

# Matthew 1

## *The Genealogy and Birth of Jesus Christ*

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### Overview

Matthew 1 opens the New Testament and serves as a bridge between the Old and New Covenants. It contains two distinct sections: a genealogy establishing the legal and royal lineage of Jesus Christ (vv. 1-17), and a narrative of the circumstances surrounding His miraculous birth (vv. 18-25). Together, these sections answer two foundational questions: Who is Jesus? and How did He come into the world?

This chapter is among the most theologically dense opening chapters in all of Scripture. Matthew writes primarily to a Jewish audience, and every name in the genealogy, every fulfilled prophecy, and every detail of the birth account carries profound meaning rooted in the promises of the Old Testament.

#### **Approach to This Study**

We approach Matthew 1 as historical and factual narrative. The genealogy lists real ancestors of a real person born in real history. The virgin birth is treated as a literal, biological miracle — not a metaphor. The angel's appearance to Joseph is taken as an actual event. Our interpretive lens is: unless the text uses obvious poetic or symbolic language, we accept the plain, literal meaning.

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## Part 1: The Genealogy of Jesus Christ (vv. 1-17)

### The Opening Verse — A Title with Weight

**Matthew 1:1 (NKJV)** *"The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham."*

This single verse is not merely a title — it is a declaration. Matthew uses the Greek word *biblos geneseos*, which echoes the very language of Genesis 2:4 and 5:1 in the Septuagint (the Greek Old Testament). Matthew is signaling to his Jewish readers: this is a new beginning, as significant as the creation account.

Two titles are applied to Jesus immediately:

- Son of David — connecting Jesus to the royal covenant God made with David in 2 Samuel 7:12-16, promising an eternal kingdom from his line.
- Son of Abraham — connecting Jesus to the Abrahamic covenant (Genesis 12:1-3, 22:18), in which all nations would be blessed through Abraham's seed.

#### **Key Observation**

Matthew lists "Son of David" before "Son of Abraham," even though Abraham came first historically. This likely reflects Matthew's primary purpose: establishing Jesus as the rightful Messianic King of Israel, the fulfillment of David's throne.

## **The Structure of the Genealogy**

**Matthew 1:17 (ESV)** *"So all the generations from Abraham to David were fourteen generations, and from David to the deportation to Babylon fourteen generations, and from the deportation to Babylon to the Christ fourteen generations."*

Matthew organizes the genealogy into three groups of fourteen generations. This is a literary and mnemonic device — in Hebrew numerology, the name David (D-V-D) has a numerical value of 14. Matthew is using this structure to hammer home the point that all of Israel's history has been moving toward this moment and this person.

The three periods also correspond to three great eras in Israel's history:

- Patriarchal to Monarchical: Abraham to David — the formation of the nation and the establishment of the kingdom.

- Monarchical to Exile: David to the Babylonian captivity — the height and fall of the kingdom.
- Exile to Messiah: The captivity to Christ — the long waiting, now ended.

It should be noted that Matthew likely omitted several names in the genealogy (comparing with 1 Chronicles), which was a common and accepted practice in Hebrew genealogical records. The purpose was not an exhaustive list, but a structured theological argument.

### **Notable Figures in the Genealogy**

Matthew includes five women in the genealogy — unusual in Jewish practice — and each one carries a story of grace and sovereignty:

- Tamar (v. 3) — a Canaanite woman who was wronged by Judah's sons and acted unconventionally to secure the covenant line (Genesis 38).
- Rahab (v. 5) — a Gentile prostitute from Jericho who hid the Israelite spies and is listed in the Hall of Faith (Joshua 2; Hebrews 11:31).
- Ruth (v. 5) — a Moabite widow whose loyalty to Naomi and to Israel's God made her an ancestor of King David (Ruth 1-4).
- "The wife of Uriah" (v. 6) — Bathsheba is pointedly not named, but referenced by her connection to Uriah, a reminder of David's grievous sin and God's mercy.
- Mary (v. 16) — distinguished from all others. She is not said to have begotten Jesus, but that "of whom was born Jesus." The grammar shifts deliberately.

These women remind us that the genealogy of the Messiah is not a record of perfect people, but of a sovereign God who weaves redemption through failure, foreigners, and faith.

### **Discussion Questions — Part 1**

1. Why do you think Matthew begins with a genealogy? What would this have communicated to his original Jewish audience?

2. What does it mean for Jesus to be both "Son of David" and "Son of Abraham"? How do these titles connect to Old Testament promises?
  3. Why might God have chosen to include sinners and Gentiles in the Messianic line? What does this say about the nature of God's grace?
  4. How does the three-part structure of the genealogy (14-14-14) show intentional design rather than random history?
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## Part 2: The Birth of Jesus Christ (vv. 18-25)

### The Virgin Conception

**Matthew 1:18 (NASB)** *"Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: when His mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child by the Holy Spirit."*

Matthew states this plainly as historical fact: Mary was pregnant before she and Joseph had come together physically, and the source of the pregnancy was the Holy Spirit. This is not metaphorical. Matthew is narrating a biological miracle — the conception of a child without a human father.

The Jewish betrothal (erusin) at this time was a formal, legally binding contract, more serious than a modern engagement. Breaking it required a certificate of divorce. To be found pregnant during betrothal would have been legally and socially catastrophic.

### Joseph's Dilemma and Character

**Matthew 1:19 (ESV)** *"And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly."*

This verse reveals the character of Joseph. He is described as a just (righteous) man. Under the Law, a suspected adulteress could be publicly accused and shamed (Deuteronomy 22:23-24). Joseph had the legal right to do this. Instead, his

righteousness expressed itself in mercy: he chose the quieter, more compassionate option of a private divorce.

