

Prayer

We praise You O Lord, for the great blessing which is ours through Your Word, the Bible. We thank you for all those who have worked to translate it and make it available to people throughout the world. May we so treasure this great gift that we pass it on to those who come after us with reverence and awe, knowing that it has the power, through Your Holy Spirit, to change lives. Thanks be to God: AMEN

Other Prayer Suggestions

Weekly Theme: Justice

Continue to pray for the people of Zimbabwe whilst politicians across the world decide how to respond to the political concerns now being expressed. Pray also for the United Nations.

On-going prayers

- *Pray for local shops and businesses*
- *Thank God for the good work done by Christian children's workers.*
- *Pray for China and Tibet, and freedom for all who are oppressed*

Meditation

I guess we can never know the fullness of God:

How often do we need to seek Your forgiveness,
and how often do we need to forgive others ourselves?

How great is the glory You will one day show us
and how great the honour we must give back to You!

How much more of Your love will You lavish upon us,
and how much more love we will need to give others?

How powerful is the Spirit who strengthens us now,
and how great is the Gospel we have been given to proclaim!

How many great gifts do You still wish to give us,
and how much more of ourselves do we need to give back?

How magnificent the eternity You have waiting for us,
and how limited our view of Your bounty, from here!

But in Christ, we have a glimpse of it all, now!

Bible Study - Matthew 1:1-6

¹ *A genealogical record of Jesus the Christ, son of David, son of Abraham:*

² *Abraham was the father of Isaac,*

Isaac the father of Jacob,

Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers,

³ *Judah the father of Perez and Zerah, whose mother was Tamar,*

Perez the father of Hezron,

Hezron the father of Ram,

⁴ *Ram the father of Amminadab,*

Amminadab the father of Nahshon,

Nahshon the father of Salmon,

⁵ *Salmon the father of Boaz, whose mother was Rahab,*

Boaz the father of Obed, whose mother was Ruth,

Obed the father of Jesse,

⁶ *Jesse the father of King David,*

David was the father of Solomon, whose mother had been Uriah's wife.

Review

As far as most modern readers are concerned, the Gospel of Matthew starts with the story of Jesus' birth. We soon discover however, that it begins with a list of names! This is because in the early days of the Christian Church, it was crucial for the early believers to state clearly who they believed Jesus to be, and as strange as it may seem to us, this list of names of Jesus' ancestors was powerful evidence about Him. In the first verse, Matthew gives Jesus a title, and then he explains that title by way of a genealogy, or list of ancestors, lasting from verse 2 to 16. The whole list is rather interesting and I have split it into two, so that we gain most from studying it! This will set us up for the well known story of the birth of Jesus, from verse 18 onwards.

We are used to talking about Jesus as 'Jesus Christ', as if 'Jesus' was his first name, and 'Christ' was his surname. However, this is not what is happening here in Matthew. 'Jesus' is an Aramaic word from the Hebrew word 'Joshua', meaning 'salvation'. It is a most appropriate name, but in those days it was certainly not unique! The title of Jesus comes next, and it is this; 'the Christ, son of David, son of Abraham', and this tells us a great deal. Firstly, 'the Christ' means that Jesus is the 'anointed one' or in Hebrew, the 'Messiah'. Secondly, Jesus is the 'Son of David', standing in the royal line of King David with whom God entered into a special Covenant for the leadership, protection and salvation of His people (see 2 Sam 7). Although the earthly line of David ceased around the time of the Babylonian exile, the prophets saw this as a spiritual inheritance to be fulfilled by the Messiah. Thirdly, Jesus is the 'son of Abraham'; in other words, Jesus was a Jew descended from Abraham, the 'Father' of the nation. God had made an eternal covenant with Abraham through which he promised to bless all nations. It was a relationship of trust and faithfulness and ultimately, a relationship of love, and Matthew believed that Jesus fulfilled this Covenant.

From verse 2 to verse 16, Matthew groups the genealogy into three sections; Abraham to David, David to the Exile, and the Exile to Mary and Jesus. Each group has fourteen names (although as we will see, the last may have thirteen). In those days it was common to arrange things in groups with special numbers, as a way of remembering things correctly, and here, the fourteen is 4 + 6 + 4, which is the numerical equivalent of 'D W D' the consonants of David's name in Hebrew, added up using a popular numbering system of the day.

Two points arise about the genealogy when we compare it with the only other genealogy of Jesus, in Luke 3:23-38. Firstly, it starts with Abraham, whereas Luke starts with Adam. Secondly, although there is a close parallel between them from Abraham to David, after David, these two are quite different. Matthew and Luke however wrote for different reasons; firstly Matthew wrote about Jesus as the Jewish Messiah, so his genealogy commences with Abraham, and Luke wrote an 'orderly account' of 'everything pertaining to Jesus' (Luke 1:3) and hence put him within the whole history of humanity, starting from Adam. Secondly, Matthew wrote his genealogy going forward, choosing to follow the line of kings that sat on the throne of Judah. However, David had many other sons so there other male links from David to Joseph and thence to Jesus; so Luke, writing backwards in time from Joseph, traces a quite different line, but ultimately back to David. It would be

remarkable if by writing their genealogies from such different standpoints they came up with the same list! It would then certainly read as if it was a 'fix'!

We would have more knowledge of the facts of these genealogies if Herod the Great, in a fit of pique because he discovered he was not a pure Jew, had not ordered the Sanhedrin copies of Israel's genealogies to be destroyed! We are left with what we have, which is sufficient to teach us a great deal about Jesus!

Questions (for use in groups)

1. Has this raised your interest in the genealogies of Jesus, or do you find it uninteresting or boring?
2. What does the title 'the Christ, son of David, son of Abraham' mean to you and why?
3. Which names do you recognise in the genealogy, where from and why?

Discipleship

Personal comment:

Matthew's Gospel is a fascinating Gospel with many features, but right from the beginning we gain the impression that he is trying to be exact and careful in his recording of the facts. By contrast, it seems to me that in the life of the church today, people are not worried about recording 'who is a member' or 'who has come to church' or 'done' something in the life of the church. Matthew tells us that records are important!

Ideas for discipleship programme

- *Make a list of your own descendants as far as you know and offer this to the Lord in prayer. Some of these people will have had a significant influence on your life.*
- *Read through the whole list, and if possible the whole of Matthew 1 in order to gain a feeling for the whole of the Gospel's introduction.*

Final Prayer

Lord God, thank You for the gift of marriage. You have created men and women to find their fulfilment in each other, and demonstrate to the world the love which God has for all people. May all who are married appreciate the great gift they have received in Christ, and testify to its glory; AMEN