

Title: The Birth of Jesus & the End of Exile
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Text: Matthew 1:1-25
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The Birth of Jesus & the End of Exile

[Proposition: Jesus is the long awaited King who fulfills God's promises, therefore we must conform our lives to his kingdom.]

Leon Uris's novel *Exodus* is set in the years of tension after the end of World War II but before the establishment of the state of Israel, when so many displaced Jewish people were stuck in political and geographical limbo. Early in the book two of the main characters David Ben Ami and the older more grizzled Ari Ben Canaan, argue about their divergent view of their people's struggle. David "must never stop believing...that I am carrying on a new chapter of a story started four thousand years ago." Ari replies:

Oh yes, the Bible and our history are filled with wonderful tales and convenient miracles. But this is real today. We have no Joshua to make the sun stand still or the walls to come tumbling down. [They] will not get stuck in the mud like the Canaanite chariots, and the sea has not closed in on [them] as it did on Pharaoh's army. The age of miracles is gone, David."

I imagine that first century Jews must have felt similar tension in their hearts. In 538 BC many Jews had returned from their captivity in Babylon. We saw last week they had even rebuilt the Temple. Yet by the time of the birth of Jesus the Jewish people had spent the preceding five centuries under the rule of various Gentile oppressors (the Babylonians, the Persians, the Greeks led by Alexander, the Seleucids and Ptolemies, and finally the Romans). Only for a brief period between 142-63BC was Judah restored as an independent state, yet even then no Son of David sat on the throne of Israel.

It would be hard for many of us to relate on political or social level to Ari's statement, or the first century Jewish believer. And yet, perhaps you can relate on a personal level—does it ever seem to you as if the age of God's power at work is gone? Does it ever seem like you'll never conquer that sin or struggle? Do you wonder if God's promises have failed? This passage speaks to people like us and tells us that God's promises haven't failed, he isn't done with the world, or with you, and that in Jesus we have an answer for our struggle and our sins.

I. Jesus is the long awaited king who fulfills God's promises.

A. Jesus is the Son of Abraham

Clearly the first and most important thing Matthew wants us to know as we read this genealogy is that Jesus comes as the continuation and fulfillment of the story of Israel.

Perhaps now is the time to acknowledge that in the Gospels we are given two different genealogies for Jesus. One here in Matthew and another in Luke, there are differences in the two genealogies, which some point to as contradictions, but there have been multiple, credible, explanations put forward by scholars that account for the differences. I would encourage you to

see the manuscript for more info if you like,¹ but for our purposes let me just say Matthew and Luke are not just listing ancestors, they are both telling a story. They want to emphasize different things.

This morning we are concerned with Matthew, and his genealogy tells us that Jesus comes as the continuation and fulfillment of the story of Israel. It is the story of God calling Abraham, forming a people through him, bringing them to the land where eventually David was their King, but the sons of David lived faithless lives, and God judged the people of Israel and Judah because of the sin and sent them into exile at the hands of foreign invaders. And yet that isn't the end of the genealogy, because it isn't the end of the story.

B. Jesus is the Son of David, the Messiah.²

Matthew is making the claim that Jesus is the Messiah (or Christ), the anointed king who would restore God's people after the captivity and bring resolution to God's promises. You see in v. 1:

An account of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham

“Christ” is not Jesus's surname, but a title—it means “anointed,” specifically the Anointed King. “Son of David” too was a messianic title, because the coming Savior-King was to be from the line of David. We see this in several Scriptures, for instance 2 Samuel 7:12-13 when God says to King David:

*12 When your time comes and you rest with your fathers, I will raise up after you your descendant, who will come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom.
13 He is the one who will build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever.*

Moreover, nearly all scholars agree that to really emphasize that Jesus is the Son of David, Matthew stylizes and compresses the genealogy into three sets of 14 because the name David had the numerical value 14. So Matthew says in v. 17:

¹ See the commentaries of Keener, Carson, or Blomberg. For free resources, see Dr. Mark Strauss, “Why Are Jesus' Genealogies in Matthew and Luke Different?” on the Zondervan Academic blog, <https://zondervanacademic.com/blog/why-are-jesus-genealogies-in-matthew-and-luke-different/>; or from another point of view, apologist J. Warner Wallace, How Can We Trust the Gospels When the Genealogy of Jesus Is So Different?, <https://coldcasechristianity.com/writings/how-can-we-trust-the-gospels-when-the-genealogies-are-so-different/>

² This claim that Jesus is the Son of David perhaps seems obvious to those of us who are used to reading our Christian Bibles, the New Testament starts with Matthew after all. Yet, it challenges many religious beliefs both in Matthew's day and ours.

- The story of Israel didn't end with the return from Babylon.
- Jewish people should not still be waiting for the coming of Messiah.
- The continuation of the faith of Abraham is not found in Islam, but in Christ
- Jesus does not come to overturn the Old Testament, or to let us unhitch from the story of Israel—the same God who called Abraham is the Incarnate Jesus.

