

MWEWA

NEW TESTAMENT

COMMENTARY

BIBLE

MATTHEW

The Gospel According to St. Matthew

Chapter 1

[1:1] The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.

The purpose of the Gospel of Matthew is in here revealed; it is about the generation or genealogy of Jesus Christ. A genealogy is a line of descent, usually, traced continuously from a named ancestor. In this regard, too, Matthew is emphatically asserting that Jesus was first a Man, and then the Christ (Messiah). And as a Man, Jesus had an earthly ancestry traced from human ancestors. In the case of Jesus Christ, Matthew traces His Jewish generation from David and Abraham, thus, combining a kingly or regal authority (law) through David, with grace, which is by faith, through Abraham.

[1:2] Abraham begat Isaac; and Isaac begat Jacob; and Jacob begat Judas and his brethren;

Abraham, Isaac and Jacob are singled out in the genealogy of Jesus for a number of reasons. Abraham was the first Hebrew person to have believed God purely by faith when he accepted to sacrifice his own son, Isaac, when God demanded of him. Abraham epitomizes the faith regime that would be implemented later on through the dispensation of grace. Abraham was, therefore, God's forerunner who illustrated how God would accept people by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. In Isaac, God delivered the message of love, namely, that just as Abraham sacrificed his only legitimate son, Isaac, God would, in the fullness of time, do the same by sacrificing His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ. And through Jacob, who later became Israel, God engineered a deliverance mechanism that would save not only the Jews but the entire human race from Satan's shackles by His Son, Jesus Christ. Jacob had twelve children, dubbed, the "the twelve tribes of Israel." However, out of the twelve, God chose Judah. This signified the process of grace that God would initiate through His Son. For no apparent reason serve by His unmerited favor, God chose one tribe of Judah out of the twelve brothers. God did choose us in His son for no apparent reason serve that we believed and accepted His Son, Jesus Christ, as our personal Lord and Savior. Jacob's "brethren" are not mentioned by names but are alluded to. This demonstrates that even those who

are not named or were originally part of the commonwealth of Israel have a place on the Lord's table in the dispensation of grace. God will accept everyone who believe and accept His Son's offer of salvation by faith even if they are nameless and unknown.

[1:3] And Judas begat Phares and Zara of Thamar; and Phares begat Esrom; and Esrom begat Aram; [1:4] And Aram begat Aminadab; and Aminadab begat Naasson; and Naasson begat Salmon; [1:5] And Salmon begat Booz of Rachab; and Booz begat Obed of Ruth; and Obed begat Jesse; [1:6] And Jesse begat David the king; and David the king begat Solomon of her [that had been the wife] of Urias;

The Jewish genealogy is traced from the male figures owing to its patrilineal lineage. However, in this passage, we find a sharp diversion from the norm to deliberately include three women, two are named and the other is implied. These three women are Thamar, Ruth and Bathsheba. All of the three have found a place in a male dominated society owing to their special contribution to the line of the Messiah. Tamar was married to Er who was Judah's eldest son.¹ Er died without a son. So, Tamar was given in marriage to Onan,² Er's brother according to Jewish custom. Onan like Er also died without giving Tamar a son. Tamar's father-in-law, Judah promised Tamar that she would be given Shelah as a husband. The promise was not fulfilled. Tamae's revenge was to sleep with her father-in-law, Judah, and she bore him twins – Pharez and Zerah or Zarah – and Perez continued both the Davidic royal line and Messianic lineage of Jesus Christ.³

The reference to "Obed of Ruth" is an acknowledgment of a very significant historic event that grafted Ruth into a male dominated line of ancestry. Ruth, a non-Jew, earns a place in both the Davidic and Messianic lineage, because she accepted the Jewish God to be her God.⁴ When Naomi, Ruth's mother-in-law, demanded that Ruth return to her people and gods, Ruth chose to follow Ruth and to worship her God: "But Ruth replied, 'Don't urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God.'⁵ Eventually, Ruth was married by Obed, a descendant of Judah, and they bore a son called Jesse,⁶ who became King David's father.

The reference to "David the king begat Solomon of her [that had been the wife] of Urias" is, similarly, an acknowledgement of God's sovereignty in the perpetuation of the Davidic and Messianic genealogies. David had committed both murder and adultery but God still exercised His mercy and continued the Messianic genealogy through

¹ Genesis 38:6

² Genesis 38:8

³ Gen. 38:12-30

⁴ Ruth 1:13-16

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ Ruth 4:21–22 ff

Solomon, the child born from David and Bathsheba. The denotation about David “the king” is illustrative of God’s agenda to pattern His future governance on the pattern bequeathed to David.

