

# Introduction to Matthew's Gospel

## He Was Born a King

In his gospel, Matthew emphasizes the royalty and authority of Jesus Christ. That is Matthew's great intent, and the carols that we sing at Christmas time are reminders of the fact that Jesus Christ was born a King. All the carols we sing at Christmas time emphasize the great reality of the birth of Christ that He is in fact born a King. The wise men who came seeking the newborn King of the Jews, stopped in Jerusalem and asked, "Where is He who is born King?" The Christ child was born to be supreme ruler, supreme monarch. In fact, the writer of Revelation, John, says He is King over all kings and Lord over all lords. He is the greatest, the most supreme of all monarchs.

A king, as you know, has a sovereign right to rule. A king is the final court of appeal. He holds in his hand the power of life, the power of death, the right to make every decision and all decisions. Jesus Christ was born a King. He is different from any other King but nonetheless a King. The difference is in His surpassing royalty, regal character, kingdom, and dominion, authority, and power. Matthew wants both Jew and Gentile to understand that Jesus is King and His birth is the birth of a King. Therefore, in the first chapter he focuses on the royal aspects of the birth of Jesus.

## His heritage was both Racial and Royal

First, in chapter 1 verses 1 through 17 Matthew 1:1-17 we have the genealogy of Jesus. That is, we have the line of descendants from Abraham down to the birth of Jesus. In Israel, the racial line of Jews came from Abraham. Abraham was the father of the Jewish people, so racially He would need to be a descendant of Abraham. Within the descendants of Abraham, the royal line began with David. So in order to have the pedigree of a king, in order to possess royal lineage, one would need to be a son of Abraham and a son of David (Genesis 12; 2 Samuel 7). In the genealogy of Jesus the most important two names are Abraham for racial lineage, and David for royal lineage.

## The importance of the genealogy

The genealogy of Jesus is very important. Matthew is writing to a Jewish audience, the matter of pedigrees is very important to them. They built their whole culture around that. For example, when the children of Israel came into the land of Canaan and God gave them that land in which to dwell, He apportioned the land giving specific territory to every given tribe. Therefore, the tribe to which you belonged dictated where you lived and what land you possessed. Within the tribal territory, families assumed certain portions of land and your link to your family said where your home was, where your land was. Therefore, your lineage was very important to establish the place of your residence. Tribes, families and ancestor's houses were utterly essential in understanding your relationship and rights and privileges in the Promised Land. Whenever there was the need to sell or transfer or exchange property,

it required knowledge of family trees in order to ascertain to whom the property really belonged. In the Jubilee Year, the fiftieth year when land all went back to its original family, again it was necessary for one who would claim a land portion because he was descendant to be able to prove that he was descendant of those to whom that land was originally given.

During the captivity in Babylon from around the year 600 down to 586 B.C., the land of the house of Israel was desolated. At the end of the 70 years when they went back into the land, Ezra tells us that when they set about to reestablish themselves in the land after a whole generation or two of absence, it was necessary for people to prove their descent in order to lay claim to the land which was rightfully theirs.

### **Why two genealogies?**

It is interesting that Matthew gives us His lineage through His father, Joseph. Luke gives us His lineage through His mother, Mary, also a descendant from David. She came through David's son Nathan who never reigned, but nonetheless was royal blood. Therefore, from David through Nathan all the way down to Mary, there is royal blood. It is then through Mary, that Jesus is the real son of David for Mary was His mother. On the other hand, Joseph's line is the line of the legal right to the throne. It always comes through the father. Therefore, He had to have a father who also was a son of David and not only a son of David but also a son of David through David's son Solomon, for it was through Solomon that the reigning line came. Therefore, Jesus received His royal blood through Mary and the legal right to the throne from Joseph, even though Joseph had no part in the conception of Mary. Jesus was the son of Joseph legally and therefore bore the right to reign as King. Many scholars claim, that had there been a king, a rightful king in Israel at the time of Joseph, it would have been Joseph. Joseph was the legal heir. So that the Matthew genealogy comes down through Joseph because there is the legal right to the throne, it comes from the father. Luke brings it through Mary so that we know He has a legal right because He bears the blood of David.

Notice in verse 16 the emphasis. "To Jacob was born Joseph," this being a Jacob other than the familiar patriarch in the Old Testament, it is a common Jewish name. We do not know anything about this man. "But to Jacob was born Joseph, the husband of Mary, by whom," that is in the feminine form in the Greek, referring only to Mary, "was born Jesus who is called Christ." In the Bible Joseph is never called anything other than the husband of Mary, never is Joseph called the father of Jesus.

### **What about Jeconiah?**

In chapter 1 verse 11 it says, "Josiah was the father of Jeconiah and his brothers at the time of the deportation to Babylon." What is overlooked in a causal reading of verse 11 is the character of the Jeconiah, also called Coniah, he was an evil man. In Jeremiah's prophecy chapter 22 and verse 30, the Word of the Lord says this about Jeconiah, "Write this man down childless," in what sense? "

A man who will not prosper in his days for no man of his descendants will prosper sitting on the throne of David or ruling again in Judah." What did the word of the Lord tell Jeremiah, "No man of his descendants will prosper sitting on the throne of David or ruling again in Judah." The word of the Lord did not tell Jeremiah a descendant of Jeconiah would not sit on the throne of David or rule again in Judah. The word of the Lord said he would not prosper.

After the deportation to Babylon; Jeconiah became the father of Shealtiel, Malchiram, Pedaiiah, Shenazzar, Jekamiah, Hoshama, and Nedabiah (1 Chronicles 3:17). None of the sons of Jeconiah occupied the throne of David or ruled over Judea. The question, "How can Jesus be the Messiah if the line of Jeconiah is cursed?" The seemingly hopeless dilemma is resolved in the virgin birth. Through that line, Jesus received the legal right to the throne. So in a marvelous working of God, the curse of Jeconiah is bypassed by having Jesus born of a virgin. Therefore, Matthew wants us to understand that Jesus has a genealogy that brings out the reality of His royalty. He is the authentic King born to the kingly line, bypassing the curse of Jeconiah through the virgin birth. Jesus has impeccable credentials.

## Kings

We do not know a lot about kings in our society, we are a nation that revolted against a king and kings are not a part of our understanding. However, the one thing you have to keep in mind about a king is that a king was a supreme ruler. Forget the Supreme Court, forget Congress, forget legislatures on a state level and put yourself in a situation where one man rules unilaterally and you have an understanding of what it is to be under a king. A king is the single sole authority and power over a people and that is the best form of government if you have the right king. It is the worst if you have the wrong one. In the millennial kingdom and throughout all eternity we will live under the Lordship, one King, God Himself and revealed in Christ and the Holy Spirit.

A king has the right of life and death. Under any circumstances, by his wisdom or his whim, by his justice or by his bias he could determine who lived and who died. Kings were then the source of grace. If you wanted mercy, you bowed before the king and pleaded for mercy. If you wanted grace, you bowed before the king and pleaded for grace. A king is the Court of Appeal to which all who seek mercy must go, for he holds the power of life and death.

**Jesus will be a King of grace. He will be a King to whom sinners can go for pardon, forgiveness, and favor. He will be a King to whom those who have violated His very law and despise His name can go to seek forgiveness.**

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