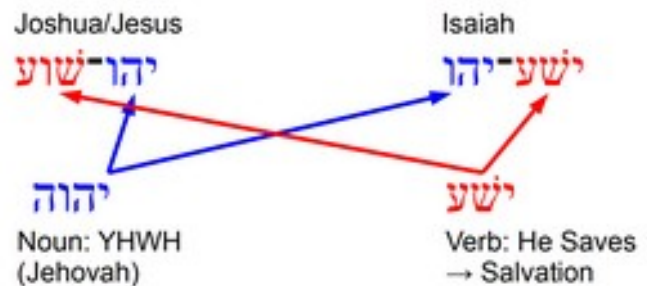


Figure 2: Etymology of the name “Jesus”

So the baby’s name is to be “Jehovah is salvation.” That is a wonderful reminder for any person to carry with them throughout their life, but the angel’s explanation goes even further.

**for he shall save his people from their sins.**--By way of explanation, the angel invokes the “salvation” part of the name—but the explanation is unusual.

Of the OT Joshuas, it might be said, “call his name Joshua, to remind him that God will save God’s people from their sins.” But that’s not what the angel says here. Jesus is not named Jesus to remind him that Jehovah saves Jehovah’s people. He is named Jesus because he—Jesus—will save his own people from their sins. The baby is also the Lord of the people and their savior.

In Isaiah, salvation is distinctly the work of the Lord (see notes).

Isa 43:11 I, *even I*, *am* the LORD; and **beside me there is no saviour.**

Hos 13:4 Yet I *am* the LORD thy God from the land of Egypt, and thou shalt know no god but me: **for there is no saviour beside me.**

Later, when the Lord heals the man with the palsy (9:1-8), he forgives his sin, and the scribes accuse him of blasphemy. They realize that that saving from sin is God’s prerogative.

The angel’s explanation thus asserts that this child, begotten by the Spirit of God, has authority over the people of God, and is able to do the distinctively divine work of saving his people from their sin.<sup>9</sup>

**22 Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying,**--This is the first of thirteen places where the first gospel says something is done “that the Scripture might be fulfilled.”<sup>10</sup> Matthew quotes the OT more than any of the other evangelists (about

<sup>9</sup> Mark (2:7) records that at the healing of the palsied man, the scribes from Jerusalem protested, “Who can forgive sins but God only?” That’s very much the point that the angel is making, though Matthew does not record the statement that Mark recalls, perhaps because he was yet among the disciples and so not present at the event (see Mark 2:14). If the house in Capernaum was Peter’s house, as was often the case, one would expect that Peter would recall it with particular vividness.

Some who question our Lord’s deity point out that humans in the OT (notably, the judges) are said to “save” God’s people, but this salvation is always with reference to physical deliverance, and never “from their sins.”

<sup>10</sup> Carson suggests that the distinctive form of the introductory formula, starting with *ταῦτο δὲ γέγονεν*, indicates that the

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six times per hundred verses), and repeatedly draws our attention to how the Lord fulfills the OT prophecies.

Some of these fulfillments are typological in nature, but when we studied Isaiah, we saw that this prophecy is directly Messianic, and would have been understood even in Isaiah's day as extending beyond the time of Ahaz.<sup>11</sup>

**23 Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us.**--The prophecy is strikingly parallel with the words of the angel (Table 4).

	Matt 1:20-21	Matt 1:23 = Isa 7:14
Conception	that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost.	a virgin shall be with child,
Birth	21 And she shall bring forth a son	and shall bring forth a son,
Name	and thou shalt call his name JESUS:	and they shall call his name Emmanuel,
Explanation of the name	for he shall save his people from their sins.	which being interpreted is, God with us.

Table 4: The words of the angel and Isa 7:14

The major apparent difference is in the name and its interpretation. But how different are these?

We have seen that the angel's explanation identifies Jesus with the Lord. Only the Lord can forgive sin, and the angel says that Jesus himself will save his people from their sin. Matthew realizes that this implies that Jesus is God, and thus fulfills the ancient prophecy that a child, born of a virgin, would be "Emmanuel," "God with us." His quotation thus makes explicit what was implied in the angel's announcement to Joseph, and in fact was probably spoken by the angel (see footnote).

I suspect that the relation between the angel's words and Isaiah's prophecy is something that righteous Joseph would have recognized as well. A dream is a very subjective experience. How is one to tell whether it is truly from the Lord, or the result of eating spicy food too late in the evening? We should always be cautious about following our feelings, for

Jer 17:9 The heart *is* deceitful above all *things*, and desperately wicked: who can know it?

