

Upside-Down Christmas: The Birth of Jesus According to Matthew // Matthew 1:1–17 // “Jesus’ Resume”

Matthew 1:1–17

[1:1] The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.

[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 Ram, [4] and Ram the father of Amminadab, and Amminadab 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, [6] and Jesse the father of David the king.

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.

[12] And after the deportation to Babylon: Jechoniah was the father of Shealtiel, and Shealtiel the father of Zerubbabel,

[13] and Zerubbabel the father of Abiud, and Abiud the father of Eliakim, and Eliakim the father of Azor, [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 Christ.

[17] So all the generations from Abraham to David were fourteen generations, and from David to the deportation to Babylon fourteen generations, and from the deportation to Babylon to the Christ fourteen generations.

Introduction

- Alright... so how many of you zoned out during that? Be honest
- How many of you, when you come to a section like this when you are reading your Bible, either skim it or skip it all together? *And you call yourselves “Christians.” All-in... whatever.*
- (The least you could do is find some good ideas for baby names in there: Amminadab; Hezron. Shealtiel. That’s guaranteed to make your kids hate you forever.)

Most of us aren’t into genealogies, especially not someone else’s genealogy.

- Truth be told, I’m not really even into mine. Some people are—they go the websites and pay the money...
- (I feel like I have enough relatives already; I’m definitely not looking for new ones. **I’m kind of afraid of what I might find.** After going home for Thanksgiving many of you probably feel the same way.)

So, we might think it odd for Matthew to lead off his Gospel with what feels to us like a snoozer—a genealogy. But there is a reason that he does. ***In this genealogy is everything you need to know about Christianity.*** All the essentials are in there.

As I’ve studied this the past few weeks I have learned so much diving into commentaries, listening to other pastors teach on this.

- If you're interested in sources they are all in the transcript I post on my blog each week.
- I've realized that the amount of things that Matthew is trying to teach you through this simple list of names is remarkable. I'm going to limit myself to 5.

This first one I borrow from Tim Keller:

1. The gospel is not good advice, it is good news¹

- Most stories or fairy tales start out with "once upon a time;" or "somewhere, in a galaxy far, far away" or something like that...
- But Matthew doesn't start out that way. He starts out with a genealogy, which is a way of saying, "*What I'm going to tell you about actually happened in time and space.*"
- Christianity's most important feature is that it is actual history, because the core of Christianity is not a set of principles that Jesus taught *to* us, but something Jesus was going to do for us.
- Most religions, you see, when you peel back the layers, are built on teachings and principles that, really, would be true whether their religious founder ever lived or not. The religious founder was just the mouthpiece for those teachings.
 - For example, the **principles of Buddhism** don't depend on Buddha being an actual person. Those principles, Buddhists believe, undergird the universe and Buddha was the just the mouthpiece.
 - Same thing for Islam: **Islam is a pattern** for how Allah wants us to live. Mohammad was just the just the prophet, the mouthpiece, for that teaching. (*Muslims, of course, will tell you Mohammad was a real, actual person, but the principles and teachings of Islam do not depend on him being a real person. Make sense?*)
- This is not true for Christianity. Christianity depends on set of events that actually took place in time and history because ***the core of Christianity is not what Jesus taught us to do, but what he would do for us.***

- Scholars point out **the Gospels** (the books of Matt, Mark, Luke and John that contain the record of Jesus' life) are basically just **prologues** to the death of Christ. The **central element** in each Gospel is the death of Christ. **They skim over 33 years** of his life and **3 years** of his teaching and **focus on one week** in which he would go to a cross and bear the penalty for our sins and die in our place and rise again.

- The Gospels contain, of course, a lot of things that Jesus taught, but the focus of the Gospels is not on what Jesus **taught**, but what he **did**.
- That's why I say, "The gospel is not primarily good advice; it's good news."
- The **word "gospel"** means an announcement of good news.
 - In Greek gospel is "**eu-angelion**", a combination of two words: **eu-**, meaning 'good,' and '**angelion**' meaning 'message.'
 - Imagine you were living in ancient Greece and a foreign army was invading your country and the army general in charge of protecting you was shorthanded so he sent out word that he needed every able bodied man and woman to come help him fight. That would not be a "gospel." That would be a request for help.
 - But if the general had won the battle handily and defeated the invading army, and then he sent out a message to the country that he had won, and that **peace now reigned** in the land, **that would be called a 'gospel.'** And the messenger who brought the gospel would have been called an "**angelos,**" or an angel.
 - When Jesus was born who showed up? **Angels announcing peace** on earth, salvation for men. They **didn't say**, "The great **teacher** is here;" they said, "the **Savior** is born."
- You see, what we, the world, humanity, needed was not just one more religious teacher.
 - We hadn't listened to the previous ones! Why would we listen to a new one? That would be like a **7th grader**

¹ From Tim Keller's message on Matthew 1:1-17, "The History of Grace."

failing his multiplication tables and you trying to fix that by putting him an advanced college calculus class!

