

THE GENEALOGY OF THE KING

Matthew 1:1-17

The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham. (Matthew 1:1).

The opening verses of Matthew contain the genealogy of Jesus. This is not one of the more popular parts of scripture. I know of very few people who have turned to this portion of the Bible for their morning devotions. Many seem to develop a special ability in speed reading when it comes to this passage, quickly skimming over it to come to the more interesting account of the actual birth of Jesus.

Why did Matthew place this genealogy into his book? Was he looking for some filler to take up the space between verse 1 and verse 18? Had he been assigned a certain number of verses to write for each chapter so that he had to think of some way to make his introduction a bit longer? Not at all. In fact, I believe we can demonstrate this genealogy to be a crucial part of Matthew's account.

The purpose of this genealogy is to present the legal right of Jesus to the throne of David. It will trace His ancestry back through the royal line of David to Abraham, the father of the Jewish nation. This section can be outlined in five parts:

1:1	1:2-6	1:6-11	1:12-16	1:17
Introduction stating key figures	Actual genealogy			Conclusion summarizing numbers
	Abraham to David	David to Babylonian Captivity	Return from Babylon to Jesus	

There are 41 names in this genealogy. It is divided into three main parts of fourteen names each with David counted twice. Just in case we do not catch this at the outset, the author carefully points it out to us in his summarization of the genealogy.

Therefore all the generations from Abraham to David are fourteen generations; and from David to the deportation to Babylon fourteen generations; and from the deportation to Babylon to the time of Christ fourteen generations. (Matthew 1:17).

What is even more significant is that some names are deliberately left off so as to achieve this

count of fourteen names in each group. In verse 8, the names of Ahaziah, Athaliah, Jehoash and Amaziah are left out between the kings Joram and Uzziah.

Abraham to David	David to the Captivity	The Captivity to Jesus
Abraham	David	Jeconiah
Isaac	Solomon	Shealtiel
Jacob	Rehoboam	Zerubbabel
Judah	Abijah	Abiud
Perez	Asa	Eliakim
Hezron	Jehoshaphat	Azor
Ram	Joram ← Names omitted	Zadok
Amminadab	Uzziah	Achim
Nashon	Jotham	Eliud
Salmon	Ahaz	Eleazar
Boaz	Hezekiah	Matthan
Obed	Manasseh	Jacob
Jesse	Amon	Joseph
David	Josiah	Jesus Christ

What is the reason for this deliberate manipulation of the text to achieve fourteen names in each of the three sections? It is because the Hebrew language used letters as numerical equivalents beginning with the Hebrew א (1), ב (2), ג (3), etc. The name “David” in Hebrew consists of only three letters: דָּוִד.

ד - 4

ו - 6

ד - 4

The sum of these three letters comes to the number fourteen. It is for this reason that the point is made that each of the three segments of the genealogy have fourteen names. The Jews loved to set their lists in these sorts of numerical patterns. It served to underscore Jesus as the Son of David.

GENEALOGIES IN MATTHEW AND LUKE

Both Matthew and Luke contain genealogies of Jesus. When we compare this genealogy of Jesus with the one that is given in Luke’s narrative, we find that they are very different, not only in form and structure, but also with regard to the listing of names that make up the family of Jesus.

Matthew	Luke
Begins with Abraham and moves forward to Jesus	Runs the opposite way, beginning with Jesus and going back to Adam
Divides his genealogy into three groups of fourteen	Contains no divisions
Omits certain names in order to keep the pattern of fourteen names	Omits no names of which we are aware and adds the name Cainan from the Septuagint
Traces the line of David through Solomon	Traces the line of David through another of David's sons—Nathan

It has been suggested that Matthew records the legal genealogy down through Joseph, the legally adopted father of Jesus, while Luke presents the actual genealogy of Jesus through His mother Mary. This would make the first genealogy the legal line of Jesus while the second genealogy would be the physical line of Jesus. If this is correct, then the New Testament proves that Jesus is both the legal as well as the physical heir of David.