How are we to know when our heart is not deceiving us? Isaiah gives us the clue:

Isa 8:20 To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, *it is* because *there is* no light in them.

We have a positive example in the Jews of Berea and their response to the preaching of Paul:

Act 17:11 they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so.

So Paul exhorts the Thessalonians,

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angel is quoting Isa 7:14. In 2013 I attributed this citation to Matthew, but now (2020), meditating on the strong parallel with the announcement to Mary in Luke 1, I tend to agree with Carson. See notes. My count excludes 5:17; 26:54, which are clearly on the lips of our Lord rather than the narrator. 26:56 is debated (see notes).

11 See my notes on Isa 7:14, and also Motyer's commentary and antecedent article, "Context and content in the interpretation of Isaiah 7:14." *Tyndale Bulletin*. January 1, 1970;21:118-125.

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1Th 5:21 Prove all things; hold fast that which is good.

When our subjective experiences align with the word of God, we are on firm ground. The angel's words recalled to Joseph the ancient prophecy, and he realized that what God had long ago promised was finally coming to pass. Mary's child would have the divine authority to save his people from their sins. He would truly be "God with us," Emmanuel.

*Application:* We should not despise the subjective feelings that the Lord gives us, but neither should we allow them to rule our lives. If we test them in the light of Scripture, they can help focus our attention on how the Lord wants us to live day by day.

### 24-25, Joseph's Obedience

**24 Then Joseph being raised from sleep did as the angel of the Lord had bidden him,**--Joseph, like Mary, has been given a difficult assignment. Like Mary, he yields himself immediately. May God give us grace to be as responsive to the Lord as they were.

**and took unto him his wife: 25 And knew her not till she had brought forth her firstborn son: and he called his name JESUS.**--Joseph's obedience in adopting the baby reminds us of the history of Ruth, the childless widow of Chilion. When she returns to Bethlehem with Naomi, the men of the town discuss who should carry out the duty of raising up children for her deceased husband. The nearest kinsman refuses the duty, saying to Boaz, the next in line,

Rut 4:6 And the kinsman said, I cannot redeem it for myself, **lest I mar mine own inheritance:** redeem thou my right to thyself; for I cannot redeem it.

Ironically, of this kinsman, who was so jealous for his own inheritance, the Spirit has not preserved even the name. Boaz was willing to serve the interests of Ruth's first husband by raising up his line, and in the process, became a progenitor of the Messiah.

So Joseph might have refused to provide a home for Mary and her son. He might have been unwilling to have questions cast on the legitimacy of his own offspring by suspicions of her impurity, or suspicions about his own conduct by his willingness to acknowledge the child. But he is obedient to the angel. He marries Mary and raises her son as his own, and in so doing is rightly remembered in the line of the Messiah.

*Application:* Joseph and Mary were both called upon to make difficult personal choices in bringing the Messiah into the world. Both of them had to suppress their personal goals and their concern for their own reputations, in the face of obedience to the Lord. But in neither case do we sense any hesitation. Confronted with Gabriel's announcement, Mary said (Luk 1:38), "Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word. In response to the instruction from the angel of the Lord in his dream, when Joseph woke up, he "did as the angel of the Lord had bidden him" (Matt 1:24). We should thank God for giving both of them this spirit of obedience, and seek to yield ourselves just as willingly to the revelations that he makes clear to us day by day, that he might form Christ in us, and through us bring him to the world around us.

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## Notes

### Numbered Lists

Blomberg notes m. Pirke Abot 5:1-6 as an example of a relaxed attitude toward counting generations.

1. By ten divine sayings the world was created. Could it not have been created by one? What does this teach us? In order to emphasize the guilt of the wicked who destroy the world that was created with ten sayings and the merit of the righteous who preserve the world that was created with ten sayings.
2. There were ten generations from Adam to Noah, to show how great was His patience, for every one of those generations provoked Him continually until he brought upon them the waters of the Flood.
3. There were ten generations from Noah to Abraham, to show how great was His patience, for every one of those generations provoked Him continually until Abraham, our father, came and received the reward of them all.

The ten sayings (<http://www.headcoverings-by-devorah.com/TenUtterances.htm>, translating of the Zohar vol III 11bff) omits the two statements in Gen 1, “be fruitful and multiply” (vv. 22, 28)

The ten generations from Adam to Noah include 9 begets but ten people.

