

The Origins of the Christ-Child

Scripture Readings: Genesis 22:15-18; 2 Samuel 7:11b-16; Matthew 1:1-17 (Text)

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Introduction

In the 1950s, one of the top hits was a song by Doris Day entitled, "Que Sera, Sera," which was translated as, "Whatever will be, will be." In the song, this saying is the answer by a mother to her little girl's curious question, "What will I be? Will I be pretty? Will I be rich?" The mother then adds, "The future's not ours to see." Although there are some Biblical truths in these words, this song is a mixture of fatalism and deism. In many Christian circles, it is the idea that after God created the universe, he let it spin on its own course, so that the events in the world happen randomly and without purpose.

In the Philippines, this is evident in the saying, "Bahala na." This common expression implies some kind of faith in a God-like deity called "Bathala" who has power to bail one out in sticky or dangerous situations. Like the God of the Holy Scriptures, Bathala is the sovereign god of the universe, and whatever happens happen because all events happen only with his permission.

But unlike the God of the Bible, Bathala is impersonal, uninvolved, and does not give meaning, mercy or hope. And in contrast to deism is the Biblical idea of predestination: God ordained everything that will come to pass in his infinite knowledge and wisdom. Moreover, these events are not random events that he allows; instead, God planned and ordained all things that come to pass, including most importantly the salvation of all his elect before he even created the world.

What was this plan? Included in this plan was his covenant with Abraham, in which he promised three blessings to him: (1) a multitude of descendants who would become many nations; (2) a land where his descendants would settle and rest; and (3) all the nations of the earth would be blessed through him.

Also included in God's wise counsel of his gracious will was his covenant with King David. In this covenant, God promised the king that his throne would be established forever, and that he would have a Son who would reign over this everlasting kingdom.

The opening verse of our text today includes these two covenants. Matthew introduces his gospel by tracing back the genealogy of Jesus back to David, 1,000 years before he was born, and to Abraham, 2,000 years before his birth.

These opening seventeen verses in the Gospel of Matthew may look like seventeen boring verses full of unpronounceable Hebrew names. But to Jews, genealogies are extremely important to establish a person's descent, inheritance and rights. This is evident in the Old Testament, particularly in Genesis, where there are several genealogies. In fact, the Greek translation of the opening phrase, "*The genealogy of Jesus Christ*," is "A book of the genesis of Jesus Christ." The Gospel of Matthew opens with the "genesis," or origins, of Jesus who is called the Christ.

With this genealogy, Matthew proved to his Jewish audience that Jesus is the lawful descendant and heir of the covenant promises to Abraham and David. As the Son of Abraham, Jesus is the fulfillment of all of God's promises to Abraham. As the Son of David, Jesus has legal

claim to the throne of David. And as the heir to the covenant promises, he is the source of God's blessings to all the nations.

This afternoon, we will dwell on the theme "The Origins of the Christ-Child":

1. **Child of Promise**
2. **Child of Royalty**
3. **Child of the Nations**

Child of Promise

While verse 1 introduces the genealogy of Jesus, verse 17 summarizes this first portion of Chapter 1. This verse divides the genealogy into three equal parts of fourteen generations each: (1) from Abraham to David, covering about 1,000 years; (2) from David to the Babylonian exile, about 500 years; and (3) from the exile to Jesus, another 500 years. How then can there be the same number of generations, fourteen, for 1,000 years and 500 years? If there were fourteen generations in 500 years, there should be about thirty generations in 1,000 years.

The answer lies in the importance of the number seven and its multiples – "14" in this verse – in Scripture, the number usually ascribed to God's completeness and perfection. For example, according to the Jewish practice of gematria, the giving of a numeric value to consonants, the name "David" has a value of 14. It is not by chance then that "David" is the 14th name on the list. Obviously, Matthew also omitted some names for ease in memorization or for literary symmetry in order to structure the genealogy to 14 generations in each major historical period.

Beneath Matthew's genealogy is the story of God's salvation plan. When God called Abraham out of the pagan Ur of the Chaldees, one of the promises he made in his covenant with Abraham was "*in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed*" ([Gen 12:3](#)). Through Abraham, the whole world – not only his blood descendants – would be blessed. After Abraham passed the test of his faith in obeying God's command to sacrifice his covenant child Isaac, God again repeated his promise, "*in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed*" ([Gen 22:18](#)).

Coupled with this promise of being the source of blessing to all nations are two other promises made by God: first, "*I will surely multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore*"; and second, "*And your offspring shall possess the gate of his enemies*" ([Gen 22:17](#)). God promised Abraham a multitude of descendants and an inheritance, the land of their enemies (cf [Gen 12:7; 17:8](#)).