- **C. S. Lewis:** *“There has been no lack of good advice for the last 4000 years. A bit more would not have made a difference... We never have followed the advice of the great teachers. Why would we be likely to begin now? Why would we be more likely to follow Christ than any of the others? Because He is the best moral teacher? That makes it even less likely that we shall follow Him. If we cannot take the elementary lessons, is it likely we are going to take the most advanced ones? If Christianity only means one more bit of good advice, then Christianity is of no importance.”*²
- We needed a different kind of salvation and a new kind of Savior. And God became that for us by entering into history and doing for us what we could not do for ourselves. Those who believe that and receive it would be forever changed, but not primarily because of what Jesus taught but because of what he did.
- Listen: The most important thing about the gospel is that it must be believed and received, like a gift.
- **Which means: You’re not a Christian if you are just trying to emulate the moral teachings of Jesus.** REPEAT. Even if you keep them really well and better than most people do.
- Because the core of Christianity is not a set of teachings to be followed, but a gift to be received.
- *The gospel is not primarily good advice; it’s good news.*

Secondly, this genealogy shows you that...

2. Jesus is the center of history

- *Matthew takes what the world would have considered to be an insignificant family line and organizes all of human history around it.*
- Here’s why that is important—at this point it certainly **didn’t seem like** Jesus was the focal point of history.

- Israel was a small, **backwater**, Middle Eastern country that was **under the rule** of somebody else. **Nobody in Rome** was paying attention to this family line.
- But God had made a **promise to Abraham** to bring salvation to the world through Jesus and to bring the whole world **into subjection** to Jesus.
- And at this point in world history you’ve got these really **powerful nations and people** that seem like they are directing thing but **what Matthew shows** you in this genealogy is that God is the one guiding it all **according to his plans** for the Messiah! The powers of the world are an **illusion**.
 - **Let me give you one quick example of that:** One of the **details** most people know about Christmas is that Mary and Joseph had to travel to Bethlehem because Rome was taxing everyone and **you had to go to your home city** to be registered.
 - But **Luke explains** to us that **God’s purpose** in that was so that one of the prophecies about the Messiah would be fulfilled, the one that said he’d be born in Bethlehem. **So God moves Rome to this tax so he can get Mary and Joseph back to Bethlehem.**
 - *You ever wonder why God went to all that trouble? Why not just appear to Joseph in a dream and say, “Joseph, go to Bethlehem?”* It is to demonstrate to you that God moves powerful nations around like chess pieces to bring to accomplish his purposes in Jesus. *He taxed the whole world to move two people 90 miles.*
- Here’s why that should be encouraging to you. It doesn’t look now like Jesus is the center of history. **CNN** is not here this weekend paying attention to what we do. **They are watching** what they think are most important powers in the world—the markets; the White House; world politics; but these things are like an **insignificant drop** in the bucket—the **center of history** is what God is doing in the kingdom of Jesus—the accomplishing of his purpose to take salvation to every nation on earth and to bring the world into subjection of him. **And he**

² *Mere Christianity* by C.S. Lewis, 156.

moves around the most powerful nations at will to accomplish his purposes.

- **There's an unseen story behind the story.**
- Many of the Israelites were, at this point, discouraged. They looked around and didn't see how God was fulfilling his promises. Rome was in charge.
- Many of you look around and are discouraged; you see unbelief growing; secularism taking over, corrupting our institutions, destroying our nation.
- But don't be deceived. It didn't look back then like God was accomplishing his purposes. But he was. He was doing his greatest work.
 - **My wife and I did not watch 24 when it first came out.** We watched it on DVD later. Jack Bauer got into more situations where you were convinced he was going to die. In fact, I think a few times in the series he actually did die, or you at least thought he was dead, or lost forever in captivity in China, but during those times I'd be like, "Well, I have Season 4 right here, and Jack's picture is still on the cover." It looks bad now, but I know he's gotta pull through.
 - Jesus' face is on the cover of both sides of this book. He wins.
- The same thing is true in your life. You may be discouraged because it may look like you are subject to forces you can't control. But God has an infallible purpose in your life. To reveal Jesus to you and glorify himself in you. Everything in your life has ultimately been about that.