17 So all the generations from Abraham to David were fourteen generations; and from David until the exile to Babylon, fourteen generations; and from the exile to Babylon until the Christ, fourteen generations.

In other words, Matthew is saying—the Messiah is finally here! The exile is coming to an end! God’s promises have come to pass in Jesus of whom I’m writing in this gospel!

Illustration:

I think I’ve mentioned before how with our kids we try to parent, especially when we are correcting our kids through the lens of “trust.” When they do something like sneak onto the tablet to play games, or take justice into their own hands, we always try to bring it back to the question, “Who are you trusting right now, mom and dad or yourself?” But that means we have to be trustworthy right? If we show ourselves trustworthy—that we keep our word especially in the big stuff they will see we love them, care for them, and have their best interest in mind.

Matthew is suggesting the same is true for us, because God kept his promise to send this anointed King into the world—even after so many years, and despite Israel’s sin—then doesn’t it follow that we too can believe God’s promises. If you are in Christ through faith, he promises to keep you for himself by the Holy Spirit, to work all things for your good, to give you all things in Christ. These are true—you can believe them because Jesus the Christ has come!

Jesus is the Christ, the Son of David, he fulfills all the promises of God, but not only as the next chapter in the story.

II. Jesus is the long awaited King, who reshapes our view of the story.

Matthew does two subtle things in the genealogy to tell us that Jesus is more than just the next important figure next to Abraham or David. In fact, the whole story of Israel, indeed all of human history finds its significance in the one born in Bethlehem, Jesus the Christ. First, he connects Jesus’s genealogy to the book of Genesis, or origins when he writes v. 1:

An account of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham

The words we have translated “account of the genealogy” occur also in the Greek translation of the OT, but only in the genealogies in the book of Genesis, the book of origins or beginnings.. For instance, when we read Genesis 2:4:

4 These are the records of the heavens and the earth, concerning their creation. At the time that the Lord God made the earth and the heavens,

“These are the records” is the same two words as “An account of the genealogy” in Matthew 1. Furthermore, while Matthew’s genealogy goes from the past to the present like OT genealogies, another difference is striking. Scholar Craig Keener writes:

Yet genealogies like those in Genesis typically list a person's descendants after this phrase, rather than a person's ancestors (Gen 5:1; 10:1). **Matthew's point here is profound: so much is Jesus the focal point of history that his ancestors depend on him for their meaning.**³

In both cases Matthew is preparing us for what he will make explicit in 1:23:

*See, the virgin will become pregnant
and give birth to a son,
and they will name him Immanuel,*

which is translated "God is with us."

Now this may all strike you as very technical, but here's the point: the story of Israel, the story of the world, your story are not stories that are ultimately about us—the claim Matthew is making is that the OT story and every story is ultimately founded on and revolves around Christ. The story of Jesus Christ is the true story of the world, within which every other story finds its significance—not the other way around.

Imagine how this truth reorients the story of Israel—no longer is the long sorrow of the exile at the center of the story, and it no longer defines who Israel is. Exile takes on new meaning as one of the ways God brings about his plan of redemption. Knowing that Jesus is the point of the whole story reshapes the way you look at it.

Illustration:

In *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince* we watch as professor Dumbledore pleads with Severus Snape, "Severus...please." Dumbledore pleads for help, and Snape kills him. We (and Harry) finally know for sure where Snape's loyalties lie. Or do we? We learn in the next book, when Harry extracts Snape's memories and puts them into the magical Pensieve, that Dumbledore was slowly dying of an irreversible curse. And he made Snape promise to kill him when the moment came. Suddenly, the whole tragic event takes on new meaning in the scope of the wider story.

If we will let it, the story of Jesus will reshape how we look at the tragedies and difficulties in our own lives. They all become means by which he brings us to himself, conforms us to Christ, and tests and strengthens our faith. In the hardest seasons of my life: watching a loved one be devastated by medical issues, feeling embattled on all sides in a hard ministry season—knowing that this was all leading me to Jesus and making me like him gave me and continues to give a strange power to endure and not be swallowed up by sorrow.

Whatever sin or struggle, whether past or present, that feels like it continues to define and consume your story... Through faith in Jesus, all of it, like the exile, no longer defines you, it isn't the end or the center of your story—Jesus is. He means to redeem you out of those sins and struggles, and give you the eyes of faith to see that mysteriously even the hardest season is part of his sovereign plan to bring his kingdom into your life.

³ Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of Matthew*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009), Kindle Locations 2929-2932.