This tells us something important: Joseph loved Mary even in his confusion and grief. He did not yet understand the miracle. He was protecting her from the full severity of public judgment while intending to act within the bounds of the Law.

#### **A Note on Joseph**

Joseph is one of Scripture's great quiet heroes. He appears in Matthew's narrative as a man who obeys God without prolonged argument, who protects those entrusted to him, and whose righteousness is demonstrated not in grand speeches but in private decisions of mercy.

### **The Angel Appears to Joseph**

**Matthew 1:20-21 (NKJV)** *"But while he thought about these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take to you Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins.""*

The angel addresses Joseph specifically as "son of David" — reminding him of his place in the Messianic lineage and why his role matters. Joseph's legal adoption of Jesus would formally place Jesus in David's royal line.

The name Jesus (Yeshua in Hebrew) means "the LORD saves" or "salvation." The angel does not simply give the name; he explains its meaning. This child will save His people from their sins — not from Roman occupation, not from poverty, but from sin. This is a direct statement of purpose and mission at the moment of announcement.

#### **Cross-Reference**

The name Yeshua/Joshua appears throughout the Old Testament as a name connected to God's deliverance. The original Joshua led Israel into the Promised Land. Jesus — the greater Joshua — leads His people into eternal life. The name is not accidental.

## Prophecy Fulfilled

**Matthew 1:22-23 (ESV)** *"All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: "Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel" (which means, God with us)."*

Matthew explicitly identifies this as the fulfillment of Isaiah 7:14. The Hebrew word used by Isaiah is *almah*, meaning a young woman of marriageable age — and in the Septuagint, this was translated as *parthenos*, the Greek word for virgin. Matthew applies the prophecy in its fullest sense: this is indeed a virgin birth, not merely a young woman giving birth.

The name Immanuel — God with us — is one of the most significant theological statements in the entire chapter. Jesus is not merely a great teacher or prophet sent from God. He is, in His very person, God dwelling among humanity. This name anticipates what John will state explicitly in John 1:14: "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us."

Matthew does not say Mary and Joseph called the child "Immanuel" — they named him Jesus. Rather, Matthew is saying that the meaning of this child's existence is captured in the word Immanuel. The name Jesus and the title Immanuel interpret each other: the One who saves His people from their sins does so because He is God with us.

## Joseph's Obedience

**Matthew 1:24-25 (NKJV)** *"Then Joseph, being aroused from sleep, did as the angel of the Lord commanded him and took to him his wife, and did not know her till she had brought forth her firstborn Son. And he called His name Jesus."*

Joseph woke and obeyed immediately and completely. He took Mary as his wife, preserved her purity until after the birth, and gave the child the divinely appointed name. The phrase "did not know her till" is significant — it implies that after the birth of Jesus, Joseph and Mary had a normal marital relationship, which aligns

with other references to Jesus's brothers and sisters elsewhere in the Gospels (Matthew 12:46; Mark 6:3).

Joseph's final act in this chapter — naming the child — is the legal act of adoption. By naming Jesus, Joseph formally claimed Him as his son, inserting Him into the Davidic line. It is a small act in the text, but a theologically momentous one.

## Discussion Questions — Part 2

5. What does Joseph's response to Mary's pregnancy reveal about his character? How does his example challenge us?
6. Why is the virgin birth important? What would be lost theologically if Jesus had a biological human father?
7. The angel says Jesus "will save His people from their sins." Why is this the central purpose stated — not political liberation or healing?
8. How does the name Immanuel ("God with us") change how you understand Jesus's identity? How should this affect daily life for believers?
9. Joseph obeyed immediately when God spoke through the angel. Are there areas of your life where God has spoken clearly but you have delayed obedience?

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## Summary and Application

Matthew 1 is not a dry list of names followed by a birth announcement. It is a carefully constructed theological argument: Jesus of Nazareth is the fulfillment of everything God promised to Abraham and David. He enters the world in a miraculous way that fulfills ancient prophecy. He is given a name that declares His mission. And He is, in His very person, God walking among us.

The genealogy reminds us that God is patient and purposeful — working across centuries, through broken people, toward His appointed moment. The birth narrative reminds us that God acts decisively, speaks clearly, and asks for obedient trust even when circumstances are confusing.

### **For Personal Reflection**

Matthew begins his Gospel with the question of identity: Who is Jesus? Before we can follow Jesus, we must know who He is. Take time this week to meditate on the name Immanuel — God with us. What would it mean to live today with a genuine awareness that the same God who came in human flesh is present with you now?

### **Key Verses to Memorize**

**Matthew 1:21 (ESV)** *"She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins."*

**Matthew 1:23 (ESV)** *"Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel (which means, God with us)."*

### **Further Old Testament Cross-References**

- The Abrahamic Covenant: Genesis 12:1-3; 22:15-18
- The Davidic Covenant: 2 Samuel 7:8-16; Psalm 89:3-4
- The Virgin Birth Prophecy: Isaiah 7:14
- The Messiah as God with Us: Isaiah 9:6-7
- The Meaning of the Name Joshua/Jesus: Numbers 13:16; Joshua 1:1
- Rahab and the Scarlet Thread: Joshua 2; 6:17-25
- Ruth and Boaz as a Picture of Redemption: Ruth 4:13-22

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*Next Study: Matthew 2 — The Visit of the Magi and the Flight to Egypt*