

A photograph of a sunset over a mountain range. The sun is low on the horizon, casting a bright glow and long shadows across the landscape. The sky is filled with soft, golden clouds.

CHARLES R. SWINDOLL

SWINDOLL'S  
LIVING  
INSIGHTS

NEW TESTAMENT COMMENTARY

**MATTHEW 1-15**



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*Tyndale House Publishers  
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# CONTENTS

<b>Author's Preface</b> .....	v
<b>The Strong's Numbering System</b> .....	vii
<b>Introduction</b> .....	3
<b>Announcement and Arrival of the King (Matthew 1:1-4:25)</b> .....	11
The Genesis of Jesus (Matthew 1:1-17) .....	12
Standing in Joseph's Sandals (Matthew 1:18-25) .....	22
Wise Men and Wicked Men (Matthew 2:1-12) .....	32
Destination-Driven Dreams (Matthew 2:13-23) .....	39
Strange Preacher, Strong Proclamation (Matthew 3:1-17) .....	51
Acing the Devil's Tests (Matthew 4:1-11) .....	61
Where and How It All Began (Matthew 4:12-25) .....	71
<b>Proclamation and Reception of the King (Matthew 5:1-15:39)</b> .....	82
Ingredients for Lasting and Contagious Joy (Matthew 5:1-16) .....	84
Real Righteousness (Matthew 5:17-48) .....	94
Piety and Prayer minus the Pizzazz (Matthew 6:1-18) .....	107
The Troubling Temptations of the World's Wares (Matthew 6:19-34) .....	116
Powerful Principles of the Golden Rule (Matthew 7:1-12) .....	123
Secrets of an Unshakable Life (Matthew 7:13-29) .....	132
Snapshots of Power Near and Far (Matthew 8:1-17) .....	140
How Not to Follow Jesus (Matthew 8:18-27) .....	150
Dealing with Demons (Matthew 8:28-34) .....	157
Critics on Patrol (Matthew 9:1-17) .....	165
Nonstop Daze of Miracles (Matthew 9:18-38) .....	175
Listen Well, Think Right, Talk Straight, Travel Light (Matthew 10:1-15) .....	184
Sheep among Wolves: What to Expect (Matthew 10:16-31) .....	192
A Serious Checklist for Disciples (Matthew 10:32-42) .....	200
The Juxtaposing of Jesus and John (Matthew 11:1-19) .....	208
Bad for the Wicked . . . Good for the Weary (Matthew 11:20-30) .....	218
Legalists vs. Lord of the Sabbath (Matthew 12:1-14) .....	229
God's Servant or Satan's Pawn? (Matthew 12:15-30) .....	240
Severe Warnings Everyone Must Remember (Matthew 12:31-37) .....	248
Miraculous Signs, Evil Spirits, Startling Statements (Matthew 12:38-50) .....	255
A Story for the Hard of Listening (Matthew 13:1-23) .....	263
A World Full of Wheat, Weeds, and Mustard Seeds (Matthew 13:24-43) .....	277
Got It? Good! (Matthew 13:44-58) .....	285
The Strangest of All Gifts (Matthew 14:1-13) .....	296
Eating a Miracle for Dinner (Matthew 14:14-21) .....	304
What Brings Us to Our Knees? (Matthew 14:22-36) .....	310
Spiritual Blind Spots (Matthew 15:1-20) .....	319
Compassion without Bounds (Matthew 15:21-39) .....	327

<b>Endnotes</b> .....	339
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## **List of Features and Images**

Timeline of Matthew .....	2
Map of Jesus' Life and Ministry .....	2
The Gospel of Matthew at a Glance .....	4
Quick Facts on Matthew .....	6
Comparison of the Four Gospels .....	7
Did Matthew Originally Write an Aramaic Gospel? .....	8
The Three Dramatic Movements of Matthew's Genealogy .....	20
Betrothal in the First Century .....	25
Fulfillment of Isaiah 7:14 .....	29
Herod the Great .....	35
Gold, Frankincense, and Myrrh .....	38
Excursus: The Meaning of "Fulfill" in Matthew .....	47
Map: Israel after Herod the Great .....	49
The Pharisees and Sadducees .....	56
Winnowing .....	58
The Judean Wilderness .....	64
The Southwestern Corner of the Temple .....	66
Excursus: Could Jesus Have Sinned? .....	67
Map: The Sea of Galilee and the Surrounding Area .....	73
Capernaum .....	74
Map: The Spread of Jesus' Fame .....	79
The Mount of Beatitudes .....	87
Biblical Passages on Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage .....	101
Seven Benefits of Fasting .....	115
Dogs and Pigs .....	129
Excursus: The "Two Ways" .....	135
Leprosy .....	145
Peter's Home .....	147
Map: From Capernaum to Gadara .....	159
Excursus: Demonology 101 .....	161
Tax Collectors .....	170
Wineskin .....	173
<i>Tsitsiyōt</i> .....	179
Miracles in History ... and Today .....	181
The Twelve .....	186
Were Matthew and James Brothers? .....	187
Carrying Your Cross .....	205
Excursus: Prophetic Telescoping .....	213
Map: Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum .....	220
The Yoke .....	224
Excursus: God vs. Satan? .....	247
Excursus: Three Days and Three Nights .....	259
Cove of the Sower .....	269
Parables .....	270
Wheat and Tares .....	280
Mustard Seeds and Mustard Plants .....	282
Nazareth .....	292
The Twisted Relationships of Herodias .....	299
<i>Kophinos</i> (Wicker Basket) .....	309
Map: Feeding the Five Thousand and Walking on Water .....	313
Map: Tyre, Sidon, and Capernaum .....	330
Excursus: A Brief Glimpse of the Mystery .....	333

## AUTHOR'S PREFACE

For more than sixty years I have loved the Bible. It was that love for the Scriptures, mixed with a clear call into the gospel ministry during my tour of duty in the Marine Corps, that resulted in my going to Dallas Theological Seminary to prepare for a lifetime of ministry. During those four great years I had the privilege of studying under outstanding men of God, who also loved God's Word. They not only held the inerrant Word of God in high esteem, they taught it carefully, preached it passionately, and modeled it consistently. A week never passes without my giving thanks to God for the grand heritage that has been mine to claim! I am forever indebted to those fine theologians and mentors, who cultivated in me a strong commitment to the understanding, exposition, and application of God's truth.

