

The Gospel of Matthew

Lesson 1

Matthew 1:1 – Matthew 2:10

Matthew is a tax-collector in Capernaum on the shores of the Sea of Galilee where the Romans have a customs house. They collect taxes from the large number of people living in the area because of the wealth of fish available in the sea. The chief tax collector is usually a Roman citizen of wealth and appointee of the government who hires residents to collect the taxes. Matthew is most likely just one of these deputized employees of the collector general.

While Matthew is collecting taxes, Jesus offers him the opportunity to be one of His followers and he accepts.¹ Later, Matthew hosts a reception at his home for all his fellow tax collectors along with the followers of Jesus. This party results in a great ruckus with the priest because the party is held on a required "fast" day, and Jewish law states that Jews should never associate socially with the sinners found at this kind of event.²

Although he is not mentioned by name, Matthew is in the upper room on the day of Pentecost and should be numbered with the other apostles referred to throughout the history of the church, including the great Jerusalem council of AD 50 as recorded in Acts 15. According to the traditions of antiquity, Matthew preached in the Judean area for fifteen years and then became a missionary to the Jews scattered throughout the world, focusing his major ministry in Parthia and Ethiopia.³

A Jew born in Nazareth, Matthew is also called Levi in the Gospels.⁴ Because his ministry involves sharing the Gospel with the Jews, he writes to them in Hebrew. Later James, the half-brother of Jesus and the pastor of the church in Jerusalem, translates Matthew's Gospel into Greek.

In AD 57, the church is struggling as Paul, Barnabas, Peter, Silas, John Mark, Luke, Matthew and the remaining apostles attempt to spread the gospel in spite of the persecution from the Jewish community and the false theology among the Jewish converts in the church. The Holy Spirit has already guided the hands of several eyewitnesses to record for all eternity the words and teachings of the Lord for the edification of the church. They include James (AD 41-42), 1st & 2nd Thessalonians (AD 52-53), Mark (AD 53-54), 1st Corinthians (AD 57), and Galatians (AD 57). These letters are being sent from church to church, yet the Jewish converts have only the letter from James which does not answer the questions that Jews want answered before they will accept Jesus as the Messiah. Because of the need for a Gospel written specifically for the Jewish community, Matthew writes his Gospel in Hebrew and fills it with all the important Jewish rhetoric not needed in the Gospels written to the Romans (Mark), the Gentiles (Luke), and the Church (John). Therefore, Matthew begins

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¹ Matthew 9:9; Mark 2:14, Luke 5:27-28

² Matthew 9:10; Luke 5:29; Mark 2:15

³ E. J. Goodspeed, *The Twelve* (1957), pp. 25-28, 41-43; id., *Matthew, Apostle and Evangelist* (1959); W. Barclay, *The Master's Men* (1960), pp. 58-68; J. D. Jones, *The Apostles of Christ* (1982), pp. 150-71.