INTRODUCTION—THE KEY FIGURES IN THE GENEALOGY

The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham. (Matthew 1:1).

So begins the genealogy of Jesus as found in the book of Matthew. The reason that both David and Abraham are mentioned seems obvious. The genealogy is traced back to Abraham because he is the father of the nation of Israel and it is traced back to David because he is the great king and founder of the kings of Israel.

1. The Book: *The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ (1:1).*

This opening statement takes us back to antiquity. We are introduced to the βιβλος — the scroll of the genealogy of Jesus.¹ It is as though Matthew were pulling out the scroll that contained the record of the lineage of Jesus. It is the genealogy of a king.

¹ The term βιβλος is used in Revelation 6:14 to that speaks of the sky being rolled back as a “scroll.”

Furthermore, this phrase echoes from the Old Testament book of Genesis where Septuagint uses this same phrasing to translate Genesis 2:4 to say, αὕτη ἡ βίβλος γενέσεως οὐρανοῦ καὶ γῆς — “this is the book of generations of the heavens and earth.”

2. The Son of David.

When we read that Jesus was the son of David, we understand that the term “son” is not to be taken literally. It means that Jesus was the descendant of David. The same term can also be used of a son-in-law. This is why Joseph is said to be the son of Eli in Luke 3:23.²

The reason we are told that Jesus is the son of David is to tell us something about the big idea of the book of Matthew. This book is going to present Jesus as the rightful king of the Jews. We shall see that, because He is the son of David, He has the right to sit on the throne of David.

3. The Son of Abraham.

The genealogy will not start with David. It will go back all the way to Abraham. The point is not merely that Jesus is the legitimate king. It is that He is the legitimate king of the descendants of Abraham. He is the legitimate king of the Jews and traces His ancestry back to the father of the Jews.

THE GENEALOGY FROM ABRAHAM TO DAVID

2 To Abraham was born Isaac; and to Isaac, Jacob; and to Jacob, Judah and his brothers; 3 and to Judah were born Perez and Zerah by Tamar; and to Perez was born Hezron; and to Hezron, Ram; 4 and to Ram was born Amminadab; and to Amminadab, Nahshon; and to Nahshon, Salmon; 5 and to Salmon was born Boaz by Rahab; and to Boaz was born Obed by Ruth; and to Obed, Jesse; 6 and to Jesse was born David the king. (Matthew 1:2-6a).

This is the first set of fourteen names. Any Jewish scholar from the days of Jesus would have been familiar with these names. They were listed in chronicles of the Old Testament (1 Chronicles 1:28, 34; 2:1-15). These names were rooted in the history of Israel.

² Another example of such a use is found in the case of Jair who was a son-in-law of Manasseh (1 Chronicles 2:21-23 and 7:14-15), yet who is called the “son of Manasseh” in Numbers 32:41, Deuteronomy 3:14, and 1 Kings 4:13.

This is an important point. The life of Jesus is not some mystical once upon a time fairy tale. It is rooted in history. Matthew is introducing a historical account that took place in real world history. At the same time, there is a particular focus in this genealogy that is seen when we come to the sons of Jacob and we read that to Jacob was born *Judah and his brothers*. The other sons of Jacob will be ignored as we focus only upon the tribe of the king.

Another distinction about this genealogy is its inclusion of women. There are three women mentioned in this section and they are all Gentiles. That is significant because this is a Jewish genealogy starting with the father of the Jews and taking us down to the king of the Jews.

Verse	Name	Significance
3	Tamar	Produced an heir through fornication with her father-in-law
5	Rahab	Prostitute from Jericho who protected the Jewish spies
5	Ruth	Moabite woman who married Boaz

Before we come to the end of the genealogy we shall see two more women named—Bathsheba and Mary. The last two women will be Jewish, but these first three are not.