For more than fifty years I have been engaged in doing just that—and *how I love it!* I confess without hesitation that I am addicted to the examination and the proclamation of the Scriptures. Because of this, books have played a major role in my life for as long as I have been in ministry—especially those volumes that explain the truths and enhance my understanding of what God has written. Through these many years I have collected a large personal library, which has proven invaluable as I have sought to remain a faithful student of the Bible. To the end of my days, my major goal in life is to communicate the Word with accuracy, insight, clarity, and practicality. Without informative and reliable books to turn to, I would have “run dry” decades ago.

Among my favorite and most well-worn volumes are those that have enabled me to get a better grasp of the biblical text. Like most expositors, I am forever searching for literary tools that I can use to hone my gifts and sharpen my skills. For me, that means finding resources that make the complicated simple and easy to understand, that offer insightful comments and word pictures that enable me to see the relevance of sacred truth in light of my twenty-first-century world, and that drive those truths home to my heart in ways I do not easily forget. When I come across such books, they wind up in my hands as I devour them and then place them in my library for further reference . . . and, believe me, I often return to them. What a relief it is to have these resources to turn to when I lack fresh insight, or when I need just the right story or illustration, or when I get stuck in the tangled text and cannot find my way out. For the serious expositor, a library is essential. As a mentor of mine once said, “Where else can you have ten thousand professors at your fingertips?”

In recent years I have discovered there are not nearly enough resources like those I just described. It was such a discovery that prompted me to consider

becoming a part of the answer instead of lamenting the problem. But the solution would result in a huge undertaking. A writing project that covers all of the books and letters of the New Testament seemed overwhelming and intimidating. A rush of relief came when I realized that during the past fifty-plus years I've taught and preached through most of the New Testament. In my files were folders filled with notes from those messages that were just lying there, waiting to be brought out of hiding, given a fresh and relevant touch in light of today's needs, and applied to fit into the lives of men and women who long for a fresh word from the Lord. *That did it!* I began to work on plans to turn all of those notes into this commentary on the New Testament.

I must express my gratitude to Mike Svigel for his tireless and devoted efforts, serving as my hands-on, day-to-day editor. He has done superb work as we have walked our way through the verses and chapters of all twenty-seven New Testament books. It has been a pleasure to see how he has taken my original material and helped me shape it into a style that remains true to the text of the Scriptures, at the same time interestingly and creatively developed, and all the while allowing my voice to come through in a natural and easy-to-read manner.

I need to add sincere words of appreciation to the congregations I have served in various parts of these United States for more than five decades. It has been my good fortune to be the recipient of their love, support, encouragement, patience, and frequent words of affirmation as I have fulfilled my calling to stand and deliver God's message year after year. The sheep from all those flocks have endeared themselves to this shepherd in more ways than I can put into words . . . and none more than those I currently serve with delight at Stonebriar Community Church in Frisco, Texas.

Finally, I must thank my wife, Cynthia, for her understanding of my addiction to studying, to preaching, and to writing. Never has she discouraged me from staying at it. Never has she failed to urge me in the pursuit of doing my very best. On the contrary, her affectionate support personally, and her own commitment to excellence in leading *Insight for Living* for more than three and a half decades, have combined to keep me faithful to my calling "in season and out of season." Without her devotion to me and apart from our mutual partnership throughout our lifetime of ministry together, *Swindoll's Living Insights* would never have been undertaken.

I am grateful that it has now found its way into your hands and, ultimately, onto the shelves of your library. My continued hope and prayer is that you will find these volumes helpful in your own study and personal application of the Bible. May they help you come to realize, as I have over these many years, that God's Word is as timeless as it is true.

The grass withers, the flower fades,  
But the word of our God stands forever. (Isa. 40:8, NASB)

*Chuck Swindoll*  
Frisco, Texas

# THE STRONG'S NUMBERING SYSTEM

Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary uses the Strong's word-study numbering system to give both newer and more advanced Bible students alike quicker, more convenient access to helpful original-language tools (e.g., concordances, lexicons, and theological dictionaries). The Strong's numbering system, made popular by the *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*, is used with the majority of biblical Greek and Hebrew reference works. Those who are unfamiliar with the ancient Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek alphabets can quickly find information on a given word by looking up the appropriate index number. Advanced students will find the system helpful because it allows them to quickly find the lexical form of obscure conjugations and inflections.

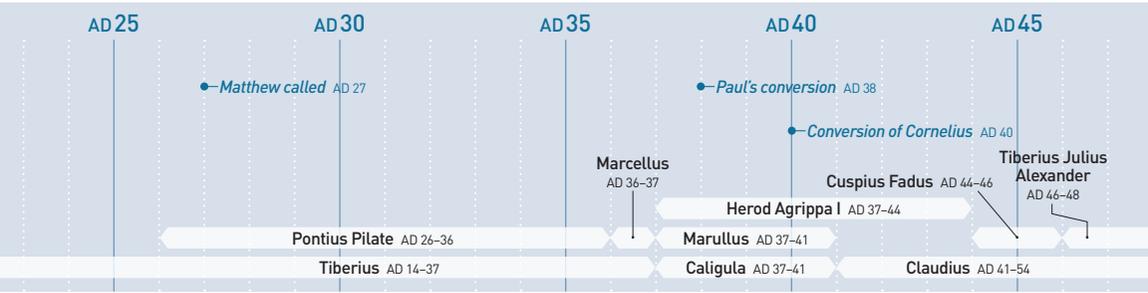
When a Greek word is mentioned in the text, the Strong's number is included in square brackets after the Greek word. So in the example of the Greek word *agapē* [26], "love," the number is used with Greek tools keyed to the Strong's system.

On occasion, a Hebrew word is mentioned in the text. The Strong's Hebrew numbers are completely separate from the Greek numbers, so Hebrew numbers are prefixed with a letter "H." So, for example, the Hebrew word *kapporet* [H3727], "mercy seat," comes from *kopher* [H3722], "to ransom," "to secure favor through a gift."

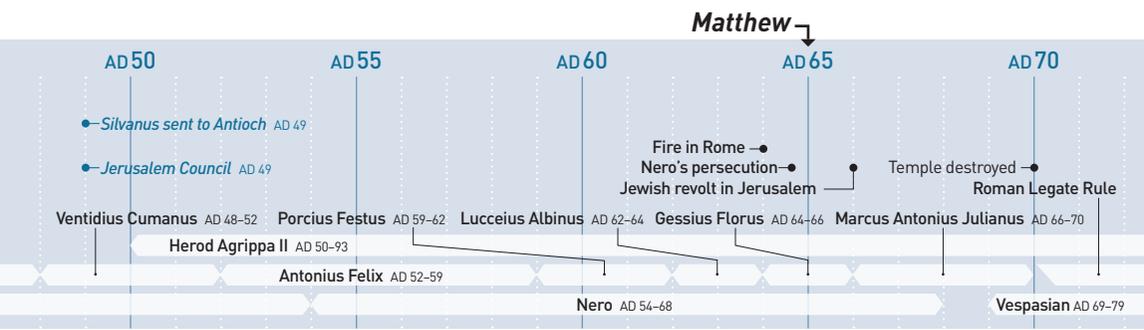


## INSIGHTS ON MATTHEW 1–15

*Though God may not show up exactly the way we're expecting or through the means we think He should, God does show up. Matthew's Gospel not only reveals that Jesus is the King, Israel's long-awaited Messiah, but it also reminds us that Jesus is our Immanuel—"God with us"—now resurrected and ascended, yet with us still, even to the end of the age.*



**Map of Jesus' Life and Ministry.** Matthew's story begins with the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem. It then traces Jesus' ministry throughout Galilee. After Jesus continued His ministry en route from Galilee to Judea, He was met with rejection in Jerusalem, ultimately resulting in His death.



# MATTHEW

## INTRODUCTION

The backgrounds of the four Gospel writers present a fascinating study in contrasts. John Mark had likely been a teenage hanger-on accompanying the disciples. He may have been the young man who fled the scene of Jesus’ arrest in an embarrassing fashion (Mark 14:51-52).<sup>1</sup> Then, after a shaky start in ministry with Paul and his own cousin, Barnabas (Acts 12:25–13:13; 15:36-41; see Col. 4:10), Mark went on to become a faithful assistant to the apostle Peter (1 Pet. 5:13), ultimately penning what was probably the earliest written Gospel, based on Peter’s firsthand testimony.

Luke, on the other hand, was a physician (Col. 4:14). As a well-educated Gentile skilled in Greek, Luke applied his meticulous, critical mind to collecting, verifying, and arranging information so as to write a careful, orderly account of the life of Christ (Luke 1:1-4). Then he wrote a sequel recounting the earliest decades of the church, partly based on his own firsthand participation in ministry (Acts 1:1-2).

John, the “disciple whom Jesus loved” (John 20:2), started out as a young fisherman willing to cast off the entanglements of fishing nets and become a fisher of men (Matt. 4:18-22). By the time John penned his Gospel around AD 97, he not only likely had access to the other three Gospels but also had had a lifetime to reflect on the deep theological truths concerning who Jesus was and what that really meant.

This brings us to Matthew. Not a blue-collar fisherman like John. Not a sophisticated, white-collar physician like Luke. And not a young hanger-on like Mark. Matthew had been a tax collector.

### A TAX COLLECTOR!

It’s hard for us to picture what that meant to a first-century Jewish audience. Banish from your mind the image of a well-dressed IRS auditor just

# THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW AT A GLANCE

SECTION	ANNOUNCEMENT AND ARRIVAL OF THE KING	PROCLAMATION AND RECEPTION OF THE KING
PASSAGE	1:1–4:25	5:1–15:39
THEMES	Jesus' Credentials	Jesus' Message
	Birth Baptism Temptation	Miracles Discourses Parables
KEY TERMS	Baptize Christ Proclaim	Righteousness Authority Blessed Parable

OPPOSITION AND REJECTION OF THE KING	PASSION AND TRIUMPH OF THE KING
16:1–25:46	26:1–28:20
Jesus' Suffering	Jesus' Victory
Opposition Rejection Second Coming	Passover and Arrest Suffering and Death Resurrection Ascension
Tribulation Woe Stumble	Hand Over Suffer

## QUICK FACTS ON MATTHEW

**When was it written?** Around AD 65

**Where was it written?** Possibly Antioch

**Who wrote it?** Matthew (also called Levi), son of Alphaeus

**Why was it written?** To demonstrate to Jewish readers that Jesus is the King, Israel's long-awaited Messiah

doing their job to keep taxpayers honest, or a matter-of-fact customs officer reviewing goods to make sure nobody exceeds duty-free limits. Matthew was not some hourly cashier collecting coins for local officials. The Greek term *telōnēs* [5057], translated “tax collector,” is used quite negatively in the New Testament—often associated with such terms as “sinners” and “prostitutes.”<sup>2</sup> Involved in the collection of money for an oppressive government, tax collectors were regarded as unpatriotic . . . and they were known to engage in extortion

for personal gain.<sup>3</sup> If we picture a low-ranking mobster fleecing honest, hardworking citizens for a local cartel, we probably wouldn't be far from the truth. Michael Green notes that tax collectors, known in Latin as *publicani*, “were much hated as social pariahs, and the Jews classed them with murderers. They were not even tolerated in the synagogues.”<sup>4</sup>

Who else but God would choose a hated, greedy tax collector not only to become one of Jesus' twelve disciples but also to pen what would become the first book of the New Testament canon? What a surprising example of the mercy and grace of God! When the presumably dishonest tax collector named Levi (Matthew) met the Lord Jesus and recognized Him as the long-awaited King of Israel, everything changed. His whole life would now be about proclaiming the Messiah to his fellow Jews—both through his living testimony and through his written words. I love what one man writes about Matthew: “When Jesus called Matthew, as he sat in the office where he collected the customs duty, Matthew rose up and followed him and left everything behind him except one thing—his pen.”<sup>5</sup>

## MATTHEW AMONG THE FOUR GOSPELS

God chose to reveal the life, works, teachings, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ through four written accounts—those of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Why four Gospels? Why not just one? Or seven? Because God has seen fit to reveal Himself in this way. His Spirit has told us the pivotal story of Jesus, the God-man, through the eyes of four unique writers with four distinct but complementary perspectives. The following chart summarizes these four Gospels, demonstrating the various contributions of their writers.

COMPARISON OF THE FOUR GOSPELS				
	MATTHEW	MARK	LUKE	JOHN
<b>PORTRAIT OF JESUS</b>	Promised King	Suffering Servant	Perfect Man	God the Son
<b>ORIGINAL AUDIENCE</b>	Jews	Romans	Greeks	The World
<b>AUTHOR</b>	Tax collector, one of the twelve disciples	Close associate of and assistant to the disciples	Gentile physician, early convert	Fisherman, one of the twelve disciples
<b>THEME</b>	The messianic King has come, fulfilling Old Testament promises.	The Son of God has come to seek, to serve, and to save.	The Son of Man has come to redeem all of humanity.	The eternal Son of God has become incarnate.
<b>RESPONSE</b>	Worship Him!	Follow Him!	Imitate Him!	Believe in Him!

Though all four Gospel accounts together harmoniously present the good news of the person and work of Jesus Christ in His first coming, Matthew, Mark, and Luke relate to each other in a unique way. These three are called “synoptic” Gospels, from a Greek term meaning “seeing together.” In many places these first three Gospels can be read side by side, giving distinct but complementary accounts of events that, when “seen together,” provide a fuller picture of what Jesus said and did. In contrast, the apostle John’s account, written several decades after the synoptic Gospels were composed, covers elements from John’s own eyewitness testimony that the preceding Gospels don’t treat.

Though the synoptic Gospels present the life of Christ in similar ways, the Gospel according to Matthew stands out as the most Jewish. This is evident from the opening words of the narrative, in which Matthew traces the genealogy of Jesus in typically Jewish ways. This unique attribute of Matthew’s account explains why we see so many references of Jewish significance throughout the book—references to the Law, to Jewish customs, to feasts, to Old Testament prophecies fulfilled by Jesus. Matthew contains a large number of direct quotations from, allusions to, and paraphrases of Old Testament passages—many more than Mark, Luke, or John. By some estimates, Matthew has over sixty-five references to the Old Testament, compared to about thirty

## DID MATTHEW ORIGINALLY WRITE AN ARAMAIC GOSPEL?

According to Papias of Hierapolis, a second-century pastor who had been a disciple of the apostle John and knew many first-generation disciples of the original apostles, “Matthew wrote the oracles in the Hebrew language, and every one interpreted them as he was able.”<sup>6</sup> This early second-century testimony is also confirmed later by Irenaeus of Lyons, a disciple of Polycarp of Smyrna, who himself had been a disciple of the apostle John. Irenaeus wrote, “Matthew also issued a written Gospel among the Hebrews in their own dialect.”<sup>7</sup> Most early church fathers believed this early tradition that Matthew had originally written an account of the gospel in the language of the Jews—Aramaic—that was later translated into Greek.<sup>8</sup>

Many modern scholars doubt this early testimony, however. Many consider it more likely that Matthew wrote his Gospel based on the earlier and shorter Gospel of Mark, expanding the account in ways that would appeal more to a Jewish audience. To date, no Aramaic or Hebrew-language version of Matthew has been found, so even if such a text once existed, the Greek version of Matthew is the one the Holy Spirit has preserved as part of the New Testament canon.

each for Mark and Luke and as few as fifteen for John. Clearly, Matthew wanted to convince his Jewish readers that Jesus was their long-awaited Messiah, who did not come to abolish the Law or the Prophets but to fulfill them (5:17).

## OVERVIEW OF MATTHEW’S GOSPEL

Matthew wrote his account of Jesus’ birth, life, teachings, death, resurrection, and ascension to demonstrate to Jewish readers that Jesus is the King, Israel’s long-awaited Messiah. The opening line of the book makes this clear: “The record of the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah, the son of David, the son of Abraham” (1:1). Every chapter contributes in some way to this overarching theme.

However, Matthew also delves deeper into a question that would have especially nagged his first-century Jewish readers who had already become convinced of the messiahship of Jesus: “If Jesus is our King, where is the promised kingdom?” Part of the plot of Matthew’s Gospel is that Jesus did, in fact, offer the kingdom to Israel, but the offer was rejected by almost all Jewish political and religious leaders as well as a majority of the people (4:17; 16:13-28; 21:42-43). Matthew thus sets up the unexpected plot twist that Israel’s rejection of Jesus

would lead to the establishment of the church of baptized disciples from all nations (8:10-12; 28:19-20). Nonetheless, Christ's fulfillment of the original kingdom promises to Israel would still one day be fulfilled at His second coming (19:28; cf. 25:31).

Matthew develops his plot in two distinct parts: Chapters 1 through 15 address the *identity of the King*; chapters 16 through 28 address the *destiny and victory of the King*. The scope of the crowd also shifts between chapters 15 and 16 from Jesus teaching the vast multitudes to Jesus narrowing His focus to teach primarily the Twelve. In the first half of the Gospel, Jesus' popularity among the people increases; in the second half, the hostility against Jesus rises. Geographically, the first fifteen chapters emphasize Jesus' ministry in Galilee; the second half focuses on His ministry in Judea and especially Jerusalem.

The first half of Matthew's Gospel, which will be the subject of the present half volume, can be further divided into two parts.

*Announcement and Arrival of the King* (1:1–4:25). These opening chapters develop Jesus' credentials and qualifications as the long-awaited Messiah. His identity is demonstrated through His messianic genealogy (1:1-17), the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies and types related to His birth and childhood (1:18–2:23), His baptismal consecration and commissioning (3:1-17), His victory over the devil's temptations (4:1-11), His calling of disciples (4:12-22), and the commencement of His public ministry (4:23-25).

*Proclamation and Reception of the King* (5:1–15:39). These eleven chapters recount Jesus' teaching, preaching, and miracles in inauguration and anticipation of His kingdom. This section includes the well-known "Sermon on the Mount" (5:1–7:29), accounts of various miracles (8:1–9:38), discourses on a number of practical, moral, and spiritual themes amid growing controversy (10:1–12:50), the exposition of the kingdom through parables (13:1-58), and additional miracles accompanied by greater resistance to Jesus' teachings (14:1–15:39).

The second half of the Gospel of Matthew, chapters 16 through 28, which chronicles the *Opposition and Rejection of the King* (16:1–25:46) as well as the *Passion and Triumph of the King* (26:1–28:20), will be discussed in the second half volume of this commentary. Suffice it to say that we have a lot of ground to cover in the first half of this Gospel before we examine the growing opposition to and rejection, crucifixion, and resurrection of Jesus in the second half.

What a profound and powerful message to kick off the opening pages of the New Testament! After four hundred years of prophetic

silence during which God’s people pored over the Old Testament writings for clues pointing to the coming Messiah, many may have wondered whether God had forgotten His promises and deserted them. Seeming silence from God can feel that way sometimes. However, John the Baptizer broke the silence with a call to repentance in preparation for the coming Messiah . . . and then Jesus Himself arrived with an offer of the kingdom, based on one condition—*faith*. Faith in a Messiah who met very few people’s expectations. Faith in a kingdom that advanced through peace rather than war. Faith in a God who cared not only for His people, Israel, but for the whole world.

For anybody who feels like God forgets His people, Matthew speaks loudly in the silence. He will never forsake His people and never break His promises. Though God may not show up exactly the way we’re expecting or through the means we think He should, *God does show up*. Matthew’s Gospel not only reveals that Jesus is the King, Israel’s long-awaited Messiah, but it also reminds us that Jesus is our Immanuel—“God with us”—now resurrected and ascended, yet with us still, even to the end of the age (see 28:20).

Get ready to meet your King!

# ANNOUNCEMENT AND ARRIVAL OF THE KING (MATTHEW 1:1–4:25)

The four Gospels all begin differently. The Gospel according to Mark, probably the earliest written account, drops us right into the middle of the action, with John the Baptizer’s proclamation of the coming of the kingdom, followed by the baptism of Jesus, His temptation, and the start of His preaching in Galilee (Mark 1:1-15). The careful, studious physician Luke opens with a kind of preface addressing a specific person, Theophilus, and setting forth in a formal fashion as assurance of the orderliness of the account. The account then begins by outlining the birth of John the Baptizer and relaying events from the birth and childhood of Jesus, providing historical details (Luke 1:1–2:52). Meanwhile, the Gospel of John starts with a soaring theological hymn about the eternal Word made flesh, exalting the God-man and the miracle of the Incarnation (John 1:1-18).

The Gospel of Matthew begins not with the immediate action of Mark, the historical context of Luke, or the glorious hymn of John, but with a genealogy tracing Jesus’ legal ancestry back to the patriarch Abraham and through King David (Matt. 1:1-17). Prior to recounting the commencement of Jesus’ public ministry, Matthew provides details spanning two chapters about Jesus’ birth and childhood, much of which is not included in any other account—the angelic visitation to Joseph (1:18-25); the arrival of the magi, or “wise men,” and their gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh (2:1-12); and the flight to Egypt and murder of the children of Bethlehem (2:13-23).

The purpose of these unique details is to point us to the announcement and arrival of the King (1:1–4:25). By the end of these opening chapters, no reader will be confused about who this Jesus of Nazareth really is. He’s the King, Israel’s long-awaited Messiah.

## KEY TERMS IN MATTHEW 1:1-4:25

**baptizō (βαπτίζω)** [907] “to bathe,” “to wash,” “to immerse”

The English word *baptize* is not a translation so much as a transliteration of the Greek verb *baptizō*, which refers to the act of dipping something underwater for the purpose of washing it. In the ancient world, the act of immersion underwater was used by both Jewish and pagan religious groups for ritual cleansing—initiation into a sacred community, consecration for a particular vocation, or the symbolic washing away of sin or guilt in anticipation of worship. To be “baptized into” a community was to become identified with the collective group, to share the benefits of membership in it, and to help shoulder its responsibilities.

**christos (χριστός)** [5547] “messiah,” “anointed one”

The Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible, the Septuagint, used *christos* to translate the Hebrew word *mashiach* [H4899] (from which we get the English word *messiah*), meaning “anointed one.” In the Old Testament, an actual anointing ceremony with olive oil was used to consecrate prophets (1 Kgs. 19:16), priests (Exod. 28:41), and kings (1 Sam. 10:1). While Israel had many anointed prophets, priests, and kings throughout its history, these all came to be seen as anticipating the ultimate Prophet, Priest, and King—the Messiah, or “Christ.”

**kēryssō (κηρύσσω)** [2784] “to preach,” “to proclaim,” “to announce”

In the first century, this verb generally referred to the making of official, public proclamations, as a herald might cry out an announcement from a king.<sup>1</sup> In the New Testament, it carries this sense, emphasizing the proclamation of God’s kingdom with a call to repentance and faith (e.g., 3:1; 4:17). After Christ’s death and resurrection, this proclamation of the good news would focus specifically on Christ as not only the King of the coming kingdom but also the Son of God who died and rose again (Acts 9:20; 28:30-31; 1 Cor. 1:22-24; 15:12).

## The Genesis of Jesus

### MATTHEW 1:1-17

NASB

<sup>1</sup>The <sup>a</sup>record of the genealogy of <sup>b</sup>Jesus <sup>c</sup>the Messiah, the son of David, the son of Abraham:

<sup>2</sup>Abraham <sup>a</sup>was the father of Isaac, <sup>b</sup>Isaac the father of Jacob, and Jacob

<sup>1</sup>This is a record of the ancestors of Jesus the Messiah, a descendant of David and of Abraham\*:

<sup>2</sup> Abraham was the father of Isaac. Isaac was the father of Jacob.

NLT

the father of <sup>c</sup>Judah and his brothers.  
<sup>3</sup>Judah was the father of Perez and Zerah by Tamar, Perez was the father of Hezron, and Hezron the father of <sup>a</sup>Ram. <sup>4</sup>Ram was the father of Amminadab, Amminadab the father of Nahshon, and Nahshon the father of Salmon. <sup>5</sup>Salmon was the father of Boaz by Rahab, Boaz was the father of Obed by Ruth, and Obed the father of Jesse. <sup>6</sup>Jesse was the father of David the king.

David was the father of Solomon by <sup>a</sup>Bathsheba who had been the wife of Uriah. <sup>7</sup>Solomon was the father of Rehoboam, Rehoboam the father of Abijah, and Abijah the father of <sup>a</sup>Asa. <sup>8</sup>Asa was the father of Jehoshaphat, Jehoshaphat the father of <sup>a</sup>Joram, and Joram the father of Uzziah. <sup>9</sup>Uzziah was the father of <sup>a</sup>Jotham, Jotham the father of Ahaz, and Ahaz the father of Hezekiah. <sup>10</sup>Hezekiah was the father of Manasseh, Manasseh the father of <sup>a</sup>Amon, and Amon the father of Josiah. <sup>11</sup>Josiah became the father of <sup>a</sup>Jeconiah and his brothers, at the time of the deportation to Babylon.

<sup>12</sup>After the deportation to Babylon: Jeconiah became the father of <sup>a</sup>Shealtiel, and Shealtiel the father

Jacob was the father of Judah and his brothers.

<sup>3</sup> Judah was the father of Perez and Zerah (whose mother was Tamar).

Perez was the father of Hezron. Hezron was the father of Ram.\*

<sup>4</sup> Ram was the father of Amminadab.

Amminadab was the father of Nahshon.

Nahshon was the father of Salmon.

<sup>5</sup> Salmon was the father of Boaz (whose mother was Rahab).

Boaz was the father of Obed (whose mother was Ruth).

Obed was the father of Jesse.

<sup>6</sup> Jesse was the father of King David.

David was the father of Solomon (whose mother was Bathsheba, the widow of Uriah).

<sup>7</sup> Solomon was the father of Rehoboam.

Rehoboam was the father of Abijah.

Abijah was the father of Asa.\*

<sup>8</sup> Asa was the father of Jehoshaphat.

Jehoshaphat was the father of Jehoram.\*

Jehoram was the father\* of Uzziah.

<sup>9</sup> Uzziah was the father of Jotham.

Jotham was the father of Ahaz.

Ahaz was the father of Hezekiah.

<sup>10</sup> Hezekiah was the father of Manasseh.

Manasseh was the father of Amon.\*

Amon was the father of Josiah.

<sup>11</sup> Josiah was the father of Jehoiachin\* and his brothers (born at the time of the exile to Babylon).

<sup>12</sup> After the Babylonian exile: Jehoiachin was the father of Shealtiel.

of Zerubbabel. <sup>13</sup>Zerubbabel was the father of <sup>a</sup>Abihud, Abihud the father of Eliakim, and Eliakim the father of Azor. <sup>14</sup>Azor was the father of Zadok, Zadok the father of Achim, and Achim the father of Eliud. <sup>15</sup>Eliud was the father of Eleazar, Eleazar the father of Matthan, and Matthan the father of Jacob. <sup>16</sup>Jacob was the father of Joseph the husband of Mary, by whom Jesus was born, who is called <sup>a</sup>the Messiah.

<sup>17</sup>So all the generations from Abraham to David are fourteen generations; from David to the deportation to Babylon, fourteen generations; and from the deportation to Babylon to <sup>a</sup>the Messiah, fourteen generations.

1:1 <sup>a</sup>Lit book <sup>b</sup>Heb *Yeshua (Joshua)*, meaning *The LORD saves* <sup>c</sup>Gr *Christos (Christ)*, Gr for *Messiah*, which means *Anointed One* 1:2 <sup>a</sup>Lit *fathered*, and throughout the genealogy <sup>b</sup>Lit *and...*, and throughout the genealogy <sup>c</sup>Gr *Judas*; names of people in the Old Testament are given in their Old Testament form 1:3 <sup>a</sup>Gr *Aram* 1:6 <sup>a</sup>Lit *her of Uriah* 1:7 <sup>a</sup>Gr *Asaph* 1:8 <sup>a</sup>Also Gr for *Jehoram* in 2 King 8:16; cf 1 Chron 3:11 1:9 <sup>a</sup>Gr *Joatham* 1:10 <sup>a</sup>Gr *Amos* 1:11 <sup>a</sup>*Jehoiachin* in 2 Kin 24:15 1:12 <sup>a</sup>Gr *Salathiel* 1:13 <sup>a</sup>Gr *Abioud*, usually spelled *Abiud* 1:16 <sup>a</sup>Gr *Christos (Christ)* 1:17 <sup>a</sup>Gr *Christos (Christ)*

Shealtiel was the father of Zerubbabel.

<sup>13</sup> Zerubbabel was the father of Abiud.

Abiud was the father of Eliakim. Eliakim was the father of Azor.

<sup>14</sup> Azor was the father of Zadok. Zadok was the father of Akim. Akim was the father of Eliud.

<sup>15</sup> Eliud was the father of Eleazar. Eleazar was the father of Matthan.

Matthan was the father of Jacob.

<sup>16</sup> Jacob was the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary.

Mary gave birth to Jesus, who is called the Messiah.

<sup>17</sup>All those listed above include fourteen generations from Abraham to David, fourteen from David to the Babylonian exile, and fourteen from the Babylonian exile to the Messiah.

1:1 Greek *Jesus the Messiah, Son of David and son of Abraham*. 1:3 Greek *Aram*, a variant spelling of Ram; also in 1:4. See 1 Chr 2:9-10. 1:7 Greek *Asaph*, a variant spelling of Asa; also in 1:8. See 1 Chr 3:10. 1:8a Greek *Joram*, a variant spelling of Jehoram; also in 1:8b. See 1 Kgs 22:50 and note at 1 Chr 3:11. 1:8b Or *ancestor*; also in 1:11. 1:10 Greek *Amos*, a variant spelling of Amon; also in 1:10b. See 1 Chr 3:14. 1:11 Greek *Jeconiah*, a variant spelling of Jehoiachin; also in 1:12. See 2 Kgs 24:6 and note at 1 Chr 3:16.

Do you know the names of your great-grandparents? How about your great-great-grandparents? Chances are good that even the most avid genealogy enthusiasts among us couldn't trace their ancestries back more than a few generations before things get fuzzy. With countless hours of research using internet resources and a cotton swab in the cheek for a genetic test, you might be able to uncover your family history back another generation or two. But I'm not sure I know anybody who could draw a line back forty generations. In fact, I'm not sure anybody would want to!

Unless you're royalty.

The present royal family of England can trace their lineage back over thirty-five generations through numerous Georges, Edwards, Williams, Fredericks, Charleses (that's my favorite), Jameses, Henrys, Johns, and others. For royal families, genealogy is everything, because

in monarchies, political power isn't conferred by vote or achieved by victory . . . it's inherited by birth.

So it is in the opening verses of the Gospel of Matthew. Remember, the overarching purpose in this account of the life of Christ is to demonstrate that Jesus is the King, Israel's long-awaited Messiah. It makes perfect sense, then, that Matthew would begin with documented proof that Jesus was not only the legal heir of the royal line of David but also the heir of the covenant blessing of Abraham.

Anyone who makes the decision to read through the New Testament in order for the first time immediately encounters a daunting challenge. Right out of the gate, the reader has to wade through a long list of names. To make matters worse, most of the names are unfamiliar, and some are even difficult to pronounce! The first reaction of someone who has no clue about the value and purpose of genealogies in Scripture is to think something like, *Why in the world does the very first book in the New Testament start like this?*

However, what appears to us to be of little interest and, frankly, rather boring information is, in fact, the most fundamental starting point for a Jewish reader. To a Jewish audience, if a man were to claim that he was the Messiah but didn't have the royal pedigree, it would all be over. One commentator writes it this way: "It is important not to think that this is a waste of time. For many cultures ancient and modern, and certainly in the Jewish world of Matthew's day, this genealogy was the equivalent of a roll of drums, a fanfare of trumpets, and a town crier calling for attention. Any first-century Jew would find this family tree both impressive and compelling."<sup>2</sup>

For these opening verses, put yourself in the place of a first-century Jewish skeptic—arms folded, eyes narrowed in suspicion, doubt written on your face. You want to see for yourself whether this Jesus of Nazareth is even worth considering as a candidate for the Messiah. You want to see documented proof.

## — 1:1 —

The first verse of the Gospel of Matthew begins, literally, "The book of the genesis of Jesus the Messiah." To qualify as the long-awaited Messiah, or anointed king, a person would have to be an heir of the promise of Abraham and a legal descendant of King David. If Jesus of Nazareth had been from some other race of people—for instance, a Roman—or if He had been from a tribe and family different from the tribe of Judah and the family of David, He would have been automatically disqualified.

In Genesis 12:7, God said to Abram, “To your descendants [or *offspring* or *seed*] I will give this land.” Thus, none other than a descendant of Abraham could be the ultimate recipient of the kingdom of Israel. Then, centuries later, God made a covenant with David and swore, “Your house and your kingdom shall endure before Me forever; your throne shall be established forever” (2 Sam. 7:16). So only an heir from the house (family) of David would have the credentials to reign as the messianic King.

This is why Matthew begins his Gospel account with a straightforward and simple—but vitally important—thesis for his Jewish readers: “This is a record of the ancestors of Jesus the Messiah, a descendant of David and of Abraham” (Matt. 1:1, NLT). The list of names that follows becomes Exhibit A—proof that Jesus really does have the pedigree to be the long-awaited Messiah.

Realizing the value of the genealogical record of Matthew, we can now look at the unique way he organized the information. He didn’t just present a roll of names in chronological order like one might dig up in the basement of a public archives building. Rather, he divided the history from Abraham to Jesus into three clusters—from Abraham to David (1:2-6a), from David to the Babylonian captivity (1:6b-11), and from the Babylonian captivity to Jesus (1:12-16). Within each of these three groups, Matthew selected fourteen names, intentionally leaving some lesser-known individuals out of the record and unexpectedly including some specific women in the list.

It’s clear that this genealogy isn’t meant to present an exhaustive, precise, “just the facts” presentation of Jesus’ lineage. While providing a summary of the ancestry of Jesus sufficient to satisfy those who would doubt His legal right to the Davidic throne, Matthew seems to have been even more interested in teaching his Jewish readers some things *about* Jesus—using a method of presenting material that would have particularly appealed to them as Jews.

Instead of examining every name in Matthew’s genealogy, let’s focus on some of the unique features of each cluster.

### — 1:2-6a —

The first cluster of fourteen generations takes us from Abraham to David. This era, spanning roughly from 2000 BC to 1000 BC, included the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Judah, from whom the line of Israelite kings was to come (see Gen. 49:10). This period also spanned the time during the enslavement in Egypt, the Exodus under Moses,

the giving of the covenant of the Law and the establishment of the tabernacle and sacrifices, and the conquest of the Promised Land.

But Matthew doesn't focus on these events. He doesn't even mention Moses or the Law. Nor does he simply transcribe from his sources a straight genealogy of father to son. Rather, he intentionally mentions that Judah fathered Perez and Zerah by Tamar (Matt. 1:3), that Salmon fathered Boaz by Rahab (1:5), that Boaz fathered Obed by Ruth (1:5), and—in the first entry of the second cluster of names—that David fathered Solomon by Bathsheba (1:6).

The four women Matthew mentions in Jesus' genealogy in 1:3-6 aren't just random wives thrown into the mix to prove that Matthew respected women. Matthew highlighted women who were probably all of Gentile—that is, non-Jewish—stock.<sup>3</sup> All of them entered the messianic lineage through less-than-ideal means. Tamar feigned being a prostitute to sleep with her father-in-law. Rahab was a prostitute prior to being incorporated into the community of Israel. Ruth came from Moab, a country often at odds with Israel. And Bathsheba became the wife of David only after David committed adultery with her and arranged for her husband to be killed. Think about it. Each of these women would have been viewed by pious Jewish readers as “tainted” or “stained” in some way. Why is this observation important? What was Matthew trying to demonstrate? One commentator puts it well: “The presence of these four persons in the lineage of the King emphasizes a genealogy of grace.”<sup>4</sup> Because of their ignoble—rather than noble—pedigrees, none of the women fit comfortably in the family of the Messiah. But then again, none of us do either.

### — 1:6b-11 —

The second cluster of fourteen generations selected by Matthew includes such major figures as Solomon, who built the temple in Jerusalem; Rehoboam, under whom the kingdom split between north (Israel) and south (Judah); Uzziah; and Hezekiah. In the first cluster (1:2-6a), Matthew added the names of four women who had been “grafted into” the family tree of Jesus despite their Gentile backgrounds. In this second set of fourteen, Matthew intentionally omitted the names of four men who appear in the more precise and detailed Old Testament genealogies—Kings Ahaziah, Joash, Amaziah, and Jehoiakim. Matthew's rationale for dropping these four names may have related either to their insignificance or to their infamous character.<sup>5</sup> In any case, a genealogy didn't need to include every single ancestor in order to demonstrate one's

legal lineage; it was acceptable practice at this time for genealogies to skip generations.<sup>6</sup> It seems that the importance of maintaining the “fourteen generations” in each cluster prompted Matthew to make decisions regarding intentional omissions from the list.

In the first movement of Matthew’s rhythmic symphony of generations (1:2-6a), we may get the impression that the long story beginning with Abraham built to a grand crescendo in the person of David. However, in the second movement, from David to the Babylonian captivity (1:6b-11), the rousing melody seems to have deteriorated into a cacophony of random clashes, out-of-tune instruments, and rogue band members either playing their own music or dropping out entirely. The history leading up to the exile in Babylon includes decline, degeneracy, apostasy, and idolatry, ultimately ending in defeat, destruction, and deportation.

But God had neither given up on His people nor broken His promises.

### — 1:12-16 —

After things fall apart in the generations leading up to Israel’s deportation to Babylon, the history of God’s people declines into obscurity. We hardly know the people named in the third section of the genealogy. We can read about Zerubbabel, who took the lead in the return to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple (see Ezra 5:1-2; Neh. 12:1). But the rest are just names.

In picturing the four centuries of prophetic silence leading up to John the Baptizer’s cries in the wilderness in the first century, we can imagine quiet, pious Jews living in the land of Israel, eagerly longing for their Messiah. As the royal line passed from generation to generation under the radar of successive oppressive nations—Babylon to Persia to Greece to Rome—the candle of messianic hope would continue to flicker until its enduring flame set the torch of the Messiah ablaze.

Matthew notes the final generation in a peculiar way that demonstrates Jesus’ identity both as the legal heir of the royal line of David and as a child born of the Virgin Mary without having physically descended from Joseph. Literally, Matthew 1:16 says, “And Jacob brought forth Joseph, the husband of Mary, from whom was brought forth Jesus, who is called the Messiah.” A few things are noteworthy about the way Matthew phrases this relationship. Previous entries in the genealogy connected names like Abraham and Isaac or Jesse and David with the Greek verb *gennaō* [1080] to indicate that the first person literally “brought forth” the second—that is, he became his ancestor. Even when

women are named in the genealogy, it's clear that the man was considered the ancestral source through normal procreation—for example, “Boaz brought forth Obed by Ruth” (1:5, my translation). However, Matthew describes the origin of Jesus in a way that disconnects His physical generation from Joseph and instead links it to Mary. In 1:16, Matthew says that Joseph was the husband of Mary, from whom (Mary) Jesus was brought forth (still using the term *gennaō*). The tiny Greek phrase *ek hēs* [1537 + 3739], “from whom,” uses the singular feminine relative pronoun, making Mary the sole source of Jesus’ physical origin. However, Joseph is called Mary’s *anēr* [435] (“husband”), making Jesus the legal (though not physical) son of Joseph . . . and thus the heir of the Davidic throne!

### — 1:17 —

Matthew ends his stylized rendition of the Messiah’s genealogy from Abraham with a summary statement noting that he intentionally limited each of the three movements to fourteen generations. In its most technical sense, the Greek term rendered “generation” (*genea* [1074]) can mean an actual physical descent from one person to another—the generation from a father to a son. However, it can also refer to “a period of time,”<sup>7</sup> just as we might say, “Back in my parents’ generation, things were simpler.” This appears to be the way Matthew is using the term in 1:17 when he says that fourteen generations passed from Abraham to David, from David to the deportation to Babylon, and from the deportation to Babylon to the Messiah. To arrive at the number fourteen for each era, Matthew appears to have counted David’s pivotal reign itself as both the end of the first era and the beginning of the second.<sup>8</sup>

The division of these three clusters into fourteen “ages” or “eras” was entirely Matthew’s doing. It isn’t found in the Old Testament, nor do the genealogical lists immediately lend themselves to such a division. So why would Matthew go out of his way to present the legal ancestry of Jesus in three groups of fourteen? It has everything to do with Matthew’s presentation of the genealogy in a style that would appeal to his original Jewish audience. Stan Toussaint explains one appealing possibility: “This was a common rabbinic device. Matthew may have derived the number fourteen from the Hebrew spelling of David’s name. In the Hebrew language the letters of the alphabet have numerical value. . . . These three letters [making up David’s name in Hebrew] have the numerical value of four, six, four, respectively, their total being fourteen.”<sup>9</sup>

Hebrew “David”	דָּוִד
Transliteration	D V D
Numerical Value	4 + 6 + 4 = 14

What’s the message behind Matthew’s clever device? Jesus is the “second David”—the long-awaited Messiah who was to restore the power, glory, and kingdom promised to the first David.

In arranging his genealogy, Matthew wasn’t merely presenting dry historical facts; he also embedded important theological truths using rhetorical devices that his fellow Jews would have caught. It’s as if Matthew was hiding “Easter eggs” in his text for Jews to find . . . if they would only take the time to look carefully and think deeply. Throughout this book, we’ll see that Matthew repeatedly invites his readers to go beyond the surface level of the narrative to think about who Jesus is by examining Old Testament patterns and prophecies and ultimately to see the truth that Jesus is the King, Israel’s long-awaited Messiah.

<b>THE THREE DRAMATIC MOVEMENTS OF MATTHEW’S GENEALOGY</b>		
FIRST MOVEMENT	SECOND MOVEMENT	THIRD MOVEMENT
<i>Crescendo</i>	<i>Cacophony</i>	<i>Climax</i>
<b>“From Abraham to David”</b>	<b>“From David to the Deportation to Babylon”</b>	<b>“From the Deportation to Babylon to the Messiah”</b>
Abraham to Isaac	David to Solomon by Bathsheba	Jeconiah to Shealtiel
Isaac to Jacob	Solomon to Rehoboam	Shealtiel to Zerubbabel
Jacob to Judah and his brothers	Rehoboam to Abijah	Zerubbabel to Abihud
Judah to Perez and Zerah by Tamar	Abijah to Asa	Abihud to Eliakim
Perez to Hezron	Asa to Jehoshaphat	Eliakim to Azor
Hezron to Ram	Jehoshaphat to Joram	Azor to Zadok
Ram to Amminadab	Joram to Uzziah	Zadok to Achim

Amminadab to Nahshon	Uzziah to Jotham (skipping Ahaziah, Joash, and Amaziah)	Achim to Eliud
Nahshon to Salmon	Jotham to Ahaz	Eliud to Eleazar
Salmon to Boaz by Rahab	Ahaz to Hezekiah	Eleazar to Matthan
Boaz to Obed by Ruth	Hezekiah to Manasseh	Matthan to Jacob
Obed to Jesse	Manasseh to Amon	Jacob to Joseph
Jesse to David the king	Amon to Josiah	Joseph to Jesus the Messiah, born of Mary
David's reign as king	Josiah to Jeconiah and his brothers, at the time of the deportation to Babylon	

## APPLICATION: MATTHEW 1:1-17

### A Genealogy of Grace

At first glance, Matthew's genealogy looks like a boring list of barely pronounceable names—verses to be skipped in a daily reading schedule and definitely not a passage to preach from on a Sunday morning! However, on closer examination, we recognize an important practical truth woven into the fabric of this list of the Messiah's ancestors.

With the exception of Jesus Himself, every person in this list was a sinner—frail and foolish. Each one—from the very well known to the virtually unknown—had a life marred by sin and guilt. We can't name each one's sin. But we know of Abraham's deceptions. And Judah's conspiring with his brothers against Joseph. And Tamar's seduction. And Rahab's prostitution. And David's adultery. And Manasseh's wickedness. And the on-again, off-again, halfhearted faith and obedience of the line of Judah's kings.

So what does this list tell us? That God's grace excludes no one. If these men and women could be included in God's past story, sinners like you and me can be included in His present story. Humanly speaking, nobody deserved a place in Christ's legal and physical family line. Likewise, none of us deserves a branch in His spiritual family tree! Matthew's genealogy reminds us all of God's amazing grace.