

Message Series: THE WORD

Message Title: The Word Promised

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Scripture: Matthew 1:1-17

INTRODUCTION

Many of you know that the first person I ever heard the Gospel from was my older brother, who had been a drug addict and was dynamited into the kingdom in the revival of the 70's. Yet, I have a vivid memory of something happening to me as a very young boy in my neighborhood in Philadelphia. I grew up in a Jewish neighborhood in Philadelphia but all my friends were Italian (we use to dip our calzone in chicken soup).

One Christmas Eve, I was walking down the street in my neighborhood when I suddenly heard some Christmas music coming from the home of one of my friends. I remember listening to it and finding the words strange. I knew they were singing about Jesus but I was fixated on the words (Noel, Noel, born is the King of Israel). I thought Noel was Leon spelled backwards. I remember thinking "Why are they calling Jesus the King of Israel?" He is the King of the Gentiles but not the King of Israel. This seemed really strange to me that Jesus was related to Israel. What is perhaps even stranger today is that so many of us that are here today are so used to Jesus in a Gentile or church context, we can't think of him in the context of Israel either. That was the first time I can remember ever really thinking about Jesus, especially in the context of Israel.

Yet, as I thought about it, very few of us think of Jesus in that context either. Take, for example, the fact that most of us will hear Christmas readings this season that will start with verse 18 (the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way: when his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph before they came together she was found to be with Child from the Holy Spirit). For most of us here, when we think of how Christianity started, we think of the manger at Bethlehem. We will sing about the Babe of Bethlehem and put out manger scenes and think about the three Wise Men who came from the East. Yet, when Matthew begins his account of how Jesus came to this planet that is not where he starts at all. Instead, he starts with a list of names no one can even pronounce. Why? Why start with such a long list of archaic names most of which we are unfamiliar with? Well, there is very good reason. Matthew starts this way because he wants his readers to know they can't understand the story of Jesus unless they see it in the light of a much longer story which goes back many centuries and leads up to Jesus.

This story is the story of the Hebrew Bible; the Old Testament. Matthew tells it in the form of a genealogy; he tells the Messiah's ancestry. It may not mean much to us but every Jew who read it knew this was a familiar story. What Matthew is saying to us is that we will only understand Jesus properly if we see him in the light of the story which He brings to a climax, the story of the Old Testament. In other words, the Old Testament tells the story which Jesus completes. We need to look at Jesus, not only in the light of the history of the Old Testament, but also that he sheds light backwards on it. You understand the importance of this. You understand and appreciate a journey in the light of its destination. As we journey through the Old Testament it makes a difference to know that it leads to Jesus. This perspective of Jesus from the background of the Old Testament is vital in understanding Who He really is. Here's a simple illustration to clarify my point. If I take a photograph of the tree in my front yard

and remove the background of my house, Can you tell me how big or small the tree is? But, if I show you the same tree with the background of my house, you suddenly see how big or small the tree is. That is what understanding Jesus from the background of the Old Testament does. Jesus suddenly comes into proper perspective.

JESUS WAS A REAL JEW

Jesus was not just a man, but a unique man born within a specific culture. His background, ancestry, and roots, were shaped and influenced, as all his contemporaries were, by the history of his people. This is important because often when we talk and sing about him it is in a general way without reference to his ancestry. The simple fact is, Jesus was a Jew!

This is what first blew my mind when Jesus began to draw me near. I had run away from home and was hitchhiking from Miami to Philadelphia. I was picked up by a Christian family who fed me and gave me rest for the night. They shared the Gospel with me and purchased a bus ticket for me to reach my brother. As I was boarding the bus, they gave me a New Testament which I immediately slipped in my pocket. No Jew ever wants to be seen carrying a New Testament. As I began riding down the road, I became curious and opened the book. I couldn't believe how Jewish it was; I knew these guys!

Of course, there are many people who don't like the fact Jesus was a Jew, but it is a fact; it is also the first thing we learn from Matthew. That is why Matthew starts his Gospel with this genealogy: Jewish society genealogies were an important way of establishing your right to belong to the community of God's people. So what we are saying is this: the story of the Hebrew Bible, the Old Testament, finds its fulfillment and climax in Jesus of Nazareth.

And as we read that history in the light of the coming of the Messiah, the story begins to make perfect sense. Look at how Matthew does this. In verse one he tells us that Jesus was the Son of David, the Son of Abraham. That is more than the fact that they are descended from these guys. It connects Jesus to the great promises God made with these two. David is first because he is the most important, but he is also the son of Abraham.

