



The Gospel of Matthew - Chapter One

Summary of Chapter One

Matthew commences his account of the Good News of Jesus life, teaching, miraculous works, substitutionary death and powerful resurrection, with a genealogical record showing the biological line from Abraham via King David to Jesus, thus indicating to those who were aware of the promises of God for a Messiah that there was legitimacy of Jesus' claim to be the long awaited Christ.

The account then turns to the pre-birth record, showing that a very young and still virtuous Mary was found to be pregnant. Her betrothed husband Joseph intended to quietly divorce Mary in order to spare her some of the shame and recriminations that would fall upon her for this supposed adultery, but an angel of God appeared to him in a dream, confirming that she was indeed pregnant through the power of the Holy Spirit, and that she would bear a son who was to be called Jesus. Joseph complied with the command from God but had no sexual relationship with Mary until after the child was born.

I. Matthew 1:1-2:23 - The Arrival in History of Jesus the Messiah

Matthew's introduction echoes the language of Genesis. The word rendered genealogy in Matthew 1:1 is Greek *genesis*, which also means 'beginning, origin, and birth', and this is also the title of the Greek translation of Genesis, implying that it is a book of 'beginnings'.

'An account of the genealogy' appears to function not only as a heading for the genealogy itself (Matthew 1:2-17), but also as a title for the entire story to follow: a new beginning with the arrival of Jesus the Messiah and the Kingdom of God.

I.a Matthew 1:1-17 - The Genealogy of Jesus the Messiah

Jews kept extensive genealogies to establish a person's heritage, inheritance, legitimacy, and rights, which is confirmed by the Jewish historian in Life of Josephus 1-6.

Matthew likely draws on the genealogies of the OT, with some omissions, which will be discussed. He demonstrates Jesus' legal claim to the throne of David, emphasising Jesus' legal descent from David and Abraham, while Luke's

genealogical record emphasises Jesus' biological descent from David and Adam. Refer to Luke 3:23-38 and the comments made in the series material on Luke.

¹ An account of the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah, the son of David, the son of Abraham.

Matthew 1:1

An account of the genealogy. The Gospel's opening words carried special significance for a Jewish audience especially, whose ancestry was inseparably intertwined with the covenants God made with Israel. In its natural language form it is very similar to the separations in the Genesis account, called *toledot*, such as: <<***These are the generations of the heavens and the earth when they were created***>> (Genesis 2:4). The series information on Genesis has a brief paper describing the twelve major partitions or *toledot* of Genesis. These would have been well known to Matthew's readership, alerting them to what he was alluding to here at the outset of his account.

An interesting point from the following genealogical record is not so much that it traces Jesus' heritage but his spiritual ancestry. Jesus is clearly so much the focal point of Jewish history that it is he that gives reason to the lives of those who had preceded him! History not only provides a purpose to current identity, it shapes the future as well. Matthew here shows just how important the history of the Jewish people is for those who would later become spiritual descendants of Abraham through Jesus.

By including two Gentile women in the family tree, Matthew provides a stark reminder that God had always intended that the Gentiles would be fully included in the family of God. Some Jewish teachers may have taught salvation particularism, i.e. for the Jews only, but God always had universalism in view; inclusion for all who would receive the message of the Gospel of Jesus as the Christ.

Jesus, Greek *lēsous*, was the historical, everyday name, and is *Yeshua*' or *Yehoshua*' in Hebrew, i.e. Joshua, meaning 'Yahweh saves'. There are two great men in the OT with this name. The first a great leader of God's people: <<***After the death of Moses the servant of the Lord, the Lord spoke to Joshua son of Nun, Moses' assistant, saying, 'My servant Moses is dead. Now proceed to cross the Jordan, you and all this people, into the land that I am giving to them, to the Israelites. Every place that the sole of your foot will tread upon I have given to you, as I promised to Moses***>> (Joshua 1:1-3); the other was a high priest: <<***Take the silver and gold and make a crown, and set it on the head of the high priest Joshua son of Jehozadak; say to him: Thus says the Lord of hosts: Here is a man whose name is Branch: for he shall branch out in his place, and he shall build the temple of the Lord***>> (Zechariah 6:11-12), a remarkable Messianic prophecy. Refer also to v.21.

Joshua had been called Hosea, but Moses prefixed the first syllable of the name Jehovah, and so made it Jehoshua, or Joshua: <<***These were the names of the men whom Moses sent to spy out the land. And Moses changed the name of Hoshea son of Nun to Joshua***>> (Numbers 13:16), to intimate that the Messiah, who was to bear that name, should be Jehovah; he is therefore able to save to the highest degree, neither is there salvation in any other: <<***There is***>>

salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among mortals by which we must be saved>> (Acts 4:12).