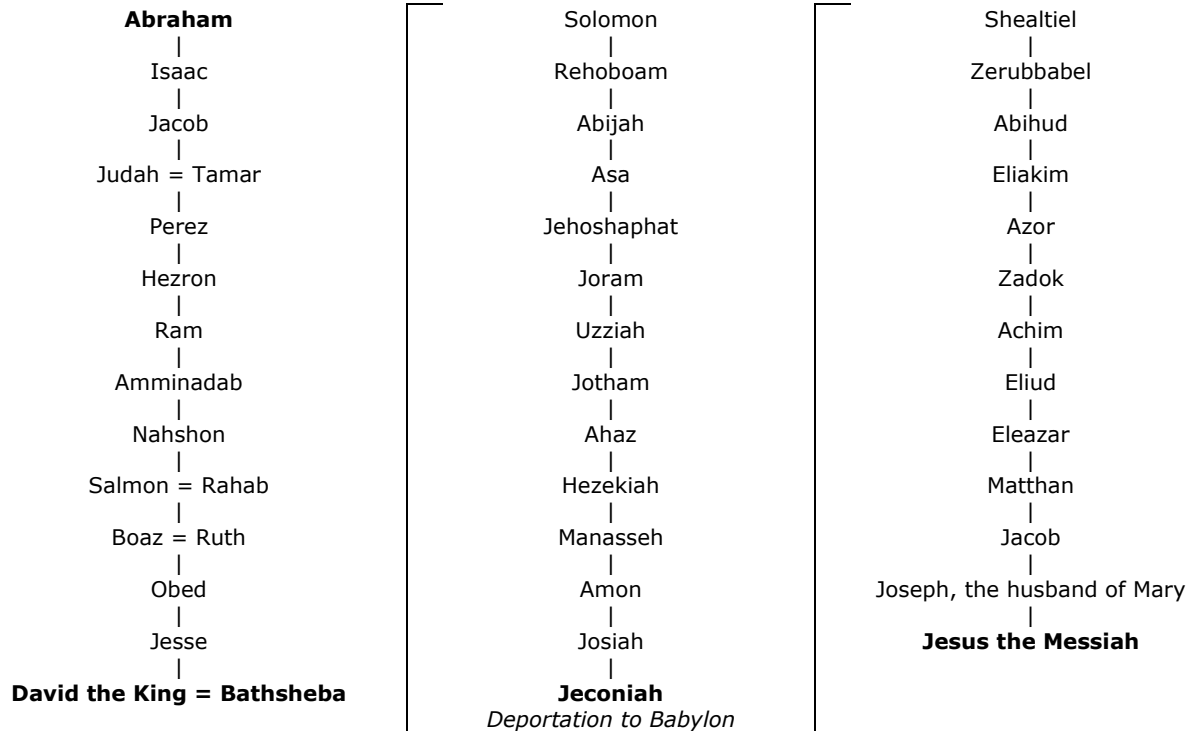
⁴ Fox's Book of Martyrs - *Matthew*

with the all-important genealogy of Jesus beginning with Abraham because heritage is the most important thing in the Jewish faith and culture.

Jesus' Genealogy

Matthew 1:¹ The record of the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah, the son of David, the son of Abraham:⁵ ² Abraham was the father of Isaac, Isaac the father of Jacob, and Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers. ³ Judah was the father of Perez and Zerah by Tamar, Perez was the father of Hezron, and Hezron the father of Ram. ^{1:4} Ram was the father of Amminadab, Amminadab the father of Nahshon, and Nahshon the father of Salmon. ⁵ Salmon was the father of Boaz by Rahab, Boaz was the father of Obed by Ruth, and Obed the father of Jesse. ⁶ Jesse was the father of David the king. David was the father of Solomon by Bathsheba who had been the wife of Uriah. ⁷ Solomon was the father of Rehoboam, Rehoboam the father of Abijah, and Abijah the father of Asa. ⁸ Asa was the father of Jehoshaphat, Jehoshaphat the father of Joram, and Joram the father of Uzziah.⁶ ⁹ Uzziah was the father of Jotham, Jotham the father of Ahaz, and Ahaz the father of Hezekiah. ¹⁰ Hezekiah was the father of Manasseh, Manasseh the father of Amon, and Amon the father of Josiah. ¹¹ Josiah became the father of Jeconiah and his brothers, at the time of the deportation to Babylon.⁷ ¹² After the deportation to Babylon: Jeconiah became the father of Shealtiel, and Shealtiel the father of Zerubbabel. ¹³ Zerubbabel was the father of Abihud, Abihud the father of Eliakim, and Eliakim the father of Azor. ¹⁴ Azor was the father of Zadok, Zadok the father of Achim, and Achim the father of Eliud. ¹⁵ Eliud was the father of Eleazar, Eleazar the father of Matthan, and Matthan the father of Jacob. ¹⁶ Jacob was the father of Joseph the husband of Mary, by whom Jesus was born, who is called the Messiah.

Abraham to Jesus – The Genealogical Chart



⁵ Psalm 132:11

⁶ 1 Chronicle 2:13-15

⁷ 2 Kings 24:14; 1 Chronicles 3:15-16

Genealogical Summary

Matthew 1:¹⁷ So all the generations from Abraham to David are fourteen generations; from David to the deportation to Babylon, fourteen generations; and from the deportation to Babylon to the Messiah, fourteen generations.

A small difficulty occurs in the numbering of the generations. We could simply multiply 14 times 3 and end with the actual number of descendants between Abraham and the Lord, but it does not work that way. The actual listing of the generations by Matthew lists only 41 male descendants, not 42. It is true that from Abraham to David is 14 generations, but for the second set, Matthew begins with David who is already counted in the first set. Finally, in the third set of 14, Matthew again begins with the last record of the second set and ends with the Messiah, resulting in 14 generations. So, instead of having 42 males in the lineage, there are actually only 41.

The lineage in the genealogical listing is that of Joseph, not Mary. Both Joseph and Mary's ancestries start with Abraham and continue through his descendants to David. At David, the two lines separate. Joseph's lineage runs through David's son, Solomon and Mary's lineage runs through David's son, Nathan. Matthew includes Solomon's line in his Gospel to show the royal line of Jesus' adoptive father, Joseph. In the Gospel of Luke, the line of Mary is recorded through the lineage of David's son, Nathan. That is why Matthew lists Joseph as the "husband of Mary." He is not the actual biological father of Jesus the Messiah because he and Mary did not consummate their marriage.

Jesus' Birth

Matthew 1:¹⁸ Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: when His mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child by the Holy Spirit. ¹⁹ And Joseph her husband, being a righteous man and not wanting to disgrace her, planned to send her away secretly. ²⁰ But when he had considered this, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife; for the Child who has been conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. ²¹ "She will bear a Son; and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins." ²² Now all this took place to fulfill what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet: ²³ "BEHOLD, THE VIRGIN SHALL BE WITH CHILD AND SHALL BEAR A SON, AND THEY SHALL CALL HIS NAME IMMANUEL," which translated means, "GOD WITH US."⁸ ²⁴ And Joseph awoke from his sleep and did as the angel of the Lord commanded him, and took *Mary* as his wife, ²⁵ but kept her a virgin until she gave birth to a Son; and he called His name Jesus.

The third word "birth," is not the word used in the oldest and most reliable copies of this passage. Those texts use the word "genesis." Therefore, the text should read, "Now the [genesis] of Jesus Christ was as follows..." Matthew is about to record the genesis of the Creator of heaven and earth as He begins His life on earth, not the genesis of the heavens and earth as described in the first book of the Old Testament.

Christ is the English translation of the Greek word for Messiah and Messiah is the English translation for the Hebrew word Mashiah. Because the words Messiah and Christ mean the same thing, the "genesis of Jesus Christ" is the beginning of the life of the Messiah here on earth.

⁸ Isaiah 7:14

The engagement of a couple is a serious matter in the Jewish community; it is not to be entered into lightly or broken apart in a lighthearted manner. During the engagement period, the couple is considered married even though they have not had the formal ceremony or consummated the relationship. Therefore, Joseph is Mary's legal husband.⁹ Because Mary is pregnant, Joseph can only assume she has been unfaithful, an act of adultery. The punishment for this crime is death.

Joseph is shocked when he learns that she is pregnant but he does not want her put to death. He does not want to disgrace her in any way. He does not know with whom she has become pregnant and he is so disturbed that the angel of the Lord visits him that night. The pregnancy is the responsibility of the Holy Spirit, not a man; therefore, the angel of the Lord gives Joseph specific guidance for his part in the process.

There are three long and difficult leaps of faith in Christianity. First, is Mary a virgin? The second leap is found in the question "Has Jesus always existed?" and the third is "Did Jesus actually rise from the dead?" When a person admits to the belief of the pre-existence of Christ, His virgin-based incarnation and His resurrection from the grave, everything else seems easy and salvation is assured.

Was Mary a virgin? Although John does mention it, only Matthew and Luke tell this story.¹⁰ Mark says absolutely nothing concerning the Lord's birth or childhood because it is not necessary for his intended readers, the Romans. Matthew and Luke explain that the birth of Jesus is not ordinary in human terms because Jesus had no earthly father in the process. God the Father is sending His Son into the world without a human father so that He can be both the Son of God and the Son of man - the God-man. Yes, Mary is a virgin, indwelt with the Son of God by the work of the Holy Spirit. Joseph needs to hear from the angel of the Lord to know that Mary has not been unfaithful and that the Lord is clearly in control of the miraculous birth that is about to take place.

The laws of nature that control all of creation are simply the miraculous expressions of God's will and desire. God did not reveal all of His will in the Old Testament nor the laws of creation, many of which we have discovered. He holds the power of life in His hands, and as time passed, revealed new laws as He saw fit. At just the right time in His plan, God places His Son in the womb of Mary, breaking what we think are the unbreakable laws of nature, but they are the Lord's laws, not ours. Joseph understands the words of the angel of the Lord, follows His directions and is careful not to have marital relations until after the birth of the Savior.