The ten generations from Noah to Abraham include 10 begets and 11 people. But if we consider Noah as belonging to the first series, then we have 10 people in each section.

### **Σωζω and σωτηρ in Isaiah**

The verb appears 37x, and the noun 4 times.

### Verb

The verb is passive without clear agent in 1:27; 10:20, 22; 20:6; 30:15; 37:32; 45:20a; 49:24; 51:14; 66:29.

The subject is sent by God to save Egypt:

Isa 19:20 And it shall be for a sign and for a witness unto the LORD of hosts in the land of Egypt: for they shall cry unto the LORD because of the oppressors, and he shall send them a saviour, and a great one, and he shall deliver them.

Isa 63:9 In all their affliction he was afflicted, and the angel of his presence saved them:

The earth saves the young of the hedgehog (LXX deviates from MT)

Isa 34:15 There has the hedgehog made its nest, and the earth has safely preserved its young: there have the deer met, and seen one another's faces.

Other gods and their prophets cannot save:



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Isa 45:20 Assemble yourselves and come; draw near together, ye *that are* escaped of the nations: they have no knowledge that set up the wood of their graven image, and pray unto a god *that* cannot save.

Isa 46:2 who will not be able to save themselves from war, but they themselves are led *away* captive.

Isa 46:7 yea, *one* shall cry unto him, yet can he not answer, nor save him out of his trouble.

Isa 47:13 Let now the astrologers, the stargazers, the monthly prognosticators, stand up, and save thee from *these things* that shall come upon thee.

The other 20 times, it is the Lord who saves. Note that denial of saving power to other gods really reinforces this claim, as well as 63:9.

### Noun

The noun appears only five times. Four of these, it is a title of the Lord, and in one of those it is denied to anyone else:

Isa 45:21 *there is* no God else beside me; a just God and a Saviour; *there is* none beside me.

In the fifth instance, the Lord announces the coming of a savior, who then appears at the start of the next chapter:

Isa 62:11 Behold, the LORD hath proclaimed unto the end of the world, Say ye to the daughter of Zion, Behold, thy salvation cometh; behold, his reward *is* with him, and his work before him.

### Fulfillment Statements in Context

Carson suggests that the angel's direct speech in 1:20 continues into the quotation from Isaiah in 22-23. His basis is the distinctive quotation formula, which adds *τοῦτο δε ολον γεγονεν* to the usual *ινα πληρωθη*.

In support of this observation, Matthew always adds this additional intro to quotations that follow direct speech, and never adds it to quotations that follow narration (refs below). And *τοῦτο + γινομαι* can certainly appear within direct speech: 1 Sam 6:9; 10:11; Eccl 2:10; Amos 7:6; Mark 9:21; Acts 11:10. But *τοῦτο + γινομαι* is not restricted to direct speech: Acts 10:16; 19:10, 17; 1 Cor 15:54. 2 Mac 1:32; 13:17; 1 Esd 1:30 (ET 32).

A difficulty with Carson's view is the perfect *γεγονεν*. In 26:56, the Lord is referring to his past teaching in the temple, but in 1:22 and 21:4, the statement follows an anticipation or prediction of what will happen. (The response is that the focus in the passage is on the "conceived" part of Isaiah's prophecy, which has indeed already happened, and in fact motivates Joseph's dilemma.)

Instead of marking the fulfillment statement as part of the direct speech, it may in fact refer to the *report* of the direct speech. The justification for the additional introductory *τοῦτο δε ολον γεγονεν* may have to do with rhetorical flow. The usual quotation formula, simply a subordinate clause with *ινα* or *οπως*, is dependent on the preceding verb, but if the quotation were meant to modify "Jesus said" or "the angel said" instead of the actual utterance, the syntactic reach would be too far for simple

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subordination, and *τουτο δε ολον γεγονεν* would reprise the earlier (narrative) material. An intermediate level of interruption is achieved in the two *τοτε* quotations from “Jeremiah” in 2:17; 27:9.

Bottom line (2013): I doubt that in any of the three cases, the OT citation is included in the direct speech. Understood rhetorically, the expanded IF in fact seems to divorce it from the direct speech and direct us further back to the report of the speaking. Thus even in 26:55, we should not include the fulfillment formula in the direct speech (contrary to most versions except the New Jerusalem Bible).

