



Lesson 1

Chapter 1: A Family Tree and the Birth of Jesus

Introduction

The Lord God inspired the four Gospel writers to record the events of Jesus' life on earth and his teaching. Each of the four Gospel accounts is written from a slightly different point of view, so if we want to have a rounded picture of the Lord Jesus we should read and compare all of them.

Matthew, who is called Levi in Mark's Gospel (2:13), was a tax collector who became a disciple of Jesus. He was probably the writer of this Gospel.

Studying Matthew's Gospel will bring its rewards. It tells us of the wonderful example of the Lord Jesus who always pleased the Lord God, his Father, and served mankind. If we humbly seek guidance from it and put into practice the lessons we learn, it will help to change us to be more like Jesus himself. People will notice this change in us and recognise that we have become true disciples of Jesus Christ.

A Family Tree (1:1-17)

Matthew's Gospel opens with a family tree (a record of ancestors) of Jesus Christ. The very first verse in the New Testament describes Jesus as a descendant of Abraham and David.

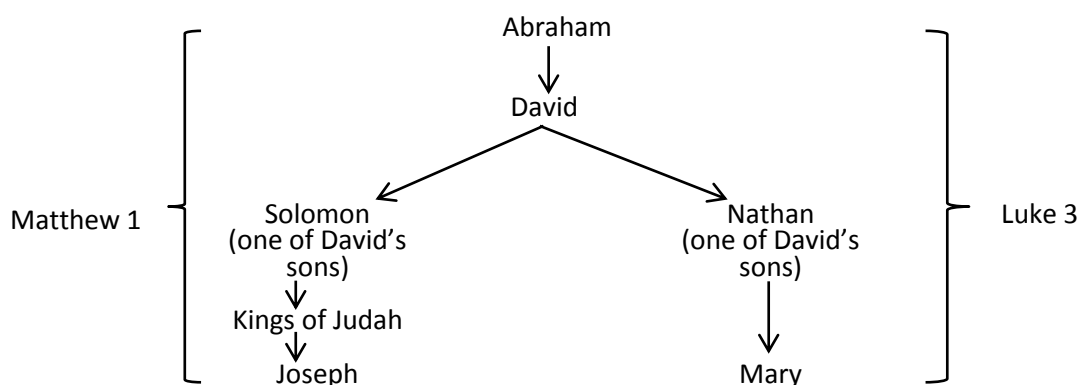
"The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham."

We need to know who these Old Testament people were. We shall not understand the New Testament without reading the Old. The list of people in verses 2-16 starts with Abraham and finishes with Joseph. Joseph was the husband of Mary, but he was not the natural father of Jesus. Verses 18 and 20 show that Jesus was the Son of God, through God's power, the Holy Spirit, coming upon Mary. Note that the Holy Spirit cannot be a separate being because Jesus is called the Son of God and not the Son of the Holy Spirit.

The list of names does not include all the generations (for example, a few of the kings of Judah are left out). It does, however, mention Rahab and Ruth, who were both Gentile (non-Jewish) women, and Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah. Rahab was also a prostitute; King David committed adultery with Bathsheba. The fact that these women are included as ancestors of the Lord Jesus Christ shows that God worked out His purpose through Gentiles as well as Jews and despite their failings.

The list of names is given in three sections (Matt.1:17) which pick out:

- Abraham: to whom God promised both the land of Israel and a special son.
- David: to whom God promised a descendant who would be both a king, and also God's son.
- The Jewish captivity in Babylon. This happened after the nation of Judah became so wicked that God took away their last king and said that there would not be another king until one came who would be faithful to Him (read Ezekiel 21:25-27). This is a prophecy of the Lord Jesus. He will return to this earth and God will make him king over Israel and the whole world.



The diagram above shows how both Joseph and Mary are descended from King David.





The family tree, or genealogy, in Matthew's Gospel starts with Abraham and finishes with Joseph, the husband of Mary. It is sometimes called the royal line as it includes the kings of Judah. Luke 3 also gives us a family tree of Jesus but this goes in the opposite direction, starting with Heli (Mary's father) and tracing the ancestors of Jesus all the way back to Adam who was created by God.

Joseph and Mary (1:18-25)

Joseph and Mary had agreed to marry. Although the marriage had not taken place, in those days an agreement like this was legally binding and it could only be broken by a legal divorce. Unfaithfulness on the part of a woman who had promised marriage in this way was very serious and the Law of Moses allowed the punishment of death for such an adulteress. We are told of Joseph's worry when he knew that Mary was pregnant. He thought that she must have been unfaithful to him, but the angel said:

"Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit." (Matthew 1:20)

Joseph took Mary into his home and looked after her but she remained a virgin until after the birth of Jesus.

Matthew shows how these events had been foretold by the prophet Isaiah (Isaiah 7:14). Through the angel God named His son Jesus which means 'God is Saviour'. This name tells us how God's purpose was to be fulfilled through His son.

Finally we see how faithful Joseph did what the angel commanded. He looked after Jesus when he was a child, and was legally Jesus' father, although his real Father is God.

Promises

God wants us to know that the Lord Jesus is descended from Abraham and David because the Lord Jesus is the special Son in the great promises that God made to them. Here are some of the promises made to Abraham. Lesson 12 of the 40 Lesson course has more details.

GOD'S PROMISE TO ABRAHAM	COMMENT
He would inherit the land of Canaan (Israel) for ever (Genesis 13:15; 17:8).	For this to happen Abraham must be raised from the dead by the Lord Jesus when he returns.
God would make a great nation of him (Genesis 22:17).	The Jewish people are descended from Abraham, through Isaac and Jacob.
Abraham would be the father of many nations (Genesis 17:5).	This is true as a number of Arab nations are descended from Abraham.
All nations of the world would be blessed through Abraham's offspring (Genesis 22:18).	Through the Lord Jesus, the special Son of Abraham, people from all nations can receive the blessing of forgiveness of sins (Galatians 3:16; Acts 3:25, 26).

