

The Gospel of Matthew: A Commentary

By James Moriello

Introduction :

The Gospel of Matthew is the first book in the New Testament. It is the first of four canonical gospel accounts. Because much of the material overlaps that of Mark and Luke, those three gospels are together called the “synoptic gospels”. John contains a high percentage of material that is unique to it. When the gospels record the same event, they are often done so from a different perspective or viewpoint. Just as eyewitnesses to an accident scene may recall different details and see things from a particular angle, so too it is with the human authors of the Bible. There are no contradictions in the gospel accounts; neither are there any contradictions anywhere in God’s Word. German scholars hypothesize a fifth document, which they call “Quelle”, meaning “Source”. That is a recent invention in their minds; there is no evidence of its existence apart from pure speculation. Why would it be needed? All four gospels are compilations of eyewitness apostolic accounts. All four gospels were certainly written prior to 70 AD, the year in which the destruction of Jerusalem prophesied by Jesus in Matthew 24:2 occurred. This is evidenced not only by the lack of reference to that particular event, but also by other internal evidence—for instance references to places in Jerusalem in the present tense by the gospel writers. Matthew presents Jesus as King, Mark presents Jesus as Suffering Servant, Luke presents Jesus as Compassionate Savior, and John presents Jesus as God.

That Matthew the Apostle wrote the gospel that bears his name is proven by overwhelming evidence. Matthew records his call to be a follower of Jesus, and the dinner that followed in details that could only be recounted by an eyewitness (Matthew 9:9-13). His repeated references to being a “tax collector” (Matthew 10:3), and downplaying of the feast that he gave in honor of the Lord support the fact that this humble disciple wrote the account (Compare Matthew 9:10 with Luke 5:29). Matthew employed his knowledge of coins as they relate to taxation in his gospel (Matthew 17:24-27). Matthew was also called Levi, so we know he was a Jew (Mark 2:14). He may have been a brother of James the Apostle (the Lesser, not the son of Zebedee), since both are called “the son of Alphaeus” (Mark 2:14, 3:18). Some have speculated that Matthew may have been the twin brother of Thomas, but this is uncertain (John 11:16). Matthew was also unanimously approved by the early church as the author of the gospel that bears his name.

The Gospel of Matthew was probably written sometime around 50 AD. C. I. Schofield has suggested a date as early as 37 AD, about ten years after Jesus' ascension. Varying dates have been suggested, but all except the most liberal scholars hold to a pre-66 AD date. According to tradition, Matthew died a martyr's death in Ethiopia. For 1500 years, nobody questioned that Matthew was the first of the four gospels to be written. This was the unanimous view of the early church fathers, and there is no reason to take a different view today. In addition to this, Matthew has always been placed first in the New Testament canon. Some of the earlier church fathers, notably Papias, Origen, and Irenaeus, also affirmed that Matthew originally wrote his gospel in Hebrew, and not Greek, citing as evidence the Hebraism of Matthew 1:21, structure in the genealogical record, and his primarily Jewish audience. If this is true, then the gospel must have a very early date indeed. This cannot be proven, however, since we have no ancient Hebrew fragments of the text, but many Greek ones.

The Gospel of Matthew was written primarily to the Jews, to prove that the long awaited Messiah prophesied of in the Old Testament Scriptures had come. This view is supported by the sheer number of Old Testament quotations, and the frequent use of the word "fulfilled" in the gospel. Jesus Christ is proven to be Messiah, King, and the Son of God.

Matthew Chapter One:

1:1: "The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ"

Matthew gives the legal line to the throne through Joseph, whereas Luke gives the biological line to the throne through Mary (Luke 3:23-38). This accounts for the fact that the lists differ. Notably, the lines are the same from Abraham to David, which is essential for God's plan to fulfill both the Abrahamic and Davidic covenants, both of which will be explained in detail shortly. The lines diverge after David, and intersect again with Shealtiel. This is a result of Levirate marriage; this too will be explained when we come to it in our study. The following chart is an aid to understanding the genealogical record.

Matthew 1:1-16

Luke 3:23-38

Comments

God
Adam
Seth
Enosh
Cainan

Luke brings the line all the way back to God.

Matthew 1:1-16	Luke 3:23-28	Comments
	Mahalelel	
	Jared	
	Enoch	
	Methuselah	He lived 969 years, oldest on record (Gen 5:27).
	Lamech	
	Noah	This is Noah of the Flood.
	Shem	
	Arphaxad	
	Cainan	
	Shelah	
	Eber	We get the name 'Hebrew' from his name.
	Peleg	
	Reu	
	Serug	
	Nahor	
	Terah	
Abraham	Abraham	Matthew begins his genealogy with Abraham.
Isaac	Isaac	The promise is through Abraham (Gen 12:1-3).
Jacob	Jacob	
Judah	Judah	
Perez	Perez	
Hezron	Hezron	
Ram	Ram	
Amminadab	Amminadab	
Nahshon	Nahshon	
Salmon	Salmon	
Boaz	Boaz	We read of Boaz in the Book of Ruth.
Obed	Obed	
Jesse	Jesse	
David	David	The promise is through David (1 Chr 17:11-14).
Solomon	Nathan	The lines will now diverge after David.
Rehoboam	Mattathah	In Joseph's line are the OT Kings of Judah.
Abijah	Menan	
Asa	Melea	Asa reigned as king 40 years (2 Chron 16:13).
	Eliakim	
Jehoshaphat	Jonan	
	Joseph	
Joram	Judah	
	Simeon	
Uzziah	Levi	Uzziah reigned as king 52 years (2 Chron 26:3).

Matthew 1:1-16	Luke 3:23-28	Comments
Jotham	Matthat	
Ahaz	Jorim	
Hezekiah	Eliezer	
	Joseph	
	Er	
Manasseh	Elmodam	
Amon	Cosam	
Josiah	Addi	
Jeconiah	Melchi	Jeconiah could not be in the line of the virgin who would bear Christ (Jeremiah 22:30).
	Neri	
Shealtiel	Shealtiel	
Zerubbabel	Zerubbabel	He was a leader in the days of Ezra (Ezra 3:8)
	Rhesa	
Abiud	Joannas	
	Judah	
Eliakim	Joseph	
	Semei	
Azor	Mattathiah	
	Maath	
Zadok	Naggai	
	Esli	
Achim	Nahum	
	Amos	
Eliud	Mattathiah	
	Joseph	
Eleazar	Janna	
	Melchi	
Matthan	Levi	
	Matthat	
Jacob	Heli	
Joseph	Mary	Matthew gives the legal line; Luke the actual.
Jesus Christ	Jesus Christ	

1:1: “of Jesus Christ”

This is not a proper name as we understand it in English, but a combination of His two most common names. “Jesus” means “Savior”, and “Christ” means “Anointed One”. The title “Christ” is the Greek equivalent to the Hebrew title “Messiah”. These titles used in conjunction mean “Anointed One Who Is Savior”. “Jesus” is more often used in association with His

humanity, while “Christ” is more often used in association with His divinity. Since Matthew is dealing with the human ancestral right to the throne of David as his first point, the names are placed in this order.

1:1: “the Son of David”

Matthew asserts that this Jesus is the fulfillment of the Davidic covenant. According to God’s covenant with David, Messiah will be “the Son of David”, eternal, and King (1 Chronicles 17:11-14). Isaiah the prophet also alludes to the fact that the Christ Child will enter the world and fulfill the Davidic covenant (Isaiah 9:6-7). Nobody who lived after 70 AD could make a verifiable claim to being a descendant of King David, since the genealogical records of the Hebrews were utterly destroyed at that time. This is more proof that the Christ must already have come, for we could not verify the prophetic fulfillment after that date.

1:1: “the Son of Abraham”

Jesus is also the fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant. The Lord’s promise to Abraham that “in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed” (Genesis 12:3) finds its perfect fulfillment not in Abraham himself, but in Christ. This particular promise is repeated more specifically later in Abraham’s life when God said, “In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed” (Genesis 22:18). Any doubt as to whom these promises referred to is erased in the New Testament by the Apostle Paul, who clearly ascribes their fulfillment to Abraham’s “Seed, who is Christ” (Galatians 3:16).

1:2: “Isaac”, “Jacob”, “Judah and his brothers”

The line of the promised Messiah came through Isaac, and not Ishmael (Genesis 17:18-19). It proceeded through Jacob, who would also be called Israel (Genesis 28:13-14). Of the twelve sons of Jacob, the Seed line would come through Judah (Genesis 49:8-10).

1:3: “Perez and Zerah by Tamar”

Tamar is the first of five women mentioned in Matthew’s account of the genealogy of Christ. She bore twins by her father-in-law Judah, of whom Perez was the first born (Genesis 38:24-30). Let us take note of and be humbled by the fact that God used men and women, Jews and Gentiles, and many people who made mistakes in their lives, for His own purposes.

1:4: “Nahshon” was part of the Exodus generation (Cf. Numbers 1:7).

1:5: “Salmon begot Boaz by Rahab”

Rahab is the second woman mentioned in this genealogy. She was a Gentile harlot who dwelt on the wall in Jericho, whose life was spared because of her service to the Israeli spies in the days of Joshua (Joshua 2:1-21, 6:17-25). She went on marry an Israelite named Salmon, and to give birth to Boaz. Boaz is a principal character in the Book of Ruth. Many see him as an Old Testament type of Christ, although the New Testament does not explicitly identify him as such. In the Book of Ruth, Boaz was the master of the harvest, the kinsman-redeemer, and the bridegroom (Ruth 2:21, 4:9-10).

1:5: “Boaz begot Obed by Ruth”

Ruth is the third woman mentioned in Matthew’s list of the human ancestry of Christ through the legal line of Joseph. She was a Moabitess, a Gentile, who chose to follow and serve the true and living God (Ruth 1:4, 16). Her faithfulness was richly rewarded, for she bore a son who would be in the Messianic line (Ruth 4:13-22).

1:5: “Obed begot Jesse”

Jesse was clearly identified as an ancestor of Jesus in His humanity in the famous Messianic passage of Isaiah 11:1-5. Jesse had eight sons, of whom David was the youngest (1 Samuel 17:12-14).

1:6: “And Jesse begot David the king”

“David the king” is mentioned again, for his office as king is of paramount importance to Matthew the evangelist’s argument. The history of the earthly reign of King David is found in the Scriptures in ‘The Second Book of Samuel’.

1:6: “David the king begot Solomon”

Here we have the divergence of Joseph’s line given by Matthew and Mary’s line given by Luke (Compare with Luke 3:31). David’s children included at least nineteen sons and several daughters (1 Chronicles 3:1-9). The birth of Solomon is recorded in 2 Samuel 12:24-25. Solomon is famous for requesting and receiving great wisdom (1 Kings 3:7-12). He wrote three books of the Bible, as the first verse in each book attests. They are Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Solomon. He was also the human author of at least two Psalms (Psalm 72 and Psalm 127). The Bible asserts that there was no human being either before Solomon or after him with such wisdom (1 Kings 3:12). Only Jesus Christ, who as God Himself was unlike Solomon, has excelled Solomon. Solomon commissioned the building of the temple in Israel, one of the most significant occurrences in the history of Israel (1 Kings 5-8). “But King Solomon loved many foreign women”, and this led him to be spiritually unfaithful later in life (1 Kings 11:1-8).

1:6: “by her who had been the wife of Uriah”

This woman is Bathsheba, or Bathshua (2 Samuel 12:24; 1 Chronicles 3:5). She is the fourth woman mentioned in Matthew’s genealogical record.

1:7: “Rehoboam begot Abijah, and Abijah begot Asa”

Solomon’s son Rehoboam inherited the throne of Israel from his father Solomon. However, he was not fit to be king. Rehoboam sought to use his subjects for his own gain. This is the complete opposite of Jesus, who died for His subjects for our gain (salvation from sin). Rehoboam was so unjust and oppressive in the way that he exercised authority that the kingdom of Israel split in his days, leaving him reigning over Judah only (1 Kings 12). Abijah his son was a wicked king; he was also known as Abijam (2 Chronicles 12:16; 1 Kings 15:1-8). Asa was his successor, and ruled with relative righteousness (1 Kings 15:9-24).

1:8: “Jehoshaphat...Joram...Uzziah”

Jehoshaphat was a godly king (1 Kings 22:41-50), Joram was a wicked king (2 Kings 8:16-24), and Uzziah was a godly king (2 Kings 15:1-7). So it was that half of the kings of Judah were relatively righteous, and the other half of them were relatively wicked. We learn from this that godly lineage is no guarantee of godliness. Neither does ungodly lineage preclude salvation. One needs only to read Ezekiel Chapter 18 to see this principle explained generally, and the history of Israel to see this principle in action specifically.

1:9: “Jotham...Ahaz...Hezekiah”

Jotham was a godly king (2 Kings 15:32-38), Ahaz was a wicked king (2 Kings 16), and Hezekiah was a good king who is perhaps best known for his prayer when faced with the overwhelming force of the Assyrian army (2 Kings 18-20; 2 Chronicles 29-32; Isaiah 36-37).

1:10: “Manasseh...Amon...Josiah”

Manasseh was a very wicked king, so much so that during his reign the patience of God with His people in Judah was exhausted, and a coming national captivity was decreed (2 Kings 21:1-18). Amon his son reigned briefly, and likewise did evil in the sight of the Lord (2 Kings 21:19-26). Josiah led a national revival in Judah according to God’s Word, which allowed the nation to retain its independence for several more years (2 Kings 22-23). We learn from this that the solutions to national problems are spiritual, and not political, economic, or military.

1:11: “Jeconiah”

Now we come to the third major division in Matthew's genealogy. The first began with Abraham, the second began with David, and the third begins with the Jeconiah and the Babylonian captivity. Jeconiah is also called Jehoiachin and Coniah (1 Chronicles 3:16; 2 Kings 24:8-16; Jeremiah 22:28). Jeconiah is vitally important to Matthew's genealogy because his presence in the legal line of Joseph is a line of proof for the virgin birth. Jeremiah had prophesied that Jeconiah would not have a legal heir "sitting on the throne of David, and ruling anymore in Judah" (Jeremiah 22:30). Therefore, his inclusion in the genealogy is proof that Jesus was not a natural son of Joseph. It is no accident that the account of the virgin birth appears in Matthew Chapter 1 immediately after the ancestral line of Joseph. This is precisely the evangelist's point. Jesus Christ was not a natural son of Joseph but the supernatural Son of God.

1:12: "Jeconiah begot Shealtiel"

Here the ancestry of Joseph and the ancestry of Mary intersect. The question arises as to whose son Shealtiel is, however, because Luke says that he is "the son of Neri" (Luke 3:27). The most likely explanation is as follows. Since Jeconiah had gone into captivity to Babylon as a young man, and died there, it is quite possible that he did not father any biological children in Israel. In such a case, the Law required that a close relative raise up an heir for him (Deuteronomy 25:5-10; Ruth 3:9-13). If this be true in this case, then Neri was the biological father of Shealtiel, and Jeconiah was the legal father of Shealtiel.

1:12: "Zerubbabel"

Zerubbabel was an important figure in Jewish history. He led the exiles in the return from captivity back to Jerusalem (Nehemiah 12:1). Zerubbabel was the governor who oversaw the work of rebuilding the temple in Jerusalem that had been destroyed when Babylon captured the city (Ezra 3:8). For this task, he was divinely empowered (Ezra 5:2; Zechariah 4:6-10).

1:13-15:

This records the genealogical record in the silent years of the inter-testamental period, the period between the 'seal of prophecy' around 470 B.C. and the coming onto the scene of human history of John the Baptist and Jesus Christ. As in the other lists of names in Matthew's genealogy, some ancestors are not mentioned. The language "begot" does not demand that one be the father of another, though this can be true. It can also mean that one is the grandfather or great-grandfather of another.

1:16: “Jacob begot Joseph the husband of Mary”

Jacob was the legal paternal grandfather of Jesus in His humanity. Nothing else is known of him. Notice that Joseph is called “the husband of Mary”, and not the ‘father of Jesus’. Mary is the fifth and last woman mentioned in Matthew’s genealogical record. It was to Mary that Jesus was born, a point which Matthew will soon explain.

1:17: “fourteen generations”

This verse records the way in which Matthew has divided his genealogy. There are three sets of “fourteen generations”. The first set is from Abraham to David, which includes the Old Testament patriarchs. The second set is from David to the captivity, and it includes the Old Testament kings. The third set covers the time period from the Babylonian captivity to the coming of Christ. One devotional note worth mentioning here is that the third set has spiritual significance in that captivity to sin always precedes the coming of Jesus Christ into the heart (Cf. Isaiah 61:1-2a; Luke 4:18-19).

1:17: “fourteen generations”

Why fourteen generations, and not some other numerical division? Commentators have offered three suggestions for why this is so. First, the numerical value of the name “David” is fourteen. Second, fourteen is twice the divine number, which is seven. The third, and preferred reason in this commentator’s view, is that this was done as an aid to memorization. It is common in Hebrew literature to use equal divisions as an aid to memorization, and there is no reason to believe that there would be less emphasis upon memorizing New Testament Scripture as there was on memorizing Old Testament Scripture. Bear in mind that Matthew was writing his gospel primarily to a Jewish audience. This view presupposes that Matthew was aware that he was writing his gospel under inspiration of the Holy Spirit, which is backed up by the New Testament Scriptures (John 16:13; Acts 1:8; Ephesians 2:20).

1:18: “Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows...of the Holy Spirit”

Matthew had provided the legal line of Jesus through his earthly ‘step-father’ Joseph. He had proven that Joseph could not have been the biological father of Jesus because Jeconiah was in his ancestral line (See note on 1:11). Now, the evangelist gives the actual genealogy of Jesus Christ with regard to His heavenly origin. God the Holy Spirit would be the Agent through Whom God the Father would effect the Incarnation (Luke 1:35).

1:18: “Mary was betrothed to Joseph”

Mary, a young woman, probably in her teens, was betrothed to Joseph, who was a carpenter by trade (Matthew 13:55). Betrothal was a legally binding oath of engagement, lasting about a year. Unlike today's engagements in American culture, this was considered a legally binding agreement. To be loosed from the oath would require a bill of divorcement. The betrothal also involved payment of a dowry by the groom to the bride's father.

1:18: "before they came together"

This verse implies that Joseph and Mary did have relations after this time. Another verse which teaches this fact is Luke 2:7, in which Jesus is called Mary's "firstborn Son", which implies that she had other sons. In fact, Mary had at least 4 other biological sons, and at least 2 daughters (Mark 6:3). Thus, the Roman Catholic doctrine of "perpetual virginity" is contrary to the biblical facts.

1:18: "she was found with child of the Holy Spirit"

Here we have a clear summary statement affirming the virgin birth of Jesus Christ, which is a core doctrine of the Christian faith. The virgin birth is clearly prophesied of in at least three places in the Old Testament. The first is in Genesis 3:15, in which it is said that "her Seed" will emerge victorious over Satan in the end, although Satan had succeeded in facilitating the introduction of sin into the human race. Since women do not have seed, but men do, the conceptive seed would need to be supernaturally provided. The second is quoted from Isaiah 7:14 in Matthew 1:23, since that Old Testament text was always understood to prophesy the virgin birth of the Messiah. The third is found in Jeremiah 31:22, which says that "the LORD has created a new thing in the earth—A woman shall encompass a man." This prophecy is found in a distinctly Messianic chapter of the Bible, and refers to a unique event accomplished by the Lord through the agency of a woman's womb.

1:19: "Joseph...a just man"

Joseph the husband of Mary was "just" in the sense that his conduct was righteous, and not devoid of kindness or mercy. Here we have a biblical example of what it means to be a godly man.

1:19: "not wanting to make her a public example, was minded to put her away secretly"

Joseph reasonably assumed at this juncture, prior to the angelic revelation, that Mary had been unfaithful, and had relations with another man. Under Old Testament Law, a woman caught in adulterous sin could be stoned to death (Deuteronomy 22:23-24). Under Roman law, this would have been forbidden. However, Joseph could have chosen to subject Mary to public

shame and humiliation. Rather, he determined “to put her away secretly”, which means to quietly divorce her. Let us follow Joseph’s lead in seeking to give others a way out of difficult situations, allowing them to ‘save face’. To behave this way is to quiet anger and minimize conflict as much as we are able (Cf. Proverbs 26:20; Romans 12:18).

1:20: “an angel” visits Joseph

This angel may have been Gabriel, who had visited Mary (Luke 1:26). In Luke’s account we have the record of the angelic visitation to Mary, while in Matthew’s account we have the record of the angelic visitation to Joseph. Joseph receives divine direction, and an exhortation not to be afraid to follow God’s directions in the matter at hand. The virgin birth is stated as fact, and was to be taken as truth through faith. Joseph was well acquainted with the Old Testament prophecies of the virgin birth of the Messiah (See note on Matthew 1:18).

1:21: “Jesus”

Having foretold the birth and the nature of the Son, the angel instructs Joseph as to what name the Child shall be given in His humanity. That name is “Jesus”, which means “Savior”, “God saves”, or “God is Savior”. This describes His purpose. Christ, meaning “Anointed One”, describes His Person, or Identity. The name “Jesus” is a form of the Hebrew “Joshua”. In Hebrew, He is called “Yeshua”. This verse, translated in Hebrew, makes a fascinating word play, which would go something like this: “Jesus will Jesus His people from their sins”. Such word plays are a common literary device in the Hebrew language, and are found throughout the Old Testament. This verse, in fact, is pointed to by some who contend that Matthew originally penned the gospel which bears his name in the Hebrew language (See note in the introduction). Though we cannot be certain of that, this verse does provide proof of a thoroughly Jewish human authorship of the Gospel of Matthew. In addition to these things, this verse answers the question “of Agur the son of Jakeh”, “what is His Son’s name, if you know?” (Proverbs 30:1,4). What the ancients desired to know, we have been blessed to have revealed to us in this present age.

1:22-23: “fulfilled” prophecy

Matthew quotes Isaiah 7:14 here, as having been fulfilled in Jesus Christ. This ordering of events was according to the divine table. “The fullness of the time had come” (Galatians 4:4).

1:23: “Immanuel, which is translated, God with us”

Now another name is applied to Jesus the Christ. He is “Immanuel”, “God with us”. He came down to do His salvation work, according to God’s plan of the ages. The fact that His

name is to be translated indicates that He came to do His work not only for the benefit of the Jews, but also for the benefit of the Gentiles.

1:24: "Joseph...took to him his wife"

Here we have the record of Joseph's obedience to the divine command given through the agency of an angel. Joseph followed through with the legal marriage contract that had been initiated with his betrothal to Mary.

1:25: "and did not know her till she had brought forth her firstborn Son"

This verse is one of many verses in the Bible that refutes the Roman Catholic teaching that Mary was a perpetual virgin. The word "know" refers to intimate relations. The verse implies that Joseph had regular marital relations with his wife Mary subsequent to the birth of Jesus. The term "firstborn" in the Bible can mean pre-eminence (Cf. Colossians 1:18), but in this context it is used in its ordinary sense.

1:25: "And he called His name JESUS"

With the naming of the Child, we have the climax of the chapter. Men could not save themselves. So God sent His Son down to save them. "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life" (John 3:16).