III. Jesus fulfills God's plan to include all people in his kingdom

You can see this as we notice that Matthew includes some unexpected people in his genealogy. In v. 3 we read of Tamar, in v. 5 Rahab and Ruth, and in v. 6 he refers to Bathsheba as "Uriah's wife." In ancient Israel, and in the OT, genealogies only included men, because lineage and inheritance were traced through men—these women are conspicuous by their inclusion. They are there to teach us

A. There are no gender politics in Jesus's Kingdom.

Surely Matthew means to signal, given the important place women have in the ministry of Jesus. Jesus receives them as some of his earliest and most faithful followers, and women are the first witnesses of the resurrection. They too are given the gift of the Spirit, and are co-laborers in the work of the Gospel.

Women are not to be treated as if they are part of the kingdom of God only by marriage or motherhood, but through faith in Jesus the Messiah they are full partakers in the salvation he accomplished on the cross. There is no room in the church for domineering attitudes toward women, nor is there license for undermining the contributions or views of women. We belong to Jesus's kingdom not because of our gender—but through faith in him, and therefore we stand against the cultural backdrop of toxic masculinity and radical feminism

B. There is no ethnic pride in Jesus's Kingdom

If Matthew meant only to highlight the importance of women, he could have chosen the Jewish matriarchs of the OT: Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel, and Leah. Instead, all these women he lists are Gentiles. Matthew is picking up the fact that God had always intended to include Gentiles in his plan of salvation. In Jesus, what was hinted at throughout the OT, becomes explicit in his teaching, death, and resurrection. God's plan of salvation is not tied to ethnic identity but by design encompasses people of every tribe, language, people, and nation.

There is no room for ethnic boasting in the kingdom of God, because again we belong in the Kingdom only because of what the King has done for us. Indeed because our identity is as subjects of King Jesus, and partakers of his kingdom, we have no need for self preserving or ethnic boasting. Instead we have the sure footing and the motivation to reach out to and seek to learn from and be reconciled to those different from us.

C. There is no self-righteous boasting in Jesus's Kingdom.

A final element ties three of the four women, they are all party in some way to sexual sin. Tamar was treated as a prostitute by her father in law Judah. Rahab is identified as a prostitute in the book of Joshua. Bathsheba, Uriah's wife, committed adultery with King David.

Certainly the men in these situations are equally as culpable, given the power dynamics in the ancient world. Matthew highlights these women not to demean them, but to make the point that being a sinner doesn't mean you can't be part of Jesus's family of faith. In fact, he reports that Jesus's name signifies that he will save his people from their sins—*everyone* needs the forgiveness and freedom that Jesus provides. In Jesus's kingdom you aren't in or out based on what you've done, what's been done to you—you can lay that down and receive a new identity in Jesus: righteous before God, a citizen of the kingdom, a son or daughter of God our Father.

Elsewhere Paul encapsulates what Matthew points to through this genealogy. Galatians 3:27-29:

27 For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. 28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. 29 And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.

Anyone can become a member of God's Kingdom—not because of gender, ethnicity, or background—but by taking on the new identity of a follower of Jesus through faith.

Illustration:

Earlier this week as I was talking with Daniel Walker about their adoption of Henry being finalized last Friday (Praise Jesus)! I was reflecting on my own life. My mother was adopted when she was an infant. All things considered that adoption was a providential blessing. And yet, around her early thirties my mom had the almost obsessive need to find her biological family. That's not necessarily a bad thing, but I think in her case she was looking for belonging, and for an identity that could give her meaning and help her weather the struggles of life.

We are all searching for that place where we belong that's secure and tells us we matter—that's what drives a lot of our sin, including the things like sexism, racism, moralism, and it's why we fall for all the messages the culture sends us about how we need to look, or think, or perform. We want to matter, and we want to belong.

Jesus has made a way for us, a place for us to belong. A kingdom where we can stop pretending, stop performing, the King has accepted us not because of anything we are or do, but because of who he is and what he has done for us.

Conclusion:

Just as Jesus's kingdom is so radically different from the kingdoms of the world, so is his way of being king. As we look once more at our passage, we see in in v. 1:

An account of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham

I believe the Son of Abraham is telling us more than simply, Jesus was ethnically Jewish.

If you remember the story of Abraham, you will remember that God commanded Abraham to sacrifice his long awaited son Isaac on Mount Moriah, and only at the last moment did God stop him and provide a ram in Isaac's place. Jesus, the long awaited Son of David, is going to be a very different type of King, one who is also the Son of Abraham—destined for the cross.

This King came not overthrow the powers that be by might and establish an earthly kingdom—he came to live up to his name v. 21:

21 She will give birth to a son, and you are to name him Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins."

This king saves us through his humility, his suffering, for he is Immanuel, God with us (1:23) and yet he gives his life as a ransom for many and bring his redemption to the deepest point of our need. He fulfills the promises of God, reshapes our story around his story, delivers us from the sin and exile in our hearts, and gives us a place with him in his kingdom.

This king calls us to humble ourselves before him, take up our cross and follow him.