

The Old Testament contains God's promises that a King in the line of David that would rule over Israel eternally (Isa. 9:7, 11:1; Zech. 9:9) in a time of blessing and prosperity. Matthew wants his Jewish readers to see that Jesus of Nazareth is that King because not only does Jesus descend from king David but His conception and birth were ordained by God and fulfilled many Old Testament prophecies.

Matthew writes his gospel to the Jews and focuses on demonstrating that Jesus Christ is the king of the Jews, the long awaited Messiah that was promised in the OT scriptures. Toward that end, Matthew begins presenting Jesus' credentials as king in the very first chapter by tracing the lineage of Jesus from Abraham, the father of the Jews, passing through king David and finishing with Joseph, the husband of Mary, who gave birth to Jesus. Matthew understands the importance that his Jewish readers place on bloodline and begins demonstrating that Jesus meets the qualifications needed to be the Messiah because He is descended from both Abraham and David, two of the most important people in the history of Israel.

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

“The book of the generation [origin] of Jesus [Jehovah is salvation] Christ [anointed one]” – Some commentators suggest that this statement is the true title of this gospel given by its author, Matthew, for it certainly describes the verses that follow and perhaps even the entire book. The Greek word for “generation” is “Genesis” which of course means “origin,” although some Bible versions translate this word as “genealogy.” Matthew will describe the earthly origins of Jesus Christ. The name “Jesus” is the Greek form of the OT name “Joshua,” which means “Jehovah is salvation” (a fitting name for the Savior of the world). The word “Christ” means “anointed one” and is the Greek equivalent of the OT word “Messiah.”

“the son of David” – In vs. 6-16, Matthew traces the family line from King David forward until it comes to Joseph, the husband of Mary, who gave birth to Jesus. Thus Matthew shows that Jesus is qualified to be king because He is descended from David and is in line for the throne. God promised David that he would establish a kingdom with a descendant of David on the throne forever (2 Sam. 7:16 *“And thine house and thy kingdom shall be established for ever before thee: thy throne shall be established for ever.”*). This promise will be fulfilled by Jesus Christ when He returns and establishes His kingdom on earth for a thousand years.

“the son of Abraham” – Beginning in v. 2, Matthew shows that Jesus' ancestry traces all the way back to Abraham, the father of the Jewish people. Not only is Jesus qualified to be a king, but he is also qualified to be the king of the Jews since He is descended from Abraham. God made a covenant of promises with Abraham and his seed and the Apostle Paul demonstrates that the promised seed is actually Jesus Christ in Gal. 3:16: *“Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ.”* As Paul describes in Gal. 3, those who come to Christ in faith will also benefit from the promises and covenants that God made with Abraham.

Verses 2-16: Matthew makes the claim in v. 1 that Jesus Christ is the son of David and the son of Abraham. In vs. 2-16 he proves it by listing the ancestry from Abraham through David to Jesus. However, this genealogy does have some omissions, perhaps in order to be able to break it into three groups of fourteen as stated in v. 17. Also, Matthew's genealogy does not exactly match the one that Luke presents in his gospel (Luke 3:23-38). It is generally accepted that Matthew presents Jesus' legal ancestry on Joseph's side while Luke presents Jesus' bloodline ancestry on Mary's side.

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.

It is not clear why Matthew breaks the genealogy of Jesus into three groups of fourteen. It was a Jewish practice to break things down into equal sized groups and perhaps Matthew is adhering to that practice. Commentators also suggest that the three groups of fourteen may be for the sake of memorization.

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. 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.

“Now the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise [in this manner]” – Matthew now moves from the ancestry of Jesus to the circumstances involving His birth, essentially saying “The birth of Jesus Christ was this way.”

“When as his mother Mary was espoused to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Ghost” – In the Jewish culture of the time, being espoused was as binding as a marriage and the couple were legally considered to be husband and wife even though the wedding day had not yet arrived and thus had not physically consummated the marriage. A divorce was required to terminate a betrothal even before the physical consummation of the marriage. Joseph and Mary were still in this betrothal stage when it became obvious that she was pregnant. Matthew points out that the child was the product of the Holy Ghost but apparently Joseph was not yet aware of how she had become pregnant or possibly was not convinced by Mary's explanation.

“Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not willing to make her a publick example, was minded to put her away privily” – Joseph was within his rights to divorce Mary on the grounds that she had cheated on him and gotten pregnant. However, Joseph was a good man and still loved Mary. Although he likely felt he had no choice but to divorce her (“to put her away”), he did not want to shame her publicly and was planning to divorce her in private. Legally, he could have had her stoned for adultery but Joseph wanted to be merciful and spare her life in a private divorce.

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. ²¹ And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins.

“But while he thought on these things” – Joseph either had not made his final decision on what to do or he had not yet acted upon it. **“behold, the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream”** – The Lord intervenes in a dream to prevent Joseph from deciding to divorce Mary.

“saying, Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife” – The Lord establishes the context that Joseph is descended from king David. He would have been in line for the throne, as would his Son, if the Jews had not been in subjection to Rome. The Lord informs Joseph that he does not have to fear that Mary has been unfaithful to him because the circumstances are not what they appear to be.

“for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost” – The conception had not come about because Mary had been unfaithful but because of the influence of the Holy Ghost. Luke’s gospel says that Mary was overshadowed by the power of God: **Luke 1:34-35** *“³⁴ Then said Mary unto the angel, How shall this be, seeing I know not a man? ³⁵ And the angel answered and said unto her, The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God.”*

“And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS” – Mary is going to have a son and because Joseph is a descendant of David this son will be of royal descent. Joseph is also given the name for this son: JESUS. As previously stated, “Jesus” is the Greek form of the Hebrew name “Joshua” and means “Jehovah is salvation.” When the angel Gabriel was sent to Mary to inform her that she would bear a Son, she was also told that his name should be JESUS (Luke 1:31).

“for he shall save his people from their sins” – The appropriateness of the name is apparent because the Lord says that Jesus will “save his people from their sins.” The phrase “his people” most likely refers primarily to Israel since Jesus Himself said that He was sent to Israel (**Matt. 15:24** *“But he answered and said, I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel.”*). However, “his people” could also include Gentiles who would eventually believe (**John 10:16** *“And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd.”*). Israel has had “saviors” in their history that God raised up to give the Jews temporary relief from their oppressors and lead them back to serving the LORD (see the book of Judges for a sampling). Jesus, however, is different in that He will save his people from their sins, which is something these other “saviors” were never able to do. Jesus will bring an eternal spiritual deliverance where the previous saviors could only bring a temporary and limited physical deliverance.

²² Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, 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.

Matthew frequently quotes OT scriptures and here he points out that the events he has just described are in fulfillment of OT prophecy. He quotes Isa. 7:14 and says that the circumstances surrounding the conception of Jesus and His birth were predicted and orchestrated by God. He also supplies us with the interpretation of the name “Emmanuel” which means “God with us.” God has come to be with us in human flesh in order that He could be a suitable high priest and sacrifice for us (**Heb. 2:17** (talking about Jesus Christ) *“Wherefore in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people.”*). Matthew wants his Jewish readers to recognize the deity of Jesus Christ and that He is the Messiah King that the LORD promised to send to save and rule over Israel.

²⁴ Then Joseph being raised from sleep did as the angel of the Lord had bidden him, and took unto him his wife: ²⁵ And knew her not till she had brought forth her firstborn son: and he called his name JESUS.

“Then Joseph being raised from sleep” – Apparently Joseph woke up immediately after the dream. It is unclear how much sleep Joseph had gotten before the dream.

“did as the angel of the Lord had bidden him, and took unto him his wife” – It appears that as soon as he awoke, Joseph began making/completing his preparations for the wedding and then proceeded have the wedding. He wasted no time in proceeding now that the one hindrance to the marriage had been removed.

“And knew her not till she had brought forth her firstborn son” – Out of respect for her pregnancy and the holiness of the child to be born, the couple did not engage in normal marital relations until after Jesus had been born. The Catholic Church believes that Mary remained a virgin her whole life, but there is no evidence of this. This verse implies that Joseph and Mary eventually do have sexual relations and there are references to other children of Mary (Luke 8:19-20; John 7:3-5). In fact, the brothers of Jesus are named in Matt. 13:55-56 and mention is made of His having sisters as well. So it appears that Mary did have other children after Jesus was born.

“and he called his name JESUS” – Although Mary had already been instructed on what to name the child (Luke 1:31), Joseph took the lead as head of the house and named the child JESUS as he had also been instructed.