- The first is Tamar. She is mentioned in verse 3. Her story is found in Genesis 38. It is a story of death and betrayal. She was married to Er, the son of Judah, but he died before they could have any children. According to the custom of the day, she was given to Onan, the next brother, who would produce an offspring who would be have the rights of the firstborn, but Onan was resistant to the idea and tried to use a rudimentary form of birth control and the Lord took his life.

The rest of the story is one of fornication, deceit, and dishonor, but in the end, a male heir was produced and it was through Tamar that the lineage of David was descended.

- The second woman mentioned is Rahab (1:5). She was the prostitute of Jericho who was described in Joshua 2. It was to her that the two Hebrew spies came for shelter. She gave them refuge, telling them how she had heard of the God who brought Israel out of Egypt. As a result of her faith in God, she and her family were spared in the destruction of Jericho. She was not only spared, she also married an Israelite—a man from the tribe of Judah. His name was Salmon. Jewish tradition has it that he was one of the two spies Rahab hid in Jericho.

- The third woman is Ruth (1:5). She was a woman from Moab. The people of Moab were under a special curse for the reception they had given to Israel.

3 No Ammonite or Moabite shall enter the assembly of the LORD; none of their descendants, even to the tenth generation, shall ever enter the assembly of the LORD, 4 because they did not meet you with food and water on the way when you came out of Egypt, and because they hired against you Balaam the son of Beor from Pethor of Mesopotamia, to curse you. (Deuteronomy 23:3-4).

The Moabites were not permitted to come before the tabernacle of worship. Yet this woman was permitted to marry a man of Judah and their great grandson would be David, the king of Israel. When Ruth turned to the Lord, her cursing was turned into blessing.

All three of these women were Gentiles. All three of them were sinners. All three had been raised in pagan families, but were then brought into a covenant relationship with the Lord and with His people. All three are in the line of Jesus.

THE GENEALOGY FROM DAVID TO BABYLON

And to David was born Solomon by her who had been the wife of Uriah; 7 and to Solomon was born Rehoboam; and to Rehoboam, Abijah; and to Abijah, Asa; 8 and to Asa was born Jehoshaphat; and to Jehoshaphat, Joram; and to Joram, Uzziah; 9 and to Uzziah was born Jotham; and to Jotham, Ahaz; and to Ahaz, Hezekiah; 10 and to Hezekiah was born Manasseh; and to Manasseh, Amon; and to Amon, Josiah; 11 and to Josiah were born Jeconiah and his brothers, at the time of the deportation to Babylon. (Matthew 1:6b-12).

Now we come to the second set of fourteen names. This set would also have been familiar to any Jewish scholar of the first century. These names were to the Jew what a list of the presidents of the United States would be to an American. Each of these men reigned as king over the Jews. Some had been good kings while others had been evil.

1. David the king (1:6).

The Old Testament has a great deal to say about David. As the youngest of eight sons, David had risen from obscurity to become the king of all Israel. Under his leadership, the borders of Israel were extended so that his influence was felt as far as the Euphrates River in the north and as far as Egypt in the south.

In the midst of his greatness, he had committed great sin, murdering one of his loyal subjects and taking the man's wife for himself. It was through this union that Solomon was born. This is referenced in the genealogy when we read that Solomon was born *by her who had been the wife of Uriah*.

By now we will have noticed a pattern among the women who are mentioned in this genealogy. All the women who are mentioned up to this point are of questionable character. They were not always in the wrong, but they were all put into a position where their character might be brought into question.

- Tamar had a child by her father-in-law.
- Rahab was a Canaanite prostitute.
- Ruth was a Moabitess who came to Boaz by night.
- Bathsheba was the wife of Uriah who engaged in adultery with David.
- Mary conceived a child while only betrothed to Joseph.

