

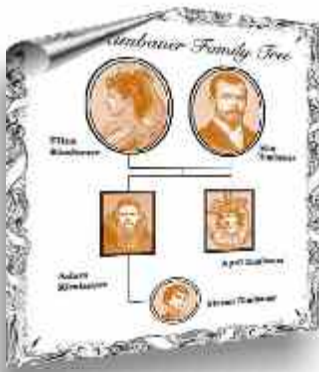
BACK TO SQUARE ONE

study 1

Matthew's Gospel is a fascinating collection of carefully woven stories about Jesus. Much of his material is exactly the same as Mark's gospel - as if Matthew has re-crafted Mark's framework, and added big slabs of Jesus' teaching. Reading Matthew brings you face to face with the words of Jesus!

Matthew's gospel is aimed especially at Jewish readers; in fact, Matthew reminds us that the mission of Jesus was first and foremost to the people of Israel, calling on them one last time to be what they were always meant to be as the "people of God." There are lots of reminders of God's "covenant" - the contract with Israel that began with Abraham, and was confirmed with King David.

MATTHEW 1 - MEET THE FAMILY



Some people love family trees, others find them incredibly dull! Matthew's gospel begins with one - and at first glance it's not very interesting reading. This is one of those bits of the bible it's tempting just to skip over - an endless list of names of obscure people. Without getting bogged down in detail, though, it's interesting to look at some of the most obvious features of the family tree of Jesus.

Verse 1 and verse 17 make a "frame" around the family tree, and both these verses give us a clue about what Matthew sees as the high points in the list. Who are the key people mentioned in verse 1 and 17?

What do you think is significant about them?

What other key historical event does Matthew add in verse 17? Why this is important?

BACKGROUND BRIEFING...

PROMISES, PROMISES

Abraham and David are two of the most important figures in the history of Israel. God made key "covenants" with both of them... and in both cases, promised that from their family line would come huge blessing for the world.

a) Look back to **Genesis 12:1-3**. What does God promise to **Abram** (later *Abraham*) and his family?

In the midst of the curse of sin that had fallen on creation, God chooses the family line of Abraham to carry his blessing to the world. Abraham's son Isaac, and grandson Jacob were the patriarchs of the twelve tribes of Israel... the people of God. **You can read their story in a nutshell in Matthew 1: 2.**

b) What does God promise to **David** and his descendants in **2 Samuel 7:16**?

Abraham's family line will bring blessing to all the nations, and a descendant of David will rule over an eternal kingdom!

Read Matthew 1:1-6 again. Can you see new significance emerging from the family tree?

THE DOWNHILL SLIDE

By the time of King David, Israel was enjoying all the promises of God's blessing. But that's not the end of the story. Matthew has carefully arranged the family tree in three sections, from Abraham to David (verses 2 to 6), then from David to Israel's exile in Babylon (verse 6 to 11), and from the exile to Jesus (verses 12 to 16). Each section has a story to tell.

a) Read from verses 6 to 11. What do all the people listed have in common?

(If you need a clue, just turn back to 1 Kings 16 and 1 Kings 18 and look at the headings!)

Because of the rebellion of Israel's kings which the people willingly followed - the nation was sent into exile. As Jeconiah (also known as Jehoiachin) was dragged off into Babylon, God's promise of blessing to the line of David seemed to have been extinguished. But there's still a glimmer of hope.

b) From the very start, God had warned Israel that their time in the promised land would be short if they refused to honour him as their God. **Read the warnings, (and the one final ray of hope) in Deuteronomy 29:24-30:6.**

- If Israel is exiled, what hope do they have? (Dt 30:2,4)
- What will Israel have to do to bring this about? (Dt 30:1,2)
- According to Dt 30:6, something important will happen. What?

In summary, when a truly repentant "Israel" comes back from the exile, God is ready to circumcise their hearts to enable them to serve Him and honour Him as they always should have.

FROM THE EXILE TO THE CHRIST

Read verses 12 to 16. After the Israelites return from Israel, the rebuilding of the broken nation begins. Leaders like Zerubbabel are hailed as great "messianic hopes." But the results are always disappointing. The book of Nehemiah points out that in spite of their time in exile, the people of Israel haven't learned their lesson. They haven't turned back to God with all the hearts, David's throne is empty, and all Israel's leaders ultimately fail!

Notice the term Matthew uses of Jesus in verse 16 and 17..."Jesus, who is called Christ." The word "Christ" means "anointed one", in other words, the one "anointed to be King." Clearly, Matthew is building us up to meet someone important!

The fact is, Jesus is no ordinary "descendant of David." And that's what Matthew details in the story of the birth of Jesus, the Christ...

SURPRISING WOMEN



It's unusual to find women mentioned in any Jewish family tree, but in this case there are quite a number. Even stranger, most of them are women with questionable reputations! Tamar (v3) was a prostitute, as was Rahab (v5). Bathsheba (referred to as "Uriah's wife" in verse 6) committed adultery with David. Tamar, Rahab and Ruth were not even Jewish! And yet all of them feature in key "turning point stories" in the Old Testament. We're about to meet another questionable "turning point woman."

Read verses 18 to 25.

Engagement in the days of Joseph and Mary was a serious matter. Breaking a betrothal was viewed as divorce.

a) What is Joseph's first reaction when he discovers Mary is pregnant?

b) What persuades him to change his mind?

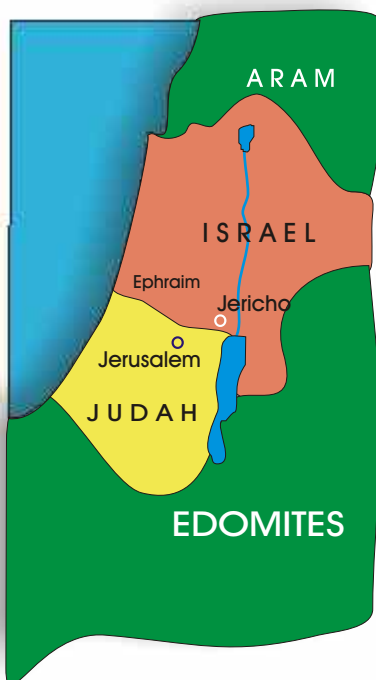
c) Look at the way the angel addresses Joseph in verse 20. What does it bring to mind?

d) What is the significance of the name Joseph is to give the child? (Footnotes may help!) As a first time reader of Matthew's gospel, what questions would this leave in your mind as you continue to read the story?

The name Jesus literally means "*The Lord Saves*." At last, here is the one who is going to save his people Israel from the cycle of sin, death and destruction. Here is the one who is going to fulfil the hopes of Deuteronomy 30!

DIGGING DEEPER

In verse 23, we meet the first of Matthew's direct quotes from the Old Testament - a reference to Isaiah 7, written hundreds of years before the birth of Jesus. In your own time, go back and **read Isaiah 7 and 8**.



Note that the Kingdom of "Israel" has by now split into two parts "Judah" is the area centred around Jerusalem, and is ruled by King Ahaz. Pekah, King of Israel, has formed an ungodly alliance with King Rezin of Aram. (To add to the confusion, "Israel" is sometimes called "Ephraim," after the closest tribal area to the border with Judah.)

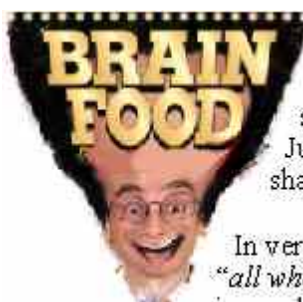
The "house of David" refers to Judah who still cling to God's promise to bless them through David's line.

a) From Isa 7:2, how does the "house of David" react to news of the coming attack?

b) What is God's message to Ahaz through Isaiah? (v4)

c) What proof does God offer to Ahaz in v10-11, and what's his response?

d) When Ahaz refuses to ask for a sign, an angry Isaiah says he's going to get one anyway! According to verse 14, what's the sign?



The virgin will be with child? Immanuel? What's it all about? Well, Jesus, of course... But before we jump to conclusions too soon, it's worth thinking a little deeper. When you read the rest of the chapter, you'll see Isaiah is talking about something more immediate. Before "the child" comes of age, the two kings opposing Judah will be crushed (v16) at the hand of the king of Assyria. And it's going to be close shave for Judah, too! (v18-20)

In verse 15, the "Immanuel child" will eat curds and honey... which verse 22 explains as "*all who remain in the land* will eat curds and honey." That's because the once fertile vineyards and farms are now gone... and all that's left are a couple of cows and goats, and a

few wild bees. “As for the hills once cultivated by the hoe, you will no longer go there for fear of the briars and thorns.” (v25)

So who's the “virgin” Isaiah is talking about? Maybe Isaiah is talking about his own child, born in the next chapter as a “sign.” But here’s another suggestion. Isaiah (and the other prophets) often personified Israel as a “virgin daughter.” In Isaiah 37:22, for example, Isaiah says, “This is the word the Lord has spoken against the King of Assyria... “The *Virgin Daughter of Zion* despises and mocks you. The *Daughter of Jerusalem* tosses her head as you flee.”

The prophet Jeremiah used similar words. 'Let my eyes overflow with tears night and day without ceasing; for my **virgin daughter-my people**- has suffered a grievous wound, a crushing blow.”

If that's what Isaiah has in mind in Isaiah 7, then he's saying that God's virgin daughter Jerusalem is going to give birth - and that instead of God's blessing resting on Jerusalem, it will instead be on her child - the “faithful ones” who continue to trust him. The land may be desolate, but the remaining, faithful Israel will be called Immanuel... “*God with Us.*” King Ahaz and his regime are no longer at the centre of God's purpose.

The birth of Jesus to the virgin Mary, then, is not just the fulfilment of a strange prediction, but an important announcement. It says something important about Jesus...



Micah 4:9-10
makes a very similar point with similar images

e) What?

CONCLUSION

The exile to Babylon may have finished fourteen generations before Jesus... but until now, the “remnant” of Israel hasn't truly turned back to God. There’s still “unfinished business.” Matthew is telling us that in Jesus, the truly faithful “remnant” of Israel has finally arrived in the person of the Christ, the Son of David. He’s going to be the focal point of the new, truly repentant people of God. The question is, who will join him to make up the new Israel? And will the leaders and people of Israel take notice of their Christ?

f) Note again the two names given to Jesus, and their meanings.

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What relevance do you see in these two names for people like us living in the 21st century?

REMEMBER

¹WHEN ALL THESE BLESSINGS AND CURSES I HAVE SET BEFORE YOU COME UPON YOU AND YOU TAKE THEM TO HEART WHEREVER THE LORD YOUR GOD DISPERSES YOU AMONG THE NATIONS, ²AND WHEN YOU AND YOUR CHILDREN RETURN TO THE LORD YOUR GOD AND OBEY HIM WITH ALL YOUR HEART AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL ACCORDING TO EVERYTHING I COMMAND YOU TODAY, ³THEN THE LORD YOUR GOD WILL RESTORE YOUR FORTUNES ⁴AND HAVE COMPASSION ON YOU AND GATHER YOU AGAIN FROM ALL THE NATIONS WHERE HE SCATTERED YOU. ⁵EVEN IF YOU HAVE BEEN BANISHED TO THE MOST DISTANT LAND UNDER THE HEAVENS, FROM THERE THE LORD YOUR GOD WILL GATHER YOU AND BRING YOU BACK. ⁶HE WILL BRING YOU TO THE LAND THAT BELONGED TO YOUR FATHERS, AND YOU WILL TAKE POSSESSION OF IT. HE WILL MAKE YOU MORE PROSPEROUS AND NUMEROUS THAN YOUR FATHERS. ⁷THE LORD YOUR GOD WILL CIRCUMCISE YOUR HEARTS AND THE HEARTS OF YOUR DESCENDANTS, SO THAT YOU MAY LOVE HIM WITH ALL YOUR HEART AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND LIVE.