

MATTHEW HENRY COMMENTARY

MATTHEW CHAPTER 1 Verses 1–17

Concerning this genealogy of our Saviour, observe,

I. The title of it. It is the book (or the account, as the Hebrew word *sepher*, a book, sometimes signifies) of the generation of Jesus Christ, of his ancestors according to the flesh; or, It is the narrative of his birth. It is *Biblos Geneseos*—a book of Genesis. The Old Testament begins with the book of the generation of the world, and it is its glory that it does so; but the glory of the New Testament herein excellet, that it begins with the book of the generation of him that made the world. As God, his outgoings were of old, from everlasting (*Mic. 5:2*), and none can declare that generation; but, as man, he was sent forth in the fulness of time, born of a woman, and it is that generation which is here declared.

II. The principal intention of it. It is not an endless or needless genealogy; it is not a vain-glorious one, as those of great men commonly are. *Stemmata, quid faciunt?*--Of what avail are ancient pedigrees? It is like a pedigree given in evidence, to prove a title, and make out a claim; the design is to prove that our Lord Jesus is the son of David, and the son of Abraham, and therefore of that nation and family out of which the Messiah was to arise. Abraham and David were, in their day, the great trustees of the promise relating to the Messiah. 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 (*Gen. 12:3; 22:18*), and to David that he should descend from him (*2 Sam. 7:12; Ps. 89:3; 132:11*); and therefore, unless it can be proved that Jesus is a son of David, and a son of Abraham, we cannot admit him to be the Messiah. Now this is here proved from the authentic records of the heralds' offices. The Jews were very exact in preserving their pedigrees, and there was a providence in it, for the clearing up of the descent of the Messiah from the fathers; and since his coming that nation is so dispersed and confounded that it is a question whether any person in the world can legally prove himself to be a son of Abraham; however, it is certain that none can prove himself to either a son of Aaron or a son of David, so that the priestly and kingly office must either be given up, as lost for ever, or be lodged in the hands of our Lord Jesus. Christ is here first called the son of David, because under that title he was commonly spoken of, and expected, among the Jews. They who owned him to be the Christ, called him the son of David, *Matt. 15:22; 20:31; 21:15*. Thus, therefore, the evangelist undertakes to make out, that he is not only a son of David, but that son of David on whose shoulders the government was to be; not only a son of Abraham, but that son of Abraham who was to be the father of many nations.

In calling Christ the son of David, and the son of Abraham, he shows that God is faithful to his promise, and will make good every word that he has spoken; and this. 1. Though the performance

be long deferred. When God promised Abraham a son, who should be the great blessing of the world, perhaps he expected it should be his immediate son; but it proved to be one at the distance of forty-two generations, and about 2000 years: so long before can God foretel what shall be done, and so long after, sometimes, does God fulfil what has been promised. Note, Delays of promised mercies, though they exercise our patience, do not weaken God's promise. 2. Though it begin to be despaired of. This son of David, and son of Abraham, who was to be the glory of his Father's house, was born when the seed of Abraham was a despised people, recently become tributary to the Roman yoke, and when the house of David was buried in obscurity; for Christ was to be a root out of a dry ground. Note, God's time for the performance of his promises is when it labours under the greatest improbabilities.

III. The particular series of it, drawn in the direct line from Abraham downward, according to the genealogies recorded in the beginning of the books of Chronicles (as far as those go), and which here we see the use of.

Some particulars we may observe in the genealogy.

1. Among the ancestors of Christ who had brethren, generally he descended from a younger brother; such Abraham himself was, and Jacob, and Judah, and David, and Nathan, and Rhesa; to show that the pre-eminence of Christ came not, as that of earthly princes, from the primogeniture of his ancestors, but from the will of God, who, according to the method of his providence, exalteth them of low degree, and puts more abundant honour upon that part which lacked.

2. Among the sons of Jacob, besides Judah, from whom Shiloh came, notice is here taken of his brethren: Judas and his brethren. No mention is made of Ishmael the son of Abraham, or of Esau the son of Isaac, because they were shut out of the church; whereas all the children of Jacob were taken in, and, though not fathers of Christ, were yet patriarchs of the church (Acts 7:8), and therefore are mentioned in the genealogy, for the encouragement of the twelve tribes that were scattered abroad, intimating to them that they have an interest in Christ, and stand in relation to him as well as Judah.

3. Phares and Zara, the twin-sons of Judah, are likewise both named, though Phares only was Christ's ancestor, for the same reason that the brethren of Judah are taken notice of; and some think because the birth of Phares and Zara had something of an allegory in it. Zara put out his hand first, as the first-born, but, drawing it in, Phares got the birth-right. The Jewish church, like Zara, reached first at the birthright, but through unbelief, withdrawing the hand, the Gentile church, like Phares, broke forth and went away with the birthright; and thus blindness is in part happened unto Israel, till the fulness of the Gentiles become in, and then Zara shall be born—all Israel shall be saved, Rom. 11:25, 26.

4. There are four women, and but four, named in this genealogy; two of them were originally strangers to the commonwealth of Israel, Rachab a Canaanitess, and a harlot besides, and Ruth the Moabitess; for in Jesus Christ there is neither Greek, nor Jew; those that are strangers and foreigners are welcome, in Christ, to the citizenship of the saints. The other two were adulteresses, Tamar and Bathsheba; which was a further mark of humiliation put upon our Lord Jesus, that not only he descended from such, but that is decent from them is particularly remarked in his genealogy, and no veil drawn over it. He took upon him the likeness of sinful flesh (Rom. 8:3), and takes even great sinners, upon their repentance, into the nearest relation to himself. Note, We ought not to upbraid people with the scandals of their ancestors; it is what they cannot help, and has been the lot of the best, even of our Master himself. David's begetting Solomon of her that had been the wife of Urias is taken notice of (says Dr. Whitby) to show that the crime of David, being repented to, was so far from hindering the promise made to him, that it pleased God by this very woman to fulfil it.

5. Though divers kings are here named, yet none is expressly called a king but David (Matt. 1:6), David the king; because with him the covenant of royalty was made, and to him the promise of the kingdom of the Messiah was given, who is therefore said to inherit the throne of his father David, Luke 1:32.

6. In the pedigree of the kings of Judah, between Joram and Ozias (Matt. 1:8), there are three left out, namely, Ahaziah, Joash, and Amaziah; and therefore when it is said, Joram begat Ozias, it is meant, according to the usage of the Hebrew tongue, that Ozias was lineally descended from him, as it is said to Hezekiah that the sons which he should beget should be carried to Babylon, whereas they were removed several generations from him. It was not through mistake or forgetfulness that these three were omitted, but, probably, they were omitted in the genealogical tables that the evangelist consulted, which yet were admitted as authentic. Some give this reason for it:—It being Matthew's design, for the sake of memory, to reduce the number of Christ's ancestors to three fourteens, it was requisite that in this period three should be left out, and none more fit than they who were the immediate progeny of cursed Athaliah, who introduced the idolatry of Ahab into the house of David, for which this brand is set upon the family and the iniquity thus visited to the third and fourth generation. Two of these three were apostates; and such God commonly sets a mark of his displeasure upon in this world: they all three had their heads brought to the grave with blood.

7. Some observe what a mixture there was of good and bad in the succession of these kings; as for instance (Matt. 1:7, 8), wicked Roboam begat wicked Abia; wicked Abia begat good Asa; good Asa begat good Josaphat; good Josaphat begat wicked Joram. Grace does not run in the blood, neither does reigning sin. God's grace is his own, and he gives or withholds it as he pleases.

8. The captivity of Babylon is mentioned as a remarkable period in this line, Matt. 1:11, 12. All things considered, it was a wonder that the Jews were not lost in that captivity, as other nations have been; but this intimates the reason why the streams of that people were kept to run pure through that dead sea, because from them, as concerning the flesh, Christ was to come. Destroy it not, for a blessing is in it, even that blessing of blessings, Christ himself, Isa. 65:8, 9. It was with an eye to him that they were restored, and the desolations of the sanctuary were looked upon with favour for the Lord's sake, Dan. 9:17.

9. Josias is said to beget Jechonias and his brethren (Matt. 1:11); by Jechonias here is meant Jehoiakim, who was the first-born of Josias; but, when it is said (Matt. 1:12) that Jechonias begat Salathiel, that Jechonias was the son of that Jehoiakim who was carried into Babylon, and there begat Salathiel (as Dr. Whitby shows), and, when Jechonias is said to have been written childless (Jer. 22:30), it is explained thus: No man of his seed shall prosper. Salathiel is here said to beget Zorobabel, whereas Salathiel begat Pedaiah, and he begat Zorobabel (1 Chron. 3:19): but, as before, the grandson is often called the son; Pedaiah, it is likely, died in his father's lifetime, and so his son Zorobabel was called the son of Salathiel.

10. The line is brought down, not to Mary the mother of our Lord, but to Joseph the husband of Mary (Matt. 1:16); for the Jews always reckoned their genealogies by the males: yet Mary was of the same tribe and family with Joseph, so that, both by his mother and by his supposed father, he was of the house of David; yet his interest in that dignity is derived by Joseph, to whom really according to the flesh he had no relation, to show that the kingdom of the Messiah is not founded in a natural descent from David.

11. The centre in whom all these lines meet is Jesus, who is called Christ, Matt. 1:16. This is he that was so importunately desired, so impatiently expected, and to whom the patriarchs had an eye when they were so desirous of children, that they might have the honour of coming into the sacred line. Blessed be God, we are not now in such a dark and cloudy state of expectation as they were then in, but see clearly what these prophets and kings saw as through a glass darkly. And we may have, if it be not our own fault, a greater honour than that of which they were so ambitious: for they who do the will of God are in a more honourable relation to Christ than those who were akin to him according to the flesh, Matt. 12:50. Jesus is called Christ, that is, the Anointed, the same with the Hebrew name Messiah. He is called Messiah the Prince (Dan. 9:25), and often God's Anointed (Ps. 2:2). Under this character he was expected: Art thou the Christ—the anointed one? David, the king, was anointed (1 Sam. 16:13); so was Aaron, the priest (Lev. 8:12), and Elisha, the prophet (1 Kgs. 19:16), and Isaiah, the prophet (Isa. 61:1). Christ, being appointed to, and qualified for, all these offices, is therefore called the Anointed—anointed with the oil of gladness above his fellows; and from this name of his, which is as ointment poured forth, all his followers are called Christians, for they also have received the anointing.

Lastly. The general summary of all this genealogy we have, Matt. 1:17; where it is summed up in three fourteens, signalized by remarkable periods. In the first fourteen, we have the family of David rising, and looking forth as the morning; in the second, we have it flourishing in its meridian lustre; in the third, we have it declining and growing less and less, dwindling into the family of a poor carpenter, and then Christ shines forth out of it, the glory of his people Israel.