The covenant God of Abraham was faithful to all his promises. Abraham's descendants were a multitude of tribes feared by their enemies when they entered and conquered Canaan, their land of promise. [Joshua 21:43-45](#) summarizes God's unchanging faithfulness to Israel after they had settled in the Promised Land:

Thus the Lord gave to Israel all the land that he swore to give to their fathers... And the Lord gave them rest on every side just as he had sworn to their fathers... Not one word of all the good promises that the Lord had made to the house of Israel had failed; all came to pass.

Two of God's three promises to Abraham were completely fulfilled during the time of Joshua. But what about the third promise, that through him all the nations of the earth will be blessed?

God's first act in this mighty work was the virgin conception and birth of his only begotten Son Jesus who is also called Christ. On that first Christmas night, the mission of the Son of Abraham to bless the whole earth began. It was the beginning of a new covenant and a new covenant people of God. No longer will Israel be God's only chosen nation, because Jesus was born to save all kinds of people. This was the "good news of great joy that will be for all the people" that the angels brought to poor, outcast shepherds in the field ([Luke 2:10](#)). The babe in Bethlehem was born for the salvation of all kinds of people from all the nations of the earth. Already in the opening verses of Matthew's Gospel, we see how Jesus' lineage includes not only Jews but Gentiles, not only men but women, not only the righteous, but prostitutes, adulterers, idolaters, murderers, liars, and all covetous, disobedient kings and people.

Paul explains Christ's relationship to Abraham in [Galatians 3:16](#), as he quotes [Genesis 22:18](#):
Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring. It does not say, "And to offsprings," referring to many, but referring to one, "And to your offspring," who is Christ.

After his birth, the blessing of the nations was accomplished by Christ through his death on the cross for his chosen covenant people. How will these rebellious people receive God's blessings and promises? It is only by faith alone in the Son of Abraham alone who alone is qualified to atone for all the sins of his people. All those who are united to Christ by faith will inherit the promises that God made to Abraham. Again Paul declares in [Galatians 3:26, 29](#):

For in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith... And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.

No more will Jews have exclusive claims to the covenant promises, because all Jews and Gentiles who are united to Christ by faith alone are children of Abraham and heirs of God's promises.

But what are God's promises to you who believe in Christ today? A multitude of children in this overpopulated world? An inheritance of a piece of property in the Middle East? God's blessings when you bless Israel, no matter how faithless and disobedient its people are?

No, God's promises to Abraham were only foreshadows of what Jesus would accomplish in his birth, death, and resurrection. First, together with "a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages," you are part of the new covenant "Israel of God" composed of Jews and Gentiles ([Rev 7:9](#); [Gal 6:16](#)). Second, you are to be like Abraham whom [Hebrews 11:9-10](#) commended for his forward- and upward-looking worldview,

By faith he went to live in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise. For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God.

Christian, you too are to look forward and heavenward to your Promised Land, where Jesus your Savior dwells.

Third, like Abraham, your faith is to bear the fruit of obedience to God's commands as evidence of true faith and of God's spiritual blessings. By your good works, others will also "give glory to your Father who is in heaven" ([Matt 5:16](#)). Who knows, when your family and friends, and even strangers you meet, see your godliness, God might also be gracious to them so that they will receive God's promises and blessings through faith alone in Christ alone.

While Abraham was faithful and therefore was counted righteous by God, many of the multitudes of his descendants were not. Later in its history, instead of allowing God to rule them in righteousness, Israel asked for an earthly king to rule over them. David was a godly king, “a man after God’s own heart,” but as Samuel prophesied, most of the kings who reigned after him led the people into idolatry, apostasy and outright unbelief.

Child of Royalty

In his covenant with King David, God promised that David’s Son would righteously rule God’s people, and in this Son, “*Your throne shall be established forever*” ([2 Sam. 7:11b-16](#)). Indeed, David’s son Solomon inherited his father’s throne and during his time, Israel flourished into a great kingdom respected by and well-known among the surrounding nations.

However, after David and Solomon reigned, Israel was ruled by a dynasty of kings, most of them evil and wicked, who led the people into apostasy. This continuous rebellion provoked God’s judgment that led to their captivity and slavery in Babylon. After 70 years, a remnant returned to Israel, but there was no more king or prophet in Israel to whom God spoke ever since. For 400 years, the people longed for God’s promised Son of David who would rule Israel in peace, justice and righteousness.

We know that David and all other kings of Israel died. How then would God fulfill his promise to David of an everlasting throne and kingdom?

Verse 1 of our text begins with, “The genealogy of Jesus Christ.” The name Jesus is the Greek derivation of the Hebrew name *Joshua*, which means “Yahweh saves” ([Matt 1:21](#)). And in verse 16, Matthew called Mary’s son *Christ*, which is the Greek translation of the Hebrew noun *Messiah*, which means “Anointed One.” Thus, the word Christ recalls David as the anointed king of Israel.