2. Solomon (1:6).

The days of Solomon were the golden age of Israel. What David had won by war, Solomon kept through diplomacy and peace. The temple in Jerusalem was constructed, along with a splendid palace and building projects abounded through the country.

Solomon's great failing was that he took for himself many wives after the custom of the great kings of that era and the wives he took came with their idols and false gods. Thus Solomon fell into idol worship and he led the nation into that same idolatry. For this reason, it was prophesied that the nation would be torn into two parts and his son would only retain the two southern tribes.

3. Rehoboam (1:7).

Solomon's building projects had placed a very heavy tax burden upon the people of Israel. When his son Rehoboam was to come to the throne, a delegation came to him and requested tax relief. When Rehoboam foolishly threatened to raise the taxes even further, the people revolted and the kingdom divided, just as had been foretold by the prophet. The ten northern tribes seceded from the union to form a kingdom of their own, selecting a king to rule over them. The southern tribes of Benjamin and Judah remained loyal to Rehoboam and to his dynasty.

4. Hezekiah (1:10).

One of the great revivals of Judah was brought about under Hezekiah. We read in 2 Chronicles 30:1 that Hezekiah sent letters to all Israel and Judah, inviting them to

come and celebrate the Passover in Jerusalem. Though the response was mixed among the tribes of the northern kingdom, the chronicler tells us that 2 Chronicles 30:11 *some men of Asher, Manasseh, and Zebulun humbled themselves and came to Jerusalem* (30:11). Thus Hezekiah led representatives from all the twelve tribes in a return to the Lord.

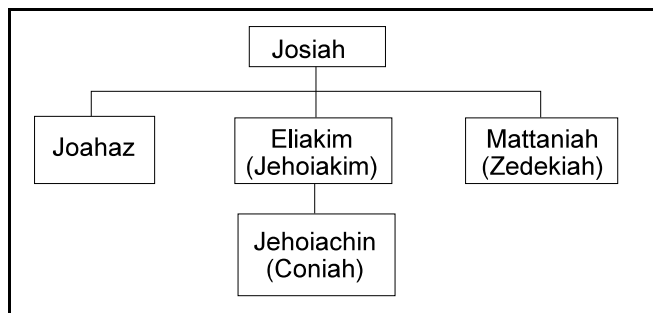
It was in Hezekiah's day that the Assyrian army came against Samaria, destroying the city and taking the inhabitants of the northern kingdom away into a captivity from which they never returned. Next the Assyrians turned their eyes south to the tiny kingdom of Judah. They besieged Jerusalem in 701 B.C. but suffered a humiliating defeat, not by force of army, but when an angel was sent by the Lord to strike the Assyrian army.

Judah was safe for a time, but the descendants of Hezekiah did not continue to follow the Lord. Tradition has it that his son, Manasseh, was responsible for having the prophet Isaiah put to death.

5. Josiah (1:11).

Josiah's advent to the throne brought about one final revival in Judah. At the beginning of his reign, he ordered that the temple was to be restored and all idols were to be removed. When the workers began to clean the temple, a forgotten scroll was discovered there that set forth the covenant God had made with His people. Josiah called for the prophetess Huldah and she predicted that the curses of the law would be poured out upon Judah, but because of Josiah's faithfulness, it would not take place in his day.

Josiah had three sons who reigned upon the throne of Judah after his death, but none of them are mentioned by name in this genealogy. The only one who is mentioned is Josiah's grandson.



Joahaz came to the throne following the death of his father in an encounter with the Egyptian Pharaoh Necho. After a brief reign of only three months, Pharaoh Necho came to Jerusalem and deposed Joahaz, placing a tribute on the land of Judah of 100

talents of silver and a talent of gold. Joahaz was taken to Egypt for the remainder of his life.

Necho now placed Eliakim upon the throne of Judah and changed his name to Jehoiakim. Jehoiakim had been on the throne for several years when Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon defeated the Egyptians and the famed Battle of Carchemish in 605 B.C. Nebuchadnezzar subsequently came up against Jerusalem and Judah became a vassal of Babylon. It was at this time Daniel and other young nobles of Judah were taken back to Babylon as hostages. Jehoiakim was permitted to retain the throne.

Jehoiakim remained faithful to Babylon for several years, but then, contrary to the advice of Jeremiah, he formed an alliance with Egypt against Babylon. The Babylonian army marched against Jerusalem, threw Jehoiakim into chains, and carried him off to Babylon along with 10,000 of the craftsmen and the prophet Ezekiel. Jehoiakim's son, Jeconiah, was now placed upon the throne.

6. Jeconiah (1:11).

The prophet Jeremiah had decreed that this same Jeconiah, also known as Coniah, would not prosper upon the throne and that none of his descendants would ever sit upon the throne of David.

“As I live,” declares the LORD, “even though Coniah the son of Jehoiakim king of Judah were a signet ring on My right hand, yet I would pull you off; ²⁵ and I shall give you over into the hand of those who are seeking your life, yes, into the hand of those whom you dread, even into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, and into the hand of the Chaldeans.” (Jeremiah 22:24-25).

A signet ring was the sign of a ruler's authority. The Lord is saying in effect, “Even if it meant that I would lose the sign of my rule and authority upon earth, I would nevertheless pull you off.”

Verse 30 goes on to point out that Jeconiah would be considered to be childless. It would be as though his line had ended with him.

*Thus says the LORD,
“Write this man down childless,
A man who will not prosper in his days;
For no man of his descendants will prosper
Sitting on the throne of David
Or ruling again in Judah.” (Jeremiah 22:30).*

True to the prophecy, Jeconiah was taken as a captive to Babylon after a short reign of only three months. Although he had seven sons (1 Chronicles 3:16-17), none of them ever reigned upon the throne. Instead, it was his uncle Zedekiah who was placed upon the throne to rule until 586 B.C. when the nation was laid desolate, the temple was destroyed, and the inhabitants carried away to Babylon.

THE GENEALOGY FROM BABYLON TO JESUS

12 And after the deportation to Babylon, to Jeconiah was born Shealtiel; and to Shealtiel, Zerubbabel; 13 and to Zerubbabel was born Abihud; and to Abihud, Eliakim; and to Eliakim, Azor; 14 and to Azor was born Zadok; and to Zadok, Achim; and to Achim, Eliud; 15 and to Eliud was born Eleazar; and to Eleazar, Matthan; and to Matthan, Jacob; 16 and to Jacob was born Joseph the husband of Mary, by whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ. (Matthew 1:12-17).

This final section of the genealogy follows from Jeconiah all the way down to Joseph. They were all descendants of king David, but none of these men ever sat upon the throne of Judah. None of them was ever a king. When Zerubbabel returned to the land after the Babylonian Captivity, he held the position of governor over Judah, but he never attempted to be a king. At the same time, the Lord gave a wonderful promise regarding Zerubbabel:

“On that day,” declares the LORD of hosts, “I will take you, Zerubbabel, son of Shealtiel, My servant,” declares the LORD, “and I will make you like a signet ring, for I have chosen you,” declares the LORD of hosts. (Haggai 2:23).

Do you recall how the Lord had said that, even if Coniah had been a signet ring upon the hand of the Lord, he would be pulled off? The signet ring was a sign of royal authority and now we read that there is an aspect of this authority that was to be passed down through Zerubbabel.

The blessings of God had been taken away in the days of Coniah, but now there is a promise of their restoration under Zerubbabel. The promise is that Zerubbabel would be “like a signet ring.” Where do you put a signet ring? On your right hand (see Jeremiah 22:24). That is where we find Jesus. He is seated at the right hand of God. He is the fulfillment of this promise. He is the legal heir of Zerubbabel who would be the signet ring of God.