His name is to be Jesus, the New Testament Greek word for the Old Testament Hebrew name, Joshua. Yes, He is another Joshua who will lead people to the promise of the Lord. He will save His people from their sins. He will be their Savior as well as their prophet, priest and king. But He will be the Savior of more than just the Jews; He will also be the Savior of the rest of mankind. It is His intention to save all who allow Him to reign in their hearts and He will give them eternal life, casting their sins away as He covers them from the sight of all eyes.

The Magi

Matthew 2:¹ Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, magi from the east arrived in Jerusalem, saying, ² "Where is He who has

⁹ Genesis 29:21; Deut. 22:23-24

¹⁰ John 1:14

been born King of the Jews? For we saw His star in the east and have come to worship Him." ³ When Herod the king heard *this*, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him.¹¹

"Magi" is an old Persian word signifying a priest of Zarathustra or Zoroaster. Since Matthew has given the direction of their journey as coming from the east, the legend has stated that they are from Persia or modern day Iran. Before A.D. 225 Tertullian called them kings. Because there were three gifts, it was assumed that there were three visitors. Shortly before A.D. 600, the Armenian Infancy Gospel identified them as Balthasar, Melchoir, and Gaspar, the priests and wise-men of the Zoroaster religion. However, these names are not found in the Bible.

It should also be noted that by the time of Jesus' birth, the old Babylonian-Persian-Median Empire contained the largest population of Jews outside the Jerusalem area. They are Jewish descendants of the thousands of Jews who did not return to the Promised Land after they were released from exile by Cyrus the Great in 536 BC. While legend has its merit, it is noteworthy and plausible that these priests were Jewish and carried them the the Persian name for priests, Magi.

Does the Scripture indicate the number of priests that came to the birth of the Lord? No. Does the Scripture reveal the homes of these priests? Yes. It is found in the following passage.

Ps 72:10 Let the kings of Tarshish and of the islands bring presents; The kings of Sheba and Seba offer gifts. ¹¹ And let all kings bow down before him, All nations serve him.

Where is Tarshish? It is found on the southern tip of Spain, and during the days of Jonah, traded heavily with the city of Tyre on the northern tip of Israel. It is as far to the west of Jerusalem as one can be and still remain on the Mediterranean Sea. Sheba is found in the southern part of Arabia, south of Israel. Therefore, the priests could not have seen the star from the east. Seba is southwest of Israel in the Ethiopian area of Africa. It, too, is on the wrong side of Israel for the star to be seen from the east. Therefore, if this promise is true and refers to the kings that will come to see the baby Jesus in the manger, they all could have seen the star from their individual perspectives in the eastern sky and followed it to Bethlehem.

Herod

Matthew 2:⁴ Gathering together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. ⁵ They said to him, "In Bethlehem of Judea; for this is what has been written by the prophet: ⁶ 'AND YOU, BETHLEHEM, LAND OF JUDAH, ARE BY NO MEANS LEAST AMONG THE LEADERS OF JUDAH; FOR OUT OF YOU SHALL COME FORTH A RULER WHO WILL SHEPHERD MY PEOPLE ISRAEL.'"¹² ⁷ Then Herod secretly called the magi and determined from them the exact time the star appeared. ⁸ And he sent them to Bethlehem and said, "Go and search carefully for the Child; and when you have found *Him*, report to me, so that I too may come and worship Him." ⁹ After hearing the king, they went their way; and the star, which they had seen in the east, went on before them until it came and stood over *the place* where the Child was. ¹⁰ When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy.

¹¹ Jeremiah 23:5; Zechariah 9:9; Numbers 24:17

¹² Micah 5:2

The life of Herod the Great is near its end when the Lord is born in Bethlehem. Josephus' history records the great turmoil in the last years of Herod's life. He and those who live around him are greatly bothered by the news of the birth. His family is fraught with rivalries and jealousies. In his rage he puts to death four of his sons and one of his wives.¹³ One of the sons was heir to the throne at one time.¹⁴ He also puts to death the brother of one of his wives and a mother-in-law. Then, to top it off, he kills John Hyrcanus II, the high priest of the Temple, and grandfather of one of his wives. Constantly changing his wills during the fatal illness of his last days, he now has to deal with the Magi and the threat of the birth of a new king. Needless to say, the entire city is upset because it is fully aware of the capabilities of his rage especially with the news of a rival king. They have a right to be disturbed; he will soon order that all the baby boys be killed.

¹³ Aristobulus, Alexander, Antipater and another son. Mariamne is the wife he put to death.

¹⁴ Antipater