

G R A C E

REFORMED BAPTIST CHURCH

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SERMONS FOR ADVENT

Sermon Notes

Before the Incarnation: The Genealogy of Jesus Christ

Matthew 1:1-17

December 11, 2005

INTRODUCTION / OVERVIEW

- Throughout the history of the Church, heresies have often arisen concerning the nature of the Person of Jesus Christ.
 - One of the earliest of these was Arianism, which denied that Jesus Christ was *fully* God. The Son, according to Arius, was *created* by the Father, and then the Son created the cosmos.
 - In reaction to Arianism, another heresy arose, known as Apollinarianism. According to this heresy, Jesus Christ was fully God, with a human body. However, the divine Logos took the place of the human mind. However, this heresy is fundamentally wrong, because if Jesus Christ did not have a human mind, He would not be fully human.
 - Jesus Christ was fully God and fully human.
 - As we study the Incarnation this Advent season, we will examine both of these truths.
- We begin our study of the Incarnation this year with the genealogy of Jesus Christ as recorded in the Gospel of Matthew. One of the fundamental truths of the genealogies of Jesus Christ [Matthew and Luke] is that Jesus Christ was fully human and **He had a human ancestry**.
- In the First Century, the Jewish people had great interest in genealogies and lineages.
 - When Joshua led God's people into the Promised Land, He divided Canaan into separate territories, with each tribe receiving its proper inheritance. Each family needed to know what tribe it belonged to in order to know where to live (Read Numbers 26; 34-35).
 - For the priestly class, each individual had to prove he descended from the tribe of Levi. More specifically, each High Priest had to be from the lineage of Aaron. Read

in Ezra 2:61-62 where some of the “sons of the priests” were forbidden from serving because they could not prove the ancestral origin. “These searched among their ancestral registration, but they could not be located; therefore they were considered unclean and excluded from the priesthood.”

- Notice even at the time of the birth of Jesus, the census recorded in Luke 2 was done so in accordance with the tribal descent of each Jewish family: “And everyone was on his way to register fore the census, each to his own city. Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the city of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and family of David, in order to register along with Mary...”
- Recall, even the Apostle Paul indicates that he is from “the tribe of Benjamin” (Romans 11:12 Corinthians 11:22; Philippians 3:5).
- Josephus indicates that many Jewish families preserved detailed records of their ancestral records.
- Further, he begins his own autobiography by tracing his lineage, indicating his use of “public registers” as the source of his data (*Life* 1).
- Also, the central repository for ancestral records was, most certainly the Temple.

Therefore, it is impossible for a Jew today, still looking for the Christ, to verify his necessary lineage. Since the destruction of the Temple in A.D. 70, and the subsequent dispersion of the Jewish nation, no genealogies exist that could establish the ancestry of anyone claiming to be of the line of David [or any other lineage for that matter]. Therefore, as John MacArthur accurately states, “**Jesus Christ is the last verifiable claimant to the throne of David, and therefore to the messianic line.**”

Matthew 1

Verse 1

- Matthew begins his Gospel in the following manner: “The record of the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah...”
 - The word **genealogy** comes from the word “genesis” meaning “beginning, or origin.” [Note: Of course, Jesus Christ has no origin, for He is eternal, however, what Matthew is speaking of is the Incarnation, when the Word became flesh.]
 - One scholar believes that this first Verse in Matthew is supposed to be “**the title of the entire Gospel**” and “**that this will be the story of the New Creation.**”
 - This is entirely possibly, since Scripture reveals Jesus Christ as the Creator and Sustainer of the cosmos, and the Redeemer, or **Recreator** of the cosmos through His Incarnation, perfect life, Death, and Resurrection.