Which brings me to point #3...

3. God is working in all things, good and bad, for his purposes

- See how in vs. 17 the author **organizes the progression** from Abraham to David and from David to exile and from exile to

Jesus as 3 sets of 14? "14" is of course two 7's, and 7 is the biblical number of completion, or **perfection**.³

- (Now, if you compare this list to some OT genealogies, you'll see some generations are skipped. *This was a commonly accepted practice in repeating genealogies.*)
- **Matthew chooses to organize this genealogy in 3 sections of 14 to show that God has superimposed his seal of perfection on history.)**
- Which is amazing when you consider some of the messy, random, chaotic stuff in there.
- See **vs. 3, "Judah was the father of Perez and Zerah by Tamar."**
 - First of all, why did he include the mother's name? They never included women's names in Jewish genealogies. He put that in there to call to mind the story behind it.
 - **Do you know that?** (*If you have a young kid in here this might be a good time to take them to the kids' ministry or go to the bathroom*)
 - **Gen 38:**
 - Tamar was a wife of one of Judah's sons. But her husband died before they could have kids.
 - And in those days if a guy died and left his wife without kids it was the obligation of the deceased's brother to marry her and give her children.⁴
 - So the brother was named Onan and he begrudgingly takes her as his wife (evidently he didn't like her) but he doesn't want to have any kids with her, because, you know, kids are expensive, and **he didn't even like** Tamar, and so whenever they came together Onan made sure that he didn't quite "seal the deal" with her. The KJV puts it delicately—he "spilled it on the ground so that he wouldn't give seed to his brother."

³ William Hendriksen, *Vol. 9: Exposition of the Gospel According to Matthew*, Baker New Testament Commentary, 110.

⁴ Deut 25:5-6.

- **Well, God wasn't pleased with this either, so he killed Onan. Now Judah is two sons down and he's only got 3.**
- Well, legally speaking, Tamar was supposed to be given to **Judah's 3rd son, Shelah**. But at this point Judah starts feeling like Tamar must be cursed and he doesn't want to lose his last son, so **he stalls...** for years.
- Tamar figures out that Judah is never going to let her marry the third son, so she devises a plan. Turns out Judah, her father in law, has a weakness for prostitutes. So she dresses up like a prostitute and seduces him and gets pregnant with **Perez and Zerah**.⁵
- Well, 3 months after she gets pregnant she starts showing and Judah, who has no idea it's his babies, orders that she be stoned because obviously she's been sleeping around and so they drag her out and she says, "I have here the belt of the man whose babies these are" and it's Judah's belt; so now he's in an awkward situation.⁶
 - *I wonder what it was like around the Thanksgiving table at their family that year? BTW, are you feeling better about your family now?*
 - *I had a pastor friend who is about my age said he'd bought a dramatic Bible reading CD for his kids to listen to as they were going to bed—he thought it was a great idea—well, evidently the translation they were using did not put it delicately and the next morning at breakfast his little girl starts asking about very specific anatomical names and the mom says, "Where did you hear that?" And she says "From the CD dad gave us of the Bible!" Josh's wife glared at him. Josh was like, "Uhhh... that's it. No more Bible. You kids go watch TV."*
- And for those of you parents who chose not to take your kids into our kids' ministry... Merry Christmas. That's my gift to you.
- This is some messy, chaotic stuff.
- Yet in all of this, God was working, bringing about a perfect plan. That's why the number 14 is used.
- He is working in your life, too, even when he seems absent.
 - Some of you have some messy dysfunction in your life, and **I'm not saying God** was pleased with the pain that has come into your life; he was broken-hearted by it; some of the things that others did to you angered him, just like it would anger me for someone to hurt one of my children, **but God has one over-riding purpose in your life**, to accomplish Jesus' purposes in and through you, and he's working in all things, in the darkest parts of your **personal genealogy to bring that to pass**. He takes the chaotic mess of your life and stamps his **perfect 14** on them.
 - **Romans 8:28** says "all things work together for good." Do you know verse 29?
- **Before I go on to our 4th point, let me give you one remarkable observation about this genealogy that further substantiates this point: Skeptics** will often point out that this genealogy is different than the one in Luke. **Most scholars** answer that the genealogy given in Matthew is through Joseph, Jesus' adopted father, but the one in Luke traces Jesus' line through Mary.
 - God had told David in 2 Sam 7 that a blood descendant of his would sit on the throne forever. Well, the kingly line was passed to Solomon, David's son, because in those days the kingly line was passed from father to son. But one of Solomon's descendants, Jeconiah, sinned so badly that God said (in Jer 22:3) that none of his descendants would ever sit on the throne again. So now we have a dilemma.⁷