The events connecting Tamar, Ruth and Bathsheba illustrate, first, that God is sovereign; second, that although the Jews were the chosen people, in principle, all the peoples of the world were chosen as well; third, that God’s grace, and not men’s merit, necessitated the incarnation of God through Jesus Christ in saving humanity from sin and Satan. But fourth, that the genealogy of Jesus Christ includes these four Afro-Asiatic women. Rahab, Tamar, Ruth and Bathsheba occupy a very special place in God’s grace parlance. There is very strong empirical evidence that these women originated from Africa or Asia. David “begat Solomon of her [that had been the wife] of Urias” which is none other than Bathsheba. Africa, thus features prominently in the Messianic genealogy.

[1:7] And Solomon begat Roboam; and Roboam begat Abia; and Abia begat Asa; [1:8] And Asa begat Josaphat; and Josaphat begat Joram; and Joram begat Ozias; [1:9] And Ozias begat Joatham; and Joatham begat Achaz; and Achaz begat Ezekias; [1:10] And Ezekias begat Manasses; and Manasses begat Amon; and Amon begat Josias; [1:11] And Josias begat Jechonias and his brethren, about the time they were carried away to Babylon:

The reference to Solomon and to “Jechonias and his brethren, about the time they were carried away to Babylon” deserve a special commentary. The sins of idolatry and disobedience loom large in this dispensation. Solomon, though wise, had been misled by his many wives to worship idols. The Israelites became idolatrous and disobeyed God and He caused them to be taken into captivity into Babylon. Despite their sin, God still graciously found a way to perpetuate the Messianic lineage. The denotation derived from here is that nothing can hinder God’s plans and purposes, not even sin or foolishness. God’s purpose cannot be thwarted.⁷

[1:12] And after they were brought to Babylon, Jechonias begat Salathiel; and Salathiel begat Zorobabel; [1:13] And Zorobabel begat Abiud; and Abiud begat Eliakim; and Eliakim begat Azor; [1:14] And Azor begat Sadoc; and Sadoc begat Achim; and Achim begat Eliud; [1:15] And Eliud begat Eleazar; and Eleazar begat Matthan; and Matthan begat Jacob; [1:16] And Jacob begat Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ. [1:17] So all the generations from Abraham to David [are] fourteen generations; and from David until the carrying away into Babylon [are] fourteen generations; and from the carrying away into Babylon unto Christ [are] fourteen generations.

⁷ Job 42:2

These verses reveal two exceptional spiritual dimensions not seen in previous generations. First, as noted earlier, the mention of Tamar, Ruth and the implication of Bathsheba were monumental. However, the inclusion of Mary, the mother of Jesus, into the Messianic genealogy is a phenomenon. Jesus Christ does not trace his Messianic genealogy from Mary, rather from his earthly step-father, Joseph. Legally, Jesus is a descendant of David by way of affinity (by marriage) and He belongs to the Messianic generation through Mary by grace. The salutation given to Mary by the angel is very illustrative: “And having come to her, he said, ‘Greetings, you favored with grace. The Lord is with you.’”⁸ Thus, Mary enters the Messianic genealogy by being the Mother of the Messiah through marriage to Joseph and by grace through obedience to God’s will. She is God’s instrument in the incarnation of law into grace. Through Joseph, Jesus Christ legally fulfilled the requirement of the Law into the Messianic generation, but through Mary, He is the author of the new dispensation of grace. The Messiah was not, thus, born by way of law, but by grace, as the scripture says, “Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ [Messiah].”⁹

Second and last, the pattern in which God designed the generations that would bring about the divine change are a phenomenon, too. There are all together 42 generations demarcated by specific individuals and events. The first 14 generations stand on the Abrahamic faith pillar (Abraham to David), the second on Davidic royalty pillar (David to the captivity), and the third on the Messianic royal-priesthood pillar (from captivity to the birth of the Christ). In these pillars, we learn, first, that, no matter how long it might take, God’s promises will always come to pass.¹⁰ Second, everything God says or intends to do, will prove to be reliable.¹¹ Third, from generation to generation, God is His people’s dwelling place.¹² And last, “Nothing can hinder the LORD from saving.”¹³

The combination of first and second above, illustrates that God has a plan for His people,¹⁴ a plan to save them and create a purpose for their future. God is alive in the dispensations of men and He orders every personality and event. When Jesus was born, it was not an historical accident; it had all been planned by God from the beginning. Thus, “But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons.”¹⁵

⁸ Luke 1:28 [Berean Literal Bible]

⁹ Matthew 1:16, *supra*.