- Read Hebrews 1:1-4; **Revelation 21:5**
- Matthew calls Jesus, “Jesus the Messiah”
 - Jesus comes from the Hebrew Joshua, or Yeshua, meaning, “Yahweh is my salvation.”
 - Further, Matthew calls Jesus “the Messiah” which is the Hebrew form of “Christ,” meaning “anointed.”
 - Interestingly, in the Old Testament, the three offices in Israel [prophet, priest, and king] were revealed as “anointed.” Jesus Christ is the only Person to fulfill all three offices; therefore, He is the **one true Messiah**.
- Matthew, then, calls Jesus the Messiah, “the son of David, the son of Abraham”
 - In order to fully appreciate the Gospel of Matthew, one must first realize that this, likely, the most “Jewish” of the four Gospels.
 - Leon Morris writes, “The writer seems concerned throughout to show that Christianity is the true continuation of the Old Testament.”
 - Further, Matthew does not spend a great deal of time explaining Jewish rituals and customs, as a knowledge of the background of these was assumed among a mainly Jewish audience.
 - Also, there are 61 quotations from the Old Testament in Matthew, more than any of the four Gospels (Mark has 31, Luke 26, and John 16).
 - This explains, then, why Matthew calls Jesus, “the son of David, the son of Abraham” (as well as why he begins the actual genealogy with the great patriarch Abraham)
 - Jesus was of the royal line of David. He was, for the First Century Jew the long-awaited Davidic Messiah.
 - Matthew also speaks of the name of David more than any of the Gospels [Matthew uses David’s name 17 times...Luke, who is next, uses it only 13 times].
 - **God made a covenant with David** (2 Samuel 7:12-16) that the great King of Israel would be one of his descendants and would eternally reign on his throne.
 - However, not only is Jesus Christ the Davidic Messiah, He is also the son of Abraham – the great patriarch.
 - **God made a covenant with Abraham**, that all nations would be blessed through Him (Genesis 12:3).

- The Jews held Abraham in highest esteem and viewed themselves as “sons of Abraham.”
- Therefore, not only is Jesus the son of David, but He is the son of Abraham. He is the child of the two covenantal promises of God.
- Puritan Matthew Henry wrote, “The promise of the blessing was made to Abraham and his seed, of the dominion to David and his seed; and they who would have an interest in Christ, as the son of Abraham, in whom all the families of the earth are to be blessed, must be faithful, loyal subjects to him as the son of David, by whom all the families of the earth are to be ruled. It was promised to Abraham that Christ should descend from him, and to David that he should descend from him; and therefore, unless it can be proven that Jesus is a son of David and a son of Abraham, we cannot admit him to be the Messiah.”
- The one true Messiah had to fulfill both covenantal promises, and only Jesus did.

THE GENEALOGY

Verse 2

- Matthew begins the genealogy of Jesus with Abraham, unlike Luke who begins with Adam.
- There are other differences between Matthew’s and Luke’s accounts.
- Scholars do not completely agree on the reasons why the differences exist. Leon Morris suggests that “Matthew’s list represents the legal descendants of David (through Joseph), those who would actually have reigned had the kingdom continued, while Luke gives the descendants of David in the line to which Joseph belonged.”
- However, I believe the best explanation seems to be that Luke traces the **actual** lineage of Jesus from David through his mother; whereas, Matthew traces the **legal** lineage from David through Joseph.
 - Those who disagree with this interpretation do so on the basis that genealogies were reckoned through the father, not the mother. However, **Joseph was not the father of Jesus.**
 - Luke even speaks of this truth in his genealogy: “When He began His ministry, Jesus Himself was about thirty years of age, **being, as was supposed,** the son of Joseph...”
 - Therefore, not only is Jesus a legal descendant from David (through Joseph), He actually descends from David (through Mary).
- Matthew begins the genealogy, “Abraham was the father of Isaac, Isaac the father of Jacob, and Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers.”
 - These are the **patriarchs**, and each of them, being found in the lineage of Jesus, foreshadow Him in certain ways:

- **Abraham** was the father of many nations.
- **Isaac** was a type of Christ – the “son of promise”; the “only begotten [*monogenes*] son” of Abraham [Hebrews 11:17]; the one willingly offered as a sacrifice by Abraham to God on Mount Moriah [Genesis 22:1-13].
- **Jacob**, although he was a deceiver, was actually the father of God’s chosen people. God changed his name to Israel, and he had twelve sons, each representing one of the tribes of Israel.
- **Judah** was one of Jacob’s sons, and represents the tribe of Judah – the tribe from which David, and eventually Jesus the Christ, would come.