God’s covenant promise to David was fulfilled by Jesus, the one whom the wise men said was “born king of the Jews” and was worthy of their homage and worship ([Matt 2:2](#)). These Gentiles understood that this child was born King to reign not only over the Jews, but also over them who are Gentiles.

Jesus himself constantly preached that his kingdom, the kingdom of God, had already come when he started preaching, “*Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand*” ([Matt 4:17](#)). But what is this kingdom that he was preaching about? Was it the kingdom of Israel?

No, it was not. Jesus firmly rejected the devil’s offer to give him the kingdoms of this world. During his trial before Pilate, he answered Pilate’s question if he was the king of the Jews, “*My kingdom is not of this world*” ([John 18:36](#)). His kingdom is not an earthly kingdom, but a heavenly kingdom. So we are not to listen to those who insist that when Jesus returns, he will sit on a throne in Israel ruling over an earthly kingdom. The Bible clearly teaches that the kingdom of Christ is a spiritual, heavenly kingdom without national boundaries and with people from all nations of the earth as its citizens. Jews and Gentiles are now “*both one and [Christ] has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility*” ([Eph 3:14](#)). Why insist on rebuilding the obsolete dividing wall?

The coronation of Israel’s kings was also a foreshadow of the coronation of God’s only-begotten Son, the heir of David’s throne, and the King on Zion the holy mountain, who will

break his enemies with an iron rule ([Psa 2:6-9](#)). In the end, this Christ-Child, born a King and as the Son of David, will be crowned and reign as “King of kings and Lord of Lords” ([Rev 19:16](#)).

Child of the Nations

Matthew’s sources of his genealogy were the genealogies of the Old Testament, particularly 1 Chronicles 2:3-15 and 3:10-19. All of the names from Abraham to Zerubbabel, who led the return of the first exiles from Babylon back to Israel, are found in the Old Testament, but the rest are not found anywhere in Scripture. So Matthew probably lifted the names of Abiud down to Jacob, the father of Joseph, from available genealogical records of Joseph’s family.

Notice that the record includes not only Jews, but also a few Gentiles, all of them also women, which was unusual, since Jewish lineage is usually traced through the fathers. In addition, all of these women also had tarnished reputations.

Tamar, a Canaanite, in her quest for a son, had an incestuous relationship with her father-in-law Judah, from whose name the word “Jew” came. Her son by Judah, Perez, continued the Messianic line. Rahab was a Canaanite prostitute who helped the Israelite spies escape from Jericho during the time of Joshua. Ruth was the Moabite woman who is under suspicion as being too aggressive in her quest to marry Boaz. Bathsheba, with whom David committed adultery, is even described as “the wife of Uriah” the Hittite! Even Mary, the mother of Jesus, must have been suspected of bringing a baby out of wedlock; after all, who would believe such a story as “the virgin shall conceive and bear a son” (Isa 7:14; Matt 1:23)?

Moreover, the kings named in the genealogy include some good, but mostly evil kings. For example, Manasseh was described as a king who did “*more evil than the nations whom the Lord destroyed before the people of Israel*” (2 Chr 33:9). And Jehoniah, also known as Jehoiachin, was so evil that God cursed his line (Jer 22:30), although Jesus was still the lawful heir to the throne since he was still David’s Son.

In summary, Jesus’ lineage is comprised of both men and women, the sexually pure and adulterers and prostitutes, heroes and villains, kings and peasants, and Jews and Gentiles. Matthew’s genealogy therefore demonstrated that this baby Jesus, born Son of Abraham and Son of David, will be the Savior of all kinds of people. Paul explains this so clearly in Galatians 3:7-9:

Know then that it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham. And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, “In you shall all the nations be blessed.” So then, those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.

Truly, Jesus as Savior of the world and as Christ the King of the universe fulfilled all of the covenant promises God made to both Abraham and David.

Conclusion

Brothers and sisters in Christ, unlike the mother’s answer to her little girl’s question about the future, “the future is ours to see.” God reveals to you in his holy word that he has planned, ordained and guaranteed before the creation of the world his promise to you of a future eternal inheritance through his Son.

Through Jesus the Son of Abraham, you are also children of God, heirs of all the inheritance and spiritual blessings promised to Abraham. Through Christ the Son of David, you belong to the everlasting kingdom of God. But these covenant promises did not become yours through your good works, but only through faith alone in Jesus Christ alone, as Paul says in [Romans 4:13](#):

For the promise to Abraham and his offspring that he would be heir of the world did not come through the law but through the righteousness of faith.

This Christmas, give praise and thanksgiving to God because he has brought you, who were not his people,

alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world,

into his kingdom by sending his Son Jesus to be born into this world in order to redeem you with his blood ([Eph 2:12-13](#)).

May this be your joy and comfort as you celebrate the birth of our Savior and King – Jesus Christ – the Son of David, the Son of Abraham. Amen.