¹⁰ See Joshua 21:45 or Jeremiah 1:12

¹¹ 1 Samuel 3:19

¹² Psalm 90:1

¹³ 1 Samuel 14:6

¹⁴ Jeremiah 29:11

¹⁵ Galatians 4:4-5

[1:18] Now the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise: When as his mother Mary was espoused to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Ghost. [1:19] Then Joseph her husband, being a just [man,] and not willing to make her a publick example, was minded to put her away privily. [1:20] But while he thought on these things, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream, saying, Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost. [1:21] And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins. [1:22] Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, [1:23] Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us.[1:24] Then Joseph being raised from sleep did as the angel of the Lord had bidden him, and took unto him his wife:[1:25] And knew her not till she had brought forth her firstborn son: and he called his name JESUS.

The heart of the Gospel (Good News) and the root of the incarnation converge in these verses. First, the author wants readers to see and remember that Jesus was born. Unlike Christ who is the Creator God, Jesus Christ came to earth by way of birth. The humanity of Jesus Christ is of fundamental importance in the redemption story. The loss of paradise (The Garden of Eden) was through human weakness via the temptation of the devil (Satan). Satan, too, understood this principle, that if the new order of grace was to be efficacious, someone who was born of a woman should retrieve the key (authority) back from him, not God. God had no jurisdiction on earth to take back man's authority taken by Satan during the temptation.

The reason is because Satan obtained authority on earth by trickery and not force. Had Satan done the later, God would have intervened divinely to take away the authority He had originally given to man. The announcement was, therefore, very clear, that Jesus Christ was born according to the Bible, humans are born by blood (also known as the will of the flesh or of the will of man)¹⁶ and by the Spirit (or the will of God).¹⁷ So far, humans have come to be made by the act of "creation" as in the case of the first man (Adam) who was made, literally from clay or dust;¹⁸ by using a part of an already created person, to form Eve from Adam's rib;¹⁹ by transmitting a cell from a man into a woman through a procreatory process (sex) or what the Bible refers to as a man knowing a woman;²⁰ and by divine intervention in a woman's womb, as was the case in the birth of Jesus Christ. The angel had revealed to Mary, thus, "The angel

¹⁶ See John 1:13

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Genesis 2:7

¹⁹ Genesis 2:22

²⁰ See Genesis 4:1

answered, “The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you.

So, “the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God.”²¹ In reality, God’s power was transmitted directly into Mary’s womb, not through vaginal penetration, and thus, eliminating the incestuous claim that God had sex with His own creation. And Adam himself gave meaning to the way God’s will in creation might be effected. “And Adam knew Eve his wife; and she conceived, and bare Cain, and said, *I have gotten a man from the Lord.*”²² Accordingly, God’s sovereignty in creation involves all of the mentioned methods and as Adam reveals, he might have known his wife but ultimately conception is getting “a man from the Lord.” Similarly, the four identified ways have not been the only methods of procreation. In our times, artificial insemination has been used in the reproduction process. So, no matter whether a child was conceived by making, forming, knowing, wombing or insemination processes, the resultant human being is God’s creation.

Second, the meanings of betrothing and marriage in the Jewish traditions are explained. It is clear from this passage that Joseph and Mary were marriage in the strictest sense of the tradition. In the Jewish tradition, marriage is a two-part process. It begins with what in the Western culture is called an engagement ceremony. However, this ceremony, which is known as *Kuddushin* in Hebrew is legally binding. *Kuddushin* has no mutual obligations. *Kuddushin* makes the woman the wife of the man, and such a relationship may only be dissolved by death or divorce. From the preceding, it is very clear that Joseph planned to “put away” or divorce Mary secretly, but for the warning by the angel. A conjugal relationship, though, seems to be proscribed during *Kuddushin*. The second part of the marriage tradition is called the *Nisuin*. During *Nisuin*, the man takes the woman (his wife) to his house and thereafter the marriage may be consummated. The reference to Joseph as “a just man,” is illustrative. It may stand to show that a man had discretion in situations where *Kuddushin* had been performed but before *Nisuin* had been consummated, to expose his wife who was found pregnant not with his child. The Law of Moses on the violation of marital privileges was very trite and harsh.²³ A woman who was betrothed to a man and before consummation she was found not to be a virgin (in the case of Mary, she was pregnant), would have earned herself a bad name within the community if her husband brought and proved the allegations in the public square. Joseph here, had taken a huge risk in his thinking of leaving Mary without reprisal. There is a strong suggestion from Deuteronomy 22 that if he had done that, Joseph would be breaking the moral law himself. First, it is evident that *Nisuin* had not been performed, which gave Joseph no legal rights to consummate the marriage, and second, that, even in deciding to take on Mary as his wife (*Nisuin*) after discovering that she was pregnant, Joseph would have violated the law.