Verses 3 – 6 – The First Set of Fourteen Generations

- These verses conclude the first of the three sets of fourteen generations in the genealogy of Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew. It goes from Abraham to David.
- This first set of fourteen generations is very significant, as it not only lays the necessary foundation for the ancestry of the Messiah [Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Judah...and David], but it contains something quite unusual for a Jewish genealogy: the names of **women**.
 - However, not only does it contain the names of women [three of four: Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, and Bathsheba (who is mentioned in the second of the three sets)], it is quite possible that each of these women are **Gentiles**. Further, three of them were either adulteresses or harlots [Tamar, Rahab, and Bathsheba].
 - **Tamar** is the first woman mentioned, and she was a Canaanite [Gentile] and the daughter-in-law of Judah, the son of Jacob. After losing her husband Er, and his brother Onan, she dressed as a prostitute and deceived her father-in-law, Judah, into sleeping with her. Because of this [sinful] encounter, Tamar conceived, and gave to twins: Perez and Zerah [also mentioned in the genealogy in Matthew].
 - **Rahab** was a prostitute and resident of Jericho in the book of Joshua, and she hid the Jewish spies sent into the city. Because of this, God spared her life when Jericho fell (Joshua 2:1-21; 6:22-25).
 - **Ruth** was a widowed Moabitess [Gentile] who was redeemed by another Christ-type, Boaz, who became her kinsman-redeemer. Ruth would also be the grandmother of King David.
 - **Bathsheba** was the former wife of Uriah the Hittite. After being summoned by King David, she had an adulterous affair with him, and became his wife. Although the child she conceived through this extra-marital affair died, she would later become the mother of David’s heir to the throne, Solomon.

- **Why, then, would God providentially include women, especially such sinful Gentiles, in the genealogy of Jesus?**
 - The reason is most definitely to underscore the grace of God.
 - “The number [of women] is intentional, not accidental. The Evangelist has a point to make through them. He wishes to show that the genealogy of Christ, embracing the whole history of Israel, bears witness not only to its high points but also to the sin and unworthiness which run through this history even at its high points, i.e., in the age of the patriarchs and the house of David...the history of the people elected to be the people of the Messiah is one of grace rather than glory.” G. Kittel
 - Barclay also commented, “In his genealogy Matthew shows us the royalty of kingship gained; the tragedy of freedom lost; the glory of liberty restored. And that, in the mercy of God, is the story of mankind, and of each individual man.”
- Matthew concludes the first section of his genealogy with “David **the king**,” further emphasizing Jesus as the **royal** Davidic Messiah.

Verses 6-11 - The Second Set of Fourteen Generations

- This second list contains the generations from David’s reign through the period of the divided kingdom [the kings of Judah] until the deportation to Babylon.

Verses 12-16 - The Third Set of Fourteen Generations

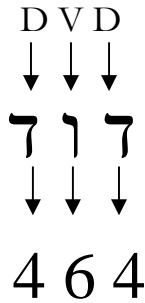
- This final section contains the names of those after the deportation to Babylon up to the birth of Jesus Christ.
- Most of the names in this third section are unknown to the reader apart from this genealogy.
- This period of time, part of which was the “silent” inter-testamental years when no prophet existed in Israel, is known by some as the “Dark Years” of Israel’s ancient past.
- Matthew concludes this section by referring to Joseph, not as the father of Jesus, but “the husband of Mary.” He will later, in Verse 20, explain that the reason for this is the virgin conception.

Verse 17

- Matthew concludes the genealogy by summarizing the three sets of fourteen generations:
 - Abraham to David
 - David to the deportation to Babylon
 - Deportation of Babylon to the Messiah

- There are several possible explanations of the significance of the three sets of fourteen.
 - First, in an age when many did not own their own copies of the Scriptures, it would have been easy to memorize.
 - Secondly, many scholars believed that Matthew employed a rather common Hebrew literary technique known as *gemetria*. In this technique, the writer emphasizes the numbers associated by letters in a word or a name as significant.

- The Hebrew name **David** [the consonants] looks like the following:



In other words, the letter for “D” is 4th letter in the Hebrew alphabet; the letter for “V” is the 6th; and “D” is 4th; therefore **4 + 6 + 4 = 14**

- If this use of *gemetria* is true, then, once again, it emphasizes Jesus is the true **Davidic Messiah**.
 - Furthermore, it is likely no coincidence that David is the fourteenth name mentioned in the genealogy.
 - Thirdly, as L. Finkelstein stated, the number fourteen was very significant in First Century Judaism: “The number, ‘fourteen’, is not accidental. It corresponds to the number of high priests from Aaron to the establishment of Solomon’s Temple; the number of high priests from the establishment of the Temple until Jaddua, the last high priest mentioned in Scripture. It is clear that a mystic significance attached to this number in both the Sadducean and the Pharisaic traditions.”
 - Finally, the number fourteen may be significant, because $14 = 2 * 7$, and, as Dietrich suggests fourteen ($2 * 7$) is “the symbol of plentitude, of something complete.”
- From a close examination of the genealogy of Jesus in Matthew, it is clear, therefore, that:
 - God’s providential, sovereign hand was at work thousands of years before the birth of Christ, orchestrating the events necessary for the Incarnation.
 - God is a God of grace
 - Jesus Christ truly is the Davidic Kingly Messiah, indeed, He is the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords!