

Gospel of Matthew – A Quick course

General Background

Audience – Who was Matthew writing for?

Christian scholarship has historically maintained that Matthew’s Gospel was written for a Palestinian Christian audience. The Jewish outlook of the book seemed to point in this direction, as did an ancient tradition that Matthew had originally written his Gospel in a Semitic language, either Hebrew or Aramaic. Since few Gentiles would have been interested in a work dominated by Jewish concerns, and few communities outside the land of Israel could have read it in a Semitic tongue, every indication was that Matthew’s Gospel was intended for the early believers in Palestine. **(See Handout – Who Did Matthew Write His Gospel For?)**

Central Theme of the Gospel – The Kingdom of Heaven. The content of Matthew’s Gospel has as its central theme “the kingdom of heaven”. This keynote expression appears more than thirty times throughout the book and is especially seen in the preaching of Jesus (4:17), John the Baptist (3:2), and the twelve apostles (10:7). The kingdom is not reducible to a purely spiritual or otherworldly realm, nor is it exclusively linked with the future blessings of eternal life. It points to the fact that God the Father is now working through the Messiah to establish his will on earth, as it is in heaven (6:10).¹

Going Deeper – The Kingdom of Heaven

The biblical world was no stranger to the concept of a kingdom but this leading motif in Matthew points us to something radically different from the normal fare of historical monarchies.

¹ Mitch, C. (2010). [Introduction to the Gospels](#). In *The Ignatius Catholic Study Bible: The New Testament* (p. 4). Ignatius Press.

In Matthew's theology, the kingdom of heaven is the divine perfection of the ancient kingdom of David. As such, it answers the ancient expectation that Yahweh, in fulfillment of his oath (Ps 89:3–4), would establish the kingdom of David forever (2 Sam 7:12–16) by sending a royal messiah, a new and “definitive David,” to reign forever as the heir to his throne (see Isa 9:6–7; Jer 23:5; Ezek 34:23–24; Hosea 3:5). This prophetic hope has at last become a reality in Jesus. He is the royal Davidic Messiah who reigns as king, not in Jerusalem, where the descendants of David once sat enthroned, but high above “at the right hand of the Power” (26:64), where he wields “all power in heaven and on earth” (28:18). The new and everlasting covenant established through Jesus Christ is thus a transcendent fulfillment of the Davidic covenant of kingship, raising its rule from earth to heaven and extending its reach over the entire creation.

Though the expression “kingdom of heaven” is not found in Jewish or Christian texts before Matthew's Gospel, it is not an altogether novel idea. It is rooted in OT expectations for the messianic age. One can speak, for instance, of its apocalyptic background in the Book of Daniel, where it is said that the God of heaven will triumph over the kingdoms of this world by establishing his royal dominion over the whole earth (Dan 2–7). Daniel foresees in a vision that God will exercise his divine kingship through “one like a son of man” (Dan 7:13–14). Several times, Jesus identifies himself in Matthew with Daniel's royal figure (24:30; 26:64; 28:18). One can speak also of a historical background to the kingdom of heaven in the ancient Davidic monarchy and in prophetic hopes for its restoration. The basis for such a hope was the Davidic covenant, in which the Lord swore an oath to establish the kingdom of David for-ever (2 Sam 7:12–17; Ps 89:3–4).

With the end of Davidic kingship in the sixth century b.c., the prophets envisioned the coming of a new David to restore his kingdom for all time (Is 9:6–7; 11:1–5; 55:3–5; Jer 23:5–6; Ezek 34:23–24; Hos 3:4–5; Amos 9:11–12).

Through Jesus’s ministry, the kingdom of heaven is proclaimed and its power is made present in the lives of ordinary people (4:23; 9:35; 12:28). Jesus shows the kingdom in this world as a hidden grace that slowly exerts its influence over time (13:33, 36–43). It stands in our midst wherever the messianic King (25:34) is invoked by his gathered disciples (18:20).

Matthew sees Jesus as this messianic “son of David” (1:1; 9:27; 12:23; 15:22; 20:30; 21:9, 15). Incorporated into the royal line of David (1:2–16) and is now enthroned in heaven (26:64), Jesus has achieved, not the re-founding of Israel’s political empire, but a transcendent fulfillment that brings the ancient Davidic ideal to its perfection. In the risen Jesus, Davidic rule is forever restored and given universal extension over heaven and earth and all nations (28:18–19).

Matthew’s concept of kingdom can be seen throughout the Gospel especially in its main themes: Christ, the Church, and the Christian vocation.²

Christ – Christology - In Matthew’s Gospel

Mt. 1:1. ¹The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham... ¹⁶Jacob the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary. Of her was born Jesus who is called the Messiah. ¹⁷Thus the total number of generations from Abraham to David is fourteen generations; from David to the

² Mitch, C., & Sri, E. (2010). [*The Gospel of Matthew*](#) (p. 24). Baker Academic.

Babylonian exile, fourteen generations; from the Babylonian exile to the Messiah, fourteen generations.³

1 Kings 1:41-46. What does this uproar in the city mean?”⁴² While he was still speaking, behold, Jonathan the son of Abiathar the priest came; and Adonijah said, “Come in, for you are a worthy man and bring good news.”⁴³ Jonathan answered Adonijah, “No, for our lord King David has made Solomon king;⁴⁴ and the king has sent with him Zadok the priest, Nathan the prophet, and Benaiah the son of Jehoiada, and the Cherethites and the Pelethites; and they have caused him to ride on the king’s mule;⁴⁵ and Zadok the priest and Nathan the prophet have anointed him king at Gihon; and they have gone up from there rejoicing, so that the city is in an uproar. This is the noise that you have heard.⁴⁶ Solomon sits upon the royal throne.

Dan 7:13-14.¹³ I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him.¹⁴ And to him was given dominion and glory and kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed.

Isaiah 42:1. Behold, my servant whom I have chosen, my beloved with whom my soul is well pleased. I will put my Spirit upon him, and he shall proclaim justice to the Gentiles.

³ All bible quotes unless otherwise noted are from the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine. Board of Trustees, Catholic Church. National Conference of Catholic Bishops, and United States Catholic Conference. Administrative Board. (1996). [*The New American Bible: translated from the original languages with critical use of all the ancient sources and the revised New Testament*](#) (Mt 1:17). Confraternity of Christian Doctrine.

Mt. 12:38-41. ³⁸ Then some of the scribes and Pharisees said to him, “Teacher, we wish to see a sign from you.” ³⁹ But he answered them, “An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign; but no sign shall be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. ⁴⁰ For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the whale, so will the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. ⁴¹ The men of Nineveh will arise at the judgment with this generation and condemn it; for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and behold, something greater than Jonah is here.

Mt. 16:15-16. ¹⁵ He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” ¹⁶ Simon Peter replied, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”

Mt. 14:28-33. ²⁸ And Peter answered him, “Lord, if it is you, bid me come to you on the water.” ²⁹ He said, “Come.” So Peter got out of the boat and walked on the water and came to Jesus; ³⁰ but when he saw the wind, he was afraid, and beginning to sink he cried out, “Lord, save me.” ³¹ Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him, saying to him, “O man of little faith, why did you doubt?” ³² And when they got into the boat, the wind ceased. ³³ And those in the boat worshiped him, saying, “Truly you are the Son of God.”

Mt. 28:18-20. ¹⁸ And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age.”

Commentary - Christology in Matthew.

Matthew’s vision of the nature and works of Jesus Christ (Christology) can hardly be captured by any one title or theme in the Gospel. It is simply too rich and multidimensional. But since the dominant theme of the Gospel is the kingdom of heaven, it is no surprise that Jesus is frequently portrayed as a

king. He stands in the royal Davidic line (1:1–16); he is born a “king” (2:2) in Bethlehem, the hometown of David (2:6); and two of his most prominent titles in the Gospel are “Messiah” and “son of David.” The first means “Anointed One” and was a title once borne by the Davidic kings of Israel (see 2 Sam 22:51; Ps 2:2). In fact, the royal messianism current in Jesus’ day was tied to the hope that the Lord would raise up one of David’s descendants (12:23) to restore the glories of his kingdom (Mark 11:10). The second was also a royal title that brought to mind the original son of David, King Solomon. He stands out in the Gospel as a type of messiah inasmuch as Jesus declares himself “greater than Solomon” (12:42) and stages his triumphal entry into Jerusalem to recall Solomon’s entrance into the holy city as king of Israel (21:1–11; 1 Kings 1:32–45).

Other Christological portraits in Matthew are similarly rooted in the Old Testament. For instance, Jesus is the “Son of Man” envisioned by the prophet Daniel (24:30; 26:64; Dan 7:13–14) as well as the “Servant of Yahweh” foreseen by the prophet Isaiah (8:17; 12:18–21; Isa 42:1–4; 53:4). Typological links between the great figures of Israel’s history and Jesus also combine to present him as a new and greater Moses (4:2; 17:1–7), as well as a new Jonah (12:38–41; 16:4).

Most spectacular of all is Matthew’s teaching that Jesus is the “Son of the living God” (16:16). At this level, nothing could prepare us to embrace the full mystery of the man from Nazareth, who is nothing less than God-with-us (1:23). The Son possesses divine knowledge and enjoys an unparalleled intimacy with the Father in heaven (11:25–27); he is worshipped by his disciples (14:33); he is present amid his disciples gathered in prayer (18:20); and once risen from the dead, he wields universal authority over heaven and earth (28:18–20).

The Church

Mt. 16:18. And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the powers of death shall not prevail against it. ¹⁹ I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.”

Isaiah 22:20-22. ²⁰ In that day I will call my servant Eliakim the son of Hilkiah, ²¹ and I will clothe him with your robe, and will bind your girdle on him, and will commit your authority to his hand; and he shall be a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem and to the house of Judah. ²² And I will place on his shoulder the key of the house of David; he shall open, and none shall shut; and he shall shut, and none shall open.

Mt. 6:10. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

Mt. 25:31-36. ³¹ “When the Son of man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. ³² Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate them one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, ³³ and he will place the sheep at his right hand, but the goats at the left. ³⁴ Then the King will say to those at his right hand, ‘Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; ³⁵ for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, ³⁶ I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.’”

Commentary – Aspects of the Church, Ecclesiology, in Matthew. We can say that the kingdom is also *ecclesial*, that is, it pertains to a church or its functions, teachings, or organization. That is to say that the kingdom’s saving power is made present in the world through the Church. It is noteworthy that the Gospel of Matthew, which stresses the importance of the kingdom more than any other, is likewise the only Gospel to make explicit reference to the

Church (16:18; 18:17). The authority to bind and loose in the kingdom is given to Peter, who is made the kingdom's chief steward and the guardian of its "keys" (16:19). Similar royal authority is conferred upon the other apostles as a group (18:18–19). Sent forth by Jesus, they extend the kingdom of heaven through their preaching (10:7) and sacramental actions (28:18–20).

Going Deeper – Peter, A Key 'Rock'

Matthew's vision of the Church is closely connected with his messianic conception of Jesus. First, it is noteworthy that Matthew's is the only Gospel to refer explicitly to this ecclesial community. The Greek term *ekklēsia*, meaning "church," appears first in 16:18 and then twice in 18:17. The first passage is significant because it forges a link between the Church and the kingdom of heaven. There Jesus promises to build his Church upon Simon Peter, who will serve as the foundation of God's messianic people, envisioned as a living temple. From this we recall that the Lord's temple in Israel was the architectural sign of God's covenant with David constructed by the original son of David, King Solomon. Now Jesus is cast in this Solomonic role as the builder of the Church.

Also Jesus entrusts Peter with "the keys of the kingdom of heaven" (16:19), an allusion to "the key of the house of David" that the Davidic ruler of Israel would entrust to his chief steward (Isa 22:22). Thus the kingdom of heaven not only finds its historical and visible manifestation in the Church but it also implies that the Church is in some respects modeled on the royal government of David and Solomon. The difference is that the Church's authority is spiritual rather than political; its function is not to manage the earthly affairs of societies and nations, but to transform the temporal order of this world and infuse it with the blessings of heaven.

Ultimately the kingdom of heaven is present in the Church “in mystery.” The pilgrim Church on earth is its historical manifestation, but not its final realization. The coming of the kingdom in its fullness remains the joyful hope of the Church, for which she prays daily to the Father (6:10: “your kingdom come”). Only when the Son of Man returns will his kingdom’s unseen glory be revealed to all (25:31–46).

The Christian Vocation or Discipleship.

Mt. 3:1-3. ¹ In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judea, ² “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” ³ For this is he who was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah when he said, “The voice of one crying in the wilderness: Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.” (Is 40:3)

Mt. 5:17-20. ¹⁷ “Think not that I have come to abolish the law and the prophets; I have come not to abolish them but to fulfil them. ¹⁸ For truly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the law until all is accomplished. ¹⁹ Whoever then relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but he who does them and teaches them shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. ²⁰ For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

Mt. 5:43-48. ⁴³ “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ ⁴⁴ But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, ⁴⁵ so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. ⁴⁶ For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? ⁴⁷ And if you salute only your brethren, what more are you doing than others? Do not

even the Gentiles do the same? ⁴⁸ You, therefore, must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

Mt. 16:24-28. ²⁴ Then Jesus told his disciples, “If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. ²⁵ For whoever would save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. ²⁶ For what will it profit a man, if he gains the whole world and forfeits his life? Or what shall a man give in return for his life? ²⁷ For the Son of man is to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay every man for what he has done. ²⁸ Truly, I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom.”

Mt. 7:21-22. ²¹ “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. ²² On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?’ ²³ And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you evildoers.’

Commentary

Discipleship in Matthew. Included in Matthew’s vision of the kingdom are the principles, priorities, and imperatives that define the Christian way of life, how we are to act. Throughout the Gospel the discourses of Jesus urge listeners to embrace the demands of discipleship.

The initial summons of the kingdom is a call to repentance (3:2; 4:17). This is a turn from sinful and selfish ways to Jesus, who has come to save us from our sins (1:21; 26:28). From this starting point, the teaching of the Gospel stretches across a broad canvas of moral and spiritual matters. In terms of priorities, disciples are challenged to put God and his kingdom first in their lives (6:25–33) and to pursue a righteousness that surpasses the letter of the

Mosaic Law (5:17–42). The goal of Christian discipleship is nothing less than unconditional love, a form of perfection that imitates God’s love for saints and sinners alike (5:43–48). Commitment to these standards will make believers a light shining in the world and a witness to God’s power to change lives for the better (5:13–16).

Of the many specific injunctions in Matthew, we are told that following Jesus means imitating his humility (11:29) and shouldering the cross of suffering as he did (10:38; 16:24). Disciples should be dedicated to integrity of speech (12:36–37), to exercising a generous mercy toward others (18:21–22), and to performing works of service (25:35–36). Spiritual commitments also include fasting (6:16–18), almsgiving (6:2–4), and communion with the Father in prayer (6:5–13; 7:7–11). All this amounts to building a relationship with Jesus, which is the one true necessity (7:22). The disciple who is known by the Lord is the one who does the will of the Father (7:21) and comes to possess the kingdom in heaven (25:34). (*Ibid.* pp. 23-26)

The Relevance of Matthew Today

Matthew’s Gospel is as potent today as when it first appeared in the cradle of the ancient Church. Despite the centuries that have passed, its power to change lives and to bring men and women into a living relationship with Jesus has not lessened in the least. For the early Christians, it was the precious first witness to the story of Jesus from the pen of an eyewitness apostle. For us too, the Gospel of Matthew is the flagship of the fourfold Gospel canon and the first testimony to Christ that appears in the New Testament. Then as now, it comes to us as the word of salvation.

Like all the Gospels, Matthew is designed for instruction as well as proclamation. It presents us with Jesus the Teacher and allows us to hear his voice in all of its thunderous wonder. Sometimes we are privileged to eavesdrop while he schools his disciples privately and challenges them with

the demands of Christian faith and life. Other times we observe the Lord reaching out to sinners and the “unchurched” of his day with a call to repentance. Given this dual focus in Matthew, the First Gospel is uniquely suited to catechetical instruction and evangelical proclamation.

Faith formation & instruction

Mt. 12:1-8. ¹ At that time Jesus went through the grainfields on the sabbath; his disciples were hungry, and they began to pluck heads of grain and to eat. ² But when the Pharisees saw it, they said to him, “Look, your disciples are doing what is not lawful to do on the sabbath.” ³ He said to them, “Have you not read what David did, when he was hungry, and those who were with him: ⁴ how he entered the house of God and ate the bread of the Presence, which it was not lawful for him to eat nor for those who were with him, but only for the priests? ⁵ Or have you not read in the law how on the sabbath the priests in the temple profane the sabbath, and are guiltless? ⁶ I tell you, something greater than the temple is here. ⁷ And if you had known what this means, ‘I desire mercy, and not sacrifice,’ you would not have condemned the guiltless. ⁸ For the Son of man is lord of the sabbath.”

1 Sam 21:2-7. And David said to Ahimelech the priest, “The king has charged me with a matter, and said to me, ‘Let no one know anything of the matter about which I send you, and with which I have charged you.’ I have made an appointment with the young men for such and such a place. ³ Now then, what have you at hand? Give me five loaves of bread, or whatever is here.” ⁴ And the priest answered David, “I have no common bread at hand, but there is holy bread; if only the young men have kept themselves from women.” ⁵ And David answered the priest, “Of a truth women have been kept from us as always when I go on an expedition; the vessels of the young men are holy, even when it is a common journey; how much more today will their vessels be holy?” ⁶ So the priest gave him the holy bread; for there was no bread there

but the bread of the Presence, which is removed from before the Lord, to be replaced by hot bread on the day it is taken away.

Hosea 6:6. For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God, rather than burnt offerings.

Commentary

Catechesis (teaching) in the church has traditionally made extensive use of Matthew, earning it a reputation for being “the catechist’s Gospel.” One thinks of the Sermon on the Mount, where so many essentials of Christian living are brought together into an inspiring vision of the new life made possible by Christ (chaps. 5–7). So too the ecclesial nature of the discourse stresses that humility and mercy are the hallmarks of authentic Christian leadership and service to others (18:1–35). One also finds teachings on prayer (6:5–15), celibacy (19:12), marriage (19:1–9), children (19:13–15), and keeping the commandments (19:16–19). At its core, Christian formation involves modeling our lives on Jesus, who says, “Learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart” (11:29). Now as always, the way of the disciple is the way of imitating the Master.

Of the many catechetical gems in Matthew, one that is often underappreciated is its instruction in reading the Old Testament. Too many of us read the New Testament in isolation from the Old Testament. As a result, we have little sense of how God’s plan of salvation developed to reach the point of fulfillment in Christ. Matthew teaches us to read and ponder the whole Bible with reference to Jesus, for he recognized that our understanding of God and his ways are deeply enriched by discovering the unity of the Father’s plan as it unfolds in the pages of Scripture.

Evangelization

Evangelization is also at the heart of Matthew’s Gospel. Not only does Jesus set the example by his actions, but this is also the subject of his final words in the book: “Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (28:19). This missionary mandate still has the force of marching orders for the Church today. At one level, Jesus calls us to engage in personal evangelization, which means sharing the good news with friends and family members, coworkers and business contacts, neighbors and new acquaintances. However, it is also a summons to transform entire nations by making the gospel our way of life and shining the light of Christian truth into every corridor of human society and its institutions. This is what it means for disciples to be “the salt of the earth” (5:13) and “the light of the world” (5:14).

Finally, a word should be said about Matthew, evangelization, and the Jewish people. It is a regrettable fact of history that some Christians have invoked the authority of the First Gospel to accuse the Jews of perpetual bloodguilt for the murder of Jesus Christ (on the basis of 27:25). In reality, this is anti-Semitic slander and a serious misreading of the Gospel. It is true that Matthew portrays Jesus engaged in heated polemic with the Jewish authorities of his day (e.g., 23:1–39). But this is precisely what the prophets had done when denouncing the transgressions of Israel and summoning the people to repentance and faith in the Old Testament. The Church therefore insists that responsibility for Jesus’ death must not be laid on the Jewish race or religion, as though it followed from Scripture that the Jews are now a rejected or accursed people. On the contrary, the New Testament considers them “beloved” by God to this day (Rom 11:28).

In point of fact, Matthew’s Gospel should lead us to appreciate the spiritual heritage that Jews and Christians share in common. Clearly a profound reverence for the Torah shines through the pages of the First Gospel (5:17–18). Its moral commandments are as binding on the followers of Jesus as on

their fellow Jews (19:16–19); so too are its demands that we love God and neighbor with our whole heart (22:34–40). Most of all, to affirm the messiahship of Jesus is to affirm the messianic hope that was nourished for centuries among the chosen people. In this respect, the faith of Israel has become the faith of the Church now centered on the Jewish man from Nazareth. (*Ibid.* Mitch pp. 26-28)

Matthew Chapters 1–2. The Genealogy And Virgin Birth

Genealogy

Matthew’s prologue does two things—it tells us Who Jesus is and how He came into the world. And for Matthew, the Old Testament background is critical to understanding both. To begin this connection with the Old Testament, Matthew’s Gospel employs a common connecting literary device for the times, a genealogy. In fact the first words of his Gospel are the title of the first book of the Old Testament—the Book of Genesis (the Greek word *genesis* is translated “genealogy” in the New American Bible and elsewhere).⁴

Genealogies can serve a number of functions depending upon their context. In the Bible, however, genealogies never appear primarily to preserve historical detail—they invariably serve other functions: demonstrate both kinship and distinction between Israel and neighboring peoples; interrelate otherwise isolated elements relating to Israelite origins; Some serve to establish a chronological framework to world history by dating events such as the flood and the birth of Abraham; They serve an apologetic purpose by showing the way in which history is managed by a divine plan⁵

The opening chapter of Matthew’s Gospel is a stumbling block for many modern readers. Many question why begin a Gospel with a list of more than

⁴ St. Paul Center for Biblical Theology. (2017). [*Reading the Old Testament in the New: The Gospel of Matthew*](#). St. Paul Center for Biblical Theology.

⁵ Shields, M. A. (2016). [*Genealogy*](#). In J. D. Barry, D. Bomar, D. R. Brown, R. Klippenstein, D. Mangum, C. Sinclair Wolcott, ... W. Widder (Eds.), *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

forty names? A biblical genealogy does not seem to be the most captivating way to draw readers into the story of Jesus. As one commentator put it, “Reading other people’s genealogies is about as exciting as watching other people’s holiday videos.” But for the ancient Jews, a genealogy was not merely a catalog of old names. Each name told a story and recalled key events in salvation history. Biblical genealogies also conferred identity and privileges on members of a family, bestowing a sense of mission and responsibility.

The particular genealogy in Matt 1:1–17 compresses the entire history of Israel into seventeen short verses. The many names would have brought to mind the various twists and turns, triumphs and tragedies, in that story. By tracing Jesus’ lineage back to David and Abraham, Matthew places the story of Jesus within the larger plot of God’s dealings with Israel and, at the same time, announces that Israel’s story is reaching its climax in the child at the end of the line. Most of all, the genealogy establishes Jesus’ messianic credentials. Grafted onto the trunk of David’s royal lineage, Jesus will appear as the legal heir of this family’s kingly prerogatives that have been passed down from generation to generation.

The genealogy is followed by an account of the angel’s announcement to Joseph (1:18–25). Here, the camera lens zooms in on the last part of the genealogy, where we encounter an anomaly. While the Gospel carefully traces a royal lineage from “David the king” (1:6) all the way down to Joseph (1:16), Matthew points out that Jesus is not a biological descendant of Joseph and David after all. Joseph, the bearer of the Davidic ancestry, appears not as the father of Jesus, but as “the husband of Mary. Of her was born Jesus who is called the Messiah” (1:16). The story of the announcement to Joseph serves as an explanation for this last link of the genealogy. It shows how Jesus first of all was conceived in Mary not by natural means, but by the Holy Spirit and second, was named and accepted by Joseph as his son, making him a true Davidic heir. (*Ibid.* Mitch pp. 34-35)

See the two Handouts: “Notes on Matthew’s Genealogy” and “What’s up with the Women”

With the end of the genealogy at Mt 1:18 and the mention of Joseph, Matthew’s prologue moves from “who” Jesus is to “how” He came among us.

The idea of “fulfillment,” so prominent in this Gospel, reflects a common biblical worldview shared by all the New Testament writers. These writers believe a “plan” has been in place from the foundation of the world, that God revealed Himself and His plan slowly in the history of Israel and in His words given to the prophets; they believe, finally, that in Jesus, God brings His plan to completion or fulfillment (see Ephesians 1:3–10; Acts 3:18; Mark 14:49).

End of Week 1