²¹ Luke 1:35

²² Genesis 4:1, *ibid.*, emphasis added.

²³ Deuteronomy 22: 13-30

The intervention of an angel is germane to this conversation. The injunction given by the angel is notable: “Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost.” As discussed, Joseph had cause to fear. He would have been considered to have violated Mary’s chastity before consummation was allowed. If he was not a “just man,” his only legal act would have been to expose Mary in order to save himself from the penalty of the law. It is unclear how he would have been punished since he would have concealed a crime, but it is clear that Mary would have been stoned to death.

But it turned out that Mary had conceived of the Holy Spirit. And that baby to be born would be called JESUS – because he would be the people’s savior. Thus, it had to remain a secret between Mary and Joseph how Jesus was conceived. There would be some clues later, such as when the baby (John the Baptist) inside of Elizabeth’s womb leaped with joy: “When Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit,”²⁴ as well as when Simeon revealed that Jesus was the Messiah.²⁵ And verse 33 is instructive, “Jesus’ parents were amazed at what was being said about him.”²⁶ Mary and Joseph could not have been “amazed” if they had not kept the Holy Spirit-begotten pregnancy as a secret. And the reaction of the people when Jesus taught with wisdom and power, cements this fact: “Isn’t this the carpenter’s son? Isn’t his mother’s name Mary, and aren’t his brothers James, Joseph, Simon and Judas?”²⁷ Mary and Joseph must have kept the secret perfectly solid for all the people around them lived to believe that both Mary and Joseph were biological parents of Jesus. We may never know at what ages Jesus’ young brothers – James, Joseph Jr., Simon and Judas – had become aware of the virgin-birth of their elder brother, Jesus. As they grew up together, they didn’t see Jesus in a divine light; to them, he was just like a normal sibling. But what is clear is that had Mary and Joseph not kept this secret, both would have been in trouble with the law. God’s law is above men’s. However, it takes time, character and discernment to understand the workings of God. And if the couple had disclosed this secret before its time, it would not have aborted God’s plan, but it would have made their own lives a little bit uncomfortable.

The name Jesus is a very common name both in Israel and around the world. The Hebrew nomenclature for Jesus is *Yeshua* (or *Y’shua*), which literally means to “deliver” or to “rescue.” However, this particular “Jesus” was also the Christ or *Mašiah* (Messiah), in Hebrew which means “one who is anointed.” And the angel gave a very specific semantic rendering of the name “Jesus,” that it is he who “shall save his people from their sins.” So, this Jesus had a specific mission, to rescue people from sin. This “Jesus” would also be called Emmanuel, “which being interpreted is, God with us.” Therefore, this anointed Jesus is also God, but not a distant God; he is God with us. John puts it

²⁴ Luke 1:41

²⁵ Luke 2:25-35

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Matthew 13:55

this way: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God... The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.”²⁸ Jesus was first in the form of the Word (air), and this Word (air) was, in fact, God himself. And this Word (air) became flesh (was born in human form as Jesus). Thus, his birth was divine; but his existence on earth, was fleshly or natural. And this is the reason why his siblings never suspected him to be God and all the neighbors knew him as the son of the carpenter and Mary.

Joseph was a very wise, moral and patient man. He preserved the human chastity of Mary and did not consummate the marriage until Jesus was born: “And knew her not till she had brought forth her firstborn son: and he called his name JESUS.” Joseph had extended *Kuddushin* until Jesus was born. And when *Nisuin* happened, Jesus was already born. It is the reason why the Bible calls Jesus “Mary’s son.” However, it was Joseph who named Jesus, both in accordance to the instructions of the angel and in keeping with the genealogical requirements (since Jesus had to be within the line of David). Thus, both Joseph and Mary participated in the kneading of the family in which the Savior of the world from sin would be raised up.

²⁸ John 1:1, 14