Messiah or Christ, Greek *Christos*, from Hebrew *mashiakh*, means anointed, and points back to David as the anointed king of Israel.

The designation Messiah came to summarise several strands of OT expectation, especially the promise of an 'anointed one' who would righteously rule God's people: *<<Moreover, the Lord declares to you that the Lord will make you a house. When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your ancestors, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come forth from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom for ever. I will be a father to him, and he shall be a son to me. When he commits iniquity, I will punish him with a rod such as mortals use, with blows inflicted by human beings. But I will not take my steadfast love from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away from before you. Your house and your kingdom shall be made sure for ever before me; your throne shall be established for ever>> (2 Samuel 7:11b-16).*

The Son of David evoked images of a Messiah with a royal lineage who would re-establish the throne in Jerusalem and the kingdom of Israel: *<<When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your ancestors, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come forth from your body, and I will establish his kingdom>> (2 Samuel 7:12), <<You said, 'I have made a covenant with my chosen one, I have sworn to my servant David>> (Psalm 89:3), <<The Lord swore to David a sure oath from which he will not turn back: 'One of the sons of your body I will set on your throne'>> (Psalm 132:11), <<The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land>> (Jeremiah 23:5), <<In those days and at that time I will cause a righteous Branch to spring up for David; and he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land>> (Jeremiah 33:15), and: <<Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy scriptures, the gospel concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh>> (Romans 1:1-3). It should be noted that he is referred to with the definite article the and not just 'a Son of David' or 'a Son of Abraham'.*

Even after three years of serving Jesus as his apostles, these men still had visions that Jesus had come to re-establish the greatness to the small nation of Israel that it had enjoyed under David, rather than to bring salvation to all mankind: *<<So when they had come together, they asked him, 'Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?'>> (Acts 1:6). A short time later they received personal empowerment from the Holy Spirit that provided them with true knowledge and understanding of who the Christ really is and what he had put in place.*

The Son of Abraham. God's covenant with Abraham established Israel as a chosen people and also affirmed that the whole world would be blessed through his line: *<<Now the Lord said to Abram, 'Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a*

blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed'>> (Genesis 12:1-3), <<and by your offspring shall all the nations of the earth gain blessing for themselves, because you have obeyed my voice>> (Genesis 22:18). To be called a son of Abraham was to be known as the ideal Jew.

God had made these promises to Abraham approximately two thousand years before they were fulfilled, showing that hope should not fade with time. This was clearly expressed by Peter showing that such time has no real relevance in Kingdom terms: <<*But do not ignore this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like one day*>> (2 Peter 3:8). The same must be remembered of Christ's promised return: <<*The one who testifies to these things says, 'Surely I am coming soon.' Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!*>> (Revelation 22:20). Such delays may test human resolve and trust but they do not diminish the promises of God!

What should not be missed in this first verse of this, the first Gospel account, even though it is not explicitly stated, is that God is faithful in keeping his promises, especially those identified as official covenants.

² Abraham was the father of Isaac, and Isaac the father of Jacob, and Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers, ³ and Judah the father of Perez and Zerah by Tamar, and Perez the father of Hezron, and Hezron the father of Aram, ⁴ and Aram the father of Aminadab, and Aminadab the father of Nahshon, and Nahshon the father of Salmon, ⁵ and Salmon the father of Boaz by Rahab, and Boaz the father of Obed by Ruth, and Obed the father of Jesse, ^{6a} and Jesse the father of King David.

Matthew 1:2-6a

The four generations between Perez and Aminadab encompass approximately 450 years. The six generations from Nahshon to the rise of the monarchy with David total about 400 more.

Judah and his brothers. Matthew does not mention Isaac's brother Ishmael or Jacob's brother Esau, both of whom history shows to have been excluded from the church of Israel. Jesus would be traced through the line of Judah but his eleven brothers are mentioned here to show that all twelve tribes of Israel are included in the promise of a Messiah. Of course, Jesus would be the Saviour of those excluded from the church of Israel as he is Lord of All!

The inclusion of five women in Jesus' genealogy: Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, Bathsheba, i.e. the wife of Uriah (v.6b), and Mary (v.16), is unusual, since descent was usually traced through men as heads of families. Rahab and Ruth were Gentiles, and Tamar, Rahab, and Bathsheba were women of questionable character. Mary would have been considered an adulteress by those of her community. Therefore, there are plenty of examples of 'sinful flesh' in this historical account: <<*For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do: by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and to deal with sin, he condemned sin in the flesh*>> (Romans 8:3).

However, it is hard to put the sole blame on Tamar, who was let down by her

father-in-law Judah: <<*Then Judah said to his daughter-in-law Tamar, 'Remain a widow in your father's house until my son Shelah grows up' – for he feared that he too would die, like his brothers. So Tamar went to live in her father's house*>> (Genesis 38:11), who never had his son marry her then got her pregnant when she dressed as a shrine prostitute. She gave birth to twins, Perez and Zerah, both of whom Matthew names although it would be via the line of Perez that the Messiah would come.

Bathsheba was David's conquest, for he knew her to be a married woman, and it would have been difficult for her to refuse the king: <<*David sent someone to inquire about the woman. It was reported, 'This is Bathsheba daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite.'* So David sent messengers to fetch her, and she came to him, and he lay with her. (Now she was purifying herself after her period.) Then she returned to her house>> (2 Samuel 11:3-4).

Rahab was a prostitute in Jericho: <<*Then Joshua son of Nun sent two men secretly from Shittim as spies, saying, 'Go, view the land, especially Jericho.'* So they went, and entered the house of a prostitute whose name was Rahab, and spent the night there>> (Joshua 2:1), but her actions saved the lives of the Hebrew spies, even though it put her own life in danger.

Ruth was a Moabite who remained faithful to her Jewish mother-in-law Naomi, rather than staying in her own country, where it was more likely she would find a husband. Her faithfulness was rewarded by God when Naomi's kinsman redeemer took Ruth as his wife: <<*I have also acquired Ruth the Moabite, the wife of Mahlon, to be my wife, to maintain the dead man's name on his inheritance, in order that the name of the dead may not be cut off from his kindred and from the gate of his native place; today you are witnesses*>> (Ruth 4:10). Ruth and Boaz were the great grandparents of David but it is unlikely that Boaz was the son of Salmon and Rahab who were together shortly after the Israelites entered the Promised Land, something that occurred 250-400 years before David became King, thus it seems that at least two generations were omitted again at this point.

The lineage is thus comprised of kings (some good and some very bad), priests, men, women, adulterers, prostitutes, heroes, and Gentiles. Jesus will be Saviour of all!

King David. David is the only one listed with the title king by Matthew. The other kings of Israel or Judah, Solomon to Jechoniah, are listed only by name. Indeed, God only considered them to be princes of his people, as noted when he spoke to Isaiah: <<*Turn back, and say to Hezekiah prince of my people, Thus says the Lord, the God of your ancestor David: I have heard your prayer, I have seen your tears; indeed, I will heal you; on the third day you shall go up to the house of the Lord*>> (2 Kings 20:5). Even David himself noted this to be his true designation: <<*David said to Michal, 'It was before the Lord, who chose me in place of your father and all his household, to appoint me as prince over Israel, the people of the Lord, that I have danced before the Lord*>> (2 Samuel 6:21). God was their true King, although they had rejected him as such: <<*and the Lord said to Samuel, 'Listen to the voice of the people in all that they say to you; for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected me from being king over them*>> (1 Samuel 8:7). The Messiah was referred to as an 'anointed prince' by the prophet: <<*Know therefore and understand: from the time that the*

word went out to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until the time of an anointed prince, there shall be seven weeks; and for sixty-two weeks it shall be built again with streets and moat, but in a troubled time>> (Daniel 9:25), and simply as the Lord's anointed by David: <<The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord and his anointed, saying, 'Let us burst their bonds asunder, and cast their cords from us'>> (Psalm 2:2-3). Yet one day he will be acknowledged as Sovereign over all: <<On his robe and on his thigh he has a name inscribed, 'King of kings and Lord of lords'>> (Revelation 19:16).

^{6b} And David was the father of Solomon by the wife of Uriah, ⁷ and Solomon the father of Rehoboam, and Rehoboam the father of Abijah, and Abijah the father of Asaph, ⁸ and Asaph the father of Jehoshaphat, and Jehoshaphat the father of Joram, and Joram the father of Uzziah, ⁹ and Uzziah the father of Jotham, and Jotham the father of Ahaz, and Ahaz the father of Hezekiah, ¹⁰ and Hezekiah the father of Manasseh, and Manasseh the father of Amos, and Amos the father of Josiah, ¹¹ and Josiah the father of Jechoniah and his brothers, at the time of the deportation to Babylon.

Matthew 1:6b-11

Matthew may have drawn from 1 Chronicles 3:10-14, since both genealogies omit several kings found in the narrative of Kings and Chronicles. Omitting names in a genealogy was common to make for ease of memorisation. What is striking in this section is the listing alternately of godly and wicked kings who ruled Israel, then subsequently Judah.

¹² And after the deportation to Babylon: Jechoniah was the father of Salathiel, and Salathiel the father of Zerubbabel, ¹³ and Zerubbabel the father of Abiud, and Abiud the father of Eliakim, and Eliakim the father of Azor,

Matthew 1:12-13

The deportation to Babylon marks a period in history where God allowed King Nebuchadnezzar to take control of Judah and start to deport the inhabitants back to his own country, which commenced in 597BC: <<*And in the ninth year of his reign, in the tenth month, on the tenth day of the month, King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon came with all his army against Jerusalem, and laid siege to it; they built siege-works against it all round*>> (2 Kings 25:1). After the fall of Babylon to the Persians, King Cyrus allowed the Jews to return to rebuild Jerusalem and the temple in 538BC, but the land remained under Persian control. Babylonian exile marked the end of the reign of kings in Judah.

What is remarkable is that under Babylonian exile the Jews did not disappear from history as some of the other nations of that era had. Again, this reflects the promises of God: <<Thus says the Lord: As the wine is found in the cluster, and they say, 'Do not destroy it, for there is a blessing in it', so I will do for my servants' sake, and not destroy them all. I will bring forth descendants from Jacob, and from Judah inheritors of my mountains; my chosen shall

inherit it, and my servants shall settle there>> (Isaiah 65:8-9), which would have been an answer to prayer: <<Now therefore, O our God, listen to the prayer of your servant and to his supplication, and for your own sake, Lord, let your face shine upon your desolated sanctuary>> (Daniel 9:17).

The evil of Jechoniah, also known as Coniah and Jehoiachin, was so great: *<<Jehoiachin was eighteen years old when he began to reign; he reigned for three months in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Nehushta daughter of Elnathan of Jerusalem. He did what was evil in the sight of the Lord, just as his father had done>> (2 Kings 24:8-9), that his line was cursed: <<Is this man Coniah a despised broken pot, a vessel no one wants? Why are he and his offspring hurled out and cast away in a land that they do not know? O land, land, land, hear the word of the Lord! Thus says the Lord: Record this man as childless, a man who shall not succeed in his days; for none of his offspring shall succeed in sitting on the throne of David, and ruling again in Judah>> (Jeremiah 22:28-30). While a natural, biological son could not therefore inherit the throne, the legal claim could still come through Jechoniah's line.*

Zerubbabel led the first group that was given permission by King Cyrus to return to Israel following the exile: *<<In the first year of King Cyrus of Persia, in fulfilment of the word of the Lord spoken by Jeremiah, the Lord stirred up the spirit of King Cyrus of Persia so that he sent a herald throughout all his kingdom and also declared in a written edict: 'Thus says King Cyrus of Persia: The Lord, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth, and he has charged me to build him a house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Whoever is among you of all his people, may the Lord his God be with him! Let him go up'>> (2 Chronicles 36:22-23). Although Zerubbabel is listed here as the son of Salathiel, he was in fact his grandson and the son of Pedaiah, as is written in 1 Chronicles 3:17-19. This is another example of generations being deliberately omitted. This does not detract from historical accuracy as it was an accepted practice in Jewish genealogical record keeping to omit generations they considered to be of little consequence, or where it would aid memorisation to link to a point in history that was in view.*

¹⁴ and Azor the father of Zadok, and Zadok the father of Achim, and Achim the father of Eliud, ¹⁵ and Eliud the father of Eleazar, and Eleazar the father of Matthan, and Matthan the father of Jacob, ¹⁶ and Jacob the father of Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom Jesus was born, who is called the Messiah.

Matthew 1:14-16

Jesus is the rightful legal heir to the covenant promises associated with the Davidic throne (v.6), as well as the rightful legal heir to the covenant promises related to the Abrahamic seed and land (vv.1-2).

Whereas Matthew traces Jesus' lineage from Abraham to emphasise his Jewish heritage, Luke traces it back to Adam to show that Jesus is the fulfilment of the hopes of all people and records. As Paul puts it: *<<From one man he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live>> (Acts 17:26).*

And Jacob the father of Joseph the husband of Mary. In addition to some minor differences and gaps mentioned above, the genealogies in Matthew and Luke Chapter 3 differ significantly in the period from David to Jesus, even naming different fathers for **Joseph: Jacob** in Matthew and Heli in Luke 3:23. Both Matthew and Luke are evidently depending on detailed historical records and various suggestions have been proposed to explain the differences:

1. An old suggestion is that Matthew traces **Joseph's** ancestry, while Luke traces **Mary's** ancestry. But very few commentators defend this solution today because Luke 3:27 refers to **Joseph** not **Mary** and taking Luke 3:23 as a reference to **Mary's** ancestry requires the unlikely step of inserting Mary into the text, where she is not mentioned but Joseph is.
2. The most commonly accepted suggestion is that Matthew traces the line of royal succession, moving from David to Solomon in v.6, while Luke traces Joseph's actual physical descent by moving from David to Nathan, who is a little-known son mentioned in 2 Samuel 5:14 and Luke 3:31, and not the prophet Nathan that David so frequently conferred with, and both lines converge at Joseph.
3. Apparently, some post-Babylonian genealogy records show that Solomon's line ended with Jeconiah and the legal right of accession then passed to Shealtiel, who was in the line of Nathan. This is not so clear from Scripture but certainly a possibility to resolve the two routes from David.

Then there are various explanations for the two different people named as Joseph's father: Jacob in Matthew; Heli in Luke. In most proposed solutions they are thought to be different people and a second marriage is assumed, sometimes a levirate marriage.

The OT law stated that a surviving brother of a childless deceased man was obligated to marry the dead man's widow, i.e. his sister-in-law, in order to provide for her needs and to preserve his deceased brother's family line by dedicating his first born son to his brother. This is what was later called levirate marriage from the Latin *levir*, meaning brother-in-law and is fully explained in Genesis 38:8 and Deuteronomy 25:5-10.

Therefore, by this analysis, Joseph was the legal son of one man but the biological son of the other, and thus there are two lines of ancestry for the two men.

Some commentators have suggested that Heli in Luke was Mary's father but that there were no male heirs in the family so Heli adopted Joseph as his son when Mary and Joseph were married. This would make Mary a descendant of David, which extra-biblical evidence supports, thus linking Jesus to David without Joseph as his father.

Examples of such adoption elsewhere are: <<*Sheshan had no sons – only daughters. He had an Egyptian servant named Jarha. Sheshan gave his daughter in marriage to his servant Jarha, and she bore him Attai*>> (1 Chronicles 2:34-35), <<*And from among the priests: The descendants of Hobaiah, Hakkoz and Barzillai, a man who had married a daughter of Barzillai the Gileadite and was called by that name*>> (Ezra 2:61 and Nehemiah 7:63).

Refer also to Numbers 27:1-11 for the story of Zelophehad's daughters and the resulting inheritance law when there is no son, only daughters.

Although the genealogies in Matthew and Luke differ in their organising principles, both of these genealogies emphasise that Jesus is the son of David, Luke 3:31 and v.6 here in Matthew. Luke further emphasises the virgin birth, as recorded in Luke 1:34-35 with the phrase: <<*He was the son, so it was thought, of Joseph*>> (Luke 3:23).

The Messiah. At the end of this long historical list, Matthew reveals that he too is the bearer of good news, the Gospel of Christ, for the long awaited Christ of God had come. The prophets had written of those that would bring such glad tidings: <<*How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of the messenger who announces peace, who brings good news, who announces salvation, who says to Zion, 'Your God reigns'*>> (Isaiah 52:7), and: <<*Look! On the mountains the feet of one who brings good tidings, who proclaims peace! Celebrate your festivals, O Judah, fulfil your vows, for never again shall the wicked invade you; they are utterly cut off*>> (Nahum 1:15). However, it would be an angel of the Lord that would make the initial announcement of the good news to lowly shepherds on the very evening of Jesus' birth: <<*But the angel said to them, 'Do not be afraid; for see – I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is the Messiah, the Lord*>> (Luke 2:10-11).

¹⁷ So all the generations from Abraham to David are fourteen generations; and from David to the deportation to Babylon, fourteen generations; and from the deportation to Babylon to the Messiah, fourteen generations.

Matthew 1:17

Fourteen generations. Matthew does not mean all the generations that had lived during those times but 'all' that he included in his list, for he evidently skipped some, such as three generations between Joram and Uzziah or Azariah. Refer to 1 Chronicles 3:10-12. Perhaps for ease of memorisation, or perhaps for literary or symbolic symmetry, Matthew structures the genealogy to count 14 generations from each major section.

According to the Jewish practice of gematria, the giving of a numeric value to the consonants in a word, David's name D + V + D would add to 4 + 6 + 4 = 14, and David is the 14th name on the list. This would have been highly symbolic.

I.b Matthew 1:18-25 - The Birth of Jesus the Messiah

A new era of Israel's history begins with the story of Jesus' conception in the little town of Nazareth. The angel announces his conception in the young virgin called Mary (vv.18-21), explaining that he is the prophesied Emmanuel (vv.22-23). Joseph immediately obeys the angel's directive to keep Mary as his wife (vv.24-25).

¹⁸ Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit.

Matthew 1:18

Mary had been engaged to Joseph. The custom of betrothal was different from engagement in modern society. Customarily the parents of a young man chose a young woman to be engaged to their son. A second stage of betrothal involved official arrangements and a prenuptial agreement before witnesses, which was a legally binding contract and could be terminated only by a formal process of divorce. It is quite likely that Joseph knew very little of Mary as a person at this stage and therefore had no reason to believe that she had remained faithful to him.

Before they lived together means that they would not yet have had a sexual relationship, indeed, they would not have spent any time alone together; there would be no sexual union until after the birth of Jesus, which is confirmed in v.25.

Found to be with child. Mary is about four months pregnant, having spent three months with her relative Elizabeth after the angel had informed her she was to be a mother: *<<And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren>>* (Luke 1:36), followed by: *<<And Mary remained with her for about three months and then returned to her home>>* (Luke 1:56).

With child from the Holy Spirit is more something to be wondered at rather than analysed as some have wanted to do through modern scientific understanding. David had shown such wonder even over normal conception: *<<For it was you who formed my inward parts; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; that I know very well. My frame was not hidden from you, when I was being made in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth. Your eyes beheld my unformed substance. In your book were written all the days that were formed for me, when none of them as yet existed>>* (Psalm 139:13-16), However, mortal man has now worked out how to produce children through artificial insemination, how to create a foetus in laboratories, and even how to clone a human from genetic materials, yet the words of King Solomon still hold true even today: *<<Just as you do not know how the breath comes to the bones in the mother's womb, so you do not know the work of God, who makes everything>>* (Ecclesiastes 11:5). Such is the power of God over all things seen and unseen, known and unknowable!

¹⁹ Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to dismiss her quietly.

Matthew 1:19

Her husband Joseph. Betrothed partners were referred to as husband and wife (v.20), although they were not yet considered to be married, and having a sexual relationship during that period was considered both immoral and illegal. Under Mosaic Law an adulteress could have been put to death by stoning: *<<The scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery; and making her stand before all of them, they said to him, 'Teacher, this woman was caught in the very act of committing adultery. Now in the law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?''>>* (John 8:3-5), but under Roman law they no longer had that right: *<<Pilate said to them, 'Take*

him yourselves and judge him according to your law.’ The Jews replied, ‘We are not permitted to put anyone to death’>> (John 18:31).

Expose her to public disgrace. Sexual unfaithfulness during betrothal was considered adultery, and under the Mosaic Law carried the death penalty by stoning as noted: <<*If there is a young woman, a virgin already engaged to be married, and a man meets her in the town and lies with her, you shall bring both of them to the gate of that town and stone them to death, the young woman because she did not cry for help in the town and the man because he violated his neighbour’s wife. So you shall purge the evil from your midst*>> (Deuteronomy 22:23-24). Although no longer punishable by death in Roman times, it still carried a great deal of stigma and she would have been shunned by many in her community. It was probably the primary reason why she could not find accommodation in Bethlehem and had to give birth to Jesus in the stable.

Dismiss her quietly refers to instigating divorce proceedings. Joseph intended to maintain his personal righteousness, for he desired to show compassion even though Mary appeared to be an adulteress, breaking a bond of trust and betraying her husband. Even Jesus would have supported his actions had Joseph dismissed Mary in the circumstances that he had naturally, if wrongly, perceived: <<*But I say to you that anyone who divorces his wife, except on the ground of unchastity, causes her to commit adultery; and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery*>> (Matthew 5:32). Something he could legally and morally have done, and still retained his righteousness.

An aspect of Joseph’s decision to be considered is that, had he decided on a public divorce then he could have demanded legal right of the wedding dowry for himself. By issuing a quiet certificate of divorce in front of two or three witnesses only would have lost him that right.

²⁰ But just when he had resolved to do this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, ‘Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.

Matthew 1:20

The angel of the Lord may have been the same one who had visited Mary a few months earlier who is named as Gabriel in Luke 1:26. The angel refers to him as Joseph, son of David, acknowledging his Davidic line.

Do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife. The angel puts Joseph’s mind at ease. If he had accepted an adulteress as his wife, his fear and shame would not only be before his friends and family but before God, for he was a righteous and God-fearing man. Although Joseph knew he was not the biological father of the child, he would have realised at some point the enormity of the privilege and the responsibility he would have to raise the child Messiah in the way a good father was expected to do. This is something history attests to although most of his own generation saw him as the natural father: <<*All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his mouth. They said, ‘Is not this Joseph’s son?’>> (Luke 4:22), and: <<*Philip found Nathanael and said to him, ‘We have found him about whom Moses in the law and also the prophets**

wrote, *Jesus son of Joseph from Nazareth*'>> (John 1:45).

The child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit is also confirmed by Luke: <<*Mary said to the angel, 'How can this be, since I am a virgin?' The angel said to her, 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God*>> (Luke 1:34-35). Paul acknowledges that he was not of mere human descent: <<*The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is from heaven*>> (1 Corinthians 15:47), although his birth was of human origin: <<*But when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law*>> (Galatians 4:4).

Although many would claim that Joseph had no choice but to forgive Mary and give her a second chance, or so it would seem from a human perspective, it should also be noted that his choice to obey the angel was brave in his cultural setting, for both Jewish and Roman law demanded that a man divorce his wife if she were guilty of adultery. In fact, Roman law actually treated a husband, who failed to divorce an unfaithful wife, as a panderer exploiting his wife as a prostitute! Thus his choice was not only one that would bring personal shame on himself and his family, it was one that violated both law and custom. Mary and Joseph both chose to embrace shame to preserve the sanctity of God's call. Such is the price of obedience that some are called to pay.

²¹ She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.'

Matthew 1:21

Throughout Jewish custom, the name Jesus was given to sons as a symbolic hope for the Lord's anticipated sending of salvation through a Messiah who would purify his people and save them from oppression. But the angel points to a more important theme: to save his people from their sins. Salvation from sins was a repeated promise in the OT prophets: <<*Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that she has served her term, that her penalty is paid, that she has received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins*>> (Isaiah 40:2), <<*All we like sheep have gone astray; we have all turned to our own way, and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all*>> (Isaiah 53:6), <<*The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant that I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt – a covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, says the Lord. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. No longer shall they teach one another, or say to each other, 'Know the Lord', for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the Lord; for I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more*>> (Jeremiah 31:31-34), <<*I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will remove from your body the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. I will put my spirit within you, and make you follow my statutes and be careful to observe my*

ordinances>> (Ezekiel 36:25-27), <<Seventy weeks are decreed for your people and your holy city: to finish the transgression, to put an end to sin, and to atone for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal both vision and prophet, and to anoint a most holy place>> (Daniel 9:24), and: <<On that day a fountain shall be opened for the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, to cleanse them from sin and impurity>> (Zechariah 13:1).

Save his people from their sins. Even those who wholeheartedly commit themselves to following Jesus are still drawn by their sinful nature into iniquity. Sin has great power over people, yet even in this life Jesus can save people from the power that sin can have over their lives, and from the guilt and shame that accompanies it. Paul explained the purpose of this to Titus: *<<He it is who gave himself for us that he might redeem us from all iniquity and purify for himself a people of his own who are zealous for good deeds>> (Titus 2:14).*

²² All this took place to fulfil what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet:

Matthew 1:22

All this took place to fulfil. This is Matthew's 'fulfilment formula', by which he points to an event or teaching of Jesus that fulfils an OT passage, indicating:

1. A direct prediction-fulfilment, e.g. vv.22-23.
2. The intended full meaning of the OT Scripture, e.g. *<<Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfil. For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth pass away, not one letter, not one stroke of a letter, will pass from the law until all is accomplished. Therefore, whoever breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, will be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven>> (Matthew 5:17-20).*
3. A divinely orchestrated analogical/typological correspondence to Israel's history, e.g. *<<Then Joseph got up, took the child and his mother by night, and went to Egypt, and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfil what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet, 'Out of Egypt I have called my son.' When Herod saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, he was infuriated, and he sent and killed all the children in and around Bethlehem who were two years old or under, according to the time that he had learned from the wise men. Then was fulfilled what had been spoken through the prophet Jeremiah: 'A voice was heard in Ramah, wailing and loud lamentation, Rachel weeping for her children; she refused to be consoled, because they are no more'>> (Matthew 2:14-18).*

Matthew affirms the inviolability of God's plan promised in Scripture. Theologians debate why Jesus had to be born from a virgin, sometimes suggesting, for instance, that God sent Jesus through a virgin so he could escape the sin nature. Yet, for whatever other reasons God incarnated Jesus through a virgin, the only reason

Matthew states is that Scripture might be fulfilled. Thus Matthew clearly and unequivocally trusts the authority of Scripture.

²³ ‘Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son,
and they shall name him Emmanuel’,
which means, ‘God is with us.’

Matthew 1:23

This prophecy in Isaiah 7:14, delivered to bring comfort to King Ahaz, occasioned by threat of attack on Judah in the time of Isaiah, and recorded in 2 Kings Chapter 16, points to God’s enduring promise for the line of David. Matthew thus presents the virgin birth of Jesus as God’s miraculous fulfilment of this promise in the person of Jesus the Messiah. This brings further affirmation of the promise that God incarnate, i.e. Emmanuel or God with us, will be with his disciples in every age by his Holy Spirit indwelling them, to empower them in their commission to ‘make disciples of all nations’, something Jesus reaffirmed in the closing words of this Gospel: <<*And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age*>> (Matthew 28:20b).

The virgin translates the Greek word *parthenos* that corresponds to the Hebrew term ‘*almah*, as used in the prophecy: <<*Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Look, the young woman is with child and shall bear a son, and shall name him Immanuel*>> (Isaiah 7:14), regarding the virgin birth of the coming Saviour. The NRSVA translation states ‘young woman’ for virgin but the Hebrew word ‘*almah* generally denotes an unmarried woman who is a virgin, such as Isaac’s future wife: <<*I am standing here by the spring of water; let the young woman who comes out to draw, to whom I shall say, ‘Please give me a little water from your jar to drink’*>> (Genesis 24:43), Moses sister as a child: <<*Pharaoh’s daughter said to her, ‘Yes.’ So the girl went and called the child’s mother*>> (Exodus 2:8), and other young girls: <<*the singers in front, the musicians last, between them girls playing tambourines*>> (Psalm 68:25).

In 1984, Dr David Jenkins, professor of theology at the University of Leeds and already designated to become ordained as the next Bishop of Durham, shocked many people by stating in a live television interview, that he doubted God would have arranged a Virgin Birth, or allowed Jesus to walk on the water. He also allowed people, who did not believe Jesus to be any more than a divinely inspired human, to consider themselves to be Christians. Although David Jenkins went on to do much good work in the role of Bishop, and he had a great ability to shock atheists more than they could shock Christians, I believe it unhelpful, especially for non-believers, when supposed followers of Jesus, especially senior church leaders, are not able or prepared to defend God’s Word - although God himself needs no defending of course.

From this point in the account through to the Sermon on the Mount in Chapter Five, Matthew supports just about every paragraph with a Scripture. Yet he does not frame the birth or childhood narrative in the Scriptures; instead, he chooses Scriptures to support the story. This adds more weight to the authenticity of the account for there are many sceptics who dismiss the historicity of the early years of Jesus’ life. Had Matthew wanted the story to fit

the Scriptures there are better Messianic writings he could have chosen, such as: <<*For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace*>> (Isaiah 9:6). Perhaps instead of a virgin birth, he could have used miraculous examples where God allowed the elderly and baron Sarah to give birth to Isaac, or his answers to prayer to allow Hannah, Rebekah and Rachel to have children, when they too were barren.

Although there is divergence between this account and that given by Luke, who stated that: <<*I too decided, after investigating everything carefully from the very first, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus*>> (Luke 1:3), this actually adds to the story rather than detracting from it. Some sceptics say they would have preferred to see one writer using the material of the other to give corroboration to the accounts. However, it must be remembered that both authors had access to Jesus' younger half-brothers and that both Gospel accounts were circulating during the lifetime of some of them, without any apparent claims of discrepancy made against them.

²⁴ When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took her as his wife,

Matthew 1:24

He took her as his wife. Mary, being betrothed to Joseph, was already considered to be his wife. This was clearly a brave decision by Joseph, but an even greater one by Mary to bear the forthcoming Saviour despite her young age, probably about 12 or 13 years old, and the social stigma that it would cause her. When charged with her assignment in history she spoke to the angel Gabriel: <<*Then Mary said, 'Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.'* Then the angel departed from her>> (Luke 1:38). Thus both Matthew and Luke add to the account of Jesus' purity by setting the scene that both his earthly 'parents' were obedient servants of God.

²⁵ but had no marital relations with her until she had borne a son; and he named him Jesus.

Matthew 1:25

Had no marital relations with her until she had borne a son. Following the birth of Jesus, Joseph and Mary had a normal marital relationship producing at least six children: <<*Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon, and are not his sisters here with us?' And they took offence at him*>> (Mark 6:3). Therefore, there is no substance to the tradition of some that Mary remained the perpetual virgin. The relationship she then had with her husband would be far more honouring to God than her continued virginity could ever be.

He named him Jesus. This simple statement once again alludes to the obedience of Joseph and Mary.