⁵ Paraphrased from Genesis 38.

⁶ Genesis 38:1-30

⁷Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. 1983-c1985. *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*. Victor Books: Wheaton, IL.

- **Enter Luke's genealogy.** Luke makes it clear that Mary, Jesus' mother, was a physical descendant of David through another son of David named Nathan (Luke 3:31).
- Joseph was a descendant of Solomon, which means he got the legal right to the throne through him, but because he was adopted he avoided the blood curse.
- In other words, the virgin birth of Jesus was the only way both prophecies could be true. Jesus got the legal right to the throne from Joseph, but because he was adopted he avoided the blood curse. He was, however, an actual descendant of Mary, who was a blood descendant of David, which God fulfilled his word to David that a blood descendant of his would sit on the throne forever.⁸
- **Who but God could have come up with that? He is so in control. Amen?**

4. The gospel is for the outsider

- For a Jewish person, their genealogy was like their **resume**. Your heritage was how you showed the world your worth. And so back then (like today!), résumés were fudged to include the best parts and to omit the nasty details. (*The closest some of you have ever come to perfection and to being a complete and total liar is on your resume. Amen?*)
- I'll give you an example: **Herod**, who was the king when Jesus was born, published his genealogy, but when he did he expunged his record of all his embarrassing ancestors so it

⁸ The text of Luke 3:23 includes a strange phrase, "supposed to be," which many argue is a clue that Luke was referring instead to Mary, not Joseph. Certain rabbinic traditions refer to a connection between Mary and Heli, which further reinforces this view. Others proponents of this view add that the Christmas story in Luke follows *Mary's* experience, while that of Matthew follows *Joseph's*. (Darrell Bock, *Luke Volume 1: 1:1 – 9:50*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, p. 919; William Hendrickson, *Luke*, Baker New Testament Commentary, p. 223). *[[Bock, D. A. Carson, John Nolland, and others find the Joseph/Mary genealogy answer unsupportable. They instead try to resolve the issue by positing a connection between Joseph and Heli (Luke 3:23) that is legal but not physical. Options include levirate marriage, in which Joseph's physical father was Jacob (so Matthew) but his legal father was Heli (so Luke). In any case, they maintain the physical/legal distinction—and so the point about the curse of Jeconiah stands.]]*

looked like he came from a line of sheer awesomeness and so of course he deserved to be king.

- **I told you I'm not that into genealogies** but if you do ask me what I know about mine I'll tell you about the great, famous people I'm even remotely related to so you'll think I have awesomeness in my blood.
- For example, (and this is kind of a joke around here now) anybody that knows me knows that if you bring up ancestry I'll tell you within **30 seconds that my great, great uncle is Davy Crockett**. A couple of years ago I visited the Alamo for the first time and I walked around saying, "You're welcome." I've also got an ancestor that was a captain in the Union Army.
- But I've also got some people who spent some time in prison for counterfeiting money and one for making moonshine. In fact, my last name—people want to know why we spell it the way we do: GREEAR, it seems like it has an extra vowel. They say that my first ancestor entering the US was Shadrach Greer in 1735 and he spelled his name normally, GREER, but **somewhere down the family line the extra vowel got added without explanation, and this most often indicates someone** who changed the spelling of their name to avoid taxation. So, I've got tax evaders in my bloodline. You're likely not to hear me brag about a bunch of those.
- So a genealogy is like a resume, and so kings like Herod would only list people in their genealogy who established their worth
- Yet look who Jesus included in his:
 - Tamar.
 - Vs. 5: **Rahab**. She was a prostitute and a Gentile that God saved from Jericho.
 - **Ruth**. She's a Moabite.
 - BTW, you see all these women? Women were not considered important in those days. Yet, they are included in Jesus' genealogy. And, btw, these are not even respectable women. Every woman

listed in here was involved in some sexual scandal.

