

# More Than a List

## Matthew 1:1-17

*The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.*

The New Testament canon is launched with a long list of names: the genealogy of Jesus Christ. There was a period of 400 years between the final witness of the Old Testament and the beginning of the New Testament record. It was a time of silence. God had not spoken to his people for generations. And now the official record of God's renewed revelation to his people begins with a family tree. This is highly significant for it represents the continuity between what God had been doing in ages past with what he was doing in the sending of Jesus Christ.

**Main Idea:** Jesus is the fulfillment of God's promise to save His people and be their God in an everlasting Kingdom.

\* A note about Matthew's "fourteen generations" in verse 17:

Matthew's genealogy, like other biblical genealogies is selective rather than exhaustive because Matthew's purpose is theological rather than statistical. The reader will notice also that the three groupings of names are not equally balanced: "the first group has fourteen if both Abraham and David are included, the second has fourteen if David is not included again, but after Jehoiachin there are only twelve names down to Joseph, so that even with the addition of Mary's son there are only thirteen generations in the third group unless Jehoiachin, unlike David, is counted twice" (France, 30). It is clear that Matthew's arithmetic leans on theological concerns. While avoiding intricate theories of numerology, it is likely that Matthew's three groups of fourteen is an intentionally symmetrical construct meant to communicate that the fullness of time had been reached with the advent of Jesus Christ.

\* Why is Matthew's genealogy different from Luke's?

Matthew was written to a primarily Jewish audience so he naturally grounds Jesus' genealogy in Abraham. Luke on the other hand is written to a primarily Greek audience so his concern is more universal thus grounding his genealogy in Adam. While both Matthew and Luke present their genealogies as that of Joseph, it is often suggested that Luke's record is actually that of Mary (Joseph being used for legal reasons). It is also possible that the two differ with Matthew presenting the dynastic line through David and Luke presenting a biological line. Matthew's genealogy passes through Solomon (David's royal successor) while Luke's passes through Nathan (David's other son). But this is only speculation.



## **1. Jesus is the comprehensive fulfillment of God's covenant promises.**

"So all the generations from *Abraham* to *David* were fourteen generations, and from David to the *deportation* to Babylon fourteen generations, and from the deportation to Babylon to *the Christ* fourteen generations." (Matthew 1:17)

- Jesus' genealogy is structured by Matthew as three lists of 14 generations. Matthew highlights three landmarks to help us navigate our way to Jesus Christ: Abraham, David, and Exile.
- Along the way we will see the significance of God's covenant of grace. Beginning with Abraham God made a covenant of grace with his people whereby he promised to save them by grace alone. That same covenant of grace would be reaffirmed to Moses and later David. But it would be fulfilled finally in Jesus Christ.

### **a) Abraham**

Following generations of rebellion from His human creatures God graciously chose a pagan living in Ur to be His own. God made a covenant of grace with Abraham (Gen 12) whereby He promised to give him an everlasting land filled with a vast nation of people. Further, God promised to bless the whole world through Abraham and his seed. The covenant of grace, like all covenants, had very clear obligations for both parties. But what marked this covenant out as uniquely gracious is that God, the covenant maker, promised to keep all of the covenant obligations himself (Gen 15).

### **b) David**

God did not allow David to build a great temple. Rather God promised to build, through David's line, an everlasting kingdom under the rule of an everlasting King (2 Sam 7; 1 Chron 17). Those kings following David were, in many cases, wicked men. Some of them married foreign wives and led God's people into idolatry. Ultimately the kingdom divided. Rather than being enlarged, the kingdom was diminished and ultimately sent off in captivity to a foreign power.

### **c) Exile**

Babylon captured God's people and throne of David was left in ruins. But rather than altering His promise during this period, God added to it. God gave his people prophets during this time. Most notably the prophet Jeremiah told of a new covenant whereby God would replace the stony hearts of his people and give them new hearts.

## **2. Jesus is the extravagant provision for our salvation.**

One famous name succeeds another: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, David and the kings of Judah, and Jesus the Christ is at the end of that line. The great forward movement of the history of salvation, of the history of God's covenant with his people, now culminates in Jesus. The promise that God made to Abraham and later David, now comes to fruition in the life and work of Jesus of Nazareth.

Along with the names of some wicked kings, four women are named in the genealogy which is contrary to custom in Jewish genealogies. But their presence is a powerful reminder that God's gracious providence often works in unconventional ways. Tamar was Judah's daughter-in-law with whom Judah, before his conversion, had an incestuous relationship. Rahab was a Canaanite prostitute. Ruth was a pagan Moabite. Bathsheba, Uriah's wife, was the woman with whom David committed adultery. These names are reminders that it is not our virtue by which we are saved but through the gracious act of God who spared not His own Son for us and our salvation.