Now I want you to notice something. Joseph was the last of the line of Jeconiah. He was the last of this royal line who had the right to sit on the throne of David. But he himself could not sit upon the throne because of the prophecy of Jeremiah. The Lord had said no physical

descendant would ever sit upon the throne of David and that meant Joseph could not sit upon David's throne

Jesus, the adopted son of Joseph, was the only person in all the ancient world who was both legally and prophetically entitled to sit upon the throne of David. His half-brothers and all other physical descendants of Coniah were under a curse. They could not sit on the throne and prosper. But Jesus was not a physical descendant of Joseph. He was born of a virgin. He was not under the curse.

But this is not all. If we are correct in understanding Luke's genealogy to be that of Mary, Jesus was also a physical descendant of David through Mary. Just as His adoption gave Jesus the legal right to the throne, His birth through Mary gave Him the prophetic and physical right to the throne because it meant He was the physical descendant of David.

CONCLUSION

Therefore all the generations from Abraham to David are fourteen generations; and from David to the deportation to Babylon fourteen generations; and from the deportation to Babylon to the time of Christ fourteen generations. (Matthew 1:17).

Matthew closes this section with a simple acrostic. He shows a pattern within these groupings of name that will aid the reader in remembering them. There are three groups of fourteen names. As we have noted, David is mentioned in both the first as well as in the second group.

Abraham to David	David to the Captivity	The Captivity to Jesus
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Abraham	David	Jeconiah
Isaac	Solomon	Shealtiel
Jacob	Rehoboam	Zerubbabel
Judah	Abijah	Abiud
Perez	Asa	Eliakim
Hezron	Jehoshaphat	Azor
Ram	Joram	Zadok
Amminadab	Uzziah	Achim
Nashon	Jotham	Eliud
Salmon	Ahaz	Eleazar
Boaz	Hezekiah	Matthan
Obed	Manasseh	Jacob
Jesse	Amon	Joseph
David	Josiah	Jesus Christ
Promise of a nation to rise of the king	From the king to the fall of the kingdom	Captivity to the coming of the Greater King

Thus there is a rising, a falling, and a second rising action to be seen in this genealogy. Fredrick Bruner makes this observation:

We will understand this three-times-fourteen formation best if we picture a kind of leaning capital N, an N in which the first fourteen generations head upward from Father Abraham to King David like this (/), the second fourteen generations plummet downward from King Solomon to the Babylonian Exile (), and then finally the last fourteen generations move upward again from exile to the Christ (/). (1987:4).

As we noted earlier, the numerical equivalent of the Hebrew name “David” is fourteen. The Hebrews regularly used the Hebrew letters in place of numbers. Instead of 1+1=2, they would think in terms of a+b=c. The letters that spell the name “David” come to a total of fourteen when they are seen in their numerical equivalent.

This brings us to a question. What is the importance of all this? What is the significance of this genealogy? What significance did it hold for the Jew living in the first century for whom this was written? I want to suggest that this document was meant as evidence to identify Jesus as the Messiah, the king of Israel who had been promised by the Hebrew prophets of the Old Testament.

The Jews kept very detailed genealogical records. Such records were accessible to the public. They were official documents. They were kept accurate from generation to generation. Thus the Jews were able to trace back their lineage all the way to Abraham. This

genealogy presented by Matthew could easily be verified by going to Jerusalem and checking it against the official documents. Its authenticity was never questioned by the Jews. It was accepted as a true and accurate document.

This document testifies that Jesus has the legal right to sit upon the throne of David. He is the only Jew on record living since the days of the Babylonian Captivity who has both the right to sit on the throne and yet who is not under the curse of Coniah. No one else in history meets these two requirements. Only in Jesus do we see them fulfilled.

This is the point of the genealogy. If Jesus is not the promised Messiah, the heir of David, and the true king of the Jews, then who is? The answer is obvious. No one else in history has ever fulfilled these requirements. Jesus is indeed the Messiah and true king of Israel.