- Vs. 6: **David and “the wife of Uriah.”** Why that phrase? Why didn’t Matthew just write her name? He’s making you remember the story. David betrayed one of his best friends and slept with his wife and then had him killed to cover it up.
- Jesus’ line is filled with moral outsiders; ethnic outsiders (Gentiles); gender outsiders (women).
- This is all supposed to be sending you a message: Jesus came for the outcast. He was not ashamed to identify with the outcasts as their brother and make them part of his family.⁹ All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one of us to our own way; he would take upon himself the iniquity of us all.” So Abraham and King David are mentioned in the same list as the prostitute Rahab because *“In Jesus Christ, prostitute and king sit down as equals.”*¹⁰
- **It’s a message to you:** These names are included in the line that leads to Christ so that you can know that your name can be included in the line that leads from Christ.¹¹ Our Savior saves to the uttermost.
 - That means no matter **who you are** or what you’ve done, there is **room in his family** for you.
 - You may feel like an **outcast**. You’re not. He has brought you close.
 - You may feel **worthless**. He has purchased you with the **universe’s most valuable possession**: his blood.
 - You may think **God’s plans** for you are over. **This genealogy** shows you they have just begun.
- God was at work in the ugliest of situations bringing forth his most beautiful son. In Christ he takes the ugliness of your life and redeems it for the beauty of his glory.

⁹ From Josh Harris’ Sermon on Matthew 1:1–17, “The Genealogy of Jesus”

¹⁰ From Tim Keller’s sermon.

¹¹ From David Platt’s sermon on Matthew 1:1–17, “The King and His Kingdom.”

5. Jesus is the ultimate rest¹²

- You have **3 sets of “14.”** I know it’s been a while since you have been in **math class**, but 3 14’s is 6 7’s; which makes Jesus the **7th 7**.
- Again, **7 is a really significant number** in the Bible. It is the biblical number of completion. It points to rest.
 - God **rested** on the seventh day.
 - Every seven years, **the land** in Israel was supposed to rest—to lie fallow so it could replenish its nutrients.
 - **Leviticus 25** talks about the “seventh seven year,” called **the Year of Jubilee**, in which all debts were forgiven in Israel and all slaves were freed.
- When Matthew shows you that Jesus is the 7th 7 he is saying *Jesus the year of Jubilee*. In him all debts are forgiven; all slaves are freed.
- He is ultimate rest. **Come unto me, Jesus says, all you who labor and are heavy laden and I will give you REST.**
 - **You don’t have to earn God’s love:** it’s given to you as a gift purchased by him. You can quit striving, quit worry. Rest in his gift.
 - **You don’t have to prove yourself:** in Christ you have the absolute approval of the only one whose opinion really matters. The highest being in the universe could not be more affectionate toward you. And when you embrace that, you’ll find rest. *If God is for us, who can be against us?*
 - **You don’t have to bear the weight of the world on your shoulders.** He came as your shepherd and friend; your protector and provider. You can rest in his care. *He who did not spare his own son...?*
- **Come unto me all you who labor and are heavy laden and I will give you REST. Isn’t this what some of you most need at Christmas? REST?**
- (Listen: You can go crazy with the number games, but I think it’s clear with the 3x14’s it is clear that something significant is being said. Jesus is the 7th 7; the ultimate rest.)

¹² From Tim Keller’s sermon.

In Conclusion:

In this genealogy are all the essential things you have to know about Christianity:

- Jesus comes to as a gift, doing something for you that you could not do for yourself, winning a battle against your sin and paying your sin debt for you. ***Have you received him?***
- Jesus is the central point of history and your life. ***Have you come to know him?***
 - That's what God has been saying to you in all of your pain. He's trying to get to see that life is fragile, and that there is no joy on earth that can sustain you or fill you. You were created for something more. There is a love and a joy from outside this world that is trying to press into your life if you will receive it and his name is JESUS.
- **He's the center of history.** When it's all said and done, and all the minor actors have taken a seat, the only one on center stage receiving all the applause will be him.
 - If you're not on board with him, or you try to stand in his way, you'll be crushed like a gnat trying to stop a railway car. The railway car would hardly even notice that you were there.
- **He offers rest to you.** Which is what some of you most need at Christmas 2012. Rest for a weary soul. It's in Christ.

Have you received him? John 1:12