In my comparison of the announcements to Joseph and Mary at Christmas 2003, I made the same suggestion as Carson does:

Characters in the gospel do talk about fulfillment (26:54). The precise phrase *touto gegonen hina pl8rwq8/pl8rwqwsin*, which occurs three times in Matthew, is once unambiguously on the Lord's lips (26:56) and could be on the speaker's lips in the other two cases (here and 21:4). It seems best to take it this way here. When it is narrative, the purpose clause *hina/hopws pl8rwq8* supports a clause in the narrative. Only these three instances stand independent by virtue of the *touto gegonen*, and it is reasonable to see them as spoken by the characters.

And reflecting on the strong parallel between the two announcements, I now (2020) think it's preferable to take both citations as the speech of the angel.

### Direct speech + fulfillment

Mat 1:20 the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream, saying, Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost. 21 And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins. 22 **Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled** which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, **saying**, 23 Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us.

Mat 21:1 then sent Jesus two disciples, 2 Saying unto them, Go into the village over against you, and straightway ye shall find an ass tied, and a colt with her: loose *them*, and bring *them* unto me. 3 And if any *man* say ought unto you, ye shall say, The Lord hath need of them; and straightway he will send them. 4 **All this was done, that it might be fulfilled** which was spoken by the prophet, **saying**, 5 Tell ye the daughter of Sion, Behold, thy King cometh unto thee, meek, and sitting upon an ass, and a colt the foal of an ass.

Mat 26:55 In that same hour said Jesus to the multitudes, Are ye come out as against a thief with swords and staves for to take me? I sat daily with you teaching in the temple, and ye laid no hold on me. 56 **But all this was done, that** the scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled. <<no citation>>

### Narration + fulfillment

Mat 2:14 When he arose, he took the young child and his mother by night, and departed into Egypt: 15 And was there until the death of Herod: **that ~~wa~~ it might be fulfilled** which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, **saying**, Out of Egypt have I called my son.

Mat 2:16 Then Herod, when he saw that he was mocked of the wise men, was exceeding wroth, and

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sent forth, and slew all the children that were in Bethlehem, and in all the coasts thereof, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had diligently enquired of the wise men. 17 **Then was fulfilled** *τοτε επληρωθη* that which was spoken by Jeremy the prophet <<Jer 31:15>>, **saying**, 18 In Rama was there a voice heard, lamentation, and weeping, and great mourning, Rachel weeping *for* her children, and would not be comforted, because they are not.

Mat 2:23 And he came and dwelt in a city called Nazareth: **that οπως it might be fulfilled** which was spoken by the prophets, He shall be called a Nazarene. <<lacks λεγοντος>>

Mat 4:13 And leaving Nazareth, he came and dwelt in Capernaum, which is upon the sea coast, in the borders of Zabulon and Nephthalim: 14 **That ινα it might be fulfilled** which was spoken by Esaias the prophet, **saying**, 15 The land of Zabulon, and the land of Nephthalim, *by* the way of the sea, beyond Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles; 16 The people which sat in darkness saw great light; and to them which sat in the region and shadow of death light is sprung up.

Mat 8:16 and he cast out the spirits with *his* word, and healed all that were sick: 17 **That οπως it might be fulfilled** which was spoken by Esaias the prophet, **saying**, Himself took our infirmities, and bare *our* sicknesses.

Mat 12:15 he healed them all; 16 And charged them that they should not make him known: 17 **That οπως it might be fulfilled** which was spoken by Esaias the prophet, **saying**, 18 Behold my servant, whom I have chosen; my beloved, in whom my soul is well pleased: I will put my spirit upon him, and he shall shew judgment to the Gentiles. 19 He shall not strive, nor cry; neither shall any man hear his voice in the streets. 20 A bruised reed shall he not break, and smoking flax shall he not quench, till he send forth judgment unto victory. 21 And in his name shall the Gentiles trust.

Mat 13:34 All these things spake Jesus unto the multitude in parables; and without a parable spake he not unto them: 35 **That οπως it might be fulfilled** which was spoken by the prophet, **saying**, I will open my mouth in parables; I will utter things which have been kept secret from the foundation of the world.

Mat 27:7 And they took counsel, and bought with them the potter's field, to bury strangers in. 8 Wherefore that field was called, The field of blood, unto this day. 9 **Then τοτε was fulfilled** that which was spoken by Jeremy the prophet <<Zech 11:12-13!>>, **saying**, And they took the thirty pieces of silver, the price of him that was valued, whom they of the children of Israel did value; 10 And gave them for the potter's field, as the Lord appointed me.