THE SON OF ABRAHAM

The first verse really reads, "The book of the genesis of Jesus Christ". Obviously, the word genesis is meant to take us back to the Old Testament book by that title. What is the book of Genesis? It is the book of beginnings, the book of origins. Matthew's book tells the origins of the Son of God on earth. But the book of Genesis is really about one man above all others: Abraham. There is material in the first eleven chapters but it moves quickly until we meet Abraham and then it settles down in his life story for a long time. What does it mean that Jesus is the son of Abraham? Let's remember who this man was and the promises God made to him. God chose a man out of the mass of humanity and gave him incredible promises.

He would have a son who would not only be incredibly blessed by God, through Him all the nations of the earth would be blessed. So often, when people think of Abraham they think of Israel. It is true that in Abraham a nation named Israel would spring, but to really understand Abraham you have to understand that there is a universal scope to him—Abraham was about God blessing the nations! When Matthew says that Jesus is the son of

Abraham, he is saying that Jesus belongs to a people whose very reason for existence was to bring blessing to the rest of humanity. This is demonstrated in this genealogy by more than just connecting Jesus to Abraham physically.

Between verses 3-6, the genealogy mentions four women. These four women all share one thing in common; they were all foreigners. Not only were they foreigners, some of them had very shady characters. Rahab was a harlot; Tamar had posed as a prostitute in order to lure her father-in-law Judah to conceive a child. Bathsheba probably knew she was seducing David. Ruth was a Moabite, a member of a group that God had told Israel to totally extinguish. It is very unusual for Jewish genealogies to ever contain names of women, let alone women of dubious character. Why did Matthew include them? ***These women symbolized the essence of what it means that Jesus was a "Son of Abraham." The inclusion of these women demonstrates that Messiah's family line would include Gentiles as well as sinners.***

THE SON OF DAVID

It is clear that Messiah's genealogy really centers around Jesus as the "Son of David". The Jews Messiah would "Mashiach, ben David." That is because to David was given the promise that one of his sons would sit on the throne of Israel forever. ***Matthew breaks Messiah's genealogy into three distinct periods: from Abraham to David, from David to the Babylonian Captivity, from the Babylonian Captivity to the time of the Messiah.*** From the period from Abraham to David there is a natural connection. In David, the covenant God had made with Abraham had come to a measure of fulfillment Abraham's offspring had become a great nation and they had taken possession of the land.

It is when we come to the second period, from David to the Babylonian Captivity, that we have a problem. The Messiah had to be a descendant of David, through Solomon and the line of the kings of Judah. There is a problem though that has to be addressed. One of the kings of Judah in that direct line had a curse put on him. His name was Jeconiah and it is written of him: "Thus says the Lord: 'Write this man down 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'" (Jer. 22:30). That curse means that no one descended from him can sit on the throne of Judah, ruling as a "son of David." When we look at Jesus' genealogy in Matthew 1:11 we read, "and Josiah the father of Jeconiah and his brothers, at the time of the deportation to Babylon."

So in Jesus' direct line is the man Jeconiah which means that Jesus cannot legitimately rule as king because of the curse. How does God get around this? The answer helps us to see why the virgin birth of the Messiah is a necessity. If Messiah was the physical son of Joseph, he could not have been Messiah because Joseph descended from Jeconiah and all of his sons were cursed. ***Only the Virgin Birth could solve the Jeconiah problem.*** Joseph will marry Mary after she conceived the Messiah in her womb so Joseph is not the physical father of Jesus. Yet, he became the legal father of Jesus since he married his mother before He was born, so that Jesus gets his legal rights to the throne through Joseph, while not being physically born of the line. ***This made the Virgin Birth not only a New Testament miracle, but a necessity.***

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Ed Rosen has provided the questions below to include in your House Church group discussions.

1. Why do you suppose that the New Testament opens with Matthew's gospel?
2. Why is it important that you have a good grounding in the Old Testament Scriptures?
3. Why did Matthew consider it absolutely necessary to begin his gospel the way he did with **"The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ."**? Matthew 1:1-17
4. Matthew gives us two keys to understanding the necessity of Jesus' genealogy. The first key is in verse 1, **"The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham."** The second key is in verse 17 by intentionally arranging Jesus' genealogy in groups of fourteen to coincide with the three important stages of Jewish history: Abraham the first Hebrew or Jew to David, Israel's greatest king; David to Israel's worst disaster up to that time, the deportation to Babylon; and from Babylon to the first advent of Israel's promised Messiah, Jesus. **"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."**
 - a. What is the significance of Jesus' relationship to Abraham? In what way is Jesus the fulfillment to the promises that God made to Abraham?
 - b. What is the significance of Jesus' relationship to David? In what way is Jesus the fulfillment to the promises that God made to David?
 - c. What is the significance of the deportation of the Jews to Babylon?
 - d. How is the advent of Jesus the Messiah the restoration of God's people?
5. Why does Matthew include the names of five women, four of which were Gentiles and of questionable character in his genealogy?